

Responding versus Reacting

How We Should Respond to the Circumstances of Life

- Introduction
 - Everyone seems to be concerned about overreacting to situations that arise in their daily lives.
 - However, people should also be concerned about reacting instead of responding.
 - Reacting is rooted in emotions/feelings whereas responding is rooted in thought.
- Unbelievers
 - Unbelievers can have some level of success in responding rather than reacting.
 - Even though an unbeliever does not have the benefit of the Holy Spirit, if he takes the time to give a considered response instead of immediately reacting, emotional factors can be minimized.
- Believers
 - Believers have spiritual assets that can help them respond instead of react, not the least of which are the ministries of the indwelling Holy Spirit [Rom 8:9-11; 1 Cor 3:16; 6:19].
 - However, we can grieve the Spirit through sin [Eph 4:30] or quench the Spirit by resisting His leading [1 Thess 5:19].
 - When we grieve or quench the Spirit, we will find ourselves the object of His convicting ministry [John 16:8].
 - When we respond to that conviction, we should confess our sins [Ps 32:1-5; 51:1-10; 1 John 1:9] to once again be filled with the Spirit [Eph 5:18].
 - When we are walking in the Light [1 John 1:7] and by means of the Spirit [Gal 5:16] we are able to take advantage of all of the Holy Spirit's ministries.
 - One of these ministries is to help us know what to say and when not to say anything [Luke 12:11-12].
 - If we are yielding to the Holy Spirit and allowing him to give us the words to say, we will be responding instead of reacting.
 - In order to do this, it is important to listen and take our time before responding so we can make sure anger is not influencing our words [Jas 1:19].

- Another key to responding instead of reacting is to allow the peace of Christ to guide the thoughts of our hearts [Col 3:15].
- This means that we should never allow words to come out of mouths when our soul is in a state of turbulence, being unduly affected by various emotions.
- In addition, everything we do should be done in the sphere of love [1 Cor 16:14].
- In the passage where Paul lists attributes of ἀγάπη love, the first one mentioned is patience [1 Cor 13:4].
- When our words are governed by peace and love, they will not be said in haste.
- The second attribute of ἀγάπη love listed is kindness [1 Cor 13:4].
- If our words are shaped by kindness they will be sweet rather than bitter [Jas 3:8-11].
- Emotional reactions are filled with angry and bitter words that stir up strife [Pr 10:12; 15:18; 28:25; 29:22].
- Another attribute of ἀγάπη love is that it is not provoked [1 Cor 13:5].
- When we allow something or someone to provoke us, we succumb to anger and bitterness [Hos 12:14] which causes us to become reactive, so we must put them away from us [Eph 4:31-32].
- Another attribute of ἀγάπη love is that it does not take into account a wrong suffered [1 Cor 13:5].
- When we have been truly wronged and we fail to respond in love, we will react in a way that seeks vengeance of some kind which is not ours to exact [Rom 12:19].
- **Conclusions**
 - When we encounter various situations in our lives we can either react to what has happened or we can respond.
 - Reactions are based upon feelings and emotions which are not rational.
 - Responses are based upon thoughtful consideration.
 - Everyone, including unbelievers, can choose to either respond or react to the circumstances of life.
 - Believers have access to spiritual assets to help them respond rather than react.

- These spiritual assets are made available to every believer at the moment of salvation.
- The most important spiritual asset available to believers is the indwelling Holy Spirit.
- The Holy Spirit enables us to learn spiritual things from God's word [1 Cor 2:12-13; John 16:13].
- Once we learn God's word, we must allow it to dwell richly in our souls [Col 3:16].
- The more of God's word we have dwelling in our souls, the more the Holy Spirit has to bring to our remembrance [John 14:26].
- Throughout this process, the love of God is being manifested in us [1 John 4:9].
- God's love allows us to be patient, kind, unprovoked, etc.
- We also have the ability to have our thoughts, decisions, etc. controlled by the peace of Christ [John 14:27].
- When God's love and peace are working together in us, we will not be controlled by emotion and will respond to every situation rather than react.
- This is only true when we are walking by faith [2 Cor 5:7] and our faith is working through love [Gal 5:6].
- This requires us to be in fellowship, walking by means of the Spirit.
- Carnal believers walk in the flesh rather than by the Spirit [Rom 8:4-5; 1 Cor 3:3].
- This means that, while believers have the blessing of being able to utilize God's grace assets to avoid reactive behavior, when they are carnal they can react like unbelievers.
- Therefore, it is important for believers to confess sins when necessary so that they glorify God in their response [1 Cor 10:31].
- A believer who stays in fellowship, walks by faith and by means of the Spirit, does everything in the sphere of love with a soul governed by Christ's peace, and is quick to hear and slow to speak, will glorify God in all his responses and avoid reactionary behavior which leads to quarrels [Jas 4:1].