

While I have seldom heard of the example above among brethren, there is one area of wide-spread imbalance which, I believe, does exist and is hindering our efforts to reach the lost. I am speaking of our prevalent practice of completely isolating ourselves from any meaningful association with people in the world.

Now it is indeed true that the Bible abounds with warnings of the evil influence which our associates can have on us (1 Corinthians 15:33; 2 Corinthians 6:14-17). In reaction to these and other warnings, could it not be that we have become unbalanced? We "hole up" in our comfortable church buildings and classes, limiting our association to those of "like precious faith," with the possible exceptions of those who have already expressed some interest in the truth. Oh, it's true that we occasionally may take expeditions "out into enemy territory" and invite an "outsider" to services or to a Bible class. And (don't miss the point) we should extend such invitations. The imbalance is that we have largely ceased to be "the salt of the earth" and "the light of the world" that Jesus intended us to be (Matthew 5:13-16). *What good is the salt if it's isolated on the table in a fancy container? What good is light if it is hidden under a basket?* We've got to be "amongst 'em" if we're going to influence 'em! Jesus, our greatest Example, was viewed as "a friend of sinners" (Matthew 11:18-19). The lonely, sin-sick and suffering saw Him as their friend -- not as the Pharisees with their isolationist, "I'm better than you," "touch me not" attitude. In this respect, are we not sometimes closer in identity to the Pharisees than with our Lord?

Of course we must beware the evil influence that unbelievers can have -- just as we must beware the evil influence that worldly ambition and the riches of this world can have upon us. But keep some balance here. The only ones from whom Christians are specifically commanded to withdraw association are incorrigible brethren (1 Corinthians 5:5-11). Take a close look at verse 10 in that passage.

Like our Lord, let's become "a friend of sinners," not in order that they might influence us back to the world - but that we might be able to influence them to the saving gospel of Jesus Christ.

Do You Act -- Or React
by Sydney J. Harris

(It originally appeared in the Chicago Daily News and then in the Readers Digest.)

I walked with my friend, a Quaker, to the news-stand the other night, and he bought a paper, thanking the newsie politely. The newsie didn't even acknowledge it.

"A sullen fellow, isn't he?" I commented.

"Oh, he's that way every night," shrugged my friend.

"Then why do you continue to be so polite to him?" I asked.

"Why not?" inquired my friend. "Why should I let him decide how I'm going to act?"

As I thought about this incident later, it occurred to me that the important word was "act."
My friend acts toward people; most of us react toward them.

He has a sense of inner balance which is lacking in most of us; he knows who he is, what he stands for, how he should behave. He refuses to return incivility for incivility, because then he would no longer be in command of his own conduct. When we are enjoined in the Bible to return good for evil, we look upon this as a moral injunction - which it is. But it is also a psychological prescription for our emotional health.

Nobody is unhappier than the perpetual reactor. His center of emotional gravity is not rooted within himself, where it belongs, but in the world outside him. His spiritual temperature is always being raised or lowered by the social climate around him, and he is a mere creature at the mercy of these elements.

Praise gives him a feeling of euphoria, which is false, because it does not last and it does not come from self-approval. Criticism depresses him more than it should, because it confirms his own secret shaky opinion of himself. Snubs hurt him, and the merest suspicion of unpopularity in any quarter rouses him to bitterness.

A serenity of spirit cannot be achieved until we become the masters of our own actions and attitudes. To let another determine whether we shall be rude or gracious, elated or depressed, is to relinquish control over our own personalities, which is ultimately all we possess....The only true possession is self-possession.

(NOTE: Isn't that a dandy article? Why not read it over again and then ask yourself, "Am I acting or reacting?" "Am I in complete possession of my emotions and actions or am I letting my friends and brethren make a balloon out of me which explodes at the slightest prick?" Now we should not be hypocritical in our actions. But we should cultivate an even-keeled emotional stability which will enable us to take "snubs": and hurtful words or deeds without "upsetting our boat" and causing everyone else to get wet in the process.)

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