

Responses

Something subtle in the Gospel of Mark is the bizarre and irrational response that people make to God's work. For just two examples: Herod was amazed at John the Baptist and liked him, yet Herod had him killed. In almost every chapter, the crowd was thrilled and amazed at Jesus, yet at the end they shouted, "kill Him." What's going on? Darkness! Jesus alone brings light. But that light is only for those who understand that His glory is expressed by submitting to torture and death. Mark's point is, our response, the expected response to Jesus, is key to our destiny and blessing.

Peter's speech in Acts 2 is the closest the N.T. gets to stating the Gospel. And an intrinsic part of that presentation is a demand for a response, a *correct* response. That expected response is "Repent." Now, that word is big. It means to change one's mind about who Jesus is and what He did and to humbly submit to Him as a life-long commitment (the "be baptized" part). The Gospel demands a response, the *expected* response.

We easily miss it. All thru the Gospels and the Book of Acts, and in the Epistles too, what's not explicit but is heavily present is the demand for a response. It's the reason for the Book of Revelation. Hey! It's the reason for the entire Bible. How do we respond to what God has done, is doing or will do? We can almost say that the Scriptures are given to us in expectation of our correct response. In fact, that's what "faith" is: It's our right, expected response to God, to His Word, to His Person, to His works.

"Who are you, O man, to answer back to God?" (Romans 9:20). How we respond to God is *exceedingly* important. In this verse, "to answer back" means to respond *against* God. It has to do with responding to God with an attempt to excuse our sin and unbelief. There are right and wrong responses to God.

In today's Christianity, as I observe it, the response to God's Word, whether it's preached, taught, or read by individuals, is to try to remember it as information. That's a necessary but insufficient response. It is not the expected and sufficient response, which is a changed life. When God speaks to us, our values, our thoughts, our life cannot be the same. It is in the Scriptures that we encounter the living God, and no one can have an encounter with God and not be radically changed.

I'm appalled when I'm watching a preacher in a church on the tele and the camera shows people sitting in the (always) huge audience, for they're sitting there absorbing (I suppose) the preached Word, passively, as if it's one of my physiology lectures they're attending. Undoubtedly, some are affected. But God's Word must deeply move us, cause us to repent, change our life. If it doesn't, something's wrong; we're answering back to God, *against* God. We are always, necessarily, responding in some way to God's Word, either with repentance (a faith response), or we're responding *against* God. It's a serious matter to hear (or read) God's Word, because we *must* respond to it. We must respond aright.

Two related considerations underscore how important this is: (1) We may easily get away with refusing to respond to another person. Or respond insincerely or indifferently to someone. That person we blow off may be offended, but probably it will be without, or with only minimal consequences. But now this is the transcendent God to whom we're responding. He is not going to be offended without significant consequences of some kind. (2) The whole reason we're here, why we exist, is to test our responses to God. A more ultimate existence awaits, and that depends on how we respond to God's Word in this life.

One more consideration that I suspect is a common misunderstanding in evangelicalism. We mustn't suppose that our response to Jesus for salvation is all that matters, that we have made the one decision in life that's important, and we therefore can live as we please, according to the Word or not. That's wrong. A decision for Christ only *begins* a walk with the Lord, and biblically it's a committed walk that

continues all thru life as we respond obediently and lovingly to His Word. That's not an option, it's what salvation *does*.

There are basically only two categories of responses to God, one that exalts self, and one that exalts God. [Someone might argue that exalting Satan is a 3rd category.] To follow Christ biblically is to exalt God. That's the right response, and we do that by a lifetime of submissive obedience to His Word and by imitating Christ. All else is self-exalting—the wrong response. The responses of a believer in Jesus to the Word must always be, “Yes, Lord.” Whatever sacrifice or loss is involved is irrelevant; we always say, “Yes, Lord.” Why? Precisely because He is Lord.

We need to understand something very basic about life. We're not here to enjoy life according to our own desires, interests, and values. “Pursuit of happiness” is not biblical; it's a secular notion, and it's a demonic lie. God put us here for *His* purposes, and those are to glorify Him by honoring Him, which, in this current era, means honoring the Son. We're to take the side of good in a great cosmic contest between good and evil. We fulfill these purposes by knowing the Word and living it. It's why the Word of God has been given to us. We'll be held accountable for this, at a future time when it'll be too late to change. The changes we have to make therefore must be now, in this life. It's called repentance. It's also termed sanctification. If we don't understand this, we miss what the Gospel is, and we therefore can't suppose that we're even “saved.”

What God has done is, at great personal sacrifice, He has made it possible for every human to be in His presence for superlative and eternal blessing. To reject what God has lovingly provided severely offends God, and it results in spending eternity in hell, apart from God and apart from blessing (John 3:36). For a believer, someone who identifies as a Christian, to pursue a life that's indifferent to God's provision in Christ seems scarcely different from the response of the unbeliever. The only reasonable (and expected) response to the atoning, reconciling and life-giving work of Christ is gratitude, love and devotion. More specifically, it's a life-long, Spirit-enabled, radical commitment to obedience, loyalty, holiness and service, regardless what loss or sacrifice pursuing such a life may entail.

I hope all this makes sense. I can't think of anything more important, more fundamental to anyone than the discussion above.