

Having A Right Attitude

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A dictionary will define the word *attitude* as "the arrangement of the parts of a body or figure: posture; a position assumed for a specific purpose; a mental position with regard to a fact or state; a feeling or emotion toward a fact or state; the position of an aircraft or spacecraft in relation to a reference point (like the horizon)." Spiritually, we tend to be concerned with the general mental and emotional position we take toward others, doctrines, circumstances and trials.

When we evaluate someone, we frequently note whether the individual has a good or bad attitude. When considering keeping or firing an employee, employers, particularly ones with smaller workforces, really consider an employee's attitude. An enthusiastic worker with a positive attitude is much easier to justify keeping than one of equal value who complains all the time.

Though God calls us from different backgrounds and is infinitely patient with us, He views us and our attitudes much the same as we view those we deal with. We could go so far as to say that, if over the years we fail to develop a positive, thankful attitude about what God is doing in our lives, we may not be in His Kingdom!

Jonah's Bad Attitude

With attitude being so important, Jonah's recalcitrant approach to the calling and work God gave him is an example of God dealing with an individual with a very bad attitude. In fact, it leaves us with the question; "Will Jonah be in the Kingdom of God?"

God calls Jonah to perform a work: to warn Nineveh that their sins had come to God's attention and that He would deal with them. Instead of yielding to God and doing the commanded work, Jonah boards a ship and flees to Tarshish. His attitude leads to disobedience.

We all know what follows. After several miracles, God finally forces Jonah to do exactly as He had commanded him, and upon completing God's commission, Nineveh repents and receives a reprieve from destruction, much to Jonah's resentment and disgust.

Jonah 4 brings out Jonah's pettiness, as well as God's tremendous patience. From all that we know of Jonah's attitude, we should consider what God's evaluation of him might be. Jonah has a completely negative attitude toward all that God does to save all 120,000 people "who cannot not discern between their right hand and their left." In addition, he is negative toward God in what He is working in his life. He doubts God, does not believe that He is doing the right thing, and does not want to serve Him by answering his calling.

If Jonah has God's Spirit and does not change from his present attitude, what position in the Kingdom would God consider appropriate for Jonah to fill? Will God accept people with attitudes like Jonah's into His Kingdom at all? Let us put ourselves in God's place for a moment. How would we evaluate Jonah?

Moses and the Rock

The congregation of Israel in the wilderness has no water to drink, and the people gather themselves together against Moses and Aaron. Complaining and whining echo off the canyon walls, and God tells Moses to take his rod and "*speak* to the rock, and it will yield its water" (Numbers 20:8).

In great frustration and anger, however, Moses says, "Hear now, you rebels! Must we bring water for you out of this rock?" Moses then *strikes* the rock twice, and water pours from the rock, enough to feed Israel and all their livestock (verses 10-11). But this is not what God had commanded him to do. In part because of Moses' rotten attitude at this point, God denied him entry into the Promised Land (verse 12). Aaron is included in this curse (verse 24). What a blow this must have been to them! All of it as a result of allowing a wrong attitude to provoke them to anger!

James gives us a formula to help us keep our attitudes in check: "Therefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God" (James 1:19-20). God wants us to be quick and ready to hear Him and His truth. As disciples of Christ, we should always remember that we are engaged in learning from God the Father and Jesus Christ, and a good attitude is paramount in getting the most out of our lessons.

Being "slow to wrath" is learning to restrain our tempers and any wrong attitudes. Those that allow anger to trouble them have the tendency to break the law rather than keep it and to contend with ministers and brethren. When one allows wrath or a poor attitude into his thinking, doubts about God's instructions creep in, and disobedience often results. The wrath of man will not produce the right course of life and love of the truth that God requires.

Hasty! Hasty!

The person who jumps to angry conclusions is often one who hears God's Word from the Bible but finds that it does not fit with his thinking or background. For whatever reason, he initially rejects what he hears. This is a *hasty attitude*, and it is one God does not like.

- » **Proverbs 14:29:** He who is slow to wrath has great understanding, but he who is impulsive [*hasty of spirit*, KJV] exalts folly.
- » **Proverbs 21:5:** The plans of the diligent lead surely to plenty, but those of everyone who is hasty, surely to poverty.
- » **Proverbs 29:20:** Do you see a man hasty in his words? There is more hope of a fool than for him.
- » **Ecclesiastes 5:2:** Do not be rash with your mouth, and let not your heart utter anything hastily before God. For God is in heaven, and you on the earth; therefore let your words be few.

God understands the changes demanded of us by our calling. He knows our backgrounds and that we have much to learn in following His way. He knows some conflicts will catch us off guard; there will be times when it comes down to His way versus our way.

Romans 4:3 says, "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." As "father of the faithful," Abraham is a prime example of a correct relationship with God. He did not just believe some things from God or just ideas he agreed with. He believed everything God said! Because of Abraham's wonderful love of God and his right attitude and obedience, God refers to him as His friend.

Being Fair-Minded

In whatever difficult situation we face, whether we feel we are being taught the truth or not, there is still a *right attitude* God wants us to have. As we have seen, this right attitude is neither angry nor hasty. Though the word "attitude" is not found in the Bible, there is a wonderful example of the right attitude that we can follow if we are confronted with a teaching that is different from our understanding.

Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, [Paul and Silas] came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with, them from the Scriptures. . . . But the Jews who were not persuaded, becoming envious, took some of the evil men from the marketplace, and gathering a mob, set all the city in an uproar. . . . Then the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea. When they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so. (Acts 17:1-2, 3, 10-11)

Commenting on the Bereans being "fair-minded," Albert Barnes writes:

This literally means more noble by birth; descended from more illustrious ancestors. But here the word is used to denote a quality of mind and heart. They were more generous, liberal, and noble in their feelings; more disposed to inquire candidly into the truth of the doctrines advanced by Paul and Silas. It is always proof of a noble, liberal, ingenuous disposition to be willing to examine into the truth of any doctrine presented. (*Acts-Romans*, p. 254)

They received the word with all readiness of mind. They listened attentively and respectfully to the gospel. They did not reject out-of-hand Paul's teaching as unworthy of examination. Then they searched the Scriptures daily, repetitively, to ascertain the truth of what the apostle taught.

Right attitude is of the utmost importance to one called by God. If our attitude is poor, we will have a difficult time learning and may reject God's Kingdom. If, on the other hand, our attitude is good, we will be thankful to God for all He does for us, and we will cheerfully work to take on His mind and nature.

Our focus should be on the teaching of God, and our attitude in receiving that teaching should be that of the Bereans, to see if it is so. Herbert W. Armstrong always urged us not to believe him but to search our Bibles to prove it for ourselves.

Isaiah 66:2 reminds us that it is the individual who is humble before God, who is poor and of a contrite spirit, who trembles at His Word—a person with a right *attitude*—that God will deal with and bless as a son.

Did Jonah Repent?

But what about Jonah, his wretched attitude and God's awesome love and patience for Nineveh and for Jonah himself?

No one knows for sure what took place after we leave Jonah sitting, filled with self-pity and feeling sorry for the gourd that had withered. The only other Old Testament reference to Jonah, II Kings 14: 25, makes no mention of his adventure in Assyria. Tradition says that the people of Nineveh showed great respect to Jonah for sounding the warning that saved them.

Knowing that God wants to lose no one, as well as His ability to perfect those He calls, it is nice to think that, indeed, Jonah finally learned the lesson of having a right attitude. If he really meditated on the fruit of God's decision to spare Nineveh, he cannot help but to have repented and continued to do the things God gave him to do.

What is the lesson for us today? We, too, can allow our human nature to rule us through a flawed attitude, giving in to rebellion, anger and hastiness of thought and action. Conversely, we can humble ourselves before God, sincerely asking for a positive and right attitude.

Consider the options—but in reality, there is only one option for a true Christian.