

## THE KNEE-JERK REACTION SYNDROME

Recently I was in a discussion with an individual with a strong Calvinistic mindset who was adamant about individual predestination (by the way, this was a Oneness preacher). It still amazes me that anyone could espouse such a foolish and erroneous doctrine especially anyone with even a hint of the truth of the Apostolic faith.

It is, I think, important to learn a lesson from the circumstances that gave birth in the first place to Calvinism because that lesson can become a template by which we can overlay many other situations that arise among us as Oneness believers. The “knee-jerk reactions” to certain things can ultimately have far-reaching consequences beyond what they were initially intended to manufacture.

Take, for instance, the case of Calvin who overreacted to the works-oriented salvation of the Catholic Church. No doubt the Catholic Church, then and now, teaches that works save us. John Calvin was disgusted with man’s attempt to secure his salvation with good works. So his teachings swung the pendulum to the other extreme, where man had “nothing” to do with his salvation—not even “faith” was man’s responsibility. To him, faith was something that God sovereignly gave to those He elected to be saved.

As the TULIP doctrine congealed over time, it was so opposed to the Catholic doctrine of “good works” that it eventually ended up with man being only a pawn on the great board of life only to be maneuvered by an outside force and had no part whatsoever, in any way, of his own salvation. Man was either “elected” to be saved or, reversely, “elected” to be damned.

I stopped to muse on this “knee-jerk reactions phenomena” and recognized how easily it inserted itself not only into Calvinism, but also among us as true Oneness believers. I will not even attempt to catalogue all the instances where this reaction has reached full-blown extremes far beyond the intended goal and even, at times, falls into the other side of the ditch as an equally false doctrine as the doctrine it opposed in the other ditch.

Caution, it appears, in our reactions must be maintained lest we set in motion a chain reaction that ultimately can be as dangerous as the danger it opposed. I recall Elder Verbal Bean once stating in a conference where there was much ado about the ongoing “outreach” programs of the United Pentecostal Church (bus ministries, etc [who dare give a bus a “ministry!?”]) he said, “I suppose that some of you are so set against the UPC that if they started promoting One God strongly, you would go trinitarian!” I look back on that moment now and chuckle, however, not many were amused at the time, but coming from Brother Bean they took it anyway.

While that event with Brother Bean may be an exaggerated situation it, nonetheless, helps us to see the point of my discussion — a knee-jerk reaction can easily get out of control.

There is something to be said from the illustration that a nail driven to its head is sufficient, but repeated blows thereafter can actually undermine its retaining power. Having evangelized for many years I used to say that the experience of preaching in so many churches through the years taught me a lot of what to do and sometimes a great deal of what not to do once I became a pastor myself. I witnessed, at times, certain pastors that greatly overreacted to some situations that they actually developed a ruling that went postal on them and their churches.

I once heard a man question another with whom he was having a heated disagreement, “Do you know why I am not going to hit you?” to which the other replied, “No, why?” and his answer was, “Because I am afraid that if I start I won't be able to stop!” Now, that’s what I’m talking about!

Calvin’s knee-jerk reactions to Catholicism eventually led him and millions of others into a doctrine as deadly as the one it originally opposed, so in effect, the devil won on both sides of the ditches. Let us, therefore, be cautious in our reactions that we learn both to have them and also to limit their scope of effects. Sometimes the best thing to do with a pandoraian box of reactions is to make certain that the lid is in its rightful place.

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