I was chatting to some friends, in the church I attended. Two other people were talking nearby and one of them became hot under the collar. Within earshot, the angry person said something rather nasty to his unfortunate listener and stormed off. From what I could hear (the talk was very loud - I wasn't eavesdropping!), the argument did not warrant an angry response.

Our pastor was also nearby and had heard the whole thing. What shocked me more than the anger, was the pastor's remark. With a shrug and a weak smile he said "Ah well, that's just the way he is!" I could not believe that a pastor, who is meant to guide the flock entrusted to him by Jesus Christ, could pass over the incident with such a trite comment.

On the other hand, I was not surprised by the comment, which represents a very common view of Man, held by a large number of Christians. Basically, what happened was this: two Christians were talking about a quite inoffensive matter. One of them did not like the fact that the other person held a different view. Therefore, he simply let go with a torrent of abuse and stormed off in a temper. It was blatant sin! What the pastor did was to condone his behaviour by not treating it as sin and he made the mistake of assuming that a personality defect is something to be put up with. Is personality fixed at birth? If this is the case, then salvation does not have the life-changing power it claims to have!

I have not yet met a fellow Christian who believes a personality can be changed. It is thought that our personality is 'given'. So, if a man tends toward a flaring temper, then it is not sin, but 'personality'; if he tends toward exaggeration (bordering on lying), then that is not sin, but 'personality'. If he tends toward hurting people with barbed or sarcastic comments, then that is not sin, but 'personality'. And so the list of 'personality' defects can be extended forever!

What Christians attribute to a personality given by God is, in fact, just plain old sin. God does not give us flaws and sinful responses! We gain all these ourselves without prompting and with definite deliberation. And Satan is always there to add to them. Never fall into the trap of saying that a sinful response is a function of personality which cannot be altered. Salvation gives us far more than a doorway to heaven...it gives us power and authority in the Name of Jesus Christ. It gives us a way to combat sin in our lives. God gives us a way to deal with sin. IN NO WAY does God expect us to remain in our sinfulness, no matter what guise it comes in. If something we think, do or say is sinful, then He expects us to get rid of it immediately.
And there is always a way to act righteously and not sinfully! Not sometimes - ALWAYS. We are told that when we are tempted, we are always given the opportunity and the way to negate the force of the temptation. So, there is never an excuse to be angry without reason, to be bitter, to be nasty or sarcastic, etc. It is not our 'personality', but our sin which causes us to display these attributes. No matter how long we have done things or how often we do them, they are still sins. Each sin is a single incident in God's eyes, even it is consistent with our 'personality'. This means that each time we display a particular aspect of our personality which can be called a flaw, we are committing a fresh sin which must be accounted for. Yet, I know pastors who have abused people without so much as a blush! I know of people who are consistently vile and yet they are not challenged.

Sin ensures that we have blind spots. We refuse to call a sin what it really is because we are ourselves sinful and prone to the very same things. Instead, we make excuses and refer to it as 'personality'. That is, we express unbelief and hypocrisy. What else is it, when we preach the life-changing power of God and then allow all kinds of sins to masquerade as a God-given function? This is as close to blasphemy as we can get!

This error is discovered, rotting, in all areas of life. For example, it is common practice to deify old people. When they are old, people are automatically excused the usual social graces. They can be as unkind, unloving, bitter, snappy, or nasty, as they wish. The excuse? "Oh, it's their age!"

The same kind of nonsense is applied to children. They can be as vile as they wish, without restraint. They can lie and cheat as often as they want. They can be violent and abusive to others and parents will just smile. The reason? They are "only children"! God expects even children to bear responsibility for their sins.

It does not matter if a person is very young or very old: if he is sinning, then he is sinning! Youth - or great age - does not provide a handy exclusion-clause. A person is vile, whether he is nine or ninety. There can be no allowances for age. Yes, we can say that young children have yet to learn and that old people can suffer certain problems which can lead to the possibility of anti-social responses. But these are not excuses. Instead, armed with such knowledge, we should aim to put right what is wrong and point out what is sinful. We must never let it go. When we do that, a sinful response becomes a part of our personality and becomes more studdorn. Human beings will always get away with whatever they can get away with! And the longer they do it, the weaker becomes the conscience.
Personality is not a single factor. 'Personality' includes our physical, mental and spiritual characteristics....how we walk, talk and think; how we dress, eat and write. Everything we ever do or say or think is combined in the thoughts of others; to others, this mixture of things constitutes our 'personality'. So, how we are in life, and how we respond, is our 'personality'. Obviously, if this is what it is, it also includes sin. Personality defects or flaws (eg a bad temper), are the result of temptations which have not been faced and thwarted, but which have been succumbed to and completed. That is, instead of applying prayer and a true Christian response when we are tempted (eg to be hateful), we simply do whatever our 'old man' dictates and we sin. When we constantly respond in this way to the same kinds of temptation, we build up a formidable mass of sin which is noticed by others and which they call our 'personality'. Sin is sin! Personality CAN be changed and MUST be changed when error is prevalent, otherwise our witness suffers. There is such a thing as a Christian personality...it is found in the Christian who acts out his belief in the Lord and obeys His commands. He will still sin, but when he does so, he will repent and change, willingly. When this is an ongoing process, then what was previously a sin-centred and obviously flawed personality, will become more Christ-like.

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