

# Taking Responsibility For Our Actions

## Introduction

Romans 6:12 Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts.

1. Jason, a 14 year old, is summoned to the principal's office at school. His teacher has reported that he used abusive, foul language and hit another student. Before the principal can even inquire of Jason about the circumstances, the youngster blurts out, "It ain't my fault!"

"What do you mean it wasn't your fault?" the principal asks.

"Well, Johnny called me a name and hit me first," Jason declares with full assurance of personal exoneration.

The principal then begins to tell Jason that he is accountable for his own behavior and actions, regardless of what others do, but he notices that the lecture isn't being absorbed. Jason is sure he didn't do anything wrong.

2. This scenario is repeated in a thousand ways every day in schools, ball parks, and homes across our country.
3. Few people seem willing to accept responsibility for their actions, especially their mistakes. It is always the fault of someone else, or a whole group of someone elses (society, church).
4. Denying accountability is nearly our national pastime:
  - A. The smoker claims he "can't quit," the gambler claims he is "addicted," the adulterer claims he was "driven" to it, the homosexual claims he was "born" that way, the murderer claims he was temporarily "insane."
5. Offenders are no longer sinful or criminal (needing punishment), but sick (needing therapy).

In 1980 a Boston court acquitted Michael Tindall of flying illegal drugs into the United States. Tindall's attorneys argued that he was a victim of "action addict syndrome," an emotional disorder that makes a person crave dangerous, thrilling situations. Tindall was not a drug dealer, merely a thrill seeker.

An Oregon man who tried to kill his ex-wife was acquitted on the grounds that he suffered from "depression-suicide syndrome," whose victims deliberately commit poorly planned crimes with the unconscious goal of being caught or killed. He didn't really want to shoot his wife; he wanted the police to shoot him.

Then there's the famous "Twinkie syndrome." Attorneys for Dan White, who murdered San Francisco mayor George Moscone, blamed the crime on emotional stress linked to White's junk food binges. White was acquitted of murder and convicted on a lesser charge of manslaughter.

Nowadays, nobody's at fault for anything. We are a nation of victims.

Louis Lotz, Sioux City, Iowa, Leadership, Winter Quarter, 1992, p. 57

6. We in the church have not been unaffected — it's getting pretty hard these days to find anyone guilty of plain, old-fashioned sin.
  - A. The need for repentance is often obscured by the notion that we can't change without therapeutic "help."
    - 1) David's "I have sinned against the LORD." (2 Samuel 12:13) has been replaced by "I can't help myself; I'm suffering from a disorder."
    - 2) Jesus' "Go and sin no more" (John 8:11) has been replaced by "Go and join a support group."

## Each Person Is Responsible for His Own Sins

1. It is true that an individual may be lost because he has influenced someone else to be lost; but the fact remains that each person is responsible for his own sins.

Deuteronomy 24:16 Fathers shall not be put to death for their children, nor shall children be put to death for their fathers; **a person shall be put to death for his own sin.**

Ezekiel 18:20 **The soul who sins shall die.** The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself.

2. We tend to blame misconduct on four things:
  - A. Heredity (genetic, inheritance)
  - B. Environment (social influences, economic circumstances, etc.)
  - C. Biochemistry (chemical imbalances, hormonal deficiencies, etc.)
  - D. Psychological “disorders” (compulsions, neuroses, psychoses, etc.)
3. We have “medicalized” many misbehaviors that have little or no medical component — we have taken many moral and spiritual problems and redefined them as medical problems.
4. We think in terms of bad things happening to us, rather than in terms of what we do of our own volition.
  - A. Adam and Eve blamed the very first sin on things outside themselves.  
**Genesis 3:12-13**
5. The mere fact that we only attribute bad things to outside forces ought to alert us that something is wrong.
6. We are trying to have our “responsibility” cake and eat it, too.
  - A. As Franklin Jones once said: **“Be thankful for bad luck. Without it, you’d have to blame yourself.”**

## Responsibility Cannot Be Separated From Free Moral Agency

1. William Lee Wilbanks, a professor of criminal justice, has written about what he calls the “New Obscenity”:
  - A. “It’s not a four-letter word, but an oft-repeated statement that strikes at the very core of our humanity. The four words are: **‘I can’t help myself’** .... By ignoring the idea that people face temptations that can — and should — be resisted, it denies the very quality that separates us from the animals.”
2. Unlike the animals, human beings are subjects that act, and not merely objects that are acted upon by biological and social forces.

Genesis 1:27 So **God created man in His own image**; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

Psalms 8:5-8 For You have made him a little lower than the angels, And You have **crowned him with glory and honor**. You have made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet, All sheep and oxen — Even the beasts of the field, The birds of the air, And the fish of the sea That pass through the paths of the seas.

3. We are misdefining many “bodily necessities” as biologically inevitable when they are actually contingent on our wills.

## Considerations That Can Help Our Thinking

1. Some behaviors do come to involve medical factors and physical compulsions.
  - A. But these rarely arise if certain choices have not been made earlier.
    - 1) **Drug addiction:** The eventual bodily demand for the chemicals does not negate the fact that the demand would not be there if certain decisions had not been made earlier.
    - 2) **Suicide:** The man who jumps off a bridge may well be helpless once he is in the water, but it is hardly his body's fault that he got there.
    - 3) **Smoking:** The one who is treated for lung cancer, emphysema, and other problems associated with smoking probably would not be dealing with these issues had they not smoked that first cigarette.

Romans 13:14 But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.

2. To say that a person has a unique “package of pressures” does not absolve him of personal responsibility.
  - A. We all have peculiar pressures.
  - B. Jesus had his own pressures.  
**Luke 4:1-13**
3. Anyone can do right when **all factors are favorable to us** — but Christ has called us to a higher standard!
4. Outside (so called professional) help is sometimes needed to break out of a pattern of wrong behavior, but help is no more than that.
  - A. We must still accept responsibility for our actions.

5. What we are saying is this: Basically there are two boxes to check:
- A. I am responsible
  - B. I am not responsible
- 1) For every action that really should go in not responsible, we are putting many in that do not go there.
  - 2) God is the one who will decide what goes in which box. He knows that He made us capable of resisting much stronger temptations than we sometimes admit.

Philippians 4:13 I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

1 Corinthians 10:13 No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.

6. In God's judgment of accountable persons, there are only two groups:
- A. The responsible good
  - B. The responsible evil
- Romans 2:6-11**

2 Corinthians 5:10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

7. I must ask: Where is the third category? Those who are responsible for the good they have done, but not responsible for the evil (sin).

## Conclusion

1. Satan would like us to believe that we are helpless, that nothing we do that is sinful is really our fault — but that is a lie!

James 4:7 Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.

- A. We do not have to be the passive victims of sin
  - B. Our behavior ought to be the result of our decisions, not our conditions.
2. We never have to sin!  
**James 1:12-16**
  3. When we do sin, we ought to have the integrity to take responsibility for our actions and repent.
  4. Outside sources might help, but what we really need is Jesus Christ!

Romans 6:12 Therefore **do not let sin reign in your mortal body**, that you should obey it in its lusts.

5. May we all strive to be the best individuals that we can possibly be – serving God with all our strength.
  - A. When we do mess up, make mistakes, and sin, don't blame others or things, but rather accept what we have done as wrong and ask God and others to forgive us.

