

# RESPONSIBILITY

By

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One of the most serious problems we face in today's world is the absence of personal responsibility. Many of us grew up among people who believed that goals were to be obtained through diligence and hard work, and that every person was accountable for his own mistakes and sins.

Over the past five decades there has been a paradigm shift in values to the extent that the common attitude is: "I am not responsible for my actions." When a crime is committed there is a mad rush to check out every possible influence upon the criminal and to shift the responsibility - to the parents, to the environment, or to some other segment of society. Whenever something goes wrong the first thing many of us think of is that someone must be sued to pay for the damages. For example, tobacco companies are held responsible for people smoking themselves to death.

It appears that our culture is dedicated to destroying any such thing as the individual conscience. All must be equal - equally guilty or equally innocent. The result is that millions submit to the herd instinct. During the 1992 Los Angeles riots, Damian Williams was filmed crushing an innocent man's skull with a brick, while Henry Watson held the victim down, after which Williams did a victory dance. Their lawyers defended them on the premise that people cannot be held accountable for getting caught up in mob violence. When they were acquitted on most counts, there was hardly any objection from across the country.

In our demoralized society there is an effort to homogenize humanity and abolish independent thought. For decades the public schools have insisted that there are no absolute truths and no absolute moral standards, and have taught "values clarification" which leaves each one to create his own moral standard by observing his or her peers. "Every one else is doing it" is the basis upon which actions are determined.

This has developed what Albert Jay Nock (1870-1945) called "The mass-man." He wrote, "The mass-man is one who has neither the force of intellect to apprehend the principles issuing in what we know as the humane life, nor the force of character to adhere to those principles steadily and strictly as laws of conduct..."

The mass-people have no desire to become true individuals, persons completely and solely responsible for their own thoughts and actions. They feel accountable to the masses, rather than to God. Their fear is not the fear of God, but the fear of being stigmatized as religious fanatics. They may attend religious gathering to lose themselves in a kind of mass hysteria, to feel stimulated without the effort of clear and precise thought, and to be carried by a storm of emotion to an intense feeling of well being. "It was awesome," they may say, although they hardly knew what was said or done. "It was exciting." But the mind was never seriously engaged.

As soon as the surge of emotion has subsided, nothing is left but a void, to be filled with restlessness, or even depression.

God has made us all different, with different personalities, different abilities, and different responsibilities. We do not all have the same capacities, in spite of all the twaddle we hear about equality. So far as can be determined, God has never created any two things exactly alike. But He has set a standard by which we all will be judged, so that we do not measure our lives and our actions by the consensus of the multitude, by His own words.

We are created in the image of God to the extent that each of us can conscientiously think the thoughts of God which He has revealed. That which is produced is a mind-to-mind relationship between man and God. It can not be produced vicariously. No one can do another's thinking and no one is brought into this relationship on a mass basis. Each mind must deal with its own individual relationship to the Creator.

We will never get America to believe the gospel and repent, as so many are saying it must do. Repentance requires a personal conscience and only takes place in the mind and heart of individuals one by one.

When the prophet, Nathan, got King David to see himself in the terrible sins he committed with regard to Bathsheba and her husband Uriah his acceptance of personal responsibility for what he had done was a turning point in his life. Sin became a reality to him, as he sang out, "Against thee, thee only have I sinned.... My sin is ever before me" (Psalm 51:3-4). His prayer was not a general plea for the nation, but he prayed, "cleanse me from my sin...create in me a clean heart, O God" (vs.2, 10).

The principle is expressed in an old Negro Spiritual: "Not my brother, not my sister, but it's me, O Lord, standing in the need of prayer...Not my mother, not my father, but it's me O Lord, standing in the need of prayer." I am the one who sinned, and stand guilty before my Maker. All the sin committed by others does nothing to mitigate my own guilt. I cannot shift the blame to society, however corrupt that society may be. Before God one stands stripped of all else but his own character. For that reason, our society avoids the subject. It is afraid of character, as character is not what one is portrayed to be by the media, but what a person actually is in the eyes of God.

Only God and I know the secrets of my life, and I alone can receive the forgiveness He offers through HIS son, Christ Jesus. Such forgiveness requires personal belief, repentance and confession. Merely joining a crowd which holds to certain doctrines does not qualify as belief. Many people can recite their church's creed by memory each Sunday morning, but cannot tell you what it all means to them personally. Jesus asked his disciples, "Who do men say that the Son of man is?" They told him what others were saying. He then said, "But who do you say that I am?" Not what the polls say, and not what any of the councils of men say, but Peter, what do you say? Peter, a common fisherman and a man with common faults, was called upon to give a personal answer to the greatest question ever asked. The personal answer he gave became known as the good confession, the basis of faith: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:13-16).

The path of personal responsibility is a two-way street. Just as I am the one who sinned, so I am the one for whom Jesus died. It is the individual that counts. Jesus said that the angels in heaven rejoice when one sinner comes to repentance. However firmly the majority may deny and reject the Savior, his power is never diminished, but it is available to each one who has the willingness to exercise his own mind and arrive at personal faith. Then all the great promises belong to that one.

For personal responsibility there are also personal rewards. Besides the forgiveness of sin, which is reward enough, each penitent believer is the recipient of God's own presence through the power of His spirit. Jesus said, "If a man loves me, he will keep my word: and my Father will love him; and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him" (John 14:23). David expressed it: "In thy presence is fullness of joy" (Psalm 16:11). This is not the joy of the church picnic, but a personal joy one has in his own private communion with the Lord.

What men fail to see in this age of worldly wisdom is that God works in those who believe Him. While governments seek more ways to control the citizen, the intent of God is that each person exercise self-control in love to God and his neighbor. The news headlines do not reflect the real work of God. It is going on in the minds and hearts of people who trust Him and responsibly submit to him.

Saving faith requires that one think and act as an individual, but that is not to say that he has no concern for others. Quite the contrary: To have God as Father means that we have brothers in all His sons. It is the individual who has denied self and left the masses who feels genuine compassion for others, and will personally bear their burdens, minister to the fatherless and widows, visit the sick and impoverished, and share with them his bread.

The personal fellowship between a believer and God is a tie that cannot be broken by any outside influence or circumstance. It is a relationship that can never be taken away from you against your will, because you are the one responsible to maintain that relationship through faith and by God's marvelous grace.

"For it is written, as I live, says the Lord, to me every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall confess to God."

"So then each one of us shall give account of himself to God" (Rom. 14:11-12)

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