



—photo by Jim Whitmer

I can't help my mistakes because

- my parents never treat me right
- my teachers never care about me
- my friends don't give me a chance
- other

What's Your Excuse?

by CHARLES C. RYRIE

One morning not long ago I was in a small group meeting, where we were talking about personal responsibility. Fully thirty minutes after we had begun, a fellow dashed in and found a seat. "My alarm clock didn't go off," he explained. Everybody broke up. We'd just been talking about shifting blame, and here was a beautiful example. "My alarm clock—" Whose clock? "Mine." Who's supposed to have set it? Who's supposed to have wound it? Who's supposed to have seen it was working? You get the point. We're living in a world where the big switch is on. Everyone's trying to blame somebody else for his problems. "It's not my fault. . .you don't know my background, my parents, the home I was brought up in, the terrible circumstances that surrounded me. You don't know how mean those teachers are. It's their fault that I don't pass or get A's." The Lord even gets blamed for flunking. "I couldn't study; I had to go to church." Or someone may say, "It's not my fault that I was born with a lower IQ." What I'm talking about is a most important spiritual law, the law of responsibility. You'll find it in Gala-

tians 6:7. "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."

In other words, you bear responsibility for what you do. To be sure, circumstances and background do affect you: I'm not saying they don't. It does make a difference whether you were born in the country or in the city, whether you live in a ghetto or in a suburb. But don't ever forget that each of us has a personal responsibility to react properly to his background and circumstances.

Parents and teachers may not be the greatest, surroundings and upbringing may be the worst, and everything may seem against you. But still, how you react to those things and how you handle them is your responsibility, not theirs.

This principle is well illustrated in the familiar parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15. A man had two sons, and the younger one asked his father for his inheritance. The father gave it to him. Not long afterwards this son went to a distant country. There he lived it up, spending everything he had. Then there came a famine, and he couldn't get food. He hired himself out to a man who sent him to

feed his pigs. He was so hungry he wanted to eat the pigs' food. Then he came to himself, and you know the rest of the story, how he returned home.

NOW LET'S PUT this young man in our present day and analyze some of the excuses he might have given to dodge his responsibility. First he might have said, "I wouldn't be in this pigpen if my father had any sense. It's really his fault." The father shouldn't have given in so easily, so simply, so freely—should he?

Others might have said, "You don't know my situation. My parents are against me. That's why I am as I am."

I'm sorry if that's true. But that doesn't absolve you of the responsibility to react correctly in whatever situation you now find yourself. You can't shift the responsibility to parents or to upbringing.

Or he might have said, "The world did it to me. I couldn't stand all the temptations, so I simply spent it all. It's not my fault, it's the world's fault, the fault's out there in a thing, in a system, in the world. I was just overcome by it."

Now look, we all live in the world, and the world is that orderly system that Satan heads. The world is pretty powerful, and Satan's system is pretty strong. But we're to live holy lives in the midst of the world. The only alternative I know of is separation by suicide. But since that doesn't please God, either, then we are to live here, in the midst of the world system. Your reactions to it, how you handle

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it, how you resist temptation, are your responsibility.

Another great excuse is: God's fault. God sends rain, God withholds rain, and if the famine and there's no food, there's no rain, that's God's fault. You see, it's God's fault I'm in situation."

We do this sometimes. We do something, or we flunk something, and then we flippantly quote Romans 8:28, "All things work together for good to them that love God and are called according to His purpose." My failure is according to His purpose? Nonsense. We're blaming God for our failure to achieve what is our responsibility to achieve.

I'll take no back seat to anybody as far as the belief in the sovereignty of God is concerned. All things are in His hands. But responsibility is not obliterated because God is running the world. He's running it through you and me.

If God has everything in His control to the extent that you don't have any responsibility, why do you look when you cross the street? Does God know who's going to be saved? Yes, I believe that God has an elect people. Why do I preach, witness and give out tracts? In order that they will be saved, because God has given me that responsibility.

Does God know the answers He's going to give to my prayers? Yes. Then why do I pray? In order that He may answer them. You and I are responsible not to discover the unrevealed aspects of God's plan, but to do what is clearly revealed in His written Word. When you fail, don't say, "Oh, Lord, it's Your fault, You sent the famine, You sent the test, You sent the failure." Say, "I am responsible."

I suppose that when the prodigal was in want, before he got a job, he

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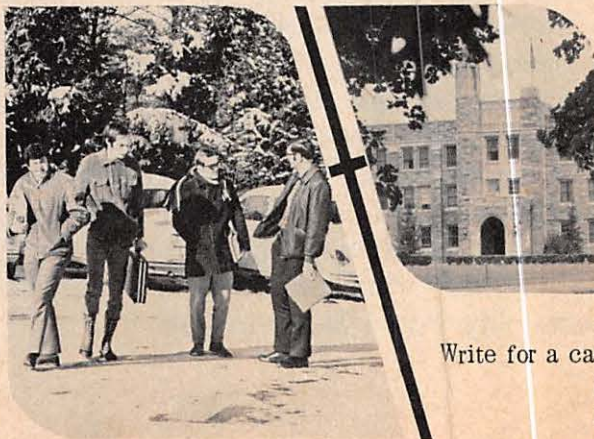
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might have said, "If this country had any concern and love for people, they'd give me welfare. The government's to blame, I'm not to blame. It's all the fault of the system. The system is to blame."

Don't kid yourself, I'm part of the system and you're part of the system. The only way to be apart from the system is to go into some other system. You can't expect the government or the school or somebody to take care of you when it's your responsibility to do what you can.

So he joined himself to a citizen, and the citizen sent him to feed swine. Of course, if that citizen had really loved him, he would have given him an inside administrative job, not an outside, pigpen job. "It's the fault of my employers." So he might have argued.

Now NOTICE those possible excuses, and see what modern, twentieth century Americans would have done with them. "My father's to blame. Lay me out on a couch, in the pigpen, and psychoanalyze me, show me that it's my father's fault, and that'll set everything right, if I can just put the responsibility on my parents." Put a couch in the pigpen and that'll take care of the problem.

"The world overwhelmed me." Okay, why don't you go to a monastery where you won't see the world? Turn off all the neon signs and take away all the ads and isolate yourself, and that'll make you a saint. Will it? You know what you'll take to the monastery? Your old nature. Get rid of the world, you've still got an old sin nature.


"God did it, famine, He sent it." Well, the answer to that will be seen in the millennium, when things are perfect, and the knowledge of the Lord covers the earth as the waters cover the sea. Yet at the end there will be enough people to revolt against God. Why? In the midst of a perfect environment, still people will sin. Suppose we had a welfare state, would that make saints out of all of us? Or suppose we had unions for pigpen workers, would that take care of the problem?

Well there's one other thing I haven't mentioned, and I suppose we could really blame the actions of this younger man on his older brother. If you had to live with a brother like that, certainly you wouldn't be responsible for what you did, would you? "Lord, you don't know my

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brother."

Yes, the Lord does, and the Lord knows you, and so does your brother. "My brother obviously is the thorn in the flesh. He's the problem. It's not me. I'm not responsible for what I do." Suppose there'd been no brother in the family, still this man would have asked for his inheritance, gone and wasted it, because he was sinful.

You're getting the point, aren't you? I can't shift responsibility if I'm ever going to deal with the problem. If I shift it, then of course I'll never deal with it personally. If I'm going to deal with the problem, the only way to do it is exactly the way this fellow did. He faced it. So he says, "How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger."

Did you ever ask something like that? How many other Christians seem to have blessing and help in the Christian life, and I'm shrivelled up. What will I do? The prodigal's answer was "I will arise and go to my father, and I will say, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee." And I'll ask for nothing.

Young people, whenever there is failure, and there always will be, till the end of your life, this is the only solution, this is the only way to victory. Don't shift the blame, don't say, "It's their fault." It is your fault. The only way to get back is to say as this prodigal did, "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee."

Please notice, this boy had departed, taken his share, gone to make his own life in another country. But when he sinned in the other country on his own, he was not sinning in isolation. He sinned against his human father back in another country. He did not sin in his presence, he did not do anything personally to the father, but he sinned against the father. You do not sin in isolation.

I know the old outline concerning sins—sins against God, sins against self, sins against others, and it's all right; but most sins are sins against all three—God, self and others. That's how it was in this story. He sinned against his father; he sinned against God, and he sinned against himself.

Even though sin is very private and personal, as many sins are, they nevertheless affect God; they affect others, and they affect you. Even though it may seem very indirect, the effect very minor, nevertheless all

sin, I think, affects God, others and you.

There's something else about sin: it's part of our history. We may be forgiven, but history cannot be changed. I would say that the years this fellow spent in the far country in riotous living, he never got back.

About once a year I get a letter from a student, and he says, "I've gotten under conviction, and I want to write and apologize to you for sleeping through your classes. I'm sorry and I apologize, and I hope you'll forgive me." Oh sure, I forgive him; I already have. It's a lot easier to forgive them years later than during the class when they're sleeping, but I forgive them.

But even the most repentant letter can't change a transcript, can't take the class over again, can't live those hours that were slept through again. What you do today will forever be a part of this day's history. What you do in class this semester will forever be on that transcript. I am responsible for what I do. Sin affects my history.

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couldn't change that fact. If you get married and let your marriage end in divorce, it will forever be a part of your history. You get a police record, and you can't get a visa to some countries to serve as a missionary, no matter how earnest your desire or your call.

It is a sobering fact, but I hasten to add that God forgives, just as the

prodigal's father did. He saw him a-far off and went to welcome him. It's almost as if we see the father just waiting for the first step to be taken, and then he bridges the gap, meets the repentant son, falls on his neck and kisses him.

When there's sin in our lives, God is waiting, just waiting for that first step of confession, and He is eager to forgive us and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Forgiven, yes. Restored, yes. Years returned, no. And yet sometimes in the grace of God, because we learn from past sins, sometimes we can make up for lost time. Even though the years may be lost or the semester or the course or the day or the week or whatever, still because we are soberly repentant about it and know what is involved, we can make up for lost time.

Sometimes the saints who make the greatest progress in the Christian life are those who've fallen into sin and learned the lesson that's involved. This is not to excuse the sin—never. Sin is always sin, but somehow God can take even the wrath of men and make it praise Him. He can do it; I can't.

That's a mysterious thing, how God can take my failures, make me learn from them, even make me better because of them and still make me responsible for sin.

Now, when I sin, *I* sin; *I'm* responsible. It's wrong; it's never right. But somehow, somehow God and only God can help us to take the mistakes, learn from them, and weave them into a beautiful life, if we acknowledge them as mistakes.

"Father, I've sinned against heaven and against thee. I don't deserve anything." When we come with that attitude, God gives us so very, very much.

Now, I don't know your spiritual state. I hope you're not trying to pull the big switch and give the responsibility to it or them. I hope you will be honest, open, sincere before God, and I hope every time sin comes into your life and you're aware of it, you quickly, immediately and sincerely say, "Lord, I've sinned."

As we do, God will throw His arms of love around us, restore us, if we'll learn from the lesson, and make us even better. Meanwhile He never excuses the sin, but He somehow weaves us into a harmonious whole with Himself as we walk with Him.

END

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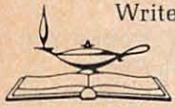
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