

## VICTIM MENTALITY VERSUS PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

### Man's Way Versus God's Way (Part 4)

In this series of feature articles, we have been contrasting man's inability to solve the problems of life with God's detailed and complete answers for facing, dealing with, and enduring every trial of life. In parts 1 through 3, we considered the first three contrasts:

<b>Contrast</b>	<b>Man Says</b>	<b>God Says</b>
#1	Follow the "Latest Research"	Follow the Scriptures
#2	Save self	Die to self
#3	Live by feelings	Live a disciplined life

In this article, we address Contrast #4: Victim Mentality versus Personal Responsibility.

#### Are we victims of our environment?

About 100 years ago, the founder of a modern psychological view theorized that a person responds to his environment because of instinctual impulses, or drives, that originate in childhood. In this view, we see clearly man's natural propensity toward self-gratification, but there is no hope, since man is doomed to follow his "drives." The possibility of victory through spiritual rebirth is ignored. What the Bible describes as being sin (preoccupation with self), the world promotes as commendable. The Bible presents self denial as a godly pursuit (*Luke 9:23*); man advocates self gratification as a desirable goal.

In recent years, many psychologists have rejected the original instinctual view, but by and large, humanistic psychologists have retained the original premise that individuals are not responsible for their "wrong" behavior. They continue to blame society, family, heritage, and the environment for a person's failure to overcome the problems of life. Even Christians have chosen to believe or have been influenced by this worldly reasoning. The statements in the following list indicate how ungodly reasoning has been slipping into Christian conversations.

"You made me angry." "I can't help the way I am." "You're responsible for getting me into this." "You hurt my feelings." "I'm genetically pre-disposed in this way."	"I can't help being embittered because I was physically abused." "I did it subconsciously." "I have always been quick-tempered." "The demon made me do it."	"I'm just free-spirited." "I was driven to do it." "You hurt my self-esteem." "I am an alcoholic and will always be one. It's something I have to live with." "That's just the way I am."
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Do any of these statements sound familiar to you? We have all heard at least one of them, regardless of the culture or generation in which we live. The common theme is that some external or "involuntary internal influence" is responsible for what the Bible defines as sin. In other words, statements like these seek to point to our being "victims" of our past, our personality, our environment, our "uncontrollable" desires, etc. As Christians, we know that God will hold us accountable for every deed (*Ecclesiastes 12:14; II Corinthians 5:10*). Even so, we often make statements similar to those above, suggesting that we are not totally responsible for our behavior. Why do we do this?

One of the reasons may be that we accept the ideas of so-called “mental health specialists,” especially if we hear the same message many times. We do not question what we hear. Instead, we should be like the Bereans, who searched the Scriptures daily to evaluate even what the Apostle Paul presented (*Acts 17:11*).

### **Godliness is the result of personal responsibility. Sin is a choice.**

The Bible makes clear that we make choices on the basis of our will, not because of some irresistible pressure (*Genesis 4:7*). The Lord stated that all of the laws of Scripture can be summarized by just two commandments – love God and love your neighbor (*Matthew 22:37-40*). We *choose* to love or not to love. We experience worry because we *choose* not to seek God in everything (*Matthew 6:33-34*). We experience fear because we *choose* not to love God (*1 John 4:18*).

We are all born with a propensity to sin (*Romans 3:10-18*). Satan is not the only one who tempts us; we are also enticed by our own lusts (*James 1:14*). Not only does man sin, he looks for excuses for his sin. Worse yet, he approves others for doing the same (*Romans 1:32*). The world looks for ways to blame bad behavior on influences such as bad parenting, bad company, personality traits, physical addictions, circumstances of life, and Satan.

Among Christians, one of the more popular ways of shifting blame is to ascribe their sins to Satan and his helpers. Many books have been written about spiritual warfare, with a heavy emphasis on blaming sinful acts on outside sources (such as “generational” sins, curses, or demons). When someone asks for prayer because he says he has the “demon of worry,” he is implying that he is not totally responsible for worrying, thus shifting the blame. The implication is that because the demon is the cause of the problem, only prayer and exorcism can free him from this sin. In a sense, he sees himself as an innocent bystander. This misunderstanding completely ignores the fact that Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil (*1 John 3:8*). Just before He breathed His last on the cross, He proclaimed “It is finished (accomplished).” He finished the work He came to do, including destroying the works of the devil. Furthermore, since the Holy Spirit is in believers, it is not possible for a demon to be in a believer (*1 John 4:4*). Satan can only tempt; he cannot make a believer sin (*1 Corinthians 10:13*; *James 4:7*; *1 Peter 5:8-9*). Believers are not doomed to have to sin (*1 Corinthians 10:13*).

It is certainly true that we may encounter powerful pressures to sin. For example, parents can greatly influence their children in the wrong direction. But God declares that each person is individually responsible for his behavior (*Ezekiel 18:20*). In *Ezekiel 18:2-18*, God makes it very clear, both by statement and by illustration, that no one (not even the very strong influence of a father on his son) can force a person to sin.

Some ask, “Then why are children of alcoholic parents more likely to become alcoholics?” It is reasonable that the manner or way in which we sin may be heavily influenced by other people or by our environment. Certainly, children who are brought up in homes of drunkards are more exposed to the availability of alcohol than children who have never been around people who are drunkards. In fact, a child may be born to a mother addicted to alcohol, and thus, have a weakness for alcohol. If a person is inclined to sin, he does not need to search very far to find ways of gratifying the flesh. Some ways are just more convenient or easy than others.

### **Conclusion**

The Lord has given us victory, but He also warned us that the desire or propensity to sin is strong (*based on Romans 6:1-8:1*). As a matter of fact, without the empowering of the Holy Spirit, overcoming our sins is impossible. However, the Lord has assured us that we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us (*Philippians 4:13*).

Believers *can* overcome the tests and trials of life; Those who are not overcoming their trials are not victims; they are disobedient children. Each person is responsible for the decision to follow the Lord or to live in defeat.

**NOTE:** Much of the information in this article is taken from the ***Self-Confrontation*** manual and its accompanying ***Instructor's Guide***.