



guidelines for living

a 5 minute message

January 17, 2018

WHO'S RESPONSIBLE?

“The soul who sins is the one who will die. The son will not share the guilt of the father, nor will the father share the guilt of the son...” (Ezekiel 18:20).

An eighteen-year-old fathers a child and then walks away saying, “How do I know that I’m the only one who could have done this?” A widow with a considerable bank account is overwhelmed with the personal interest shown to her by a man young enough to be her own son. Following a romantic fling, she marries him. Her family is quite certain that the man is more interested in her money than in her. A father of three children, a great musician whose worship choruses are sung all over the world, walks out on his family, saying, “I don’t want to be married any more!”

Irresponsible decisions, we say. What’s happened to personal responsibility? Has it gone out the window, overwhelmed by our desire for personal happiness, instant gratification, and immediate pleasure? Does it really matter how others are affected if the equation produces personal gratification?

Winston Churchill called responsibility “the price of greatness.” “But who cares about greatness? I’d rather have fun!” is the mentality that is motivating our generation.

Today, personal responsibility is challenged by three enemies: individualism, relativism, and secularism. First, there is no questioning the fact that ours today is the age of special interest groups who all demand their rights. The emphasis today is personal. “I gotta be me.” Right. We understand that. Like old Frank Sinatra, who reflected so much of the individualism many of us exhibit as he sang, “I did it my way!” But doing it your way may be very costly for others whose lives are vitally affected by your selfish choices.

Have you ever considered what kind of a mess we would be in if everybody got to do it his or her way? Consider the captain of a commercial airliner who decides halfway to his destination that he would like a few drinks on the boring flight over a dark ocean. Or what of the surgeon who gets tired during a long surgical procedure and decides that he’d rather go play golf and let the scrub nurse finish the operation?

Everything that you do affects others, especially in a family. It’s fine for a teen to bore a hole in an old piece of wood in the garage, but boring a hole in the floor of a boat on a family outing could sink the whole family.



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The second enemy of personal responsibility today is relativism. "I'm not responsible. I'm a victim of my heredity or my culture, or the society who produced me." I was on my way home when the traffic came to a halt rather suddenly and I noticed a vehicle turned crossways ahead of me, obviously in trouble. Stopping to help, I approached the pickup truck only to find that others were there helping, so I went on to the second car, which had caused the collision. In the driver's seat was a woman whose head had broken the windshield from the impact as her car had smashed the other vehicle. "Can I help?" I asked. "I'm an alcoholic," she cried, "I'm not responsible for what I did." The lives of two men in the truck were in the balance because of an irresponsible decision to drink and drive.

Secularism also is an enemy of personal responsibility. To acknowledge that you will ultimately give an account to God Himself makes you think soberly and thoughtfully about your decisions and your obligations. But throw out God and the authority of His Word, and you have no one to answer to for your selfish choices or the hurtful ways in which you conduct yourself.

Believe it or not, your choices determine your measure of responsibility for which you must ultimately be accountable.

Resource reading: Ezekiel 18:19-32.