

Question: I have a friend who always blames others for the mess his life is in. He doesn't accept any personal responsibility for what he does. What would Jesus say about this?

The practice of blaming others for one's own sins and mistakes started with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Adam blamed Eve for tempting him to take of the forbidden fruit. Although Eve was guilty of urging Adam to disobey God, he was still held responsible for his own decision to eat the forbidden fruit (Genesis 3).

Today we hear of criminals who blame the world around them for causing their actions by saying: "I was only doing what I had to do to get by." Even a man who murdered his wife blamed her because she cheated on him with another man. Sometimes we hear a person say, "It's not my fault that I do what I do. It's because of the way my parents raised me."

While we should not be expected to accept responsibility for what others do, we must accept responsibility for the way we respond to what they do. Others may influence us and make it difficult for us to do what is right, but we are still responsible for choosing to follow them and allowing them to influence us. No one forces us to do wrong. Each of us must make choices for ourselves. The prophet Ezekiel said: "The one who sins is the one who will die. The child will not share the guilt of the parent, nor will the parent share the guilt of the child. The righteousness of the righteous will be credited to them, and the wickedness of the wicked will be charged against them" (Eze. 18:20; cf. all of Ezekiel 18).

In the early 1970s, Dr. Karl Menniger, a famed psychiatrist, wrote a book entitled, *Whatever Became of Sin*. He proposed that we get back to the concept of sin and take responsibility for what happens in our individual lives and in our world. Unless we are held accountable for what we choose to do, we are not likely to see any changes for the better in our world. In fact, the degree to which one is willing to take responsibility for his actions indicates his level of maturity. The immaturity of children often responds by saying, "It's not my fault. He made me do it."

The wisdom of the Proverbs says, "He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses

and renounces them finds mercy” (Proverbs 28:13). The only way to truly cover sin in our lives is to have it covered by God through forgiveness. God’s desire and willingness to forgive through his grace is beyond our ability to measure; but we must accept responsibility, acknowledge our sinfulness and learn a better way to live. This is called repentance. Jesus taught that forgiveness is always available, but only to one who repents (Luke 17:3-4). Clearly Jesus would have us to take charge of our own lives by accepting responsibility for what we do. Others may also be at fault; but in the final analysis, each of us chooses his or her own future.

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