

*Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial,
because when he has stood the test, he will receive the
crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.
~ James 1: 12*



NEWS Regeneration

www.RegenerationMinistries.org

Involuntary Responses

By Alan Medinger

Your eyes catch hold of something or someone, or a thought suddenly comes into your mind, seemingly out of nowhere, and you feel your body start to respond sexually. Immediately your heart and mind start to flail around, thrusting the old familiar feelings of guilt and shame and hopelessness at you. Here I go again. Will I ever change? What's the use of even trying?

Does this sound familiar? Many Christian men and women, especially those who have a history of repeated failures in the face of sexual temptation, can identify with what I am describing. Guilt and despair come charging in as soon as we start to feel a sexual response to external or internal stimuli. But very often this guilt is a wrong reaction. Experiencing sexual feelings in certain situations does not mean that we have sinned.

Having a sexual response or feeling sexual arousal is not a sin. It is a natural or learned response and, more importantly, it is very often an involuntary response. A more appropriate way to react in such situations would be to tell ourselves, "Of course I responded with sexual feelings, I have trained my body to respond that way." The reason why I am addressing this subject is that the guilt, shame, and despair we feel in reaction to these involuntary responses can themselves be contributors to our moving on toward actual sin.

Our bodies are wonderfully designed so we can act responsively to specific stimuli without having to make a conscious decision to act. Some responses may be programmed in us from birth, but most are the result of past training and experiences. A ball comes flying at your face and you immediately jump out of the way or throw up your hands to deflect or catch it. You do this

because you have learned that a ball traveling at a high speed, if it impacts with your face, will cause severe pain. Similarly, our bodies may break out in goose bumps and our heart beat increase when we hear a military band play a patriotic song, or a great choir singing an anthem of praise. We see an adorable little baby and, without a conscious thought, reach out to touch its tender cheek.

We probably could not survive very long if our bodies could not be trained to respond involuntarily. Our emotional lives would indeed be flat if our bodies didn't respond spontaneously to the world around us.

Incredible things happen at conversion. The great power that sin has to control us has severely diminished. As new creatures in Christ, we have the power to change in ways that are not available to the natural man.

SIN INVOLVES CHOICE

Some Christians may debate about whether or not we sin if we engage in a sinful act that we don't know is sinful. But I believe most Christians would agree that for our behavior to be sinful, choice must be present. Thus, sexual behavior is not sinful if it is forced on us, such as in the case of rape. Nor are we guilty of theft if we accidentally pick up the wrong jacket in a coat room.

To a great extent sexual arousal is involuntary. Even the arousal that may occur in the best situations—a husband feeling great love for his wife suddenly having sexual feelings for her—can be involuntary.

But, you may protest, our concern is not for loving responses to our spouses, but sexual feelings that occur in response to a stimulus that never should have attracted us in the first place. It can be a sexual response of a man for a man or of a woman for a woman, or simply for a very attractive person of the opposite sex with whom any sexual contact would be sinful. Such a

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challenge touches on three reasons why we tend to feel guilt, shame and despair for these involuntary responses. Let's look at them:

1. Past sinful behavior formed the involuntary response.

This is probably true—but it is irrelevant. Our response was probably programmed into us through years of engaging in sexual fantasy and masturbation involving certain images. Through repetition we trained our bodies to respond sexually to certain stimuli. The stimuli may be a person or an action that comes into our field of view, or a thought that pops into our head. The sexual response became automatic.

But that is our past. Nothing we can do now can change this past. Even when we first surrendered our life to Jesus Christ, our past did not change. And some effects of the past are present in all Christians. The people we damaged are still damaged. The harm we did to our bodies and brains, barring a true miracle, are still there. And the patterns of brain activity that link one thought with another, the patterns that govern our responses, still exist. As I stated earlier, "Of course I responded that way; that's how I trained my brain to respond."

Please Pray With Us . . .

Thanksgiving – Join us this month in thanking God . . .

- For the healthy birth of **Lucy Grace Glaser**, born April 11th at 9:22 a.m. Mom and baby are home and the entire Glaser family is adjusting to life with this new gift from God in our midst.
- For the positive response to the first half of **Bob Ragan's** 7 week class at the Falls Church (formerly the Falls Church Episcopal Church) entitled *Grace, Truth and Homosexuality* in Falls Church, Virginia.

Prayer Requests – Please pray for . . .

- For **Bob Ragan** as he continues to equip and encourage members of the Falls Church on *Grace, Truth and Homosexuality*. The Falls Church is one of the several congregations that voted to leave the Episcopal Church USA because of the denomination's departure from scriptural teachings, including teachings about homosexuality.
- That many pastors and lay-leaders would take advantage of the opportunity to become better equipped to help those in their congregations struggling with sexual sin by attending this springs' pastors' luncheons held by Regeneration Baltimore (*see page 4*).

For more information or in-depth monthly prayer requests,
E-mail info@RegenerationMinistries.org.

But incredible things happen at conversion. The great power that sin has to control us is severely diminished. As new creatures in Christ, we have the power to change in ways that are not available to the natural man. Change may come slowly—too slowly for most of us—but we are no longer slaves to past patterns of response and behavior. As Paul says, sin may still live in us (Romans 7:17 and 20), but now, sin no longer defines us. It is as an alien still living in us. Perhaps these involuntary responses are a part of what Paul was writing about when he addressed sin living in us.

2. These involuntary responses are almost always the precursor of entering into lust and sexual sin.

This may have been true in the past, but it doesn't have to be now. Typically, we get into any sin through a three step process: attraction, temptation, and sin. Something sinful seems good or desirable to us (attraction), we contemplate *doing* something to satisfy that attraction, (temptation), and we take action to gain that satisfaction (sin). As just described, if the attraction is of a certain type, it may almost always be accompanied by sexual arousal.

In our ministry we frequently have to help people distinguish the difference between temptation and sinning. So often our people condemn themselves because they have been tempted to do something perverse. When they step back and look at things objectively, they often come to see that being tempted and sinning are obviously two different things, and furthermore, successfully resisting the temptation is cause for celebration not self-condemnation.

In the same way, we need to see that attractions (even with involuntary sexual arousal) are not sins. In fact they are not even temptations to sin. This distinction is important because when we allow either attractions or temptations to bring on guilt, shame or despair, we increase the likelihood that we will sin. Guilt, shame and despair diminish our sense of strength and turn us inward—away from the Lord—and they can lead us to seeing failure as inevitable. They set us up for sin.

3. The stimulus that causes our response relates to something evil and perverse; therefore our response is sinful.

This brings us to the problem we have when people say something like, "Homosexuality is a sin." Our response is, "No, homosexuality is not a sin. Homosexual behavior is a sin". The condition is a result of the fall, and it is outside of God's plan, so we should seek to resist it or change it, but the condition itself is not sinful.

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Involuntary Responses

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I suspect that if the fall had never occurred, the only sexual attraction any of us would ever feel would be to the person who is or is to become our spouse. But sin entered the world and we took on a sin nature. One result of this was to make us sexually attracted in areas where our attractions could never be legitimately satisfied.

But our sin nature, and our specific vulnerabilities are simply a fact of life. For those of us who are in Christ, they no longer need to be the basis for guilt, shame and despair.

Regarding the specific object of our attraction(s), we tend to feel guilt more readily the more “perverted” the attraction. If the object of our attraction is a young person, or if the stimulus has to do with sado-masochism or something else “really perverse,” our self-condemnation is apt to come harder and more quickly. It is good to keep in mind that all fornication and adultery is “perverted.” It is a misuse and a twisting of God’s gift of sexuality.

A BETTER WAY TO REACT

So, what is a helpful way to react when we experience an involuntary sexual response to some sort of stimuli? Our reaction would not be too different from the ways we respond to temptation, but recognizing that this involuntary physical response may precede temptation, we may start out a little differently. Here’s what I suggest:

1. Accept this as the way your body is today, remembering that none of us will get new bodies—or brains—until we go to be with the Lord. But also turn this acceptance into something good. Thank God that you are alive sexually, that you are

capable of having sexual feelings. Thank God for your manhood or womanhood. Remember that God created sex, and therefore it is good.

2. Cut off the process as quickly as you can—before it leads to temptation. Call on the name of Jesus. Start praising him. It will be easier to turn to Him in worship and praise if we don’t let our minds get flooded with feelings of condemnation and guilt. The earlier we attack the sin process by taking our minds and hearts elsewhere, the greater our chances of victory.

3. Rebuke Satan—the accuser of the faithful—who would use this response as a foothold to get you to sin. Declare your sexuality to be good and proclaim that Jesus is the One to whom you belong.

Although in this life the patterns of stimulus and response etched into our brains may never fully go away, by starving them, we do make them weaker and weaker over time. As our healing progresses, new stimulus-response patterns can develop and become preeminent, patterns that are more in line with our identity as Christian men and women. His power can be manifested in both the way we deal with our bodies’ responses and in the actual changing of those responses over time.

Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen. (Ephesians 3:20-21). ■

FINANCIAL UPDATE

A few months ago, the Lord spoke these words to me: “The men and women who come to you are like sheep without a Shepherd in the area of their sexuality. They have no one to turn to.” As He spoke, faces came to mind, faces of men and women I know who carried sexual burdens absolutely alone for years, sometimes decades, before coming to Regeneration. My heart was stirred. He continued, “*Fight for them.*”

This may seem a strange beginning to our financial column. After all, what does fighting for the men and women we serve have to do with Regeneration’s finances? While fighting in this battle certainly means much more than raising money, money is a very real part of this battle. Jesus’ words come to mind here: “Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Luke 12:34). We live in a culture where hearts are beating for illicit sexual pleasures, not for setting people free from being dominated by those pleasures. While billions are spent on sexually explicit material, a fraction of that is spent on restoring those broken by sexual immorality.

This is why we’re so thankful for you who give to this ministry. You’re beacons of light in the darkness of the culture. As you give, you battle with us and you battle for the many lost ones in need of the Good Shepherd. Please continue to give generously. And if you don’t currently support Regeneration, won’t you join us? - Josh Glaser, Executive Director

MINISTRY NEWS

Pastors and Church Lay-Leaders Luncheons

As a pastor or leader, you are one of the most influential people in your church. The burden can be heavy, and we want to help! This spring, Regeneration Baltimore is hosting a series of informal luncheons specifically geared to equip you to better respond when someone in your care is wrestling with sexual sin. Previously: *Dealing with Internet Pornography* (March 28th) and *Restoring a Marriage after Infidelity* (April 25th).

Up Next: Addressing Pro-Gay Theology— Wednesday, May 30th, Noon – 2 p.m.

This is not simply something “out there” anymore. In nearly every church, visitors, members, youth, adults, even leaders are wrestling with important questions about homosexuality:

“Aren’t Scriptural prohibitions against homosexual behavior obsolete now, like Old Testament purification rituals are?”

“Doesn’t *homosexual* in Scripture refer to something different than what we mean by that word today?”

“Weren’t the homosexual practices Paul wrote against actually about a church that was involved in prostitution?”

Become equipped to provide scriptural answers filled with grace, truth, and hope to those questioning Scripture’s teachings on homosexuality. This session will allow time for Q&A. Lunch is our treat.

For more information or to RSVP, contact info@RegenerationMinistries.org or 410-661-0284, ext. 2.

(Next Luncheon is Wednesday, June 27, noon - 2 p.m.)

REVOLUTION: Radically Change Your World Exodus International 2007 Freedom Conference June 26 – July 1, 2007

Join men, women and youth from around the country June 26th – July 1st at Concordia University in Irvine, California for this year’s Exodus Freedom Conference—*Revolution: Radically Change Your World!* Featuring some of the most respected teachers and speakers on homosexuality and related issues from a Christian perspective, this conference is a must not only for men and women desiring personal freedom from homosexuality, but also parents and loved ones, spouses, pastors and counselors as well. Come discover what it means to radically change your world! For more information visit www.exodusfreedom.org.

Summer Men’s Sexual Addiction Group in Northern VA

If you are a man living in the Northern Virginia or DC Metro area and you want freedom from habitual sexual sin issues such as pornography, fantasy, promiscuity, or marital infidelity, take advantage of this summer program just for you!

S.A.L.T. is a Christ-centered, 20-week program (beginning May 31st) aimed at discipling men into a fuller understanding of this problem and how Christ can and does break the cycle of sexual sin.

For more information or to apply E-mail info@RegenerationMinistries.org or call 703-591-4673.

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