

The Spartan Sower

The sower soweth the word... Mark 4:14



March 5, 2006 (Vol. 6)

THE "AGE OF ACCOUNTABILITY"

DWH

When does a child become accountable before God? This is something that, like anything, must be answered with scripture.

First, we know that children are not born "totally depraved" as the creeds of men often say. Rather, Jesus affirmed: "In that hour came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven? And he called to him a little child, and set him in the midst of them, and said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye turn, and become as little children, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven." (Matt. 18:1-4)

Jesus used little children to illustrate the humility necessary to be great in the kingdom! He did NOT teach they were totally depraved, or that they had a sinful & corrupt nature. You would think that men who claim to be "Christians" and who teach "in the name of Christ" would actually read the Bible before affirming something so horrific that it condemns little children with a "sinful nature", curses them with a fiery destiny, and that contradicts the very words of Christ Himself! But men often start with human traditions, preferences and errors - then find themselves forced to defend the logical consequences of their positions.

Further, "But Jesus said, Suffer the little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for to such belongeth the kingdom of heaven." (Matt. 19:4). Can there be any doubt that "little children" are innocent and safe with God? The question for Bible believers is not whether children are innocent and safe, but WHEN does this state end? When do they become accountable?

Adam and Eve were created as adults, but consider this. They were innocent until they chose to do what they knew God said not to do (Gen. 2:16-

17; 3:1-8). They were accountable to God BEFORE they actually ate because they were able to understand and choose whether to obey or not. But they were not accounted as guilty UNTIL they violated God's will. We easily see that little children do not yet understand right from wrong. They obviously do not yet comprehend what sin is, why they should avoid it, etc. As Paul writes: "For the children being not yet born, **neither having done anything good or bad...**" (Rom. 9:11). Here is a clear reference to innocence. And we can also tell the "age" range - their being not yet born means they were 9 months old or less. Though we do not count age until a child is born, this obviously hits at the point we are after: Children who have not yet DONE things either good or bad obviously are not accountable yet.

Isaiah refers to children out of the womb when he says, "Butter and honey shall he eat, **when he knoweth** to refuse the evil, and choose the good. For **before the child shall know** to refuse the evil, and choose the good, the land whose two kings thou abhorrest shall be forsaken." (7:15-16) Here is a child who grows to the point of being able to eat luxury items (butter & honey). But before that time he is not yet able to CHOOSE good over evil. This does not give a specific age, but it does (again) focus on the ability to know good and evil. And a time must exist when the change from inability to ability takes place. Again, this does not state a specific age, but keys in on ability.

What can we see from these passages? There is an "age of accountability". Is it a specific age, like 9, 10, 11 or 12? No. No Bible verse indicates this. The Scriptures do indicate that "little children" are safe & innocent. I think we can all understand that not all people reach the age of accountability at the same age... We all mature at different rates. Some people, such as mentally handicapped people, may remain unaccountable all their life if their hindrance is severe enough and they never come to comprehend right and wrong.

But who can say exactly when someone BECOMES accountable? Not I. We can usually tell when someone IS accountable though, by their comprehension of the topic of sin & repentance.

I can remember years ago a family had a 9 year old son who said he wanted to be baptized. The parents had been actually discouraging him from it for a while, trying to get him to put it off. Yet, when the

child was asked about sin and repentance, he replied correctly and coherently. So, my question would be this: "How can we deny someone baptism when they give evidence of **knowing** and **understanding** right from wrong?" If the child grows up and later decides he didn't understand properly, fine. Deal with that if it arises. But why would we ever stand in the way of one who of their own free will asks to be baptized so their sins can be taken away?

Some may ask, but what sins can such a young child have committed? Disobedience to parents is a sin (Rom. 1:30). And it is in the same category as murder, strife, lying, hatred of God, arrogance, etc. While it may surprise us that one so young can comprehend, is it impossible? No.

And does this run the risk of us "baptizing babies"? No. For we do not ever get into baptizing people against their will. Every person we baptize must first comprehend this: Belief in Jesus as the Son of God (John 8:24), repentance of sin and baptism for the forgiveness of sin (Acts 2:38). When a person (whatever their age) knows to choose good and refuse evil, the Bible pattern indicates they are accountable. They may or may not have the level of understanding you and I have as adults. But then, it is written: "And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one; **to each according to his several ability...**" (Matt. 25:15).

Maybe we should refer to this not as "the **age** of accountability", since we do not know a specific time. But refer to it as "the level of accountability", since the Bible does teach accountability based upon ability.

THINGS TO REMEMBER

- **Business Meeting** – Sun. Feb.26 @ 5pm.
- **Home Bible Study** – Sat., March 4th & 18th
- **Men's Class / Ladies Class** - Tues., March 14th @ 7 pm.
- **Debate on Security of Believer** - Sparta Civic Center on March 24-25, 2006.
- **Gospel Meeting** - Ron Daly, April 2-7, 2006.
- **Gospel Meeting** - Ron Roberts, Oct.15-20, 2006.

PRAY FOR

Mag Bumbalough, Greg Capps, Sabrina Capps, Thelma Cunningham, Donald Eller, Holly Jernigan (Joyce Gardner's niece has cancer), **John Ross Key** (Mary Cox's son), **Roger Klein** (Having a very hard time), **Marci Miller** (Alisa Fletcher's mother), **Monie Petty, Dave Poteet** (Surgery), **Kenny Streeval, Rose Taylor, Sissy Wheeler** (friend of Marilyn's, cancer), **Ed Williams, Dorris Williams, Ruth Williams** (Betty England's niece), **Jillian Francis** (Terry Francis' daughter, preacher at Hillview), **Chadlee Copeland** (Strep throat), **Carolyn Williams** (light heart attack).

Those in Iraq: Jason Zelenak (Alisa Fletcher's brother), **Cary Matheny**.

We Invite You To All Our Services!

Sunday Bible Study	9 am
Sunday Morning Worship	10 am
Sunday Evening Worship	6 pm
Wednesday Bible Study	7 pm

North Sparta church of Christ

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