

THE AGE OF ACCOUNTABILITY

Text: John 9:19-23

INTRO: Many times I've been asked, "What do you think is the age of accountability."

To begin with, I think "age of accountability" can be a mis-leading term. There is not necessarily some particular age or birthday on which everyone becomes accountable to God for his own words and deeds--but as children grow & mature, they do indeed reach a state of mental capability where God begins to hold them responsible.

Our text deals with a man who was born blind. Because of the threat of excommunication, his parents wanted no part in testifying about Jesus who had healed their son, so they reminded the Pharisees that their son had reached the point where he must answer for himself. Scholars who have studied Jewish customs tell us that the age at which a person could speak for himself in court was 13 years.

Common sense & our own experience tells us that different people grow & mature at different rates. One child may reach a state of accountability at the age of 10, while another may not do so till age 12 or 13. With this background, let us examine some Scriptures which have bearing on the subject.

I. INFANTS AND VERY YOUNG CHILDREN ARE NOT ACCOUNTABLE UNDER SPIRITUAL & MORAL LAWS.

Once I was alive apart from law; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life, and I died. (Rom. 7:9, NIV).

James 4:17

Sin is not imputed when there is no law, (Rom. 5:13).

II. AS CHILDREN GROW AND DEVELOP PHYSICALLY AND MENTALLY, THEY WILL REACH A STATE OR CONDITION AT WHICH GOD MUST HOLD THEM RESPONSIBLE.

A. Very small children answer only to their parents. Their parents, in turn, answer to God for their training. Eph. 6:4.

B. As children grow & develop they become more & more

responsible to God.

And Jesus increased in wisdom & stature, & in favor with God and men. (Luke 2:52).

III. A LOOK AT SOME BIBLE EXAMPLES WILL HELP US GET A BETTER PICTURE OF THIS DEVELOPMENT OF A STATE OF MENTAL CAPACITY.

- A. Some of the kings of Israel & Judea began to reign at very early ages.

Jehoash was 7 years old when he became king. In the 7th year of Jehu, Jehoash became king, & he reigned 40 years in Jerusalem. **His mother's name was Zibiah** of Beersheba. (2 Kings 11:21; 12:1).

Josiah was 8 years old when he became king, & he reigned 31 years in Jerusalem. **His mother's name was Jedidah** the daughter of Adaiah of Bozkath (2 Kings 22:1).

NOTE: Both these young kings were apparently still under their mothers' oversight when their reigns began.

- B. By the time Josiah was 16 years old, he was obviously accountable to God for his own actions.

For in the 8th year of his reign, while he was still young he began to seek the God of his father David; & in the 12th year he began to purge Judah & Jerusalem of the high places, the wooden images, the carved images, & the molded images. (2 Chron. 34:3).

- C. When King Amaziah of Judah was assassinated, the whole nation selected his 16 year old son Azariah to succeed him on the throne, 2 Kings 14:21.
- D. As well as can be determined by the evidence available, David was about the age of 15 when he kill Goliath & had experienced a personal awareness of God before

that time.

Moreover David said, "The Lord, who delivered me from the paw of the lion & from the paw of the bear, He will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine. (1 Sam 17:37)

- E. The "little children" (KJV) who mocked Elijah were held accountable for their action. READ 2 KINGS 2:23-24

NOTE: ASV, young lads; NASB, young lads; NIV, lads

Pulpit Commentary: "Little children is an unfortunate translation... 'boys--that is, from 12 to 15.'"

- F. Samuel was taken to the tabernacle at an early age to work with & be trained by Eli. At an early age, age 12 according to Josephus, Samuel was selected by God as a prophet. He obviously was accountable to God for his words & deeds by that time, chapters 1-3, esp. 3.
- G. Jeremiah was also called to the prophetic office at an early age. Adam Clarke suggests that he was 14, but his exact age cannot be determined with certainty.

Then said I, "Ah, Lord God! Behold I cannot speak for I am a youth." But the Lord said to me, "Do not say, 'I am a youth,' for you shall go to whom I send you" (Jer 1:6-7).

- H. Jesus Christ is perhaps the clearest example.
 - 1. Tho Jesus was the Son of God, He emptied Himself of certain Divine prerogatives to be born in human flesh, to grow & develop just as any other child would grow & develop.

READ ISAIAH 7:14-16

- 2. Joseph & Mary, being devout Jews, went to Jerusa-

lem every year for the Passover. Note what took place when Jesus was 12.

READ LUKE 2:41-52

NOTE: The family made the trip every year, but it was not till Jesus was 12 that He was obligated to remain behind & seek His Father's business. Something had happened between the time Jesus was 11 & the time He was 12 that happens to every normal healthy girl & boy: He became more accountable to His heavenly Father than to His earthly parents.

IV. SOME INDICATIONS THAT ONE HAS REACHED A STATE OF ACCOUNTABILITY.

- A. When one has begun to reason for himself & to question the decisions made for him by others in the spiritual realm, he is beginning to give indication of a personal awareness of God.
- B. When one begins to feel a personal consciousness of lust & the sin which it promotes, he has reached a condition of accountability. Sin is more than a case of mere experimentation & its guilt is more than a sense of having displeased mom & dad. When a person experiences the reality of spiritual & moral temptation & the guilt of sin he is in a condition that cannot be corrected by merely apologizing to his parents. He must get right with God.

Without shedding of blood is no remission (Heb 9:22).

Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death (Rom 6:3).

- C. When a young person begins to understand the teachings of the Scriptures regarding sin, forgiveness & spiritual growth, he has reached a mental condition where God will hold him accountable to obey those teachings.

NOTE: It has sometimes been a problem later in life when one looks back upon his childhood obedience to the gospel & realizes that he did not then have as strong a sense of awareness of sin as he has since obtained. Of course his sense of guilt was not as strong when he was a youth. He did not have as many sins to be guilty of. But when a person becomes aware of any sin, one sin, he needs to apply the blood of Jesus for the forgiveness of that sin. And if he has not yet done so, the initial applying of the blood of Jesus comes in submitting to N.T. baptism, Rom. 6:3; Acts 22:16; 2:38.

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