

AGE OF ACCOUNTABILITY AND PARENTAL AND DIVINE DISCIPLINE

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As I have mentioned in a few other articles, in the pages of the Old Testament, we discover that the Lord seems to have established a certain age of accountability, upon which when an individual reaches it, God will begin to chasten him or her when they step out of line. From my personal studies, this age of accountability may possibly occur when a young person reaches twenty years old. At this age -- and a lot sooner in some countries -- he or she begins to think for themselves in a more mature manner, makes better decisions, and strike out on their own. In my particular case, I left home when I reached the age of seventeen. Other American teens have cut the apron strings even younger than that.

But the idea that the Lord may consider young people morally responsible for their actions at the age of twenty years may

possibly find some degree of Scriptural support in the fact that only the Israelites who were twenty years of age and older died during the forty years that they wandered in the wilderness. Consider the following group of verses which verify this point:

"And the LORD spake unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying, How long shall I bear with this evil congregation, which murmur against me? I have heard the murmurings of the children of Israel, which they murmur against me. Say unto them, As truly as I live, saith the LORD, as ye have spoken in mine ears, so will I do to you: Your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness; and all that were numbered of you, according to your whole number, from twenty years old and upward, which have murmured against me, Doubtless ye shall not come into the land, concerning which I sware to make you dwell therein, save Caleb the son of Jephunneh, and Joshua the son of Nun. But your little ones, which ye said should be a prey, them will I bring in, and they shall know the land which ye have despised."

Numbers 14:26-31, KJV

As you can see, the Lord set the cut-off age at twenty years old. Now whether God did that because He viewed the younger generation as not being responsible for the negative actions of the older generation, or simply because it was necessary to preserve the future generation in order to carry out His divine plans, I honestly cannot say.

Also of note is the fact that adults who were twenty years and older were required to make sin offerings during the Old Testament period. So again, it seems that the age of twenty years holds some kind of special significance with the Lord. Consider this group of verses which likewise clarify this point:

"And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, When thou takest the sum of the children of Israel after their number, then shall they give every man a ransom for his soul unto the LORD, when thou numberest them; that there be no plague among them, when thou numberest them. This they shall give, every one that passeth among them that are numbered, half a shekel after the shekel of the sanctuary: (a shekel is twenty gerahs:) an half shekel shall be the offering of the LORD. Every one that passeth among them that are numbered, from twenty years old

and above, shall give an offering unto the LORD. The rich shall not give more, and the poor shall not give less than half a shekel, when they give an offering unto the LORD, to make an atonement for your souls. And thou shalt take the atonement money of the children of Israel, and shalt appoint it for the service of the tabernacle of the congregation; that it may be a memorial unto the children of Israel before the LORD, to make an atonement for your souls."

Exodus 30:11-16, KJV

While some people may possibly disagree with my conclusions, let me just say that, personally, I prefer to play it safe and only go by what is clearly indicated in the Scriptures. For me, that seems to be around the age of twenty when God begins to hold children morally responsible for their own actions. Am I absolutely certain of this point? Of course not. It is just my personal observation and I could be wrong. But again, we can only go by the evidence we find in the Bible.

Another very interesting verse which just crossed my mind is one which was written by the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 7 where he offers his opinion concerning marriage between a believer and a nonbeliever. If you read the entire chapter, you will discover that Paul clearly doesn't advise doing this. However, at the same time, Paul also states that if a person is ALREADY married to a nonbeliever when he or she comes to Christ, then the couple should try to make their relationship work and live in peace, in the hope that the non-believing spouse will eventually come to Christ.

But concerning our primary discussion here, the interesting thing is what Paul says about children. He seems to indicate that the sins of young children are covered by the believing parent. Up until what age that is in effect I cannot say with any degree of certainty; but could it possibly be twenty? In fact, Paul likewise seems to indicate that the non-believing spouse is also covered by the believing spouse. That is, if I understand Paul's words correctly. Please note that Paul does indicate that this is his opinion. It is not necessarily how the Lord views things. Thus Paul writes "not the Lord", as we see by the following group of verses:

"But to the rest speak I, not the Lord: If any brother hath a wife that believeth not, and she be pleased to dwell with him, let him not put her away. And the woman which hath an

husband that believeth not, and if he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him. For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy. But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us to peace. For what knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband? or how knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt save thy wife?"

1 Corinthians 7:12-16, KJV

Of course, there is a balance that needs to be understood here as well. While God may not hold young children morally responsible until a certain age, that does NOT mean that they just get a free pass, and can act like little hellions. Let's face it; there are some children -- particularly secular kids -- who are absolute, spoiled, foul-mouthed little monsters, much like their parents. I am sure that we have all met some of them during our lifetime. I know I have. Sadly, the apple does not fall far from the tree, and the child is often just a mirror reflection of their own parents.

If you are like me, sometimes you probably feel compelled to say something to the parent so that they will take control of the situation, particularly when a child is throwing a major temper tantrum in public. Well, friends, as well-meaning as your intentions may be, I strongly advise against doing that, and I will now tell you why. Quite a few years ago, I was in a government office taking care of some personal business. A certain little toddler was acting out just like I described above. I mean this boy just kept going on and on, while his mom, and another woman who I assumed to be his grandmother, just looked on without doing a single thing to rectify the situation.

I could tell that other clients in the office were feeling kind of bothered just as much as I was. So, I decided to say something to the mother. I don't remember my exact words to her now because this occurred many years ago. However, I do recall that I gently reminded her that it is our Christian responsibility to raise our children in a decent, proper, God-fearing manner. Oh boy! Was that a mistake! That mother suddenly turned into a lioness protecting her cub, and she let me have it with both barrels. In fact, she even dissed

the Bible. Well, as you can imagine, I have never tried to do that again to this very day. Lesson learned!

But as I told that woman, we as parents, particularly we as CHRISTIAN parents, have a sacred duty before God and man to discipline our children when the situation requires it. We need to recognize that there is a time to be soft and loving, and there is a time to lay down the law. I have written about this issue before. The Scriptures have a lot to say regarding this topic. Consider the following group of Bible verses:

He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes."

Proverbs 13:24, KJV

"Chasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his crying."

Proverbs 19:18, KJV

"Withhold not correction from the child: for if thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die. Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell."

Proverbs 23:13-14, KJV

"Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it . . . Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him."

Proverbs 22:6, 15, KJV

"A whip for the horse, a bridle for the ass, and a rod for the fool's back."

Proverbs 26:3, KJV

"The rod and reproof give wisdom: but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame . . . Correct thy son, and he shall give thee rest; yea, he shall give delight unto thy soul."

Proverbs 29:15, 17, KJV

"Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honour thy father and mother; (which is the first commandment with promise;) That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth. And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the

nurture and admonition of the Lord."

Ephesians 6:1-4, KJV

"Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord. Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged."

Colossians 3:20-21, KJV

"Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity;"

1 Timothy 3:3-4, KJV

"The proverbs of Solomon. A wise son maketh a glad father: but a foolish son is the heaviness of his mother."

Proverbs 10:1, KJV

"A wise son heareth his father's instruction: but a scorner heareth not rebuke"

Proverbs 13:1, KJV

"A wise son maketh a glad father: but a foolish man despiseth his mother."

Proverbs 15:20, KJV

So it is clear from the Scriptures that God holds parents responsible for training their children properly; and if we fail to do so, we will eventually pay the consequences for our weakness when those children start to disrespect us and worse! Of course, God expects no less of us that He expects of Himself. As we read in the Epistle to the Hebrews and in other Scriptures which are found in the Bible, God likewise chastens us as a loving parent whenever we turn out of the way. Consider the following group of verses:

"And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which

corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby. Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but LET IT RATHER BE HEALED."

Hebrews 12:5-13, KJV

"My son, despise not the chastening of the LORD; neither be weary of his correction: For whom the LORD loveth he correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth."

Proverbs 3:11-12, KJV

"Open rebuke is better than secret love."

Proverbs 27:5, KJV

"Behold, I have refined thee, but not with silver; I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction."

Isaiah 48:10, KJV

Of course, contrary to what some nonbelievers think, God is NOT some kind of hateful, merciless monster who takes great pleasure in chastising us as He cackles with glee. Quite to the contrary, He resorts to punishment as a last resort in order to try to wake us up, to turn us around, and to get us to repent of our sins and rebellion against Him.

We can learn a lot about the nature of God, and how He deals with His children today, by examining how He dealt with the Israelites during the Old Testament period. As I point out in articles such as "The Fruits of Disobedience", during their long history, they were quite the stubborn, rebellious lot, just as they continue to be to this day. As a result, their short periods of obedience to the Lord were often followed by long periods of rebellion and deep apostasy where they even sacrificed their own children to the false gods of the heathen nations which surrounded them.

Thus, while it pained the Lord to do so, He often found it necessary to chastise the Israelites through a variety of

means, including but not limited to disease, droughts, crop failures, famine, earthquakes, invasions by foreign armies and captivity and enslavement in the lands of their enemies.

I believe that God continues to deal with humanity today in a very similar fashion. Of course, most secular people don't see or understand things that way. They don't see God's firm hand of judgment at work. All they see are natural disasters such as forest fires, earthquakes, floods, hurricanes and typhoons, droughts, volcanic eruptions, etc. Likewise, wars are not caused by God raising up our enemies against us as He did with the ancient Israelites. To the contrary. To the modern mind, wars are just the result of political posturing and military bravado and nothing more. Such blind people fail to see the Divine Hand behind it all. I am reminded of the following verse:

"But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."

1 Corinthians 2:14, KJV

However, on the other hand, we Christians should have the Spiritual Discernment and Wisdom to recognize when God is not pleased with us, and when He is thus dealing with us accordingly, either as individuals, or as a nation on the whole. In other words, we need to be sensitive to the Spirit and recognize God's workings in our lives.

But concerning the ancient Israelites, while the Lord was forced to repeatedly deal with them due to their rebellion, He never lost hope that through their suffering, they would eventually return to their first love, and worship the LORD their God. Thus, His punishments were tempered with love. This becomes evident in verses such as the following.

"In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the LORD thy Redeemer."

Isaiah 54:8, KJV

"For the Lord will not cast off for ever: But though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies. FOR HE DOTHT NOT AFFLICT WILLINGLY nor grieve the children of men."

Lamentations 3:31-33, KJV

"Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord GOD: and not that he should return from his ways, and live?"

Ezekiel 18:23, KJV

"Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I HAVE NO PLEASURE IN THE DEATH OF THE WICKED; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?"

Ezekiel 33:11, KJV

In fact, during a time of some of their greatest suffering, which occurred following the Babylonian invasions, after Jerusalem and the temple compound had been destroyed in 587 BC, after thousands of Jews had been carried away as slaves into the provinces of Babylonia, and after women had begun to eat their own children rather than starve to death, the Lord still promised them that He would not make a full end of them, as we can determine by the following verses which are found in the Books of the Prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel:

"And it came to pass, when I prophesied, that Pelatiah the son of Benaiah died. Then fell I down upon my face, and cried with a loud voice, and said, Ah Lord GOD! wilt thou make a full end of the remnant of Israel?"

Ezekiel 11:13, KJV

"For thus hath the LORD said, The whole land shall be desolate; yet will I not make a full end."

Jeremiah 4:27, KJV

"Go ye up upon her walls, and destroy; but make not a full end: take away her battlements; for they are not the LORD'S . . . Nevertheless in those days, saith the LORD, I will not make a full end with you."

Jeremiah 5:10, 18, KJV

"For I am with thee, saith the LORD, to save thee: though I make a full end of all nations whither I have scattered thee, yet will I not make a full end of thee: but I will correct thee in measure, and will not leave thee altogether unpunished."

Jeremiah 30:11, KJV

"Fear thou not, O Jacob my servant, saith the LORD: for I am with thee; for I will make a full end of all the nations whither I have driven thee: but I will not make a full end of thee, but correct thee in measure; yet will I not leave thee wholly unpunished."

Jeremiah 46:28, KJV

So as I said earlier, whenever the Lord is forced to deal with His children, His punishments are always tempered with love, mercy, compassion and patience, because His desire is NOT to destroy His people, but rather to heal them, and to save them from themselves. As we read a moment ago in the Epistle to the Hebrews:

"And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but LET IT RATHER BE HEALED."

Hebrews 12:13, KJV

You may recall that on one occasion in the Gospels, James and John were ready to destroy a village of the Samaritans because they did not receive the Lord in their midst. But how did Jesus react to this? No doubt to their surprise, He sharply rebuked James and John, as we see by the following group of verses:

"And it came to pass, when the time was come that he should be received up, he stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem, And sent messengers before his face: and they went, and entered into a village of the Samaritans, to make ready for him. And they did not receive him, because his face was as though he would go to Jerusalem. And when his disciples James and John saw this, they said, Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did? But he turned, and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them. And they went to another village."

Luke 9:51-56, KJV

So again we see that it is not God's Will that any should perish. His desire is that all men should come to a point of repentance and be saved. This is exactly what the Apostles Peter and Paul write in the following two verses:

"The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, NOT WILLING THAT ANY SHOULD PERISH, but that all should come to repentance."

2 Peter 3:9, KJV

"For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; WHO WILL HAVE ALL MEN TO BE SAVED, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth."

1 Timothy 2:3-4, KJV

As the Psalmist writes, the truth of the matter is that if God in His righteousness dealt with each of us according to our sins, NONE of us would be left standing. We would all be goners, no doubt about it. Thankfully, as we have seen, He does NOT deal with us in such a fashion, Rather, He extends His love, mercy, compassion and patience towards us. He puts us over the fire, and then He waits for us to come to our senses and repent. Consider the following group of verses:

"If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?"

Psalms 130:3, KJV

"And Abraham drew near, and said, Wilt thou also destroy the `1`righteous with the wicked? Peradventure there be fifty righteous within the city: wilt thou also destroy and not spare the place for the fifty righteous that are therein? That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked: and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee: Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? And the LORD said, If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes. And Abraham answered and said, Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes: Peradventure there shall lack five of the fifty righteous: wilt thou destroy all the city for lack of five? And he said, If I find there forty and five, I will not destroy it. And he spake unto him yet again, and said, Peradventure there shall be forty found there. And he said, I will not do it for forty's sake. And he said unto him, Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak: Peradventure there shall thirty be found there. And he said, I will not do it, if I find thirty there. And he said, Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the

Lord: Peradventure there shall be twenty found there. And he said, I will not destroy it for twenty's sake. And he said, Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak yet but this once: Peradventure ten shall be found there. And he said, I will not destroy it for ten's sake. And the LORD went his way, as soon as he had left communing with Abraham: and Abraham returned unto his place."

Genesis 18:23-33, KJV

"Nevertheless for thy great mercies' sake thou didst not utterly consume them, nor forsake them; for thou art a gracious and merciful God."

Nehemiah 9:31, KJV

"For thy mercy is great unto the heavens, and thy truth unto the clouds."

Psalms 57:10, KJV

"The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. He will not always chide: neither will he keep his anger for ever. He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us. Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him. For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust . . . But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children; To such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandments to do them."

Psalms 103:8-14, 17-18, KJV

"It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness."

Lamentations 3:22-23, KJV

"Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God."

2 Corinthians 1:3-4, KJV

With these thoughts, I will bring this article to a close. It is my hope that you have found it informative, enlightening, and I pray that it has been a blessing in your life as well. If you have an account with Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr or with any other social network, I would really appreciate if you'd take the time to click or tap on the corresponding link that is found on this page. Thanks so much, and may God bless you abundantly!

For additional information and further study, you may want to refer to the list of reading resources below which were either mentioned in this article, or which contain topics which are related to this article. All of these articles are likewise located on the Bill's Bible Basics web server. To read these articles, simply click or tap on any link you see below.

Are Personal Tragedies Due to Sin?

Backsliding, Divine Chastisement and the Divine Agreement

Do You Want Love and Light, or Rod and Wrath?

Does God Cause Natural Disasters?

Hurricane Katrina and Other Natural Disasters

Love, Mercy, Forgiveness and Chastisement

The Fruits of Disobedience

The Judgment of Angels, Demons and Men

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