

"A TIME TO BE BORN; A TIME TO DIE"



A STUDY OF THE AGE OF ACCOUNTABILITY

By

Kent A. Field

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PREFACE

During the years I've been a Christian, numerous discussions have arisen over the subject of the age of *accountability*. The "*age of accountability*", as it is often referred to in many religious groups, is a topic of discussion regarding the age at which an individual is regarded as physically, morally, and spiritually *accountable* before God for their deeds or sins.

When I first became a Christian I was much younger than I am now. I was then recently married and had no children of my own. It was very easy for me to look at others bringing their children to be baptized and say to myself, and sometimes to them, that their children were much too young to take such an eternally important step. When I grew a bit older and then had three children of my own, things weren't as clear-cut as they once were. I'm not saying that my understanding of the Scriptures is any less than what it once was. I believe my knowledge of this particular subject has grown. However, now we're dealing with the souls of my children, and this is an area where an error can mean eternal tragedy.

Because of the seriousness of the subject, some detailed argumentation will be offered for your consideration. The definitions of words, history, customs, and the Scriptures will all be used in trying to produce a helpful aid for your gaining a more useful understanding of the subject of the "*age of accountability*".

There will be numerous references to specific ages and age groups throughout this book as they pertain to a child's growth and development and resulting physical and spiritual *responsibility*. However, this does not mean that any specific or certain "*age of accountability*" is being emphatically stated by this author in this study. Rather what is being offered is the *direction* offered by Scripture that we should be taking in our thinking on the subject.

In this study, as in any controversial subject, I don't think there is nearly enough discussion amongst truly dedicated students of the Word. All too often we are quick to defend our personal positions and previous practices with fervent emotionalism. This usually brings about an abrupt end to any *biblical* discussion. Our arguments become so impassioned by the feelings of our commitments that we often fail to possess the ability to reason, or to be reasoned with. God deliver us from this terrible sin!

Now here's the challenge. If you or someone close to you was baptized at a very young age I sincerely need to challenge you to produce the Scriptures that would allow you to believe and practice such a thing. But keep this in mind... Whatever arguments you would use to baptize a five, seven, nine, twelve year old, or even a teenager... I will have to respond with those same arguments in favor of baptizing most two, three and four year olds. If what some practice concerning the age of accountability is correct, then they need to let us actively reach out to those little "lost souls", those little "old men of sin". We need to be allowed to help those kids understand that they are in "eternal peril" and are headed for hell, unless they put Christ on in baptism! Most people I know would find this to be extremely offensive. However, if some among us are right, they need to **get out of the way and let us actively practice what they preach!** So that's the challenge! It's either, learn from God and repent of an erroneous position with eternal consequences, or... Convert souls like me to your understanding on the subject through biblical evidence, and then get out of the way and let us teach your three, four and five year old children how they are in terrible danger of the eternal fires of hell!

It is my sincere prayer that the reader will make an earnest attempt to be objective. Do your best, before God, to put past practices and prejudices away from your thinking. I hope that you will enter into this reverent study of God's Holy Word with a spirit that will be open to the things the Bible truly teaches. There will certainly be a tendency in most of us, as we are reading this book, to compare what we have already done in our lives to what we are reading. There is nothing wrong with this as long as we do not allow our past experiences to blind us from seeing some otherwise very obvious truths.

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INTRODUCTION

The Sermon

The preacher really delivered a great lesson. Many in the audience were deeply moved and wanted to respond. The invitation song was sung at the conclusion of the message, and several came forward. A number wanted to be baptized into Christ that morning. Both young and old wanted to become true New Testament Christians that day. The preacher carefully asked them all the right questions, and they all gave what sounded like the right answers. They were all baptized that day as they had sincerely requested. The oldest person baptized was sixty-two years old, and the youngest was three (almost four) years old. The other's ages were five, seven, ten, twelve, fifteen, twenty-two, and thirty-five years old. Do you have any problem with what I've just shared with you? Is it with the ages of some of those who were baptized?

If so, at what age would you draw the line? And on what *biblical* basis? If three is too young, then is four old enough? You might think that this question is a bit ridiculous by mentioning three and four year olds. However, in light of some very questionable practices, we need to take a second look at the often terribly non-specific methods we might use in determining a person's age of *accountability*.

The "Deacon"

A deacon once told me that he was "baptized into Christ" when he was just five years old, and that he would do the same for his three year old child if given the opportunity. When I questioned him further he responded, "*I don't believe we have the right to refuse baptism to anyone who requests it*". He went on to say, "*I believe that if a person knows he is a sinner, repents of that sin, and confesses that Christ, his Lord, died for that sin, and he asks to be baptized, then we had better baptize him!*"

Sounds good at first, doesn't it? Can you identify with this situation from your experience? Do you really believe it is as simple as that? I don't, and let me tell you why.

I have three children of my own, and have learned something about what children can and cannot be taught. I have learned that if I take the time and make a special effort, I can teach a great deal of information to even two and three year olds. I have found that I can teach even small children:

The Seven Steps

1. What *sin* is.
2. That they *commit* it (sin) and are therefore *sinner*s.
3. That sin causes God to *hide His face from them*.
4. That "*Jesus loves me* this I know, cause the Bible tells me so".
5. That Jesus is the *only* answer for our sins.
6. *That they are going to hell* without Jesus' sacrifice.
7. And that *they must be baptized* in order to wash away that sin.

2, 3 & 4 Year Olds

I know children well enough to know that we can and often do teach them these truths. I also know that some children could even be brought to the point of tears over their "sin" and resulting "lostness". I would never do such a thing to a small child, but I know that it wouldn't be too difficult to enter into the average three to five year old Sunday school class, take the time to teach them the above, and sufficiently terrify them into believing that they'd better be baptized, or else they are going to hell. And here's the challenge!... If you believe and practice like our "deacon" friend I've sited earlier, then ***Why would you not actively teach and baptize as many of those small trusting three and four year olds as fast as you can and save their souls from eternal death?***

This line of thought might be understandably offensive to you as it is to me, but now I have a question. The question is for those like our "deacon" friend. If such a terrified group of tearful three and four and

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five year old children came to you requesting to be baptized, would you baptize them? If your answer is “yes”, then I hope you would carefully read this book, and prayerfully reconsider your present position. If your answer is, “of course not”, then my next question to you is, why not? If it doesn’t apply to three to five year olds, then why would it apply to the eight and ten year olds, or the fifteen to twenty year olds?

According to my present understanding of the Scriptures, there certainly is more to being ready for baptism into Christ than just the seven steps listed earlier. Any dedicated student of the Word can tell you that there is more to discipleship and Christianity than those simple seven steps. There are lives of sin that must be repented of. There are “costs” that must be “counted” *before* entering into union with Christ, (Luke 14:26-35).

What’s The Harm?

So now someone asks, “*so what’s the big deal? What difference does it make if we do baptize them too soon? If they didn’t need it anyway, it can’t possibly hurt them, can it?*” I don’t mind saying to you that these very questions make me tremble in fear for the souls of countless men and women. It will make the difference between heaven and hell for many, many souls! It *could* very well destroy a soul eternally to baptize them *before* the time when they actually need it! Allow me to briefly explain why.

For now we will have to assume that you are already of the understanding that “baptism into Christ” (Galatians 3:27), is essential for eternal salvation from sin for those whom God considers *accountable* and *responsible*. The reasons for such an assumption should become obvious as you carefully study the scriptures regarding the subject.

Suppose you baptize someone before God considers him or her *accountable*. Suppose you baptize someone before they *spiritually* need to be baptized. According to this scenario we have the following:

1. They were not *accountable* for their sin at the time of this “*child*” baptism.
2. At that time their baptism had no effect. But.....
3. Later, the same person will trust that they already were baptized when the *accountability* for their sin comes knocking on their door.

What will spiritually happen to them the moment that God does begin to hold them *accountable* for their sin? Does the Bible teach that baptism is *retroactive*? That is, does the Bible teach that if you receive baptism *before* you really need it, you’ll automatically be covered when you do need it later on? Of course not! Religious groups that have followed this kind of reasoning took it to the obvious ultimate conclusion of “*infant baptism*”. We will later discuss some very good biblical reasons why this is clearly an erroneous position to take. However, “*infant baptism*” would be one of its logical conclusions. I mean, if baptism received at an early age when not needed can cover one when he does need it, the why not baptize as soon as possible, such as in infancy? Of course, this would be biblically unacceptable to most of us.

The Eternal Tragedy

The tragedy then lies in many people trusting in having received a baptism that did them no good because it was not needed when they did it. They are trusting in a baptism that provides no union with Christ or salvation from sin. They may go on to become preachers, deacons, and even elders, but being a preacher, deacon, or elder never washes away sin. Only coming in contact with the blood of Christ, in the watery grave of a valid baptism can do that! The danger is that they will have grown up amongst us as “brethren”, without ever really being scripturally baptized and therefore true members of the Lord’s Body.

Therefore, it is important that we have a clear understanding of the age of *accountability* and *responsibility* towards God. It will take both courage and Bible based conviction to boldly enter into this vital study with a view towards doing what is right, and not necessarily what has previously been done.

CHAPTER 1

ACCOUNTABILITY AND RESPONSIBILITY DEFINED

Definition

The words “*accountability*” and “*responsibility*” are words that are often used within the church. Their meaning is often taken for granted by those who use them. However, it is surprising how many of us use these words without really thinking about what we are saying. So, I think it only wise to define the words that we will be using so often in our study.

According to Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary, the word “*accountable*” means to be “*subject to giving an account, answerable, capable of being accounted for, explainable*”.

In my own attempt to better understand the meaning of a word, I like to break it down into its component parts. The fact is that much of our language is just that, smaller words “pressed together” to form larger words. The words “*accountable*” or “*accountability*” are easy to break down and examine. It is hoped that by doing this we will better understand exactly what we are saying when we use such words.

When the words, “*accountable*” and “*accountability*” are broken down into their component parts they reveal their exact meaning. “*Accountable*” is account – able, or “*able to give an account*”. “*Accountability*” is account – ability, or “*having the ability to give an account*”. Thus when discussing the “*age of accountability*”, we should be discussing the age at which one is personally able to give an account before God for their physical, moral, and spiritual behavior. You will also find that this *accountability* must be considered for some period of time, both before and after baptism into Christ. That is..., once the he or she becomes *accountable* and remaining *accountable* thereafter.

The “*age of accountability*” has also been referred to as the “*age of responsibility*”. Although both terms do refer to the same point in time in a person’s development, they do have two different meanings. Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary defines the word “*responsible*” as “*liable to be called on to answer, liable to be called to account, being the cause of some effect, able to answer for one’s conduct and obligations, able to choose for one’s self between right and wrong*”.

Again, I believe we can gain still a better understanding of this word when we break it down into its component parts. When the word, “*responsibility*” is broken down, it reveals the words, “response – ability”, or “*the ability to give a response*”.

Hence, when we use the word “*accountability*”, we are speaking of one having the ability to give an account **for** their actions, either past, present, or future. When we use the word “*responsibility*”, we are speaking of one having the ability to give a response **in** or **by** their actions, either past, present, or future. However, when applying these words and definitions to the discussion of the subject of the *age of accountability* or *age of responsibility*, our word definition must become even more specific with respect to what or Whom are we to be *accountable* and *responsible*?

Application

More specifically then, when discussing *accountability* before God, we are discussing one’s ability to give an accounting before God for their actions and thoughts. It would follow then, when discussing *responsibility* before God, we are discussing one’s ability to give THE RESPONSE THAT GOD REQUIRES of all that would come to Him. This will be key to our discussion and study.

Determining a standard age of *accountability*, and likewise *responsibility*, would obviously be a frustratingly impossible task. Even the amateur observer of people knows that all people do not progress at the same rate, neither physically, mentally, nor spiritually. It appears that God is also in agreement with this point, as the scriptures are apparently silent on the matter of a specific standardized age of accountability.

The key then lies in the word “*ability*”. The conclusion of this aspect of the discussion then rests on the following principles. People reach the “age of accountability” when they reach a point in their lives when they have the ability to account for their physical, mental, and spiritual actions. Likewise, people reach the “age of *responsibility*” when they reach a point in their lives where they are able to give the response that God requires of all people. The Bible plainly teaches that these responses would also manifest themselves in one’s physical, mental and spiritual life. Again, it needs to be stated that these considerations make determining a particular age of *accountability* an extremely individual matter.

However, the question still arises, “*How am I to know, at just what point my children will be accountable to God?*” The answer then is simply this... When they finally have the *ability* to give God the *response* of true discipleship that He requires of all that would follow Him! If you don’t happen to be a regular student of the Bible, and you don’t have a fairly good idea of what Jesus requires of His disciples, then **Chapters 4 and 5** of this study should be a great help to you. On the other hand, if you are a student of the Word and you are familiar with the passages dealing with the “cost of discipleship”, then it’s time for you to make the application of these truths and answer your own question. Please observe those passages that discuss what it takes to become a disciple of Jesus. Observe and record the response that such discipleship requires. Then look at the lives of your children. Closely examine the child’s ability, (not only their willingness), to give the required response. If it becomes obvious that the child in question has not yet sufficiently matured physically and/or, mentally to produce the needed response of discipleship to Jesus, then they aren’t *response-able*, or *responsible*! It follows then that if one isn’t *responsible* because of a lack of physical and mental growth, they obviously could not be considered *accountable* for actions and responses they are not able to give.

You might be wondering why physical development is an important consideration. I am aware of situations where this couldn’t always be applied. Such cases would include the physically handicapped. However, there are obvious physical limitations that small children must overcome through the natural maturing process. It is only at the point of maturation that these individuals can possibly meet the conditions that Jesus states for those who would be His disciples. It would also be generally safe to say that people mature as a whole person. Their physical and mental growth remains relative to one another, give or take a couple of years.

At this point it must be stressed that I am being careful not to confuse “*ability*” with “*willingness*” as many often do. There is a big difference between the two! When one lacks the ability to do something, no matter how hard he or she might try, at that point at least, he just can’t do it. However, when one lacks the willingness to do something, he doesn’t usually try, he just won’t do it! For the purpose of this discussion, there is a rather large difference between “cannot” and “will not”.

Let me illustrate. I have a small child who really loves his father. I also have some acquaintances that may care for me, but obviously not as much. Next, suppose both my youngest son and my acquaintances are present. Let us also suppose that I request some help in mowing the lawn using a rather large power mower. I can tell you the truth that my child would be the first to volunteer; even though I know at that point he lacked the physical abilities. On the other hand, although my acquaintances have the abilities to give me the service I need, they might not be so willing to help. This is a perfect example of “those who would, can’t; and those who can, won’t”. My child, although trusting and willing, just cannot **do** what is required. He is not *responsible*, and therefore cannot be called to account for his actions in this matter. Therefore he is not *accountable*. My acquaintances on the other hand, although they were unwilling, were perfectly able to give the required response. They are *responsible*, (response-able), and therefore *accountable* to that degree!

Children are by their very nature, extremely trusting and willing, from the smallest infant right on up. With this the Scriptures agree. In Matthew 18:2-4 we read:

“And He called a child to Himself and stood him in their midst, and said, “Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you shall not enter the

kingdom of heaven. Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven!”

Jesus uses the humble submissiveness of a small child to illustrate the kind of trusting willingness that all of His true disciples must possess. Our Lord wasn't making the point that children should therefore be considered *responsible* at that point. Rather, Jesus is teaching that very small children possess a quality that adults need to incorporate into their lives in order to enter into the kingdom of heaven. The word that Jesus uses here for “child” is the Greek word “paidion”, which when translated denotes an *infant* or small child. The point is that even though Jesus uses this small child to illustrate a truth about the necessary and required humility of the true disciple, this same child could not possibly give the response that Jesus continues to demand of those who would be His disciples in verses 8 and 9 of the same chapter.

“And if your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; it is better for you to enter life crippled or lame, than having two hands and two feet, to be cast into the eternal fire. And if your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out, and throw it from you. It is better for you to enter life with one eye, than having two eyes, to be cast into the hell of fire.”

In this case, Jesus surely wasn't attempting to illustrate a small child's helpless inability to give a mature response. Absolutely not! Rather, the mature response is what is required of all **adults**, then and now. I've said all this because there are those who have told me that they believe Jesus herein teaches that children are qualified “candidates” for baptism, possibly even more than adults. I find this position to be totally unfounded. If anything, the passage indicates no further *accountability* or *responsibility* for the child beyond his childlike faith and humility “*for of such IS the Kingdom of heaven*”. And, as illustrated earlier, even though a child can be both submissive and trusting, it need not necessarily follow that the child is spiritually *accountable* to God.

CHAPTER 2

CHILDHOOD AND ADULTHOOD—ANCIENT AND MODERN

Ancient:

In our study, as we pass from **definition** and **application**, through history, present day views, and into the Scriptures, it will become increasingly plain that the entire issue centers around, “What is a child?” and “What is a man?” and “What responsibilities do they have toward God?”

When reading the scriptures we all too often read them without considering the customs and social background in which they were written. Their context! Having a better knowledge of the social customs of Bible societies will help us gain further insight into the Scriptures which do often make mention of such customs. You see, the scriptures, besides being the perfect Word of God, were also written in an historical context. It would be most unwise to ignore that historical context, considering such information always sheds a great amount of light on a subject, and aids our understanding of many biblical truths present.

In this chapter we will consider the subjects of *childhood* and *adulthood*. We will consider ancient social views and customs with regards to both groups, *children* and *adults*. We will consider the social and intellectual responsibilities placed upon both groups. We will also consider our own more modern views and practices as they pertain to childhood and adulthood. This will result in important questions that will arise regarding possible inconsistent views and practices of the modern church. And of course, we will have to examine the biblical definitions and applications of childhood and adulthood in this historical context.

For the purpose of this study we will mainly concern ourselves with the customs and definitions of the ancient Hebrew culture, particularly around the period of the first century. We will do this because it is this writer’s biblically based conviction that we must do our absolute best to “retain the standard (“*pattern*”) of sound doctrine” which was delivered to the world in the first century. This “*standard*”, referred to in 2 Timothy 1:13, can be found in the Holy Bible, which was written in the historical context of first century Hebrew life.

In marked contrast to some of our more modern views, first century childhood was something that was carefully nurtured, with many stages of development before passing into adulthood or maturity. Early Jewish childhood consisted of as many as eight designations of various stages of development. These stages include:

1. the *Yeled*, which was the **newborn** babe (Isaiah 9:6);
2. the *Yoneq*, which was the **suckling** babe (Isaiah 11:8);
3. the *Olel*, which is the suckling that begins to **ask for food** (Lamentations 4:4);
4. the *Gamul*, which is the **weaned** child (Isaiah 28:9);
5. the *Taph*, which is a child that is **able to cling** to its mother;
6. the *Elem*, which is a child **becoming firm**;
7. then there is the *Naar*, which is the lad who **shakes himself free**;
8. and finally there is the *Bachur*, which is the **ripened one**.

All of these Hebrew terms denote stages that are considered within the realm of childhood.

The ancient Greek classical writers bare witness to these stages of development, as do the Greek writings of the New Testament, clearly indicating the various and somewhat distinct stages of a child's development.

1. There is the word *Nepios*, which most commonly denotes **infants**, suckling babes, and carries with it the idea of helplessness, inexperience, and simplicity.
2. Next there is the word *Pais*, which denotes a child, little boy, infant, **very young child**, youth, or baby. While socially the word came to be used to describe a servant or slave, most often the word was used to describe **a child of between seven and fourteen years** of age.
3. From this word also comes the word *Paidion*, which carries with it the idea of an even smaller child than that of *Pais*. *Paidion* denotes a little child usually **up to age seven**.
4. The word *Teknon* is another Greek word for child, or little child, but can carry with it a much broader meaning. This word has been used to describe both **male and female, as well as the unborn child** (LXX for Genesis 3:17;17:16). More often it is used to describe "**offspring**".

In the first century, up to ages between **four** and **six**, the education of the child was almost entirely the responsibility of the mother. After this period, whenever the child could speak distinctly, they were expected to begin school. Many schools did, in fact, exist throughout the land at the time of Christ.

Up to about **ten** years of age, the Bible (Torah) was used, almost exclusively, as the textbook. From the ages of **ten** to **fifteen** the Mishnah or traditional Law was introduced into the child's education. It wasn't until after age **fifteen** the students were then sometimes permitted to spend time investigating and discussing higher theological questions.

Part of what was traditionally considered to be a required part of a child's training was to be taught some manual trade. This was true even in the case of "higher class" Jewish families. If a boy's father happened to make his living in some particular manual trade, he was usually expected to follow in the footsteps of his father, and serve as his apprentice until around **age thirty**. In fact, many Bible scholars hold that it wasn't until a man reached **thirty** years of age that he could acceptably leave his father's business or trade and embark on his own professional life.

From all that the ancients have to share with us, it becomes rather apparent that one did not become an adult with the great responsibilities of making life-long decisions at a very early age. A child's development was carefully mapped out for them. They were expected to follow after and be obedient to their parents for many more years than one might expect in this modern age. When we think about applying the first century Bible truths of salvation and *accountability* to our children, do we do so considering how they understood such teachings in the first century? ... the period in which the Bible was written? Or do we attempt to make such applications only looking through modern eyes and ignorant of the important historical context in which the Bible was written?

Modern:

In our more modern times, childhood and adulthood, and the dividing line between the two, has increasingly become unclear and indistinct. This is not to say that this is the way things ought to be. This writer is of the conviction that it is a terrible tragedy when a society finds it difficult to distinguish between its children and its adults. It is for this very reason that more and more of our children are committing "adult" crimes. I read in the newspaper not long ago where a couple of eight-year-old boys were being tried for rape! The courts are having a tough time making any distinction between a child and an adult, and so, more and more children are being tried and sentenced as adults. I'm not saying that these children shouldn't be punished for what they do, but I am calling into question a social system that produces such dilemmas. And our society really can't deal with it effectively. On the one hand we'll bring some child to court and try him as an adult, but on the other hand say to ourselves, "He's just a kid!" Because of the increasing social pressures and sometimes a lack of responsibility on the part of the parents, more parents are treating their children as though they are adults. Working mothers who leave

small children at home unattended are increasing in numbers. Their children are being expected to solve life's daily problems on their own. Many children are permitted, and sometimes even encouraged, to use foul language, smoke, drink, frequent sexually explicit movies, and make their own decisions about morality. Children are being cast out into the world by their own parents, who think they are being "progressive". As a result, children as young as five years old are committing suicide, becoming alcoholics, drug addicts, robbing, cheating, and stealing! I ask you now, does it sound like these children are really ready to "break out" and make it on their own?

Most of us would hopefully say no, but this is where we have been terribly inconsistent. On one hand we can see the awful results of a society that allows its children to launch out on their own before they are ready. Then, on the other hand, many of us would take those same children and willingly baptize them into a discipling relationship with Christ, somehow believing that they are be ready to spiritually, morally, and physically launch out on their own for God. Isn't this more than a bit inconsistent?

I have again included the physical and moral aspect of the child's nature because, according to the Bible, when one makes a spiritual commitment to God, this certainly **MUST** include the physical and moral response of the individual. Therefore, if we believe that a child is ready to give God the proper spiritual response, we must also understand that we are necessarily saying that the same child is also ready to give God the proper physical and moral response as well. There are those who sincerely believe that children are somehow exempt from this obligation. They believe that, in the case of children, they can be considered spiritually *accountable* to God without yet being physically *responsible* to Him. I believe this to be a gross misunderstanding of some very plain and obvious scriptures. In **Chapter 4** of this Study, when we discuss discipleship and conversion, I hope it will become clear that **no one, not even children**, can be considered excused from the response that God has required in His Word of **all** true disciples. It is scripturally clear that the true spiritual response to God cannot, must not, exclude the physical and moral aspect of a person's being.

One brother asked me, "Then what about Ephesians 6:1-3?"

"Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother, (which is the first commandment with promise), that it may be well with you, and that you may live long on the earth."

If this passage teaches anything that would infer any obligation towards God, it seem obvious to me that it is first of all a physical obligation towards the parents. This physical obligation is found in the quotation, "Honor your mother and your father.....", and particularly in the meaning and usage of the word, "honor". Many do not realize it, but this word means more than just respect. In fact, this word is consistently used through the Bible with reference to *physical support* and *provisions*. We find Jesus giving us just such a divine interpretation of this quotation in Matthew 15:1-9. Also, there is nothing in Ephesians 6:1-3, which would necessarily demand that we understand that the children mentioned here, are in fact baptized believers.

Some would say that the phrase, "*obey your parents in the Lord*", indicates that the children were obviously considered to be Christians by the Apostle Paul. Would those who hold to such a position then say that I shouldn't quote this verse to my two-year-old and seven year old children? Would they then say that this passage has no application to *any* and all children of parents who are members of the Lord's church? Isn't there something in this passage that has a message to even my small non-Christian children? Of course! Because this passage was addressed to children, need this automatically infer their spiritual *accountability* towards God? Of course not!

In Psalms 22:9 the writer tells how he was taught to trust upon the Lord while still nursing at his mother's breast. And in 2 Timothy 3:15 the Apostle Paul recounts to the young evangelist Timothy, how that literally "*from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to give you wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus*". You might well ask, "How could Timothy understand or "know" the scriptures when he as a mere "infant" (Greek)?" The answer is that he grew

up knowing the Holy Scriptures. Whatever age it was when Timothy was able to “*know*” the Sacred Writings, the Bible calls that time in his life “*infancy*”.

When taking a closer look at Ephesians 6:1-3, there is obvious room in this passage for all children of all ages. This passage was addressed to the children of parents who were members of the church at Ephesus. No distinction was made that might demand an understanding of the phrase, “*in the Lord*”, to be speaking only to those children who have become Christians. Therefore, there is also nothing in this passage that would then necessarily demand an understanding that any of the children mentioned here are yet baptized believers. The phrase in question was quite obviously referring to the parents being Christians, or that children are to obey their parents when their guidance is consistent with the Word of the Lord. Another possibility is that the children here are baptized believers. However, although the Greek word *teknon*, here used, usually refers to a “little child, nursing babe, unborn child”, it sometimes denotes a broader meaning. It often simply refers to the “*offspring*” relationship sustained without reference to the person’s age. For example, although I am presently over forty years old, I am still one of my parents three children. I am still their child or offspring no matter how old I become. So even if we aren’t talking about a literal babe, or little child, there is nothing in this passage that would demand that we understand it to be indicative of small children that are spiritually *accountable* towards God and have been baptized into Christ. Nothing! The only thing that might demand such an understanding is our preconceived notions and past practices.

We have been so inconsistent in the treatment of our children, especially in the area of religion, that it’s no wonder to me that our society is confused, and our children are bewildered to say the least.

In the Jewish religion, when a boy reaches **thirteen** years of age, he goes through a ceremony known as “*Bar Mitzvah*”. Literally, it is when the child is to become a “*son of the Law*”. Scholars note that this tradition was spoken of in the Talmud, and had been in existence by at least the first century. Back at that time the *Bar Mitzvah* would involve the boy’s first visit to the Temple in Jerusalem and would begin his obligation to keep the Three Great Festivals each year. Some other scholars note that the age to begin this was **twelve**. In any case, however, the modern *Bar Mitzvah* of today has become something quite different.

According to the rabbinical scholars I have spoken with, today’s *Bar Mitzvah* involves the boy’s “*coming out*”, or his “*becoming a man*”. In fact, part of the ceremony involves the boy’s father or guardian say the words, “*today you are a man!*” It is interesting to note that this practice of the belief that the boy supposedly passed from childhood to manhood at age **thirteen** did not originate until the fourteenth century! This *Bar Mitzvah* is a relatively new custom, and was not believed or practiced back in the days of Christ.

Now here is the great inconsistency! If you were to ask a Jewish friend of yours whose son had gone through, or was about to go through, a “*Bar Mitzvah*” whether he believed that his son would literally pass from childhood to adulthood over night, I’m sure he would tell you, “*No*”. In the ceremony the Jewish father tells his son that today he is a “man”. Then, after the ceremony, things at home won’t really change much. He’ll still tell his son what and when to eat, what time to go to bed, what kind of company to keep, etc.. Then what of those words in the ceremony? Did he really mean what he said? Literally? Obviously not!

Most other so-called “Christian” denominations have a similar practice at a similar age. Again, age **twelve** or **thirteen** has been set by **tradition** as the age at which a child is ready to begin his or her religious obligation to God. Again, it should be noted that one cannot scripturally begin their religious obligations to God without also being morally and physically obligated. As in the case of our Jewish friends, there appears to be great inconsistencies in the treatment of our children. Parents of the “*confirmed*” children have them go through a ceremony that is to initiate their religious *responsibility* to God. Spiritually adult *responsibilities* are supposedly placed upon these children. However, in most cases, the child is still expected to answer to his parents in everything, including religious matters. The

parents understand that, in reality, their child is still in the formative years and should not be left at this point to make his own lifelong decisions without his parent's direct guidance and direction.

Let me ask you something. Does the average twelve or thirteen year old you know have the ability to say to their parents, “*no matter what you do or say, Mom and Dad, I'm going to follow Jesus!*”? Is he really in a position, if necessary, to say to his parents to stop interfering with his life, because he's going to follow Jesus not matter what?

I am aware that many parents often don't give very good spiritual, physical, and moral advise. However, how many children, thirteen and younger, do you know that have reached the point in their lives where they have received the sufficient input and training and who have the background experience to make their own eternal decision to become a disciple of Christ's and live up to that commitment? In fact, how many over (but close to) thirteen years old do you know that can meet this requirement? At this point you might think that I'm making too much of a requirement for their commitment to discipleship. However, a careful study of the passages discussed in **Chapters 3, 4 and 5** of this study should allay any such concerns.

Again, it appears to me that we have not been very consistent in the treatment of our children, even in the religious realm. It has been earlier mentioned that in civil or social matters the issue of *accountability* for maturity has become somewhat clouded. However, a careful examination of society's positions in these situations generally exposes our inconsistencies. Likewise, in the religious realm, on the one hand we say that our children, at a very young age, are ready to take on the grave *responsibility* to make an eternally important decision, but on the other hand we realize that they haven't the necessary maturity to make most personal “*life decisions*”! One is not allowed to vote in this country until they reach age eighteen. With few exceptions, a person isn't legally able to enter into a binding business agreement until they are eighteen. Most states have a minimum age of **eighteen** for the consumption of alcohol. Many states are raising this minimum age to **nineteen** and even **twenty-one**. There are many ways in which parents can be, and are, held legally *responsible* for the actions of their children until they're eighteen years of age. Many states will not issue full, “unrestricted”, driver's licenses until the individual reaches their eighteenth birthday.

I am not making the point, at this juncture, that a person should not be considered spiritually *responsible* until he is eighteen years old. Though this may not be far from being correct, it is not my purpose to legislate any specific age of *accountability*. However, at this point, I do want us to see how we have certainly been inconsistent in our consideration of our children's maturity and development in the religious and civil or social realm.

It is becoming increasingly obvious to me that children usually develop as a whole. In other words, the complete person matures at the same general rate in every area of the person's make-up. I am aware that for many the physical development precedes the mental development by as much as a couple of years. However, the two areas of development just mentioned are usually in close proximity to one another so as to generally observe that a growing child will act his or her age with only slight variations in a small number of exceptional cases.

From all that we have discussed thus far, it seems foolish to believe that our children have gained sufficient maturity to make their own spiritually eternal decisions, only to the turn right around and view them as immature and yet impressionable children, requiring our constant direction in all other areas of their life and development! It is time to carefully consider our child's entire being when attempting to determine their personal “*age of accountability or responsibility*”.

CHAPTER 3

BIBLICAL INDICATORS—OLD TESTAMENT AND NEW TESTAMENT

I believe that your reading through this work shows your keen interest in better understanding and application of Biblical principles. It is for this reason that I would assume that this chapter of Biblical indicators would be considered to be one of the most important sections of this study. I think this would be especially true of those who believe that the Bible is the sole and final authority in religious matters.

In this chapter we will consider the Light that the Scriptures shed on the subject of age and maturity and *accountability*. It is only fair to inform you of the fact that I have yet to find a single passage that will pinpoint any particular set age of maturity and *accountability* for us to adhere to today when it comes to baptism. But the Holy Scriptures do provide us with some very strong “indicators” or “road signs”, if you will, which provide us with a better understanding of *accountability* as it relates to certain age groups.

What we are looking for is a thrust or direction. The Light that the Scriptures shed on the subject. We are looking to see if our current beliefs and practices agree with the general considerations and “*indicators*” for maturity in the Bible, both Old and New Testaments.

When we speak of maturity, we mean mature enough to be able to give God the responses He requires of all those who would come to Him, and are therefore *accountable* to that degree. Here are what seems to me to be some critical questions:

1. At what age was a child considered *responsible* to God in the Old Testament?
2. Just because a child is taught from Bible passages to behave in a certain manner, does that automatically mean that those same children are considered spiritually *accountable* to God?
3. At what age does the Bible call a child, “*a child*”?
4. And at what age does the Bible call a man, or adult, “*a man*”?
5. Are there any Bible passages that clearly indicate at what age God held children spiritually and physically *accountable* for their moral responses to His Word?
6. Does the Bible give any indication as to a method of knowing when my child is “*coming of age*”?

It is hoped that this chapter will be helpful in answering these, and a few other important questions.

Old Testament Indicators:

It is hoped that most of you reading this work understand that we are no longer living under or during the Old Testament dispensation. That is, we are no longer *responsible* to God under the Old Testament Law. Even the prophet Jeremiah prophesied of the time when the Old Covenant would be replaced with the New Covenant (**Jeremiah 31:31-34**). **Ephesians 2:15,16** says that the Law was “*put to death*” at the Cross, and **Colossians 2:14-17** says that the Law was “*taken out of the way, and nailed to the Cross*”. Jesus said in **Matthew 5:17** that He came to “*fulfill*” the Law, and **Luke 24:44-47** says that He did just that! **Ephesians 2:14,15** says that Christ “*abolished the Law in His flesh*” when He died on the Cross.

There are now many religious groups that erroneously teach that we are all somehow *responsible* to two covenants simultaneously, both the “old” and the “new”. However, a careful study of the passages just mentioned should correct any such notions. But as if that were not enough, God knowing that some would still have a problem with this understanding, gave us the following passages to consider:

1. **Hebrews 10:9,10**—“*God has taken away the first covenant in order that He might establish the second covenant.*”
2. **Hebrews 8:8-12**—“*God gave us the New Covenant, which wasn’t to be like the first covenant, which was also vanishing away.*”

3. **Hebrews 8:6,7**—In giving us the New Testament, God gave us a “*more excellent ministry and a better covenant, based upon better promises*”.
4. **Hebrews 12:24**—Jesus is the *Mediator of the “new Covenant”*.
5. **Galatians 5:18**—*If you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law.*
6. **Romans 15:4; Galatians 3:24,25**—*The Old Testament was written for our learning to bring us unto Christ.*

There is one more thing to consider before we can move on. In an attempt to challenge the Biblical position just established, there are a few religious groups that would teach that God’s Law engraved on stone, and the Old Covenant, or Law of Moses, were two different things. If you are confused by this, then don’t worry yourself about it at this point in time. However, in answer to their challenge please consider the following Scriptures:

1. **Exodus 34: 27,28** -- *The Law that Moses wrote on stone, the Law that God wrote on stone, the Ten Commandments, the words of the covenant, were all the same thing!*
2. **Deuteronomy 4:11-14** -- *The covenant, the Ten Commandments, the covenant written on the two tablets of stone were the same thing.*
3. **Deuteronomy 9:9-11** – *The stone tablets of the Law were also called the tablets of the covenant.*
4. **Deuteronomy 27:1-8** – *The Law of Moses and the covenant were the same thing, and was written on the tablets of stone.*

All of these passages and many more teach that the Bible doesn’t make the distinction between the Law of Moses, the Covenant, the Law of God, and the Ten Commandments, that some religious groups erroneously make. Some may be wondering about now, “If the Ten Commandments Law is really referring to the entire Law of God, then why does God refer to it as only the Ten Commandments..., when there are so many more?” That’s a good question, but the answer is really simple. In a passages already mentioned, God tells us that He intended the distinction, “Ten Commandments” to be an abbreviation, or title, for all the words of the covenant. In **Exodus 34:28** we read:

“So he was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights; he did not eat bread or drink water. And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments.”

Having thus established the point regarding our no longer being held *accountable* to the Old Testament Law, let us now press on.

Even though we are no longer held *responsible* to God under the Old Testament, there is much we can learn from it regarding God’s dealings with man. We could, for instance, gain insight into God’s considerations of various ages in a person’s development and how God made application of those considerations. These considerations of God regarding age and development in the Old Testament are important to us in that they would give further indication of God’s understanding of human development and maturity. After all, HE made us! At what point did God understand a person to be mature enough to be *accountable*? And who would better understand the various stages of human development and maturity than the Creator Himself? Therefore, the Old Testament is still useful for our learning.

In this section of our study, as we encounter the various Old Testament passages that deal with God’s considerations of human age and maturity, we are going to notice a marked and distinct significance attributed to age **twenty**. I am making mention of this now because I don’t want you to jump to any conclusions about what it is you may think I am saying from the passages cited. Let’s let the Bible speak for itself! Shall we? Let’s just be open to what it says! I am not their author, God is. I am merely referring to the passages for their obvious value to our discussion. Additionally, while I am not specifically saying that one must wait until they are over age twenty to be baptized, I do mean to demonstrate that the Bible indicates a much later time in a person’s life when God holds them spiritually *accountable* to His Will.

Under the Old Testament, a child was born into a covenant relationship with God automatically upon their physical birth. Later this covenant was ratified or confirmed with the child being circumcised upon the eighth day from birth, (*Genesis 17:11-25; Lev. 12:1-4; Exodus 12:48*). The Bible then teaches that this “covenant child” had to be taught to “*know the Lord*”, (*Hebrews 8:11*). This does not, however, indicate any spiritual *accountability* on the part of the infant Hebrew child. Here the obligation was more on the part of the parents of the child than on the child itself.

Leviticus 27:1-7 is a very interesting passage of scripture. It is useful for our study in that God here categorizes certain age groups as having particular responsibilities that are designated for those living within those age groups. The text deals with the valuation for making and paying of vows to the Lord. You would do well to review this passage. Upon doing so you will find that those ranging in age from *one month to five years* old are classified together as having the same obligation or valuation concerning vows. You should also notice that those ranging in age from *five years old to twenty years* old are placed within the same category of valuation. Then from *twenty years old to sixty years* old. Finally, from *sixty years old and upward*. The point might not seem too strong at this point, but there is something to be noted here. What we learn here very well agrees with our previously established research regarding ancient Jewish views of human development and maturity. In basic agreement with those ancient views, could it be that those persons ages **one month to five years** are in the *infancy* stage? Then those in ages **five to twenty years** old would be in the remaining stages of *childhood*. Following this, the **twenty to sixty year** old range would be *adulthood*, and from **sixty onward** would be considered old age or the period of the *elderly*. Remember, it was God, not man, who categorized these particular age groups and classified the five to twenty year olds in the same “valuation” group.

Another two extremely strong passages of scripture which discuss age **twenty** as a key turning point relating to God’s dealings with man are **Numbers 32:11,12** together with **Numbers 14:29-32**. The first passage says,

“None of the men who came up from Egypt, from twenty years old and upward, shall see the land which I swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, for they did not follow Me fully!.....”

In this passage, was a specific age group held *responsible* for their disobedience to God or sin? Yes! What age group was that? **Age twenty and older!** What about those under twenty years of age? Is there any indication from this passage that they were held *accountable* for their not fully following God, as were those over **twenty** years of age? No! Now you might think that I’m stretching the point a bit, but wait until we study **Numbers 14:29-32**.

“Your corpses shall fall in the wilderness, even all your numbered men, according to your complete number from twenty years old and upward, who have grumbled against Me. Surely you shall not come into the land in which I swore to settle you, except Caleb the son of Jephthah and Joshua the son of Nun. Your children, however, whom you said would become a prey—I will bring them in, and they shall know the land which you have rejected.”

Wow! Here God is dealing with the same subject as He does in **Numbers 32:11,12**. He also makes age **twenty** the clear dividing line between those who were to be held *accountable* and those who weren’t. But there’s one more very interesting point to be carefully considered here. Let me see if I can bring it out clearly by asking the right questions.

What was the age of those that God called to account for their disobedience? Those persons “**twenty years old and upward**”! What was their punishment? They were not to enter into the promised land. Then who were to finally enter into the promised land? Caleb, Joshua, and those under twenty years of age! How did God refer to those under twenty years of age, who were going to enter the promised land? Look at **verse 31** for the answer. God referred to those **under twenty** as “*children*”. The Hebrew word for “*children*” in this passage was the word *taph* which denotes “*a child which is able to cling to its mother*”, or “*little ones*”. Some might attempt to argue that the word “*children*” here could possibly be referring to “*descendants*” or “*offspring*”. However, even a casual study of the Hebrew language here

would prove this to be an incorrect assumption. When descendants or offspring was the subject under consideration, the Hebrew word *zera* was the word most often used by God in the Old Testament. Therefore, we have a clear situation where God calls those **under twenty years** of age, those who would enter the promised land, “children”! Not only are they called “children”, but they are also clearly seen as not being held accountable to God for their disobedience in the wilderness as those were who were over age twenty! Again, I would like to say that I am not proposing a doctrine that would say that would require everyone who is baptized be at least twenty years of age. However, these Old Testament verses certainly are indicators of God’s view of and interaction with man as it relates to the subject of *accountability*. What is indicated in these few verses cannot be ignored by the sincere and honest Bible student, and should be taken into serious, prayerful consideration. The very possible implications of these verses certainly stand in marked contrast to a belief that nine or ten year old children are held *accountable* by God today, or that children should be baptized into Christ at such a young age.

The book of Numbers has another couple of very interesting points to be carefully considered as we study human maturity and *accountability*. The book of Numbers is just that; it is a book of the numbers of Israelites, or a census of the nation of Israel, while still in the wilderness. Family names are mentioned in these listings of the people. Various specific categories of human age are also mentioned. Again, what we are interested in is any indication of what ages in human development God considers to be *responsible* and therefore *accountable* to Him for their sin. We want to see any indication of age in respect to various physical responsibilities that would clearly indicate God’s understanding of human maturity. In other words, God’s knowledge of when people in general are to be counted as mature enough to be held *accountable* for certain responsibilities.

In **Numbers 1:2-45** it says that a census was to be taken of “all the congregation of the sons of Israel, by their fathers’ households, according to the number of names, every male, head by head”. And at what age should a person be considered part of the congregation of the sons of Israel? **Verse 3** goes on to say, “*from twenty years old and upward*”!

Wow again! It should also be noted from the same passage that those **under twenty years** of age were not to be considered old enough to go to war. Looking at this another way, only those **over age twenty** were mature enough to take on the responsibilities of fighting for the nation and the army of their God. All those under age twenty were not held *accountable*, but were permitted to stay home with their mothers and families and continue to grow and mature.

Again, in **Numbers 26:2,4** similar commands are given by God. A census is to be taken of “*all the sons of Israel from twenty years old and upward*”. In this passage God takes it a short step further and describes those of age twenty and older as “*able*” to go to war.

I believe that there may be some very interesting parallels to be derived between this teaching and that of the New Testament church. This question will therefore be raised again in **Chapter 5** of this study. However, let me ask you the following obvious questions at this point.

1. Should there be any parallels drawn between the congregation of the Old Testament and the congregation of the New Testament?
2. Is the Old Testament nation of God, and army of God, a type or copy of the New Testament nation and army of God?
3. Do we have anything at all that we can learn from this passage with regards to God’s understanding of the question of “when” is a person old enough to be held *responsible* and *accountable*?”

I hope that your answer to these questions is “yes”. As we will prove in **Chapter 5** of this work, there is a great deal of “parallelism” between the Testaments. It also follows then that there is a great deal of application of what we can learn from the Old Testament, to our present situation under the New Testament.

In general agreement with the obvious significance of age **twenty** being a noted demarcation point, **Exodus 30:14** and **Exodus 38:26** give additional insight to an understanding of that significance. In both passages the *contribution* to the Lord is under discussion. This *contribution* was to be used for the construction of the temple and Sanctuary. Please take the time to review both passages. You should find that only those who were “*numbered, from twenty years old and over, shall give the contribution to the Lord*”.

1. Who were numbered as *responsible* members of the nation of Israel? Those *twenty years of age and older*.
2. Whom did God hold *responsible* to give a contribution to the Lord? *Those twenty years of age and older!*
3. Then what about those under twenty? Weren't they held *accountable* to give a contribution to the Lord? No! They were never held *responsible* for such contributions to the Lord. They were not *accountable* to God for this response.

In **Ezra 3:8** Levites were selected to oversee the reconstruction of the Temple back around 446 B.C. Again, one of the major qualifications mentioned in this passage was that the Levites had to be at least **twenty years old** before this *responsibility* could be placed upon them.

1. What about those Levites who were under twenty years old?
2. Weren't they also held *responsible* by God for the task of building His house? No! Not until they reached their twentieth birthday!

Are you now beginning to see a strong emphasis placed up the biblical significance of a person attaining **twenty years** of age under the Old Testament? I think you'd have to miss it intentionally not to notice it.

However, age **twenty** is not the only age of some noticeable significance in the Bible. Age **thirty** is another key age in the Bible. We will soon notice a great significance of certain individual's reaching their **thirtieth** birthday, and the responsibilities that come only at that specific age.

As I already alluded to in **Chapter 2** some noted scholars hold that it wasn't until a man reached **thirty years** of age that he could acceptably leave his father's business or trade and embark on his own professional life. **Pulpit Commentary**, in its comments on **Numbers 4:3-47** cites that, in the ancient Jewish society, **thirty years** of age was the “*perfect age at which a man attained to full maturity and entered upon all his rights and duties*”. The question must be raised however: Is there any indication of this from the Old Testament? I believe the answer is “yes”!

In **Numbers 8:24-26** age **twenty-five** is set as the age at which a Levite was to “*enter the service to do the work in the tent of meeting*”. And again, **fifty years** of age was given as the mandatory *age of retirement* for a Levite. There is obviously a difference though, between the starting age twenty-five in this passage and the starting age of **thirty** in **Numbers 4**. There are a couple of possible explanations for this discrepancy. Some scholars believe that a scribal error had been made. There is a little debate among those who hold to the “scribal error theory” as to which passage contains the error. Some say that **Numbers 4** should read **twenty-five** years rather than **thirty**. However, others feel that seeing **Numbers 8** mentions **twenty-five** years of age only once, and **Numbers 4** mentions **thirty** years of age at least seven times, it is more likely that the scribal error was made in **Numbers 8**, and that **thirty** is the correct age.

We should also mention of the fact that when we discuss scribal errors, we mean errors that certain scribes may have made as they copied and recopied the scriptures. God's Word was given to man “error free”. However, we should all be aware that when man gets hold of something, he does have a way of making mistakes. This is not to say that we can't know the truth... On the contrary! It just takes a little more research, effort, study, and prayer. When one applies these qualities to their study of the Word, the truth will consistently come shining through.

I am not comfortable with the “scribal error theory”. Just because something in the Bible isn’t immediately clear to us doesn’t mean that there must be an error in the text. I have found that the error often lies within our limited understanding, and not in the Word.

Another possible explanation of the age discrepancies between **Numbers 4** and **Numbers 8** is that they were discussing two slightly different areas of service. A careful study of **Numbers 4** will reveal that the Levites here discussed were “*entering into service*” for the transportation of the Tabernacle, as well as the service for the Sanctuary. In **Numbers 4** it also states that **thirty** was the age at which a Levite entering into service was to be included in the “census”. **Numbers 8:24-26** does not mention a census, and does not mention the carrying or transportation of the Tabernacle. Therefore, it is another possible explanation that the two different passages were discussion two different points concerning Levites and their service. One passage (**Numbers 8**), was discussing the time when a Levite may enter into, and retire from his work within the house of the Lord. The other passage (**Numbers 4**), was discussing the age at which the Levites were to be included in the census for those who were qualified for the carrying of the Tabernacle, as well as the work of the service within. In any case, **thirty years** of age did obviously have some important significance. It is listed at least seven times as the age at which the Levite priests were to be enrolled in the census as those who were qualified to enter into such service.

There are a few other passages that deal with the priesthood of God in the Old Testament with respect of age. And they are really quite supportive of our same general understanding from the passages already discussed.

In **1Chronicles 23:3** again the Levites were numbered in a census “*from thirty years old and upward*”. This same passage will also show how that different Levites had different responsibilities. Again, **thirty** years of ages seems to be very significant. Then in the same chapter in **1Chronicles 23:24,27** another census of the Levites was taken. However, this time they were from “*twenty years old and upward*”. They too were to do service in the house of the Lord. Similarly, in **2Chronicles 31:17** the new censuses were from age “*twenty and upward*”.

There are several explanations as to why God would have authorized a change in the minimum age requirement for His priesthood. One explanation is that as Israel grew in number, so did the need for priestly functions. Five hundred years earlier, in the days of Moses, Israel was much smaller in number and the priesthood was in its infancy stage. Israel’s journey through the wilderness demanded the greatest examples of strength and maturity, especially from the Levite priests. Thus **thirty** years of age was selected by God. Five hundred years later, during the days of King David, Israel had grown into a mighty nation. Literally thousands of priests were now needed to minister to Israel. Physical conditions were not as rough as in the wilderness, and therefore personal maturity would not be put to as great a test. Thus, to fill the great demand, the minimum age requirement for the priesthood was dropped to **twenty** years of age. This is just one possible explanation.

No matter what your explanation or understanding may be, the age bracket of **twenty** to **thirty** does hold a definite significance. You do remember our earlier discussions regarding the Biblical importance of a person’s **twentieth** birthday in Israel? A significance, yes!, but what is that significance? Again, no matter what your interpretations may be, it is clear that such issues as *readiness, maturity, responsibility*, and therefore, *accountability* are basic to the reasoning behind the mentioning of such age categories. It appears after careful review of the Old Testament scriptures that God did not hold people responsible and therefore accountable to Himself until they reached age twenty or more. At least during Old Testament times! It seems, comparatively speaking, that a modern belief that a mere child of five, ten, or fifteen years old to be held spiritually *accountable* to God is terribly unfair, and a bit inconsistent with God’s apparent understanding of man as seen in the Old Testament. Just think about it!

New Testament Indicators:

In some contrast to the Old Testament, the New Testament has very little in the way of indicators that mention specific ages or age groups and their relationship to *accountability*. In fact the only two passages

that are specific deal with our Lord Jesus Christ Himself. However, we will closely examine these and other passages and see what they have to say to us today.

The discussion we are about to enter into was probably the most difficult for me to put into words. It is very important that you do not misunderstand what I am about to say here. I want you to know that I've truly labored over how I was going to write this section of our study. I even seriously considered eliminating it altogether. But I felt that it was ultimately too important to ignore.

We are about to discuss the growth and maturing process of a little boy. But this is not just any boy. This young first century lad also happens to be the Lord of Glory and Master of the entire universe. He is the King of Kings, and the Lord of lords. He is Jesus the Nazarene, the First and the Last, the Alpha and the Omega. And here's what is so difficult for me to properly put into words. We now need to look at a time in His existence when God incarnate had to "grow in wisdom" and "mature".

This last statement of mine is the reason for this discussion being so potentially dangerous. How could anyone dare to say that Jesus Christ, (God in the flesh), had to "grow" in anything.... Especially wisdom? Believe me, if it were not for the fact that the inspired writer said it first, I would never have the nerve. Even now I tremble at the possibilities of misunderstanding and misrepresenting the truth. However, I also tremble at the consequences of not sharing every bit of God's word that may be germane to a better understanding of spiritual *accountability*. Isn't that why God inspired the New Testament writers to share these great truths? Yes! Wasn't it to bring men closer to the Cross? Oh yes! Wasn't it to see and understand their *accountability* and need for salvation? Yes! Even a brief account concerning some isolated event in the boyhood of the Christ? Without a doubt! For everything that God has done, does, and will do is for the salvation of all mankind!

Apart from some brief references in the writings of Luke, there are no inspired writings that reveal the childhood and growth of the Master. We will therefore have to very closely examine what Luke had to share with us, particularly in **Luke 2:40-52**.

In **Luke 2:40** the writer lets us know that what he is about to share with us is with particular reference to the childhood of Jesus.

*And the **Child** continue to **grow** and become strong, **increasing in wisdom**; and the grace of God was upon him."*

In **verses 41ff**, the Bible goes on to say that when Jesus became **twelve years** old His parents took Him along with them to Jerusalem for the Passover Feast. In **verse 41** it says it was His parents' custom to do this each year. However, it would seem that Jesus did not always go with them. In any Case, He went with them this time. After the days of the Feast were completed, Jesus' family left Jerusalem and was unaware that Jesus had stayed behind. Upon discovering His absence from their caravan, His parents returned to Jerusalem, finding Him in the Temple.

From **verses 46** and **47** we learn that this **twelve-year-old** boy name Jesus was quite *spiritually minded*. His parents found Him in the midst of the Temple teachers amazing them with His questions, answers, and understanding. Of course, this was not any ordinary twelve year old boy. This was also the Master and Creator of all things!, (**John 1:1-14; Col. 1:13-19**). However, despite His glorious past, this was still a **twelve-year-old boy**. I mean no disrespect by this statement, nor do I wish to detract from the greatness of Jesus. However, we must acknowledge what **Philippians 2:5-9** seeks to make clear. That Jesus truly emptied Himself of His equality with God, humbled Himself, and became a man.

*"Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not Regard His equality with God a thing to be clung to, but **Emptied** Himself, taking the form of a bond servant, being made in the likeness of men, and being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."*

So when I say that He was a boy, I mean that He became just like you or I!, (**Heb. 2:17,18;4:15**). These two passages from Hebrews make clear that He had to be made just like you and I, complete with all of life's temptations, in order to be able to sympathize with our weaknesses as a faithful and merciful high priest. These texts also state that He never once sinned through all the temptations he suffered in the flesh.

However, the fact that Jesus never sinned does not automatically imply that there was no need for growth and maturity in his life as a human being. **Luke 2:40,52** says that Jesus had to grow up and learn things just like you or I would. I'm not saying He didn't have a advantage knowing Who He was. Of course He did! But I am saying that He was like other twelve year old boys who would have to grow, learn, and mature while also being spiritually minded and concerned with godly things. It may be true that there aren't too many like minded children around, but there are many who do exist. In my own family, when my younger brother was only ten years old, I remember his great concern for doing the right things and always wanting to please God. But this need not necessarily imply *accountability*.

I've said all this because some people believe that when young children begin to ask such questions this automatically infers their being spiritually *accountable* to God. This is nothing more than pure conjecture.

Can't a child ask questions about God and country without being held *accountable* to both? Because the average fourth or fifty grade class can ask some really good questions concerning politics and social injustices, does that mean that they should be held *accountable* to the same? Ready to fight for their country? Need this infer that they are ready to vote for the next President? Or pass legislation on some new social programs or tax reform? A child can and should ask some very good questions about God and country without this necessarily inferring any kind of *accountability* on his or her part.

Well what does it infer then? I'll tell you. It infers that they can ask a good question! It's as simple as that! It infers that they are thinking about spiritual things, which is what we should all want all of our children to begin to do no matter how old or young they are! It infers that they have had some good training in such areas and are honestly asking others to explain their own inconsistencies. And none of this need necessarily imply personal *accountability* at that point. Need it?

If we continue to study the passage of **Luke 2** we will also find that Jesus greatly upset his parents. In **verse 48** His mother asked Him why He had treated them this way in causing them to worry, (as many children do to their parents at the same age). His reply seems to imply that He believed it was time to begin His ministry and not worry about such things as worrying parents. He said to them, "*Why is it that you were looking for Me? Did you not know that I must be in the things of my Father?*" Whatever your understanding of this statement by Jesus may be, acknowledge this, He went with His parents, and did not begin His public ministry, until He was "*around thirty years of age*", (**Luke 3:23**). Though Jesus, at age twelve may have thought it was time to begin His ministry and "be in the things of His Father, when His parents got hold of Him, "*He continued in subjection to His parents*", and He continued to "*grow up in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.*"

Before we move on, a few important questions need to be asked. Study **Luke 2:40,52** carefully.

1. Did Jesus have to continue to grow and become strong like other children? Yes!
2. Did Jesus have to increase in wisdom? Yes!
3. Did Jesus keep increasing in His wisdom and stature? Yes!
4. Does this necessarily imply that there was much room for growth and maturity in these areas? Yes!
5. Did Jesus also have to increase in His favor with God? Yes, with God and men!
6. Does all this imply that Jesus may also have had to grow out of a normal natural childish lack of wisdom? I think so. To "*increase in wisdom*" certainly does mean to overcome a lack of the same!

7. Does that mean that the child Jesus didn't always know the wisest thing to do in a given situation? I think so! He had to grow in wisdom as the text says!
8. Aren't we then in danger of saying the Jesus sinned? **Absolutely not!** The Bible is clear that Jesus was without sin! (**Heb. 4:15**). And that is exactly my point here. Although Jesus had to grow in wisdom in His thinking and life as a **twelve-year-old child**, He was still considered sinless! It was never accounted unto Him as sin! God assures us of that.

My point then from this passage is simple. There is nothing in this passage that would indicate that age twelve is the age at which children should be held *accountable* before God.

On the contrary however, there are indicators from this passage that a child of this age, even the Master, would still have a great deal of growing and maturing to go through before they are ready to venture out on their own for the Father. The passage clearly demonstrates that at age twelve, even Jesus had to remain in subjection to his earthly parents, no matter what He may have wanted to do, or possibly thought He was ready to begin. And from this passage, together with the silence of the rest of scripture on the subject, we learn that Jesus *“remained in subjection to His parents”* and didn't cause them this kind of anxiety again. The next time we read about Him He is beginning his public ministry with the blessings of His Heavenly Father, and is **“about thirty years of age”**, (**Luke 3:23**).

What do you think now? Is this consistent with what we've already studied from the Old Testament? I think you can see that it is. Is this consistent with what we are seeing in many congregations where they are baptizing five, ten, and twelve year old children? I think you should honestly see that it isn't.

All faithful students of the Bible should be familiar with the account of Jesus meeting John the baptizer in the wilderness. Yes, they were related and, as cousins, they certainly knew one another quite well beforehand. However, now John has finally seen Jesus in a way he had never seen Him before. The apostle John's account in **John 1:19-36**, and Matthew's account in **Matthew 3:11-17**, give us an excellent picture of what occurred that day. The inspired writer, Luke, gives a similar accounting only he adds another little bit of information, and that is found in **Luke 3:23**.

“And when He began His ministry, Jesus Himself was about thirty years of age, being supposedly the son of Joseph, the son of Eli.”

That little bit of information is the age of our Master when He *“began His ministry”*. He was **“about thirty years of age”**.

Now, there are those in many churches today who say that children as young as seven years of age are ready to begin their ministry for the Master as baptized disciples of Christ. They might answer us by saying that they don't believe that their children are ready for their *“ministry”* for God, but that they are ready to become Christians. Such people believe that these are two very distinct things. However, I do not believe that they are in complete agreement with what the scriptures teach.

The modern understanding of so-called Christianity holds to a position of a separate priesthood or ministry for God. They believe that there are those in the church who are expected to minister to the needs of the others, and then there are those of the congregation in general who get ministered to. While I am in agreement with the understanding that the preacher or evangelist, as well as the pastors and teachers have some very specific responsibilities, It is NOT Biblical to either believe or practice that the remaining membership is without their necessary ministry!

In Christ's true church there is no separate priesthood. The writer of **1Peter 2:5-9** clearly states that every member of the church is a priest. Then what about the ministry? Well, **1Corinthians 12:12-27** teaches that every member of the Body is just as important to the Body as any of the other members, to minister to the needs of that Body. The obvious point of this passage is that every member of the body

has a ministry to fulfill. Every member entering into the Body of Christ must be prepared to enter into his or her divinely appointed ministry, (**1Corinthians 12:18; 1Peter 4:10**).

So you see? There is not a separate priesthood within the true Body of Christ. Although there are some specialized areas of service, no member of the church can be excluded from the understanding of their entering into, or beginning, their *ministry* upon becoming a member of Christ's Body. Those who believe that little children of seven years of age are ready to become Christians **MUST** also be prepared to believe that they are ready to enter into their active *ministry* for the Father.

Can you see any problems in the application of such a belief? What if a baptized child tells his or her parents that God has placed them into the Body just as He desires? (**1Corinthians 12:18**). Should they accept this? All right then, what if that same child tells his or her parents that they believe that they've been called to preach God's word to the lost? Should they accept this? Remember, if God is calling that believer into some specific service, like saving the lost, what person or persons should dare oppose "God's calling" one of His holy ones into a specific service. And what if that believer tells his or her parents that they're going to the jungles of Africa to save the lost? Should the parents accept this? And what if this "believer" is only ten years old? Should the parents stand in the way of this "God-ordained" ministry? Are you beginning to squirm a bit now?

You see? Age does have a great deal to do with how consistent, or inconsistent, we might be with our beliefs and practices. On the one hand, some would say that they'd agree that every member of the Body should, and does, have their own "God-ordained? Ministry. Some would go so far as to say that this would even apply to their "baptized" seven year old. However, most, if not all, such parents believe such things only in theory, and not in practice. And how dangerous and unbiblical is that? For what if the practice of this truth is for their seven year old to say to their parents, "*Mom, Dad, I believe that Jesus has called me to preach to the native of Africa. I'll be leaving in six months. I'll be traveling with Roger, (he's ten years old). And we may need to spend the rest of our lives there, which may not be long due to political unrest!*"? I think that this child's so called "God-ordained" ministry would quickly become "parent-ordained" limitation. Why? Because, such parents cannot really live within the confines of the practice of their own theories or beliefs.

So what does this have to do with **Luke 3:23** and Jesus beginning His ministry for the Father at age **thirty**? Only this... that Jesus wanted to be "*in the things of His Father*" when He was about twelve years old. Remember? That was in **Luke 2:41-52**. And something else that was curious...

1. No voice from Heaven was heard at that time.
2. No Holy Spirit descended upon Him when He was twelve.
3. His parents expressed their upset with Him, and the text says He remained in subjection to them.

Now, when we look in **Luke 3:23**,

1. Jesus is "*about **thirty** years of age*".
2. He is truly beginning His ministry.
3. He is truly "*in the things of His Father*".
4. Other things are present here that were not present when Jesus was younger.
5. There is now Heavenly approval.
6. There was the voice from Heaven saying, "*This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well-pleased*".
7. And there was the Holy Spirit descending upon Jesus in the form of a dove.

So what do we have then?

1. We have Jesus waiting until He was **thirty** years of age to be **baptized**. Wow!

2. We have Jesus waiting until He was **thirty** years old to begin His ministry.
3. We have the heavenly Father giving His approval at this time.
4. We have Jesus beginning his ministry at an age when many scholars say was the proper age when one could launch out on their own “*attaining to full maturity and entering upon all his rights and duties*”.
5. We have Jesus entering into His high priesthood at the same age that **Numbers 4** says the Levites were to enter into their ministry of the Sanctuary and its transportation.

These facts are certainly worthy of our consideration. How should we consider such facts. Can there be any possible application to our question of the age of *accountability*? Let’s look at it this way.

1. We’ve got people in the church baptizing their children at ages as young as **five** years old. In contrast to this, we have Jesus being baptized, although for another reason, waiting until He was “*about thirty years of age*” before He made that kind of commitment.
2. We’ve got parents who teach, at least in theory, that their children could be ready to begin their “*ministry*” for the Father at ages as young as seven. Yet we have Jesus waiting until He was “*about thirty years of age*” before He was able to make such a commitment and begin His ministry.
3. We’ve got some ministers in modern churches teaching that little children can be scripturally baptized, thus entering into God’s New Testament priesthood. Yet, we have Jesus waiting until He was “*about thirty years of age*” before He entered into His high priesthood through which He would offer up the unspotted sacrifice of Himself upon the altar. Even when we consider all other possible interpretations of the other Old Testament passages dealing with the priesthood, age twenty is the youngest you’ll find anyone being counted as a priest.

Well, what do you think? Is there something worthy of our prayerful consideration here? I believe the practice in some churches today of “infant” or “child” baptism is clearly inconsistent with what we have seen in the case of Jesus Christ. I’m not saying that we should wait until people reach “*about thirty years of age*” before we baptize them. However, I am saying that this quite possibly indicates a much older age than seven, twelve, or fourteen years old for persons to be counted as ready to make such decisions. I think that any such practices fly in the face of all the biblical indicators thus far discussed.

Are there any other indicators from the New Testament as to how old one should be in order to be baptized? Yes!; Four very strong passages from the Book of Acts. In all of these passages the words, “**men and women**” are going to be used by the inspired writer. The Greek word for men in all of these passages is the word **andron** or **andres** or similar forms of the same root word. These words come from the Greek root word **aner**, which according to the scholars, is used when the writer wants to make a distinction between *men* and *women*, or between *men* and *boys*. The word **andron** is used then when the writer wants to make clear that he is talking about *full-grown, or mature males*. In these same passages under consideration the Greek word for women is the word **gunaikas** or various other forms of the same root word, **gune**. According to the same scholars this word is used when the writer wants to indicate a *mature woman* of any age in contrast to a *young girl* or man. The writer uses this word when he wants to make it clear that he is talking about a *full-grown, or mature, female or wife*. Therefore, whatever is being discussed in these passages must be understood to be applicable to full grown and mature men and women. To say that the passages also discuss or would be applicable to children is to go beyond any scriptural authority to make such statements.

In **Acts 5:14** we read the following:

“*And all the more believers in the Lord, multitudes of **men and women**, were constantly added to their number;*”

I have just a few points to make from this passage. The writer is clearly discussing people who were becoming Christians. He said they were “*believers in the Lord*” and that they were “*added to their number*”. Also keep I mind that we are talking about “*multitudes*”. And out of all these numbers and multitudes of believers who were becoming Christians, what words were used by God to specifically describe them? That’s right! “*Men and women*”! Out of all the multitudes of believers that were being added why weren’t there any children? By **Acts 4:4** we are already looking at about five thousand *men* added to the church. Here multitudes more are being added, and no children! Please remember that the author is being very specific. The Greek words used here are to denote full-grown adult males and females. Why do you think that is? Why hasn’t the Bible shown us any children obeying the Gospel? Or more specifically, why has the Bible specified that it was adult men and women who were becoming believers?

In **Acts 9:2** we read of the account of Saul and his persecuting the church:

“.....so that if he found any belonging to the Way, both *men and women*, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem”.

In this passage we have the inspired writer again sharing with us some specifics that will greatly aid us in our search for the truth on the subject of *accountability*.

To bring those specifics out, let me ask you a few more questions.

1. Did Saul persecute the members of the Way? Yes.
2. What members? “*Any*” of them.
3. Were “any” of those who belonged to the Way said to be children? No.
4. Well then what were they? “*Both Men and Women*”!
5. As some suppose, if little children can be *accountable* members of the Way, then why didn’t Saul persecute them?
6. Why didn’t he bring them bound to Jerusalem?
7. Was it that he didn’t he bring the children bound to Jerusalem? Just the adults?
8. Was it that he left them alone out of the kindness of his heart? Where’s the scripture for that?
9. Some might say that he did persecute the believing children. Where’s your scripture for that?

All I know is that I can show you where specifically grown *men and women* were added to the church, and that specifically grown *men and women* were being persecuted by Saul, and that the Greek words used excluded little boys and little girls.

In **Acts 22:4** in the midst of Paul’s own account of his furious persecution of the church he obviously completely agrees with the words chosen by Luke to describe that persecution.

“*And I persecuted the Way to the death, binding and putting both men and women into prisons,*”

1. Who did Paul say he persecuted? Members of “*this Way*”.
2. Who did he persecute to death and bind in prisons? Paul said they were adults, **men and women!**

But some say that this evidence isn’t strong enough. They say that this was only talking about the persecution, and not people being baptized. Well, **Acts 5:14** would indicate people being baptized. But if that’s not good enough, let’s take a close look at **Acts 8:12**.

“*But when they believe Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, men and women alike.*”

Here we have the evangelist, Philip, preaching the Word to the people of Samaria. Many of those same people believed Philip's preaching. Their reaction was to be baptized into Christ. In fact, the tense of the verb in the Greek is a continuing tense. That is to say, that numbers of Samaritans were coming and were being baptized over the passing of some time. And out of all these Samaritans that "believed" Philip's preaching and were being baptized, were there any children? No! In fact, what does the text specifically say about those who were baptized? It says that they were exclusively "**men and women**".

It cannot be stressed too much that if God wanted to include boys and girls in these passages, He would not have used the words He did. He would have used other words which would have allowed a broader understanding or would have specifically mention children as well. As God clearly has done in other subjects, He would have used other words such as those earlier discussed in **Chapter 2** of this study.

Some might be wondering about now, "*then what about one of the qualifications for the elder, 'having children who believe'?*" That's a good question, but the answer is also very good. The passages we are referring to now are **Titus 1:6**, and **1Timothy 3:4** where "children" are referred to as being part of the qualifications of an elder. We will address these shortly. Additionally, though the word is not used with reference to the qualifications of elders, there is yet another passage of Scripture where the same word for "children" is used, from which some may attempt to say that "children" can and should be baptized. That passage is **Acts 2:39** where the apostle Peter says that the "*promise is to you, and to your children, and to all that are far off.....*".

The word for "children" in each of these passages is the Greek word, "**teknon**". As was already explained, although this word can be used to denote small and even unborn children, it very often has a much broader meaning such as "**offspring**". According to the scholars the word **teknon** "*stresses the relationship between a parent and his offspring without regard to age or sex*". In **2Timothy 2:1** and other passages the apostle Paul refers to Timothy as his "**child**", (**teknon**), in the faith. It stresses their relationship to one another, and not Timothy's age. Therefore, although these passages do often contain the word "children" in most modern translations, the actual meaning of the Greek word in these passages merely denotes **offspring!** And so these passages have nothing to say about the age of the **offspring** being baptized!

What then do we have thus far from these invaluable passages? We have exclusively "**men and women**" being specifically mentioned as those who believed in the Lord; "**men and women**" were added to the Lord; "**men and women**" believed preaching about the good news of the kingdom and the name of Jesus Christ; "**men and women**" being baptized into Christ; "**men and women**" being persecuted, bound, and put to death for their faith. That should be seen as very powerful and worthy of your great, prayerful consideration. It appears from passages throughout the New Testament that children were not considered to be *accountable* to the extent that they were not expected to obey the Gospel. It also is apparent that God was distinct and discriminating in the choice of His words in specifically denoting "**men and women**". There just aren't any clear references to children becoming or being active members of the kingdom anywhere in the New Testament!.

If it is not already becoming apparent to you, you should be noticing that it seems that the issue of *accountability* rests upon the questions:

1. "What is an adult?"
2. "What is a child?"
3. How old does one have to be in order to be considered a "man" or a "woman" and therefore *accountable* to God?

Though the Old Testament clearly mentions "**twenty years of age**", the New Testament doesn't mention any specific age when children are to be considered *responsible*, and thus, "*accountable*" adults. Yes, the

Old Testament mentions ages twenty, twenty-five, or thirty in passages we've already studied? However, rather than listing one of these as being the "age of *accountability*" for the New Testament, I would like us to try another approach.

Does the Bible give us a gauge by which we can measure childhood and adulthood? Considering the differing rates of maturity between individuals, is there a way to know when an individual has become, in God's sight, a *responsible, accountable* adult? The answer is Yes! **1Corinthians 13:11** contains just such a gauge. Before we read this passage I would like to acknowledge that it probably wasn't God's purpose that it be used as a gauge in determining an individual's adulthood and resulting readiness to obey the Gospel. However, a general truth is stated here by the apostle Paul which I believe should and can be generally applied even though there may be exceptions.

In **1Corinthians 13:11** we read:

*"When I was a **child**, I used to speak as a child, think as a child, reason as a child; when I became a **man**, I did away with childish things."*

Many years ago I was discussing the subject of "*the age of accountability*" with a good sister in Christ in the great state of Oklahoma. It was that good sister who shared with me a very valuable application of this passage. Very simply put, she said, "*I'll know when my children are ready to be baptized, by observing when the **put away childish things***". That really is quite a good answer. If the New Testament **only** has examples of **adult men and women being baptized**, and if the New Testament specifically mentions **only** adults being **baptized**, the question, "**What is an adult?**", must be answered. It seems apparent then, that the question of the *age of accountability* rests upon the New Testament definition or description of an adult.

In **1 Corinthians 13:11** the apostle Paul discusses the nature and purposes of certain New Testament miracles (i.e. Tongues), which were being performed during "the age of inspiration". Paul uses his own natural human development to illustrate the fact that such miracles were to be present during the "*infancy*" or "*child state*" of the church. Paul's illustration is valuable to us in that it describes, even if only by implication, a general method of determining when a *child* has entered into *adulthood* and may therefore be considered "*accountable*".

The text clearly states that in his childhood, Paul like any other child, spoke, thought and reasoned as a child. This would involve the natural mistakes, errors, and general immaturities of childhood, complete with childish toys and games. Children think, but usually never far enough through to see the consequences for their actions. The Holy Spirit, through Paul, said that *childhood* naturally involves "*childish things*".

So when can I know that God has quite possibly begun to regard my offspring as adults? The Bible says when he does "**away with childish things**". I have actually witnessed a little 10 year old boy get baptized, and on his way down the stairway from the baptistry playfully pull the hair of a little girl who was to be the next one baptized! Does this sound like he "*put away childish things*"? I have known many others who, after being baptized at a very young age, continued to play with their toys and dolls.

Furthermore, in applying **1Corinthians 13:11**, observing these children, both before and after baptism, I have noticed no real change in their natural childish behavior. Although they had obviously not matured enough to "*put away childish things*", thereby proving to have begun entering into adulthood, some well-meaning preachers had baptized these babes anyway.

I am aware that there are fifty-year-old men who act like children. However, these are the exception and not the general rule. The point of Paul's illustration was that childish things are done away with when

adulthood or maturity comes. He then went on to apply this illustration from his own life to his teaching on the subject of miraculous gifts and their place in the growth and maturity of the church. He thereby illustrates how miraculous gifts were to be present and active only during the immature or “*infant*” state of the church’s development in the first century.

It really seems to be a great deal of arrogance, or ignorance, or some combination of both, that would allow some of us to question the Catholic and Protestant churches for “*infant baptism*”, only to turn right around and practice our own form of “*infant baptism*”. And that is exactly what many in the Lord’s church are doing today. They are actively practicing *infant baptism*! And here’s the proof.

Most who baptize children of any age don’t usually make it a requirement that the child must establish that he or she has effectively “*put away childish things*”. They see no problem with baptizing children and then returning them to “play” with their friends. If confronted because of this practice they will usually respond saying that they don’t believe it makes any difference. “*What’s the big deal?*”, they respond. I find it extremely interesting that most of these same people will strongly condemn the denominational practice of *infant baptism*. You see, on the one hand they will biblically argue against the practice of *infant baptism*. They will do this by biblically proving that children are considered already saved and “*of the Kingdom of Heaven*”, (**Matthew 18:1-6; 19:13-15**). Then, on the other hand, they very often baptize children just because the child requested it, and they say that **1Corinthians 13:11** should have nothing to do with it. But you see, it does! Did you know what word the inspired apostle Paul uses for the word “child” in this text? It is the Greek word, *Nepios*. And do you know what that word means? It “denotes infants or suckling babes, and carries with it the idea of helplessness, inexperience, and simplicity”.

So we have some well-meaning brethren teaching and practicing a doctrine that allows them to baptized children, (*Nepios*), without first requiring their “*putting away childish things*”. Or stating it more accurately, we’ve got a lot of brethren baptizing children without first observing that those children have “*put away the things of infancy (nepios)*”. Hence, many who are actively condemning “*infant baptism*” in other churches, are according to the Bible, practicing their own form of “*infant baptism*”. What hypocrisy!

I ask you now. Does **1Corinthians 13:11** have anything to share with us on the subject of the *age of accountability*? Yes! It clearly states that when a person becomes a “*man*”, he “*puts away the things of infancy*”. Here God gives us a better idea of when our offspring become mature adults. All we need to do is look at their lives and observe when they do away with childish things.

1. We can know the time is near when our children put down the crayons, toys, and dolls.
2. We can know the time is near when they stop the childish games.
3. We can know by observing when our children begin to think and reason like adults.

Until this is accomplished the Bible calls them “*infants*”, and anyone who baptizes them is practicing “*infant baptism*”. Again, there may be exceptions to this. We aren’t talking about a hard and fast rule. However, the point cannot be ignored that Paul’s illustration most emphatically teaches that when a boy becomes a man he puts away childish things.

It seems apparent to me that this period of childhood is what Paul is referring to in **Romans 7:9** when he says:

“And I was once alive apart from law; but when the commandment came, sin became alive, and I died.”

This passage conveys a thought that appears to be in complete agreement with what we’ve derived from **1Corinthians 13:11**, Paul writes about a time in his life the “law” and its effects did not apply to him. This would obviously be during his childhood. Then when God began to hold Paul *accountable* for his

sin by applying the Law to Paul, sin sprang to life, in a manner of speaking, and Paul (Saul) spiritually died. Therefore we have Paul talking about the times in his life before and after his reaching the age of *accountability*.

When I had discussed these very principles with some very well meaning brethren, they raised a question about the “*children*” of Cornelius and the Philippian Jailer. Their question was, “What about the cases of Cornelius in Acts **chapter 10** and the Jailer in **Acts chapter 16**? It says that their *relatives* or *households* were also baptized! And I don’t see any restrictions here that said their children couldn’t be baptized! In fact, in **Acts 16:33** it said that the Jailer and ‘all his household’ were baptized!”

At first glance this argument in favor of baptizing children might seem to have some merit. However, it is actually a very weak argument, and one that a person should hardly build a doctrine and religious practice upon. Why is it weak? Well let me ask you a couple of very pointed questions.

What gives a person the right to say that any children were involved at all? If someone would affirm that “*children*” are under consideration here,

1. Would they mind sharing their ages, (even if only approximately), with the rest of us?
2. Could they show us the verses that indicate that that any children at all were included in the relatives of Cornelius or the household of the Philippian jailer?
3. How old was Cornelius?
4. How old was the jailer?
5. If they say they had children in their households who were baptized, then would they then be so kind as to at least give us their approximate ages?

It should be obvious at this point that one cannot accurately answer any of these questions I’ve just posed. Why not?, because the Scriptures are silent here. There is nothing here that would cause us to believe that any children were present in either household. Must the term “household” always infer that there are always little children running around? Of course not! Aren’t you aware of a household with only adults in it? Well of course you are! When the children or offspring grow older and some even move out, would that household no longer be called a “household”? Why no! Then why would some insist that children are also being baptized here? The text doesn’t do that. I’ll tell you why some insist that children are involved here. It is a preconceived prejudice based upon an already existing practice in many congregations of the Lord’s church. This causes some to see things in a text that aren’t necessarily there!

Now someone might say, “It might not say that there were any children present, but it also doesn’t say that there weren’t!” I have several things to say in answer to this.

First of all, most dedicated Bible students already understand and respect the fact that we should never take a doctrinal position and base it upon what the Scriptures don’t say for certain. Doesn’t it sound foolish to say, “*we ARE going to baptize children because no one knows for certain if the word “household”, “relatives”, or “house” in Acts 16 is even talking about children at all?*” Or in other words, “*We’re going to practice this doctrine because you can’t be certain they didn’t, and we can’t be certain they did. But we’re going to do it anyway!*” I find this to be a questionable approach. I dare say that those who arrive at doctrinal positions using this method of reasoning might as well fabricate all sorts of doctrinal heresies based upon what the Bible DOESN’T clearly address! Sounds confusing? You bet! And it’s no wonder the mess we’re in.

Secondly, since it is, at the very least, unclear as to whether or not children of any kind are being discussed at all, isn’t it “*adding to the Word of the Lord*”. Isn’t it “*going beyond what is written*” to say that children *are* present in either **Acts 10** or **Acts 16**? Again, though some may argue that I’m adding to the Word by affirming children are not mentioned here. First of all, I haven’t said yet that children aren’t

being discussed in those two passages. I haven't tried to make any sort of an argument from these passages against baptizing children. It is the person in favor of infant or "child" baptism that sometimes turns to these passages. I haven't turned to this passage saying that children must not be present in those passages. It is the "pro-infant baptizer" that has turned to these passages saying that we must understand that *children are* under discussion. It is at this point that we must require from them some substantial justification for their position. Second, remember, one need not justify a non-practice of something, especially when the scriptures make no direct reference to that practice! It is the responsibility of the one who affirms and practices some doctrine to justify that practice, including the baptism of children!

If we had to come to a common understanding as to who were baptized in **Acts 10** and **Acts 16**, it would certainly have to be a position consistent with what we've already learned from many other passages of Scripture. In other words, any view we might have of the situations in **Acts 10** and **16** must, of necessity, be in agreement with already clearly established facts or principles from other Bible passages. God is consistent, and so is His Word! Alright then, what would be a biblically consistent view of the cases of Cornelius and the jailer? To answer this question, let's review what we've already learned from the Book of Acts.

In **Acts 5:14** we read that the multitudes of believers who were constantly being added to the Lord were specifically said to be "**men and women**". In **Acts 8:12** we read that those who had "*believed Philip preaching the good news about the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ*" and "*were baptized*" were again specifically said to be "**men and women**". In **Acts 9:2** we read that those who Saul persecuted were "*any belonging to the Way*" and again the Scriptures specifically indicated them to be "**men and women**". Finally, in **Acts 22:4** we read where Paul gives his own account of his past persecution of the church and those who were part of the Way and were put into prison, and again they were specifically said to be "**men and women**".

Now, if you had to take a position as to the approximate ages of those who were baptized in the family of Cornelius or the household of the jailer, a position that would be consistent with these other plain passages from the Book Of Acts, what would that position be? Obviously, everyone in both situations who believed what was preached, was baptized, and became part of the Way, being added to the Lord, would also have to be "**men and women**", ... if we are to be consistent!

First, this is at least a very consistent view with the rest of the Book Of Acts. And second, there would be no other textual reasons to believe that anything other than "**men and women**" were being discussed. No textual reasons from **Acts 10**, not from **Acts 16**, not from the rest of the New Testament! Therefore we must conclude that those who would seek to justify their practice of *infant* or *child* baptism will have to look elsewhere for their justification.

There is one other passage that some people may think would indicate an *accountability* of children before God. That passage is **2Timothy 3:15**.

*"And that from **childhood** you have known the Sacred Writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus."*

First of all, we must define the word childhood from this passage. The word that most versions translate as "child" in this passage is actually the Greek word "**brethous**". According to the Greek scholars this word denotes, "*an unborn child, embryo, fetus, a new-born child, and infant, a babe*". Hence all Paul is saying to Timothy is that ever since Timothy was born his mother and grandmother taught him the Scriptures. This passage hasn't got a word to say about Timothy's personal *accountability* as a "*babe*". It only indicates that when Timothy grew up and became *accountable*, he had been taught the Holy Scriptures from his infancy and therefore was given the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith that is in Christ Jesus!

Secondly, I am in humble agreement with God that our children should be taught the Bible from the day they are born, to the day they die. From womb to tomb! This certainly prepares our children and points them in the right direction. This way when they need God's saving grace they will know the truth that makes men free. The Psalmist spoke of this very point in **Psalms 22:9** where he talks about learning of faith while nursing at his mother's breasts. **Proverbs 22:6** teaches the same principle of training up your child in the right way when they are young so that when they are older they will move in the right direction.

Discipleship

Before we move into the next chapter dealing with "Baptism and Conversion" there is one extremely important, crucial subject that must be discussed. That is the subject of "**discipleship**". In this section of 'New Testament Indicators' of an *age of accountability*, a discussion of *discipleship* and its "*cost*" will prove to be one of the strongest biblical evidences in favor of a much more mature "*age of accountability*" than that which some churches are presently practicing.

As we read and carefully study the following passages, I want you to keep in mind that some ministers are baptizing children as young as **5** years old. This is very interesting in light of the plain teaching of our Lord that before one can be scripturally baptized **they must already be a disciple**, at least to some degree. Please do not confuse being a disciple and being saved. According to the Bible, one need not necessarily follow the other. It is possible to be a "disciple" of Christ's without having yet become united with Him in His death, burial, and resurrection.

This very situation is found in **Acts 19:1-7**. In this case the apostle Paul finds some disciples in Ephesus, (**verse 1**). The interesting thing about these "*disciples*" is that they clearly weren't yet baptized into Jesus Christ until **verse 5**. It may be argued by some that these disciples were not disciples of Jesus, but rather they were disciples of John. This is reasoned from the fact that they were only acquainted with the baptism of John, (**Acts 29:3,4**). The eloquent preacher Apollos apparently taught these disciples when he earlier came through Ephesus, (**Acts 18:24**). And he too was only acquainted with the baptism of John at this time, (**Acts 18:25**). If all this is true then the disciples of **Acts 19:1** were most certainly "*disciples*" of the Lord Jesus even though there were not yet saved Christians until **Acts 19:5**. The proof for this is found in **Acts 18:25**.

*"This man had been instructed in **the way of the Lord**; and being fervent in spirit, he was speaking and **teaching accurately the things concerning Jesus**, being acquainted only with the baptism of John."*

Does it appear from this passage that Apollos was instructed in the way of John, or "*the way of the Lord*"? "*The way of the Lord*"! Of whom was Apollos speaking and teaching *accurately*? Of *Jesus*! Even though he was only acquainted with the baptism of John and needed, himself, to be taught more accurately about God's Way and Christ's baptism, Whose "*disciple*" was Apollos? *The Lord Jesus*! Who was he trying to follow? *Jesus*! Was he a Christian yet? No, he was not until after **verse 26**.

Now what about those "*disciples*" resulting from Apollos' work mentioned in **Acts 19:1**? From what we've learned in **Acts 18:25** would you say he made them disciples of John or "*disciples*" of the Lord Jesus and His Way? Disciples of the Lord! Clearly then the Bible does refer to situations where persons may be "*disciples*" to some degree without having yet taken that discipleship to the point of becoming a Christian, (united with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection). Throughout the Gospels there are numerous references to Jews, who for a brief period of time, were called His "*disciples*" only to later leave their discipleship. One such reference can be found in **John 6:52-66**, and there are others. But perhaps the strongest passage indicating the need for some level of discipleship before baptism is **Matthew 28:19**.

*“Go therefore and make **disciples** of all the nations, baptizing **them** in the name of the Father and the son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them whatever I have commanded you.”*

This translation, being true to the original Greek, indicates that we must make *disciples*, baptizing *them*. Baptizing who? The disciples we’re in the process of making!

The point is obvious then that one can very easily be a disciple without having yet been baptized. In fact it is just as obvious that one must first be a “disciple” before one is baptized if it is to be a scriptural baptism in agreement with our Lord in **Matthew 28:19**. Doesn’t it take a great amount of discipleship and self-denial to come to the point of understanding and conviction to be baptized? Of course! Discipleship to Jesus does not begin with baptism, but rather will bring one to the point of becoming united with Him in the watery grave. Baptism, as part of the discipling process, is indicated in the text as bringing one to the point of salvation is Christ Jesus.

Unfortunately, some have confused the term “disciple” as always being synonymous with the term “Christian” or being saved. As we have just learned, this can sometimes be a serious misunderstanding. While it is true that all true Christians must also be disciples of Jesus, it is not necessarily true that all true disciples must also be considered Christians or saved. A “disciple” is “one who disciplines him or herself under the teachings and direction of another”. Again, I have a few questions:

1. Can’t you see how it is absolutely necessary for one to first be a disciple, disciplining one’s life under Christ’s teachings, in order to progress to the point of taking the steps that would make one a “Christian”?
2. And aren’t you aware of persons, besides the many in the Bible, who were “disciples” for a time, but never brought their discipleship to the point of becoming a child of God?
3. And what about the “disciples” in Ephesus, in Acts 19:1ff, who hadn’t yet been baptized with Christ’s baptism? Notice that God called them “disciples” before they were baptized into Christ!

So why was it so important for us to understand this point? Because when someone decides to baptize a ten year old, or child of any age, they cannot do so, with Biblical authority, without also automatically saying, because of the passages just discussed, that they believe that child is fully capable of being a true “disciple” before they baptize them. And this is where I believe they have some serious problems concerning their view of “discipleship”.

Our Lord Jesus Christ set down the Biblical guidelines for a proper understanding and practice of **discipleship**. He was very clear. Jesus did not equivocate. Virtually all of Jesus’ teaching dealt with what it would mean to be His *disciple*. We are also assured that Jesus knew we would often fall short of our commitment to Him and forever need His saving Grace. Nevertheless, there are two particularly powerful passages of scripture that spell out, in great detail, what it takes to be a true disciple of the Christ. They are found in **Matthew 10** and **Luke 14**. In **Matthew 10:34-39** we read:

“Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword! For I came to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man’s enemies will be the members of his own household. He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who has found his life shall lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake shall find it!”

There are several things in this passage that discuss what it takes to be “worthy” to be called a “disciple” of Jesus. We know that “discipleship” is what is being discussed from the obvious references in **verses 1,24,25** and **42** of the same chapter. What does Jesus say it takes to be worthy of Him, or to be His disciple? To answer this question we simply need to read the passage! A “disciple” **must**:

1. Always be ready and willing to confess that Jesus is their Lord, **verse 32**.

2. They must never deny that fact that they are disciples, not even to unsupportive parents, **verse 33**.
3. They must understand and accept that their being a disciple of Christ's could very well mean that parents and other family members will become their enemies, **verses 34-36**.
4. They must never love father or mother or any family member more than Christ, **verse 37**.
5. They must possess the ability to do all of these things and to live a life that everyday carries a cross with their own name on it! **Verse 38**.
6. They must determine to lose their lives for the sake of Jesus Christ, **verse 39**.

Now some people wouldn't see any problem with these passages, especially when you're baptizing the children of parents who are already strong members of the church. However, because some may not see any of the conditions listed here as a potential dilemma to their children, that doesn't mean that such conditions for "worthiness" don't apply to any "*child candidate*" for baptism. Whether or not the parents of the prospective disciple are members of the church, the conditions that Jesus sets forth are clear and would apply to any and all who would wish to be called a "worthy disciple" of Christ's. It is not the circumstances described in this passage that are required. What is required is the *ability* and *willingness* to faithfully meet such circumstances should they arise, no matter what your age. This is powerful stuff! One's *accountability* to the conditions, or requirements for "worthy" discipleship are met only in the prospective disciple's willingness and faithfulness in meeting those conditions clearly listed by Jesus in **Matthew 10**. And like this or not, our gracious loving Jesus does use a series of demanding conditional statements to describe just who will be a "*worthy*" disciple. Therefore, our understanding of a person's ability to live **Matthew 10** must not be based upon family circumstance alone.

Now to the questions raised by the requirements Jesus makes of all true disciples. I would like to ask you the following questions as they pertain to the requirements of worthy discipleship. And remember... It will not do to say that these questions don't have application to your children because you're a member of the church. Jesus isn't necessarily discussing that. But rather, should you or the rest of your family and the world be unsupportive, does your child possess the willingness and the **ability** to give an accounting for the conditions laid down?

If a child were a "disciple", and you want to baptize that child, before you baptize him or her, they **must** be able to:

1. Always be ready and willing to confess Jesus as their Lord, even in the face of persecution and death, **verse 32**.
2. They must never deny or hide the fact that they are disciples, not even from parents, **verse 33**.
3. They must understand and be ready and able to live with the fact that their being a disciple could mean their father and mother and other family members could become their enemies!, **verses 34-36**.
4. They must never love their father or their mother or any other family member more than Jesus, **verse 37**.
5. They must possess the *ability* to do all of these things or they are "*not worthy*" of Jesus! (Otherwise they don't have the ability to account for this response and are therefore not *accountable!*), **verses 32-37**.
6. They must stop playing foolish or childish and selfish games, and live a life that everyday carries a cross with their own name on it!, **verse 38**.
7. They must lose their lives for the sake of Christ in order to gain eternal life, **verse 39**.

Now I ask you, honestly and before God as your witness, how many nine-year-old children do you know that could meet these conditions? Any? How many ten year olds? How about fifteen-year-old children? Do I need to go higher? I probably do?, don't?!?! Here are a few more questions:

1. At what age does a person at least have the ability to confess Jesus as their Lord without having to worry about what Mommy and Daddy might say or do to prevent them?

2. At what age does a person at least have the ability to understand and **live with** their own father and mother becoming their enemies?
3. At what age does a person generally possess the ability to love Jesus, with their obedience (**John 14:15**), more than their father and mother?
4. At what age does a person have the ability to live a cross-carrying life everyday?
5. And at what age does a person have the ability to make their own personal determination to lose their life for Christ's sake?
6. Or putting it another way, at what age does a person at least have the ability to be "worthy" of Jesus?

According to the Bible, it can only be at this point in an individual's life that they are then ready to be baptized!

Do you want to have at least a rough idea of what the *age of accountability* might be? All you need do is look at the person's life and abilities. Observe what approximate age they are when they have the ability to meet or fulfill the requirements that Jesus says "*must*" be fulfilled in order to be His disciple. It is at this point that they are *accountable*.

We shall use a similar approach in our study of **Luke 14**. We find that the language that Christ used in this passage in speaking of the requirements of true discipleship is even more demanding and specific than that of **Matthew 10**.

We are particularly interested in **Luke 14:26-33**. It should also be noted that most Bible commentators entitle this section of Scripture, "*The Cost Of Discipleship*". And you'll find that this is exactly what is going to be taught here by the Master; *what it costs to be a disciple*! In fact, as you read this passage you should notice that Jesus reveals His position on the subject of discipleship in such a way so as to say that **if** these stated conditions are **not** met by "anyone", they "*cannot be His disciple*".

In **Luke 14:26-33** we read:

*"If anyone comes to Me, and does not **hate** his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he **CANNOT BE MY DISCIPLE!** For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and **calculate THE COST**, to see if he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who observe it begin to ridicule him, saying, 'This **man** began to build and was not **ABLE** to finish'. Or what king, when he sets out to meet another king in battle, will not first sit down and take counsel whether he is strong enough with ten thousand men to encounter the one coming against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. So therefore, **NO ONE OF YOU CAN BE MY DISCIPLE** who does not give up all his own possessions!"*

Now, do you remember the point made in **Matthew 28:19**? What I wanted us to notice there is how one **MUST** begin discipleship to Jesus before they are baptized. Here, in **Luke 14**, Jesus takes another step back and tells us what it takes to be a disciple. A disciple **MUST** be **ABLE** to hate his or her father or mother, as well as any other family member that would stand between that disciple and Jesus!, (**verse 26**).

By the way, there is some debate over the meaning of the word "*hate*" here in the text. However, a careful study of this word in Greek will reveal that it does, in fact, mean "*hate*", and is the same word used in passages such as **Romans 7:15; Revelation 2:6; 17:16**. In these passages the word is used in connection with our need to "*hate*" evil as God does. Hence it is totally unfounded and misleading to

translate the word “*hate*” here to merely mean “*love less*”, which some have attempted to do! In fact, Jesus contrasts this word “*hate*” with its complete opposite, “*love*”, in **Luke 16:13**).

1. A disciple **must** be able to *hate* his own life!, **verse 26**.
2. A disciple **must** be able to daily carry “*his own cross*” and follow Jesus, no matter what others may say and do!, **verse 27**.
3. A *disciple*, or proper “*candidate for baptism*” must be able to first sit down and “*count the cost*” to see if he or she has enough faith and determination or commitment to remain faithful to the end!, **verses 28-32**.
4. The disciple must *give up all* that they have and are! They must renounce ownership of all things!, **verse 33**.

Come on now!

1. How many ten year olds do you know that could “*hate*” their mother and father for the sake of Christ?
2. How many twelve year olds do you know that have the ability to *hate* their own lives?
3. How many young teenagers do you know who are in a position where they can live a cross-carrying life for Christ no matter what their parents may say?
4. How many children do you know that presently have the ability to sit down and reflect upon their life and abilities and make a calculated judgment (*count the cost*), as to their ability to remain faithful to Jesus years into the future?
5. How many fifteen year olds do you know that can actually “*give up all their possessions*”? If you’re completely honest, I think you’ll have to say that you don’t know of any!

Some may attempt to argue that this writer am making the demand of the children’s *ability*, and that Jesus only demands an *attitude of willingness*. Those who make such arguments have missed two very important points.

First, remember what we have learned from passages like **Matthew 18:1-10** and **Matthew 19:13-15**? We learned that children, from the earliest ages are generally trusting and willing. We learned that it is we adults that must be “*converted and become as little children*”. And yes sir! There is **more** than the humble willingness of children being discussed in **Matthew 10** and **Luke 14**.

And that brings us to the second point that some have missed. Jesus wasn’t talking about a mere willingness here. Jesus mentions the qualifications of discipleship in a series of conditional statements as the necessary qualities, which **must** already be present in the lives of those who would be worthy to be His disciples. Besides, the words, “*able*” or “*strong enough*” or “*have enough*” in **Luke 14** certainly speak of more than just an attitude of willingness.

Hence, most students of the Word soon realize upon a careful study of the subject of discipleship, that a much older, more mature, age of response-ability is indicated in the Holy Scriptures. Though children may be willing, a child has much growing and maturing to go through before they can be the kind of disciples that Jesus wants and demands in **Matthew 10** and **Luke 14**.

How does the discussion of *discipleship* pertain to the question of *responsibility* or *accountability* towards God? Simple!

1. Jesus requires that one be a disciple **before** they are baptized and saved as part of the ongoing process of being made a disciple, **Matthew 28:19**.
2. Jesus requires that a person respond in some certain and specific ways in order to be a disciple, **Matthew 10:3-39; Luke 14:26-33**.
3. If a person is truly not able to give the required *responses*, the they are not “**response-able**”!

4. If such persons are not “*responsible*”, (God knows), then it follows that they are certainly not *able* to be called to *account* for those responses they are not able to give.
5. Therefore they are not “*account-able*” or *accountable*! (See our discussion on the subject of *accountability* and *responsibility* in **Chapter 1**).

It is by this same line of reasoning or logic that we speak to the issue of the mentally handicapped, no matter what their chronological age! And no matter what their willingness may be! Think about it!

CHAPTER 4

BAPTISM AND CONVERSION

The reason for including this chapter in this study is that there are many in the religious world who do not believe that baptism is necessary for salvation. This is by no means intended to be an exhaustive study of the subject of Baptism and Conversion. An extremely helpful aid in gaining a fuller understanding of this important subject is a short, but effective work entitled, “Test Your Salvation”, also by Kent A. Field. This has proven to be an extremely effective soul-winning aid. However, I hope that the passages from God’s Holy Word herein contained will assist in clearing up any misunderstandings that might exist concerning this subject.

Especially in regards to this study, we must clearly understand the subject of Baptism and Conversion as it pertains to the “*age of accountability*”. It is important to understand what actually occurs at baptism; to understand the effects: to understand what is required from each person: and to answer the questions of whether or not children of any age are really in need of the desired results of baptism and are really capable, (able), of giving the required response.

There are more than twenty different passages in the New Testament that clearly address the controversial subject of baptism. I am firmly convinced that all such controversy between honest souls would cease if each of these passages was studied and respected with faithful obedience. The purpose of this work is not to alleviate all such misunderstanding, but to clearly establish the purposes and results of baptism, as well as the resulting demands placed upon the person being baptized. Therefore, we will particularly concern ourselves with a small number of very clear passages.

In **Mark 16:16** is says:

*“He who has **believed** and has been **baptized** shall be **saved**; but he who does not believe shall be condemned.”*

There are just a few points that we want to establish using this passage.

1. A person **must both believe** and be **baptized** in order to be **saved**.
2. A person must believe **before** they are baptized in order to match the conditions Jesus lays down to be saved.
3. And if a person does not believe, whatever the reason, they “*shall be condemned*”!

If a person or religious group wants to swap the order of these conditions around, or even leave out any of these conditions for salvation, as Jesus stated here, they do so **IN VIOLATION** of this clear Bible verse.

Some religious groups baptize infants in spite of the fact that they are incapable of believing at such a young age. Then, as a result, they introduce their own doctrine of “*god-parents*”, who are supposed to “*believe on behalf of the child*”. However, this too is scripturally unfounded, and is a *human* attempt to maneuver around God’s clearly established Truth.

In **Galatians 3:27** we read:

*“For all of you **who** have been **baptized** into Christ, have clothed yourselves with Christ.”*

According to this plain Bible passage:

1. If a person wants to get **into** Christ, they must be **baptized into** Christ.
2. If people want to **clothe themselves with** Christ, they will have to be **baptized into** Christ.
3. And so, it only follows that all such persons must possess the maturity to be capable of living a life that is **clothed with** the Christ from their baptism forward!

4. And a careful study of the verses before and after **verse 27** will reveal that all this is absolutely necessary for becoming a “*child of God by faith*”.

In **Acts 22:16** the apostle Paul was told ”

*“And now why do you delay? Arise, and be **baptized**, and wash away your sins, calling on the Name of the Lord!”*

According to this passage:

1. The person to be baptized must be willing to *arise*, or make the move to be baptized of his or her own free will.
2. The result of being *baptized* is having your *sins washed away*.
3. The person must realize that it is at this point, as Paul did, and through this means, that one *calls upon the Name* or *authority of the Lord*.
4. And yet we still have some religious groups bringing their *infants* and small *children* to be baptized. These children obviously cannot “arise” on their own volition. They’re infants! Nor are they able to understand the concepts of calling on the Name of the Lord.

One of the clearest passages in all the New Testament on the subject of baptism and salvation is **1Peter 3:21**:

*“And corresponding to that, **baptism now saves you!** Not by the removal of dirt from the flesh, but by an answer of a **good conscience** towards God, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”*

Notice, in spite of what many religious groups are teaching and practicing to the contrary, the passage plainly says:

1. ***Baptism now saves you!***
2. It is not because one is taking a bath that we are saved or cleansed.
3. But it is by answering God with a ***good conscience*** in response to His plain commands to be ***baptized*** by faith.

Now, a couple of brief questions before we move on.

1. At what age does a person even begin to develop a “***conscience***”?
2. Or understand and appreciate the resurrection of Jesus Christ? Think about it!

Acts 2:38 is probably one of the most overlooked; yet clear passages on the subject.

*“And Peter said to them, ‘**Repent**, and let each of you be **baptized** in the name of Jesus Christ for the **forgiveness of sins**; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit!’”*

Here, you should notice that:

1. A person must both ***repent*** and be ***baptized*** in order to have their sins forgiven, (which is salvation from sin).
2. The person must first ***repent*** before they are ***baptized*** according to the order that is divinely listed in this plain Bible verse.

Therefore, we must conclude that any doctrine or practice that would allow us to reverse or alter the Biblical directives and sequence events, as they are clearly listed in these passages, must also be considered as coming from outside the realm of Biblical authority. Or to put it another way, it is **unbiblical!**

Let me ask you something.

1. How can infants “repent” before they are baptized?

2. And exactly what kind of “sins” does a five or ten year old have to “repent” of”? And remember, they must be sins for which God has already begun to hold them *accountable*.

Finally, and probably the most powerful passage on the subject, **Romans 6:2-7**, should prove to be extremely helpful to the truth seeking individual:

*“... How shall we who have died to sin still live in it? Or do you not know that all of us, who have been **baptized** into Jesus Christ, have been **baptized** into His death? Therefore we have been **buried** with Him **through baptism** INTO DEATH, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in **newness of life**. For, if we have become **united with Him** in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also in the likeness of His resurrection. Knowing this, that our **old self** was **crucified** with Him, that **our body of sin** might be done away with, that we should no longer be **slaves to sin**; for he who **died** is freed from sin!”*

Note then that this passage teaches:

1. A person must clearly be aware that when they are being **baptized**, they **die to sin**.
2. A person gets **into** Christ only by being **baptized into** Christ.
3. Only **after** a person is **baptized** can it be said that they have been **raised up** to walk in a **new life**, or “**born again**”.
4. Notice that it is only in **baptism** that the **old man of sin** is crucified and **done away with**.

And from this, a few more questions:

1. Isn't it at least questionable to hold to a position that would say that infants and children do have an “**OLD MAN OF SIN**” to be crucified?
2. What **old man of sin** does a two, six, ten, twelve-year-old child have to crucify?
3. How many children of this age, and even older, are able to understand the deeper concepts that are being taught to the church at Rome in this passage?

Are you beginning to see the point? At what age...

1. Is a person able to look down life's road,
2. count the high cost of discipleship,
3. look back over their life of sin,
4. and make a life-long determination to follow Jesus no matter what any man may say?

What ever age that truly is, and IT MAY VARY BETWEEN DIFFERENT INDIVIDUALS, that is the age at which the person is *accountable* to God to give the kind of *response* He demands.

Again, I must say as we close out this section. The question regarding the age of *accountability* must be answered through a careful study and application of the Scriptures to the life of each individual. The above-mentioned variance between individuals is precisely why I have refrained (as promised), from listing a specific age as a hard and fast age of *accountability under the New Testament*. You must apply this study of the Scriptures to those situations that are close to you. You and those you teach must stand before God with your conclusions “*having done all you can to stand*”.

CHAPTER 5

DETERMINING THE RIGHT TIME

If you haven't been able to tell from what has already been written in this study, it is not my purpose to suggest any specific "*age of accountability*". Certainly, from what we have read thus far, we can conclude that different individuals grow in their abilities and maturity at different rates. However, the honest observer must also acknowledge the fact that both the Scriptures and societies have generally categorized people's maturity and abilities by various age groups. Thus while we may not be able to arrive at a particular "*age of accountability*", we can certainly have a better idea of the general age group within which most people are considered *accountable* for their sins in God's sight. We can no longer avoid making the necessary applications of quite obvious Bible truths to our religious practices. We generally make such accurate applications when it comes to our social practices. Don't we? Are we being consistent? Consider:

1. The age at which we issue a driver's license,
2. The age at which we allow a person to vote,
3. The age at which we say a person is ready to die for their country,
4. The age when society says a person can smoke or drink alcohol.
5. The age when a person is allowed to get married,
6. And so on....

This is the section where we **must** make careful **application** of **all** that we have learned thus far from God's Word. This is the chapter that gives us the opportunity to put into practice all that we have so plainly seen in the Holy Scriptures. And this is the time when our past practices and prejudices are dramatically challenged and put to the test.

Do you know the method that many people in some churches use today to determine the right age for their children to be baptized into Christ? What are the indicators that many turn to in their attempt to determine the "*age of accountability*" of children?

Here are what could be called, a few of the "major methods" by which many in the church determine *accountability*:

1. "*The child requested baptism, and who are we to refuse baptism?*"
2. "*The child was made to understand what sin is and that they are a "sinner", that makes them accountable and in need of salvation!*"
3. *As soon as a child can understand their need to be baptized, that makes them accountable.*
4. *As soon as a child can understand what happens at baptism, this means they are ready.*
5. *Jesus said, "Allow the little children to come unto Me, and do not forbid them!"*
6. *And if they don't really need it yet, what harm could it do just to make sure?*

There may be a few other arguments that some people may use, but these seem to be the most common ones made. And I think you'll find that if there are any other arguments made from a Bible passage, we've already examined and dealt with.

While it is not my intention to be offensive, I must say that the above 6 arguments are extremely weak. Let's answer them in the order in which they are listed.

Argument #1 - "*The child requested baptism, and who are we to refuse baptism?*"

Some have tried to make the point that when someone requests baptism, adult or child, we have no right to refuse to baptize him or her. First of all, do you remember what Philip asked the Eunuch of **Acts 8**,

when the Eunuch requested baptism? Philip told the Eunuch that he would baptize him only *if he believed with all his heart*. It is true that some manuscripts don't contain this verse. However, many manuscripts do not contain **Mark 16:9-20**. Some manuscripts omit the Book of James. The point is; why do we challenge the authenticity of a document only when it personally challenges us? And even if we would say that **Acts 8:37** is not part of the original text, the truth it states certainly doesn't violate any other Bible truth.

In **Matthew 3:7** and **Luke 3:7** we have John the Baptist refusing to baptize those he thought were not yet ready to be baptized. In this case they were not ready because they were the impenitent Pharisees. The point here is that John didn't baptize those who requested it unless he was convinced that their baptism would accomplish its intended effect.

But for those who don't like the arguments from **Acts 8:37** and **Matthew 3:7** I would like to ask you a few pointed questions.

1. If someone were to come to you and request baptism, would you not carefully investigate his or her reasons for making such a request?
2. And if you discovered that they did not have a proper understanding of baptism and salvation, would you baptize them anyway?
3. Wouldn't you attempt to teach them more perfectly the way of the Lord?, (**Acts 18:26**).
4. And should they refuse to agree with the sound teaching from the Bible on the subject, would you baptize them anyway?
5. Would you assist them in their practice of error?
6. Or would you refuse to baptize them?

Do you see the point? We not only have the right, we have an obligation to do our best to make sure that people, no matter how old they are, are being baptized with a proper understanding and for the right reasons. And if we have the right and obligation to make sure *adults* have a proper understanding and appreciation for what baptism means and accomplishes, then we would certainly be just as *obligated* to any *child* that would come requesting baptism. If we find, upon careful inquiry, that the child doesn't understand or is much too immature to pay the "*cost of discipleship*", we not only have the right, but also the obligation to refuse to baptize them. If you think this is wrong, let me give the following illustration which may help you better understand the principles we're discussing now. How would you respond to a 3 year old child who could just barely talk, but requested that you baptize him or her? Would you do it? Or would you, at least at that time, refuse? See the point now?

The next three arguments that some people offer are very similar to one another, and so I'll attempt to answer all three at the same time.

Argument #'s 2, 3, 4 –

2. *"The child was made to understand what sin is and that they are a "sinner", that makes them accountable and in need of salvation!"*
3. *As soon as a child can understand their need to be baptized, that makes them accountable.*
4. *As soon as a child can understand what happens at baptism, this means they are ready.*

According to these arguments, as soon as a child can "understand":

1. What sin is.
2. That they are a sinner.
3. What happens at baptism.
4. And that they need to be baptized to go to heaven....,

The child is at this point *accountable*, lost, hell-bound, and in great need of being baptized!

To establish their point they use the following passages:

James 1:15:

“Then when lust is conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it bring forth death.”

James 2:9:

“But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convinced by the law as transgressors.”

James 4:17:

“Therefore, to one who know the right thing to do, and does not do it, to him it is sin.”

There are several things desperately wrong with turning to these passages as indicators of the *accountability* of children.

First, according to **James 1:15** *sin is brought forth when lust is conceived*. What is “*lust*” as it is discussed in this passage? If it is strong illicit desires, at what age does a person begin to have these? If it is merely strong distracting desires of any kind, then wouldn’t even a newborn babe be guilty here? For you see, even young infants, in total disregard to the needs of anyone else, have strong desires for comfort, food, and warmth. Would you take a position that would say this is sinful for them? It is obvious from the context that god, through James, had no intention of applying these verses to children. The context clearly indicates that the “*strong illicit desires*” of adult individuals are what James has in mind, condemned as the sin of “*lust*”.

Again, using **James 2:9** it is obvious that this verse was never intended to determine an *age of accountability*. For you see, even the smallest infants show a distinct *partiality* in judgment in their mother’s favor. As the child grows, while still in infancy, they grow in the *partiality* for their mother and father. If this verse were to be applied to infants and children, you’d have every baby convicted of sin. In any case, when taken in context, the passage is clearly talking about the unfair and unjust judgments that sinful *adults* make as they make ungodly distinctions between people for financial, ethnic, or racial reasons.

Finally, in James **4:17** we have another illustration of what sin is. As they foolishly apply this verse to children, some have argued that as soon as a child knows the right thing to do, and doesn’t do it, they are sinners!

Those who would make such arguments don’t usually mind applying them to someone who is **ten**, **twelve**, or **thirteen** years old. But why not apply them to children of all ages, if you’re going to apply them to children?

In response to those who would use this verse to determine the *age of accountability*, questions must be raised:

1. At what age do most children begin to learn right from wrong?
2. At what age does a child begin to learn what they should do, and what they should not do?

Those who have raised children know that this begins at ages as early as two to three years old! I have personally observed many a three year old testing his or her parents, knowing what they should be doing, but not doing it, in order to test the limits of their parent’s authority. Should **James 4:17** be used to convict these two and three year olds of sin and resulting damnation? If not, then why should this verse be used to convict any *mere child* of sin?

Some combine the above arguments and state, “*If a child of even seven years old comes to me and says they are convinced they’re a sinner, that they are hell-bound, and that Jesus is their only way to heaven,*

and that they want to be baptized, then I'm going to baptize them!" People who have made such arguments obviously haven't thought them through.

As the proud father of three grown children, there is no doubt in my mind that one could, if one were so cruelly inclined:

1. Take your average **three** or **four** year old child and teach them what sin is and illustrate it.
2. One could show them how they have done "*bad things*", (evil), when they know they shouldn't have, thus convicting them as "sinners".
3. Then one could easily teach such a small child that this sin will "*send them to hell*".
4. The child could then be sufficiently terrified that they are headed straight to hell.
5. One could then teach this terrified, trusting child of four that "*Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so*".
6. One could then teach them about what baptism is, and how that when they get baptized, their sins would be washed away and they could "*go to heaven*".

The point is, that if one were so cruelly inclined, it would be fairly easy to convince most three or four year olds that they need to be baptized. And if you wanted to, even terrify them to the point of tears in making their request to "*please let me get baptized so I can go to heaven and not go to hell!*" Scary stuff! Right?

This would be a horrible thing to do to a child of such a young and impressionable age. Most of you, I trust, can see that. And why is it so horrible? Because according to all Scriptural indicators, children are not held *accountable* until they are old enough to give the proper *responses* of a *disciple*. And so it is just *unkind*, *unnecessary*, and *untrue* to teach a **four** or **seven** year old that God holds them *accountable* as "*sinners*". Let me tell you something. As **unkind** and **horrible** as it would be to do such things to a four year old, it is just as unkind to do such things to a "*child*" of any age! And if you don't think this is being done to young children all over the country, then open your eyes and look at what's going on in many local congregations!

Can't you see that the question should be more than whether or not the child can be taught some realization of sin? The question is whether or not God is imputing such sin! Or putting it another way, whether or not God has begun to hold that person *accountable* for their sin!

Argument #5 - Jesus said, "*Allow the little children to come unto Me, and do not forbid them!*"

Some people have argued in favor of baptizing children by saying that Jesus said to, "*Allow the little children to come unto Me, and do not prevent them!*" How in the world is this an argument in favor of baptizing children? Can't a humble and trusting child come to Jesus for blessings without yet needing to be baptized? Why of course!

In the context of where Jesus made this statement, weren't the children being brought to Him for His blessings, and not baptism?, (**Matthew 19:13-15**). Is it really forbidding the children from coming to Jesus when we try to make sure that anyone we baptize has a proper understanding and true need for baptism? Especially our children? Of course not! In fact, if there is any danger of "*preventing our children*" from coming to Jesus, it will come from baptizing them too soon, before it would do them any good!

Argument #6 – "*And if they don't really need it yet, what harm could it do just to make sure?*"

In what appears to be utter desperation for self-justification, some try to argue, “*Well even if they don’t really need it yet, what harm could it do to baptize them anyway?*” Oh God, please save us from those who have eyes to see, but do not see!

Does the Bible teach that baptism is *retroactive*? That is, does the Bible teach that we can baptize infants and children when they don’t really need it, and then that baptism will cover them when they do come to need it?

Some of us may be aware of various religious groups that do teach they can baptize small children and babes and then “*confirm*” this baptism *retroactively* at a later age. However, as we’ve already learned from **Chapter 4** of this study, “Baptism And Conversion”, such doctrines and beliefs are not rooted in the New Testament.

If we can therefore agree that baptism and the forgiveness of sins aren’t retroactively applied, then we must answer this question. Does the Bible teach that a person, (child), can be baptized when they really don’t need to be, and then have that same baptism counted a valid in God’s sight later on when they do need forgiveness? Asking this question in an even more direct fashion.... Is scriptural baptism for people who are already considered accountable by God for their sins, or for children who will someday be accountable? I hope that you’ll agree that a Bible baptism is to save those who are already lost, and **not** for those who may someday be lost.

“*So what’s the harm?*” Here is the terribly tragic reality of the answer to this question. If you baptize **anyone** before they need to be baptized, if you baptize anyone before they have the proper understanding of its purposes, if you baptize anyone before God has begun to hold them *accountable* for their sin, **YOU will** have increased the chances for that soul’s eternal damnation! **YOU** will have aided in getting a soul to **trust** in an *invalid baptism* that was at the time unnecessary, thereby possibly preventing them from later seeing or accepting the need to be baptized when they truly do need it!

When God actually does begin to hold that person *accountable*, that poor soul will believe that they were already held *accountable*, *baptized*, and *saved*. Such souls will allow the true opportunity for salvation to pass them by simply because **YOU** taught them that they needed to take that step sooner than God’s Word actually teaches!

What’s the harm? Look at the implications! Many people who were baptized too soon could conceivably go on to become “preachers”, “deacons”, and “elders” in the Lord’s church. And in reality, they’ve never really become true New Testament Christians! Imagine that! Preachers, Elders, and Deacons in the church who are still trusting in an **untimely** baptism, therefore still without forgiveness of sins, therefore not yet truly “baptized into Jesus”, therefore not yet true Christians! **This is one frightening possibility!**

What makes this really terrifying to me is that it is not just a possibility, but it is also a reality in countless cases! I have witnessed and am personally aware of numerous cases of **preaching students, elders, and deacons**, as well as other members of local churches, coming forward after much careful study, thought, and prayer, requesting to be properly baptized into Jesus Christ! That’s right! They made this request because they were blessed to later realize that they were too young and not *accountable* when they were first “baptized” as mere children. But what about those who are not so blessed? What about those who are yet confidently trusting in their unscriptural infant or childhood baptisms? What about those who, because of **pride**, will refuse to even think about the possibility that their baptism was invalid because it was too soon? What does the Bible say about those who aren’t scripturally baptized into Christ Jesus? They’re lost!

So what's the harm? People in the church, even in its leadership, who have never really become true Christians! and, the damnation of their souls unless they humbly come to a knowledge of the truth they already "know" and preach to others! That's the harm of baptizing someone too soon!

Hopefully, if you weren't convinced before of the importance of knowing the right time to baptize someone, you are now. And being convinced of this it is time to do our best to arrive at some guidelines for determining an individual's *age of accountability*. We are now challenged to make some practical applications of the scriptures we've studied. As we struggle to arrive at some clearer understanding of the *age of accountability*, let us again review the scriptures with an **open mind** and an **honest heart**, letting the implications fall where they may, following in **humble obedience**.

As we again review the passages we've read in this study I want you to ask these questions:

1. In either the Old or New Testament, are there any indications of an age at which God did hold children *accountable*?
2. Are there any examples of children being held spiritually *accountable* for their sins in the Old or New Testament?
3. Are there any clear examples of "*children*" of any age being baptized?
4. Does the Bible specifically say **who** were baptized or how mature they were, chronologically speaking?
5. Does the Bible give us any indicators to use in determining the maturity and spiritual *accountability* of an individual?
6. What requirements, if any, must a person meet in order to be considered ready to be baptized into Christ?

WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED?

- Matthew 18:2-4** Jesus said that children already are of the Kingdom of Heaven, and that adults need to become like humble, trusting children in order to enter into Heaven.
- Ephesians 6:1-3** Children, (of all ages), are to obey their parents and support them when they are older.
- 2 Timothy 3:15** Children, in a good Godly home will be taught the Holy Scriptures even from infancy.
- Leviticus 27:1-7** God had designated certain persons to have specific valuations according to their age group. **God** grouped those one month to five years old together, those five years to twenty years old together, those twenty years to sixty years old together, and those sixty and older together.
- Numbers 32:11,12** God did **NOT** hold those under twenty years old *accountable* for not following Him as He did in the case of those over twenty years of age.
- Numbers 14:29-32** God did **NOT** hold those under twenty years of age *accountable* for grumbling against Him in the wilderness as He **did** in the case of those who were older. And **God called those under twenty years of age, children!**
- Numbers 1:2-45** God said that **only** those over twenty years old should be considered or counted as part of the congregation of Israel.
- Numbers 26:2,4** God said that **only** those over twenty should be counted in the census of Israel.

- Exodus 30:14; 38:26** God said that only those over age twenty were held to be *responsible* and *accountable* to give a contribution for the Temple and Sanctuary.
- Ezra 3:8** Levites selected to oversee the Temple construction had to be at least twenty years old.
- Numbers 4:3-47** Those *Levites* entering into their service of the Temple had to be thirty years old or older.
- Numbers 8:24-26** A *Levite* was not considered *mature* enough to be *responsible* to enter into the service of the tent of meeting until he was twenty-five years old.
- 1Chronicles 23:3** *Levites* were not to be counted in the census as God's priests until they were thirty years old and older.
- 1Chronicles 23:24,27** Those priests *entering into their service* of the house of the Lord had to be at least twenty years old.
- 2Chronicles 31:17** Only those over twenty years old were to be counted in the new census of God's priests.
- Luke 2:40-52** Even at age twelve, *Jesus* was still called a child, and apparently, although He was eager to begin His ministry, He still had to wait approximately eighteen more years, remain in subjection to His parents, and grow in wisdom and stature before He was ready!
- Luke 3:23** Jesus was about thirty years old when He was ready to begin His *service* or *ministry* in the father's kingdom.
- Acts 5:14** Out of *all* the multitudes that were baptized, they only baptized grown *men* and *women*.
- Acts 9:2** Only *men* and *women* were said to be those who *belonged* to the church and were persecuted.
- Acts 8:12** Out of *all* the Samaritans, those who believed and were baptized were said only to be *men* and *women*.
- Acts 22:4** Those who *belonged* to the Way and were persecuted were *men* and *women* only! No children mentioned!
- Titus 1:6** The "*children*" mentioned in this passage are more literally "*offspring that believe*" (of any age) with no reference to age. These offspring could even be adults!
- Acts 2:39** Again the promise of Salvation is made to their "*offspring*" and has no reference to small children as valid candidates for baptism.
- 1Corinthians 13:11** When someone becomes a man, (or adult), they *put away childish things*, (toys, thoughts, actions).

- Matthew 18:1-6;19:13-15** *Children* are already *of the kingdom of heaven*. These were children old enough to respond to Jesus calling them over to Himself.
- Acts 10:22** This passage only mentions *Cornelius's house*, and does **NOT** mention any *children* or their ages! *Nor* does it say anywhere that Cornelius had *children* who were baptized.
- Acts 16:30-33** Again, nowhere does it say that the jailor had any *children*, only that those in his household heard, believed, and were baptized. They could have all been over twenty-five years old, couldn't they?
- Matthew 28:18-20** One must be *made a disciple before* they are *baptized*.
- Matthew 10:34-39** In order *to be a disciple* one must be *able* and *ready* for their family members to become their *enemies*. They must **NOT** love anyone more than Jesus!
- Luke 14:26-33** Jesus plainly states that unless one is able and willing to *hate* their parents, mates, children, and their own lives, they *cannot be* His disciple. Therefore they could not be proper candidates for baptism, (**Matthew 28:19**).
- Mark 16:16** A person must first be able to *believe*, and then be *baptized*, in order to be saved.
- Galatians 3:26,27** Only when a person is able to have the understanding of what it means to *clothe themselves with Christ* in baptism can they then become a *child of God* by faith.
- Acts 22:16** A person needs to be able to *arise* of his or her own volition and motivation and be *baptized to wash away their sins*.
- 1Peter 3:21** *Baptism* saves you only when you are willing and able to answer God *for a good conscience*!
- Acts 2:38** *Baptism* is only for those who have the ability to understand and commit to the concept of *repentance*.
- Romans 6:2-7** *Baptism* is for those who have an *old man of sin* to be crucified, and for those who *were slaves of sin*. Does this passage bring to mind those little seven-year-old "*slaves of sin*"?

There we have it. A brief rundown of almost every passage we've discussed. If there are any other passages pertaining to the subject, I'm sure that they would not contradict the truths and principles so clearly spelled out for us in these.

Now, what do we do? The ball is in your court! I'm not going to arrive at your conclusions for you. As I've told you all along, I am not going to list any one particular "*age of accountability*" for you. I have merely listed and discussed every passage that I am aware of on the subject, hoping that you'll be better able to apply the Holy Scriptures to your life and the lives of your children. **YOU** are the **one** that must make clear and honest careful application of the Scriptures.

CHAPTER 6

REVIEW AND CONCLUSION

After you have done your best to make honest application of all that we've learned thus far, what do you think?

- Have you been able to draw any useful conclusions about the “*age of accountability*”?
- Do you see any problems, risks, and tragic dangers in *baptizing children*?

Did you learn anything from our discussion of the terms “*accountability*” and “*responsibility*”?

- Do you better understand what they mean so you can better apply them to your search for a proper “*age of accountability*”?

Did you learn anything useful from our study of the concepts and definitions of childhood and adulthood in both ancient and modern societies?

- Have you been able to draw anything useful from the social views of childhood and *responsibility* of the peoples that are spoken about in the Bible?
- Have you seen the need for consistency in our consideration of the maturity and *accountability* of children of all ages?
- That if children are not mature enough to be considered adults socially, then why would we ***inconsistently*** say that they are mature enough spiritually to handle the even ***greater responsibility*** for their souls?

Have you learned anything from our review of the Biblical Indicators?

- Have you seen anything that would indicate a much older age of *accountability* in God's sight than what many have previously thought and taught?
- Would the Scriptures indicate that only grown men and women be baptized into Christ?

Have you learned anything from our discussion of the Greek and Hebrew words for the different stages of childhood and adulthood?

- Do you now know the distinct differences between those the Bible calls “children” and those the Bible calls “men and women”?
- Do you realize that baptism never makes anyone a “man” or a “women”, but one must apparently be a “man” or “woman” in order to be baptized according to all scriptural indicators?

Can you now see the terrible danger of baptizing someone who is too young?

- Can you see the danger of baptizing someone *before God says* they actually need to be baptized?
- Can you see the awful dilemma that many are creating for the church of Christ by eventually giving these non-scripturally baptized “members” positions of leadership in a church that God doesn't actually recognize their membership in?
- Can you see the horror of having the church of the Lord actually under a leadership who God knows are not even true Christians because they were baptized too young?

If we can now better see and understand these important points, then we must also see the great need to no longer be quite as nebulous on the subject of the “*age of accountability*” as we once were! We can no longer sit idly by and watch many in the church practice the false doctrine of infant baptism! In all good conscience, if we believe someone is doing something that is wrong and eternally dangerous, we must say something!

And what will we do now? How old do you think a person has to be in order to be a proper candidate for baptism? Do you have a better idea of an age group or range of maturity that we can now more closely consider to be potentially *accountable*? Don't say that age has got nothing to do with it. Scripture plainly teaches that age is critical to maturity in normal development, spiritually as well as physically, (**1Corinthians 13:11; Hebrews 5:12-14**).

If we are now convinced that we were *too young* when we were first immersed, what must we do about it? If we immersed *small children*, too small to truly be *disciples*, what are we going to say to them now? If we are aware of a member or even a leader in the church who we know has been baptized at a **five, six** or **seven** years old, what are the obvious implications, and what do we plan to do about it?

You see, it is not enough to merely become aware of truth and not do anything with it. Jesus said in **Matthew 7:24-27**:

“Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine, and acts upon them, may be compared to a wise man, who built his house upon the rock. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and burst against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded upon the rock. And everyone who hears these words of Mine, and does not act upon them, will be like a foolish man, who built his house upon the sand. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and burst against that house; and it fell, and great was its fall.”

It is my fervent and urgent prayer that we will always strive to build our house upon the Rock. That we will ever struggle against viewing the Scriptures through our own past practices and prejudices, and that we would always approach God's Word with a “*virgin*” attitude.

May the God of peace give us understanding in the practice of His Holy Will.

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