

We Are Accountable

Rick Railston

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One of Harold Lee's favorite song writers is a guy named Leon Redbone. I don't know if you've heard of him, but I like his songs. One of my favorite singer and song writers is Jim Croce and you have to be a little older than twenty or thirty years old to know about him, but he had the knack of portraying human weaknesses and human foibles in song.

He had a gift and wrote songs like, Bad, Bad Leroy Brown or I Have to say I Love You in a Song or Don't Mess Around with Jim. He coined terms in his songs that have become part of the modern vernacular today, for example, "don't spit into the wind."

That was in one of his songs. "Mean as a junkyard dog" is another one and "don't tug on Superman's cape" was another. There are several others I could give, but he sadly died in an airplane crash on September 21, 1973 at the age of thirty. I'm sure he would still be writing and singing today were he still alive. Typical of his ability to portray human nature, the best one I can think of is a song called, Car Wash Blues. It's not very commonly known, but it is a hoot of a song. By way of introduction, I'd like to read some of the lyrics, because it captures human nature in the raw. It's about a man who just got out of prison. As I read the lyrics, notice the description of this person's attitude.

He said,

Well I just got out of the county prison
Doing ninety days for non-support.
Tried to find me an executive position but
No matter how smooth I talked, they wouldn't listen
to the fact that I was a genius.
The man said they got all they can use.
Now I got me the steadily depressing,
Low-down mind messing working at the carwash blues.

While I should be sitting in an air conditioned office in a swivel chair
Talking some trash to the secretary, saying,
"Hey now, Mamma, come on over here."
Instead I'm stuck here rubbing these fenders with a rag,
And walking home in soggy old shoes,
With them steadily depressing, low-down mind messing
working at the carwash blues.

You know a man with my ability, he should be smoking on a big cigar

(Now this is a guy that just got out of jail)

But till I get myself straight, I guess I'll just have to wait
in my rubber suit rubbing these cars.

Well, all I can do is shake my head;
You might not believe that it's true.
Working at this end of Niagara Falls is an undiscovered Howard Hughes.
So Baby, don't expect to see me with no double martini
In any highbrow society news,
Because I got my steadily depressing, low-down mind messing
working at the carwash blues.

It's a hoot of a song, but it describes a guy that just got out of prison for not supporting his divorced wife and he expects to be at the top of the heap, and he's complaining and whining because he's working at a carwash. Now these lyrics were written over forty years ago and they capture an attitude that is prevalent in today's society, and that is, "I deserve something better; I want the benefits without putting in the effort; and I am entitled to the very best life has to offer. That is, the world, the government owes me a prosperous life that I don't have to work that much for." That is a common attitude in the world today. It began really in the great depression, but most recently it began with Lyndon Johnson's Great Society in the 1960s, if you remember that. It's been resurrected in the Occupy Wall Street Movement here recently and it's akin to what the journalists call the nanny state, which means the government is looking over our shoulder all the time. The nanny state wants to protect every citizen from making wrong decisions, stupid decisions or taking any risks.

I read an article in the paper the other day about a school system, I think in California, but they outlawed kickball on the playground because of the fear that some kid might get hurt. So you stop the game. There's a notion that you have to protect everybody from everything that could possibly go wrong. People want freedom from pain and suffering no matter what happens; they are entitled to freedom from pain and suffering. Today people want all the benefits, but don't want to work and sacrifice to get them.

Many young people today see their parents' current lifestyle. Maybe their parents have a reasonably good home, a car and food on the table; they have reasonable clothes and are able to take vacations, etc. The young kids see that, but they want it for themselves now, not realizing it took their parents decades of hard work to get to that point. But they want to graduate from high school or college and then they want it right now, and most, frankly, they're not prepared to put in decades of hard work to get to that point. They want instant gratification.

A further extension of that attitude is, "I should be able to do things the way I want to do them; no one can tell me what to do and I don't have to pay the consequences of what I do. I can do what I want, but I don't have to pay the consequences."

This is all by way of introduction, but let me read from Dear Abby. As you know, she is nationally syndicated. This was nationally syndicated across the country on November 2 of last year. It's a letter from a fifteen year old girl complaining about her mother. I'm quoting now.

I'm a fifteen-year-old girl who has never been in trouble, but my mom treats me like I'm a criminal. She makes me go to church every Sunday. She makes me go to a Catholic School and I have to wear an ugly uniform. She won't help me with my homework; she says, 'I've already done the tenth grade.' I can't wear halter tops, short skirts, a bikini or much make-up. If I tell her it's the style, she says modesty is always in style. When I go out with my friends, she wants to know where I'm going, who I will be with and what I will be doing, when I'll be back and she wants their phone numbers. If I have a date with a new boy, she makes him come into the house and tell her what school he goes to, then she makes him show her his driver's license and car registration. I can't keep my computer in my room. When I'm using it in the den, she looks over my shoulder and won't let me go into chat rooms. I have to set the table even if we don't have company and sit down and have dinner with her every night. If I can't afford something, she tells me to save up or budget better. She won't let me drive until I can pay my own insurance. It's not like mom is poor; we go to Hawaii and Lake Tahoe and we've been to Europe and on cruises. She won't even pay for cable TV. She says it's an idiot box and I should read a book instead. She also makes me do my own laundry and keep my room and bathroom clean. She makes me do unfair chores like cleaning the guest bathroom even though I never use it.

She wants to teach me to sew and cook, but I have no interest in those things.

She makes me visit Dad every week and if I complain about anything, she says very calmly and quietly (which I hate more than if she would yell at me) 'You can always choose to live with your Dad.' She told me as long as I live under her roof, I have to abide by her rules even if I'm over eighteen, and I have to go to college and if I don't, I'll have to get a job and support myself. I could go on and on. Have you ever heard of a mother so unreasonable? I'm afraid to run away, but I don't know how much more of this abuse I can take.

Signed,

Emotionally abused in California

I guess it could only happen in California. But you see, this is the world we live in, isn't it? Sometimes these attitudes, the car wash blues attitude or this attitude can come into the Church and affect us. An example: people in the Church can sometimes make a continual series of bad decisions and then they want God or the ministry to wave a magic wand and eliminate all the consequences of those bad decisions. In other words, they don't want to live with those decisions they make and they feel the consequences of those decisions are somehow unfair and God should just wipe them all away. But you see, God has designed His plan of salvation so that we should be responsible for our own actions and He has instituted a spiritual principal; we all know it, "we reap what we sow." We are responsible for what we do.

Look at Galatians 6:7-8. We're getting to the subject here soon. This is the principal that God has instituted and we need to take heed because we are responsible for our actions. The first three words say, "Be not deceived," because God knew that we could be deceived about this.

Galatians 6:7. *Be not deceived, God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man sows, that shall he also reap.*

8) *For he that sows to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that sows to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting. (KJV)*

So what God is telling us is that we are expected to pay for and live with the consequences of our actions. Let's go to Colossians, chapter 3 and look at verse 25. You see, God is not a respecter of persons. What we sow, that is what we reap. Notice what He says,

Colossians 3:25. *But he that does wrong shall receive for the wrong which he has done; and there is no respect of persons.*

We are personally responsible for who we are, who we become and what we do. All of us are personally responsible. Yet too many in the greater Church today have a hard time accepting this fact. The question is, how do we get to the point where we can accept the reality that we're personally responsible for who we are, who we become and what we do?

We're going to explore five areas of accepting personal responsibility. It's very important because if we don't accept personal responsibility for our actions, we won't be in God's kingdom. It's as simple as that. We won't be. Yet the world around us influences us to not accept responsibility for our actions.

The first area in accepting personal responsibility is admitting that I am part of my problems. Some people become experts at pointing out other people's problems, but not their own. We've run into that and maybe we've done it ourselves from time to time. Let me paint a composite of an individual that's a result of many instances I had over the years of a similar situation. A person comes and says, "I've got a problem with person A", and then this individual says, "and I don't get along with person B, and person C is out to get me and we have a problem too and person D is upset with me and I'm upset with them and we're having all kinds of problems." So this individual has a problem with person A, B, C and D. Now person A, B, C and D don't have any problems with each other. They all get along fine and yet this person has a problem with each one of those. In discussing this and counseling, you ask the question, "Okay, you have a problem with person A, B, C and D. What is the common denominator of all of this trouble?" You get a blank look. You have a problem with A, you have a problem with B, you have a problem with C and you have a problem with D. What's the common denominator here? You get a blank look. The common denominator is you! You have a problem with all these others; these others don't have a problem with each other, so maybe, just maybe you are part of the problem. That's very hard for human nature to admit, that I am part of my problems. There is a very important principal that has everything to do with repentance and conversion and the principal is that to solve a problem, you must first admit that you have a problem. We can't solve a problem if we don't admit we have one. That is the very beginning of conversion and repentance, to realize that we have a problem.

Now David admitted his problems and David did not point fingers at other people. Let's go to Psalm 51:3, a very familiar scripture. David wrote this Psalm after the incident with Nathan where Nathan told the story about the lamb that was like a pet in the house of a very poor family. This rich man would not kill one of his own lambs, but took this lamb and slaughtered it for his table. David said that man ought to be killed and Nathan said, "You are the man." Notice what David said in Psalm 51:3.

Psalm 51:3. For I acknowledge my (not anybody else's) transgressions: and my sin [is] ever before me. (KJV)

David admits the fact that "I have sinned." Not somebody else's sin, but his sin. You see, some people get really good at pointing out other people's sins, but David said, "It's my sin. It's before my eyes; it's in my mind and I can't get rid of it," because he was so stricken by his own sins.

Let me give you an example of my brother. This is a typical attitude of today of not admitting you have a problem. My brother retired from General Motors in the service area several years ago and he's been a professor at a community college teaching an automotive technology program that's sponsored by General Motors. They take high school graduates and teach them this program; I think it's a couple year program, and after they graduate, General Motors hires them into the service departments as technicians. It's a pretty good deal. So he is responsible for that whole area in the college. He told me a story. They had started a new year, a new class and this woman bops into class, dressed rather provocatively. She was fresh out of high school, maybe 19 years old, and she's on a cell phone. She walks in, sits down, the class starts and she's still talking on the cell phone. He walked over to her and she's just yammering on the phone while he's trying to teach the class and finally he said, "Would you please shut it off?" Well, she got irate about it like he's intruding in her life and she takes her good time to shut it off. The next day the class starts and she comes in a few minutes late and in the middle of the class he noticed she is texting on her phone. He walked over and asked her to put her phone away. She again gets upset that he would dare ask her this. This goes on for the first month and finally in the middle of a class her cell phone rings and she starts talking, so he went over and kicked her out of class. So the next day, the dean called him into his office and discussed the situation and this young girl portrayed herself as being sexually abused in class by my brother and she refused to take responsibility for the fact that she was not paying attention. She was failing the first tests and sometimes she skipped class, but she wanted a free ride and she wanted to do whatever she wanted to do. He found out later that she was a single mom, just barely graduated from high school. The child's grandparents (her parents) were taking care of the child while she goes to school and then she parties every night. This is the attitude, not admitting one has a problem, wouldn't even come close. They counseled about it and she would not admit that she did anything wrong.

Now contrast that with God's way. Let's go to Proverbs 28:13. God says that's not the way to live one's life. We will not be in the Kingdom of God if we live our life that way,

but that is the world we live in.

Proverbs 28:13. *He that covers his sins (he that won't admit that he has sins; covers them; tries to hide them) shall not prosper: but whoso confesses and forsakes [them] shall have mercy.*

So in this first point, we have to admit that we are part of our problems. We must not be afraid to admit our sins and our faults and our weaknesses. So we have to ask the question: Do I have the same problems today that I had a decade ago? Good question. Do I experience the same failures and same failings over and over and over? In other words, does my marriage have the same problems today that it had ten, fifteen, twenty or thirty years ago? Do I have the same problems at work that I had five or ten or fifteen years ago? Am I still not getting along with certain family members and can't get along with them and haven't for decades? Do I still have problems with certain church members that I cannot get along with them? Do I complain about the same things over and over again year after year? Do I still not have a job or am I still not able to keep a job?

James Smyda, a good friend and fellow elder has said several times and I've repeated it several times, "The definition of insanity is to take the same action over and over and expect a different outcome." In other words, not changing or admitting one has a problem and not growing. As Dr. Phil says on T.V., "How's that working for you?" You go for decades and still have the same problems. You see, God requires self examination. He requires that we look into our innermost self. 2 Corinthians 13:15 is a scripture we often use prior to Passover, talking about examining ourselves. Notice what we should be examining. Paul is saying to this dysfunctional Church that he is trying to help and trying to get them to turn their lives around, he says,

2 Corinthians 13:5. *Examine yourselves (don't examine other people's sins and faults; put yourself under the microscope, not somebody else), whether you be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know you not your own selves, (this is the key) how that Jesus Christ is in you, except you be reprobates? (KJV)*

He says you must examine yourself to see if Christ is actually living and operating in you. All of us have to do that. We won't turn there, but we've quoted it many times,

Romans 8:14. *For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.*

So what God is saying to us is that we need to look at ourselves, examine ourselves, see if we are living by God's commandments, see if Christ is living in us, if we are being led by God's Holy Spirit. We must be honest and critically examine ourselves, sometimes take a brutal look at ourselves to see who we really are. Not as we want to see ourselves because we all tend to want to see ourselves in the best light, but we should look and see who we are relative to God looking at us. How does God see us? Not how we see ourselves, but how does God see us? Back to Psalm 51 again; notice

David understood this concept. Again, David has his sins right before him.

Psalm 51:6. *Behold, you desire truth in the inward parts (down deep in our character); and in the hidden [part] (thoughts, motives, attitudes that we can hide from the outside world and other people) you shall make me to know wisdom.*

This means, “You want me to fess it up. You want me to vomit it up and get rid of it.”

He says, “You shall make me to know wisdom if I confess my sins and faults and wrong attitudes and my wrong motives.” So what David is saying is we have to be honest with ourselves and we have to be honest with God.

It is amazing to me how sometimes we can get the idea that God doesn't know, but God knows our hearts. God knows everything about us. But somehow people can lead a double life, thinking they have the church life and then they have this other life that's a sinful life and somehow God doesn't see this other one, it's hidden, you know, they have a cloaking mechanism from StarTrek or something that they can hide this other life. That doesn't work with God.

So, in closing out this first point, we must ask daily for God to show us how we compare to Jesus Christ and we must be able to admit that we are part of our problems. It all starts there, because if we can't admit that we're part of our problems then we can't solve our problems, we can't go anywhere. That's the first point.

The second area of accepting personal responsibility means understanding that God expects us to work and provide for ourselves and provide for our extended family. God expects that. It's a fundamental concept in the Bible, providing for ourselves and providing for our family. Let's go to Proverbs 13 and just read the first part of verse 22. I read this back in the middle 1980s and I realized that I wasn't prepared to do this, because we were just living paycheck to paycheck and we would use our tax return every year to pay off our credit card debt and that is not a good way to live.

Proverbs 13:22. *A good [man] leaves an inheritance to his children's children (not just to his children but his children's children), and the wealth of the sinner [is] laid up for the just. (KJV)*

Dorothy and I took that seriously and we finally had to step out and we started our own business and risked everything. We did it for a lot of different reasons, but this was one of them, to be able to fulfill this commandment. Now let's go to 2 Thessalonians 3 and see what Paul has to say about the personal responsibility of working and providing for ourselves and providing for our families. Apparently this was a problem in Thessalonica and it's a principal that we should hold to today.

2 Thessalonians 3:10. *For even when we were with you (in a previous visit. He's writing the letter now), this we commanded you, (He says command. This isn't a suggestion; it isn't a hint, it's a command) that if any would not work,*

neither should he eat. (Meaning eat at the expense of the church.)

If he doesn't work, he doesn't eat. Obviously the implication is that the person is not handicapped or something like that. He is able bodied and able to work and if he doesn't, then he should not have Church support in eating.

11) *For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies.*

Meaning quick to point out other people's problems, but certainly not their own.

12) *Now them that are such we command (again, a commandment) and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness (meaning not gossiping and talking to other people) they work, and eat their own bread.*

Eat their own bread, not somebody else's bread. He's very strong about this.

13) *But you, brethren, be not weary in well doing.*

14) *And if any man obey not our word by this epistle (What he was just saying about working and not being busy bodies), note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. (KJV)*

Now this is something that's up to the brethren, it's up to each of us as individuals.

What he is saying is that the person should be ashamed if they are not working and they are able bodied. They don't work and he's saying that the Church is not going to support them and the brethren in the Church should walk away from them so they would be ashamed into going to get a job. What he's saying is, "look if you support somebody who refuses to work or finds a way not to work, you are enabling bad behavior. You're subsidizing bad behavior; don't do that," he is saying. Let's go to Matthew 25 and see what Christ says about personal responsibility. We're going to begin in verse 14 and we are going to read the parable of the talents, but read it with the idea of understanding personal responsibility.

Matthew 25:14. *For [the kingdom of heaven is] as a man traveling into a far country, [who] called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. (KJV)*

The man was leaving his home area and he was traveling a long distance and he was giving his goods for safe keeping and growth to his employees.

15) *And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several (New King James says, "to his own ability") ability; and straightway took his journey.*

So he analyzed the talents, the abilities of these men and gave the most talented guy ten, the next most five and then the least one he gave one. Then he took his journey.

16) *Then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made [them] other five talents. (KJV)*

He doubled what was given him.

17) *And likewise he that [had received] two, he also gained other two. (A total of four)*

18) *But he that had received one went and dug in the earth and hid his lord's money.*

19) *After a long time the lord of those servants came and reckoned with them.*

20) *And so he that had received five talents came and brought other five talents saying, "Lord, you delivered unto me five talents; behold I have gained beside them five talents more." (In other words, he doubled what he was given.)*

21) *His lord said unto him, "Well done, [you] have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things: enter into the joy of your lord." (Obviously the analogy to the Kingdom of God is very clear.)*

22) *He also that had received two talents came and said, "Lord you delivered unto me two talents: behold I have gained two other talents beside them."*

23) *His lord said unto him, "Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things, enter into the joy of your lord."*

It's interesting, the man that had less ability got the same reward. He got absolutely the same reward.

24) *Then he which had received one talent came and said, "Lord, I knew thee that you are a hard man (the Greek can mean "tough"), reaping where you have not sown and gathering where you have not strawed;"*

In other words, he employed others to do the manual labor. He didn't sow the field; he didn't reap the harvest. He had others to do that for him.

25) *And I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the earth; lo, [there] you have [that is] yours.*

No growth. No growth at all.

26) *His lord answered and said unto him, [You] wicked (If you look into the Greek on that, it can mean derelict. He said he was derelict in his duty.) and slothful (lazy) servant, you knew that I reap where I sowed not and gather where I have not strawed.*

27) *You ought therefore (at least) to have put my money to the exchangers (In the bank), and [then] at my coming I should have received my own with usury (interest). (But he didn't do that)*

28) *Take therefore the talent from him and give [it] unto him which has ten talents.*

29) For unto every one that has shall be given, and he shall have abundance; but from him that has not shall be taken away even that which he has.

30) And cast the (Notice how he described him.) unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

No profit. No growth. You see, God expects us to work, to put to use whatever talents He has given us, to use and grow those talents. In other words the spiritual analogy here is to bear fruit, spiritual fruit with the talents God has given us, but also physical fruit, meaning to go out and work. Don't just hide it. Don't just sit around in a hammock while these other guys are out working. So this is both a physical and, more importantly a spiritual analogy.

Some people say, "Well yes, but in Matthew 25 in the same chapter, what about the sheep and the goats?" You said, "When I was hungry you fed me and when I didn't have any clothes, you gave me clothes; when I was a stranger, you took me in." What about all that? How do you reconcile these two? Let's look at the context. The first thirteen verses of Matthew 25 is what? The parable of the ten virgins and what is one of the most powerful messages of that parable? We are responsible for our own oil. We are responsible, being a symbol of God's Holy Spirit, we are responsible for growing God's Spirit. The five foolish didn't do that and there was weeping and gnashing of teeth as they were banging on the door and wanted to get into the Kingdom of God.

Verses 14 through 30 we just read, the parable of the unprofitable servant. We are responsible to bear fruit with the talents God has given us, both physically and spiritually. Then verses 31 through 46 is the parable of the sheep and the goats. Now that tells us a few things. It tells us that we must serve our brethren when they are in genuine need. It says here, notice what was given. To the hungry, they were given food; to the thirsty, they were given something to drink; to the stranger (the Greek means a foreigner or an alien; somebody that's in a foreign land, doesn't know anything, has no contacts, has no associations.) they took him in because he had no place to go and didn't know where to go; naked and you gave me some clothes; sick and you came to visit me; in prison and you came unto me. Notice in all these cases, money was not thrown at them. They were given what they needed at that moment in time. Let's understand that. This is very, very important. I can't stress this enough. The parable of the sheep and goats in no way says that people should feel an entitlement to be taken care of when they are able bodied and able to work, but they find a way not to work or they choose not to work. The sheep and the goats is not an entitlement that they just get supported when they lay back and don't make the effort, because if you looked at the context of Matthew 25, that's not the whole chapter. It says we are responsible for ourselves, for God's Holy Spirit in us and we're responsible for the talents God has given us and we are responsible to grow both physically and spiritually. God expects us to take responsibility and to work for our own bread. That's the second big area of accepting personal responsibility.

The third one, and this is a big one today (and I say that from personal experience) is accepting personal responsibility; meaning realizing that it is not the responsibility of the Church or the ministry to prevent me from suffering the

consequences of my poor decisions, my laziness or my lack of conversion. I'll say it again. It's not the responsibility of the Church, it's not the responsibility of the ministry to do away with the consequences of my poor decisions, my unconverted behavior or my laziness. Yet, some people want that. People make horrible decisions in their lives, as we all have done. But people make horrible decisions in their lives and then they're faced with the consequences of those decisions and they come to the ministry and want us to wave a magic wand and make all those consequences go away. We can't do that. Even if we wanted to, we couldn't do it. For example, let's say somebody who drops out of high school and now it's twenty years later. They have no education, no skills, they have no real talents and they are working at entry level, minimum wage jobs and they whine and complain because, like the car wash blues guy, they're not sitting in a glass office with a big cigar and a swivel chair. Yet, it goes back to very poor decisions they made early on and somehow God is supposed to just wave His magic wand and have all that go away.

Another example would be mental and emotional damage because of drug use. This is one of the things we preach to our kids and say, "Don't go there," because after you do that even once with some drugs, it affects your reasoning capability, your emotional development, your mental development and sometimes people who start drugs in their teens or early twenties, by the time they're thirty or forty years old, they're emotionally a teen. They haven't grown. They're not able to reason, they're not able to focus, they're not able to concentrate. Then they wonder why they can't hold a job, why they don't get paid more, but they made choices and those choices have consequences and those consequences stay for a very, very long time.

People not living by God's law, thinking they can live by another set of rules and then they get burned and all of a sudden they're not very successful and they're like the car wash blues guy. Then they wonder why and they whine and complain.

God says we must face and live with the consequences of our actions. Let's go to Luke, chapter 15 and see some young man who made some horrible decisions. Notice the lessons in how his father, which is an analogy of our God in heaven, treats him. This is commonly referred to as the parable of the prodigal son.

Luke 15:11. *And he said, "A certain man had two sons, 12) And the younger of them said to [his] father, 'Father, give me the portion of goods that falls [to me].'* (He said, "I want my inheritance now. I don't want to grow it; I don't want to develop it. I want it right now.") *And he divided unto them [his] living."* (KJV)

The father split the inheritance between the two boys.

13) "And not many days after the younger son gathered all together (his inheritance), and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living."

A bad, bad decision.

14) *“And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want.*

15) *“And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine.*

16) *“And he would have filled his belly with husks that the swine did eat; and no man gave unto him.”*

In other words, right now after partying and partying and food, wine, women and song and all of that, he was hitting rock bottom. He had nothing. He was working feeding pigs and he wanted to eat the pig's food. That's pretty far down at the bottom of the well.

17) *“And when he came to himself, (We would say today, “When he came to his senses.) he said, ‘How many hired servants of my father’s have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!*

18) *“I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. ...”*

The beginning of repentance; “I accept responsibility of my actions. They were sinful and I am repenting before my father.”

19) *“And am no more worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired servants.”*

You see, because he hit rock bottom, his pride and his vanity now were gone. He didn't want to be the kid that inherited all this and he had fine clothing, fine cars and the nice homes and all of that. He was perfectly content to be a hired servant in his father's household; no pride anymore, no vanity because it was beaten out of him when he hit rock bottom. In verse 20, he acted on his thoughts.

20) *“And he arose, and came to his father,...”*

He came to his father. His father didn't come to him. He came to his father.

20b) *“... But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him.”*

Then notice, the son just didn't stop there. Now that he was back home, he didn't forget his commitment.

21) *“ And the son said unto him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight, and am no more worthy to be called your son.’*

22) *“But the father said to his servants, “Bring forth the best robe and put [it] on him; and put a ring on his hand and shoes on [his] feet. (He was even barefoot.)*

23) *“And bring here the fatted calf and kill [it]; and let us eat and be merry.
24) ‘For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.’ And they began to be merry.” (KJV)*

The analogy is very clear; the marriage supper. Because the son hit rock bottom, he repented of his sins, he repented to God, he repented to those he had hurt and he was willing to come and do whatever it took to make it right.

Now look at the lessons here. As I said before, the father didn't chase after him. The father wasn't wringing his hands and saying, “Oh, what can we do? How can I rescue you? How can I pull you back?” No, he let him go and he let him suffer the consequences of his very bad decision.

Another principal is he only came to himself or came to his senses after he hit rock bottom. God allows us to do that, because sometimes that is the only 2 x 4 that will get our attention, is to hit rock bottom. Don't listen until you hit rock bottom; don't admit, “I've got a problem.” Don't admit it; it's everybody else's fault; this person's fault or that person's fault that I'm in this mess. Sometimes it takes rock bottom for somebody to come to themselves.

Understand too, another principal is that the father received him back only when he had repented and turned and came back to the father. Then the father was glad, the household was glad. The angels in heaven sing when a sinner repents. The Father welcomes us when we repent, but we have to turn and come back. We have to acknowledge our sins and take responsibility for them and we have to repent.

And the celebration only occurred when all of that happened. The message is very clear. The marriage supper is only for those who take responsibility for their actions, who admit they have a problem. Maybe it comes only after hitting rock bottom, but they turn it around, they come back to their Father and then the marriage supper can occur.

What about us? We could say, “Well, yes, I've repented of my sins. I've repented of my bad choices. I've repented of my bad decisions, but I still have all these problems.”

Well, understand another great spiritual fact. If we exhibit Godly repentance, God wipes away the spiritual consequences of our sins through the blood of Jesus Christ.

We are now justified, in good standing with God, but He does not promise to wipe away the physical consequences of our sins and our bad choices.

For example, this happened in the Church. A father had two kids, but he was harsh with them, he was dictatorial and he had very unloving child rearing practices. He was very harsh and very dictatorial. After his kids reached eighteen, they went off on their own and now this father looks back and wonders why his two kids don't want anything to do with him. They don't want to come home and visit. They don't want to come for Thanksgiving. They don't want to be with him at the Feast. That's the consequence of his poor child rearing practices which were not according to God's instruction and God's wisdom.

How about people that make unwise decisions investing their money? These unwise decisions just crater, they fall apart and all the money is lost. They whine and complain that they don't have any money. God doesn't wipe that away just because we've repented of our sins. The condition still exists. You see, God is not going to step in and remove the consequences of our unconverted behavior, our poor decision making and bad choices. He will forgive us spiritually, but He's not just going to make things rosy again. In other words, He wants us to live with the consequences. The people that I just mentioned, the father with his children and people who have made unwise business investments as examples; we can think of many others, but these people need to admit that they sinned and made bad decisions. They must accept the consequences of those decisions. They've got to accept it.

Notice, David accepted it. David accepted the consequences of his decisions, the decision particularly to go to Bathsheba. Look at 2 Samuel, chapter 12. We're breaking into the context. Nathan has already said, "You are the man." Notice David's example and notice what happened as far as his converted ability to accept the consequences of his sin.

2 Samuel 12:13. *And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the Eternal. ... (KJV)*

He took responsibility. He said, "It was my sin and I sinned against God."

13b) ... And Nathan said to David, "The Lord also has put away your sin; you will not die."

14) "Howbeit, because by this deed you have given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, the child also [that is] born unto you shall surely die."

This is the consequence of David's bad behavior, even though he had repented, even though he went to God and repented, God said, "This is a consequence you're going to have to live with."

15) And Nathan departed unto his house. And the Lord struck the child that Uriah's wife bare unto David and it was very sick.

16) David therefore (notice what he did) besought God for the child; and David fasted, and went in, and lay all night upon the earth.

17) And the elders of his house arose, [and went] to him, to raise him up from the earth; but he would not, neither did he eat bread with them.

18) And it came to pass on the seventh day (he fasted for seven days), that the child died. And the servants of David feared to tell him that the child was dead; for they said, Behold, while the child was yet alive, we spoke unto him, and he would not hearken unto our voice; how will he then vex himself if we tell him that the child is dead?

They thought he might go kill himself or something.

19) *But when David saw that his servants whispered, David perceived that the child was dead; therefore David said unto his servants, Is the child dead? And they said, He is dead.*

20) *Then David arose from the earth, and washed, and anointed [himself] and changed his apparel, and came into the house of the Lord, and worshipped.*

Then he came to his own house and when he required, they set bread before him and he did eat. (The servants didn't understand this.)

21) *Then said his servants to him, What thing [is] this that you have done? You fasted and wept for the child [while it was] alive; but when the child died, you rose and ate bread.*

22) (Notice David's response) *And he said, While the child was yet alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, who can tell [whether] God will be gracious to me, that the child may live? (KJV)*

He was hoping against hope that God wouldn't take the life of the child even though God told him through Nathan that this would happen.

23) *But now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? (He got his answer) Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me.*

Meaning I'm going to die, but God chose not to bring the child back alive. So what he did was very clear. He accepted the consequences of his sin. God said, "Your son is going to die." David accepted that, and so must we. We have to accept the fact that we are responsible for our own lives, our own sins, our own shortcomings and it's not the responsibility of the Church or the ministry to wipe away those consequences.

The fourth area of accepting responsibility means realizing that pain is an effective tool that God often uses to teach us. Pain is one of the most effective ways we learn. It's sad, but it is. Sometimes we can think in the Church, well I've come into the Church, I'm baptized, I've repented and God is on my side. I'm with God. I obey His commandments, then God is going to keep bad things from happening to me and life is going to be a rose garden. God's going to grease the skids and we'll just have this greased slide right into the Kingdom of God with no trouble, no turmoil because I am chosen. I am one of God's chosen ones.

Some over the years have actually gotten mad at God because they had trials. Dorothy and I knew a man and his family in Boston back in the '60s and his house burned down. He didn't have insurance. He got so mad at God that God would allow the house to burn down with no insurance. He got so angry that he left the Church. How could God do this? How could God allow this to happen to me? They left the Church in very short order, within a month after that fire. They expected God to just give them a rose garden and everything would go well.

We need to understand, I think we all know this, that Christ never promised us a trial-free life. If anybody knows that, it's Gary and Judy Klar. Let's go to 1 Peter 2:21. Just

as a reminder; I know we all know this. It is part of our calling to have trials.

1 Peter 2:21. *For even hereunto were you called; (What were we called to?) because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow his steps (of suffering).*

If we don't accept responsibility for our actions, if we don't accept the consequences of our actions, we will never learn. It's like the typical example of a child touching a hot stove and gets burned. If the child says, "Well, it's not my fault; somebody turned the stove on, so I'll do it again next time." Or the child blames it on the stove. "Why is the stove on? It's the stove's fault; it's not my fault." You see, if we don't accept the consequences of our sins, we never grow and we never learn.

What about a child out of wedlock? Somebody makes a mistake, has a child out of wedlock, they repent to God and don't do it again. Guess what? The child is still there. The child didn't go away. The child is still there. It is a long-term consequence of a very, very bad decision and unconverted act. That consequence must be accepted by the individual and properly dealt with. That's what God expects us to do. Otherwise, we don't learn. Most times it is best for us to suffer the consequences of our sins or our bad decisions and because of the consequences, we learn not to repeat it. If God wiped away the consequences, why would we not do it again? If God, when you put your hand on the stove and then pulled it back and then God says, "Okay, I'll just wipe it away," and everything is better ten seconds later, then you're going to do it again and again. But if the consequences are still there, we learn not to repeat it. Let's understand that. Again, the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over expecting something different.

We have to become like Christ and not continue to repeat the sins of the flesh. Let's go to 2 Corinthians 3:18. Notice, Paul was trying to teach the idea that we need to look at Christ, see how He is, compare it to ourselves and then start making changes. He says to this Church that had lots of problems ...

2 Corinthians 3:18. *But we all, with open face (meaning just letting it all hang out) beholding as in a glass (meaning a mirror) the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, [even] as by the Spirit of the Lord. (KJV)*

We look at ourselves, we look at Jesus Christ, we see the difference and then we start to change to become like Him. So by accepting and properly learning from the consequences of our sins, we can set an example for others and we are better prepared to be teachers in the world tomorrow. When you go to somebody and say, "Look, I did that and this is the consequence. Don't do that. I'm here to tell you, don't put your hand on the stove."

You see, we have to understand that God will always do what is best for us to teach us what we need to learn to be in His family. Everything, even the consequences of our sin are there because they are best for us and for our learning. Let's look at 1 Peter 5,

verses 8 through 10. We read this mostly to talk about the roaring lion, Satan, coming after us, but notice the latter part of this section of scripture.

1 Peter 5:8. *Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walks about, seeking whom he may devour.*

9) (This is our job) *Whom resist (We must resist) steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.*

We have the same problems, and if we make mistakes, we have to suffer the consequences.

10) ... *After that you have suffered a while, make you perfect, (the Greek means thoroughly complete) ...*

Our suffering makes us perfect because we learn the consequences of sin.

19b) ... *establish, strengthen, settle [you]. (KJV)*

After you've been through a trial like that of our making, of our own stupidity, of our own carnality; and we come through it and we repent and accept the consequences of it, we are stronger and then we are settled. Pain helps us learn and let's understand that. So that is the fourth point.

The fifth and last point is, accepting personal responsibility means that God's love for us does not mean that He's going to give us everything we want.

Accepting personal responsibility is the realization that despite God's love for us, it doesn't mean He's going to give us everything we want. We know God is love. We won't turn there, 1 John 4; it's mentioned twice, and that God has agape love for us.

We understand that. Christ said, "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son." That's the Greek word, agape. God loves us with this perfect love, but does that mean that He gives us everything we want? Let's go to Acts 14, verse 22.

This tells us that is not the case. Certainly some protestant religions teach material prosperity; that if you follow God and follow the Bible, you're guaranteed to be prosperous. That's not what the Bible says. People wind up becoming "Christians" not because they love God, but because they want money, wealth, homes and cars, so they lead a certain lifestyle with the expectation that that's what God is going to give them.

Acts 14:22 says the opposite.

Acts 14 22. *Confirming the souls of the disciples, [and] exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the Kingdom of God. (KJV)*

Many trials, many troubles, some of our own making; others God allows to come upon us for our teaching and for our learning. Does God always answer our prayers when we ask for something that is not right for us? We might want a new car or a new home, but is that right for us? Would that be beneficial for our learning and our growth,

beneficial for us being in God's Kingdom? 1 John 5:14, we know this scripture by heart. I'll read it to you.

1 John 5:14. *And this is the confidence that we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. (KJV)*

Sometimes we ask for things that aren't good for us and God won't answer that; He won't give us that. He gives us what is best for us, you see. He gives us what we need, not what we want. I've talked to people who said, "Well, I need this and I need this, and I need this and I know God's going to give it to me." Everything they say they need is not a need, it's a want.

God never does anything for our harm. We have to remember that. He does nothing for our harm; He does everything for our ultimate good, meaning He allows or causes things to happen to us so we can change and grow and learn and be His children in the Kingdom of God. So, let's understand that despite the fact that God loves us, it doesn't mean that He gives us everything we want.

So let's conclude. We've seen that personal responsibility means a lot of things.

It means admitting that I am part of my own problems.

It means understanding that God expects us to work, provide for our family, for our children and for our grandchildren.

We need to realize it's not the responsibility of the Church, it's not the responsibility of the ministry to prevent me from suffering the consequences of my sins or my poor decisions or my carnality or lack of conversion.

We found also that sometimes God uses pain to teach us. In fact, He quite a bit of the time uses pain because most of the time, we're so hard headed (that's true in my case) that we only learn through pain most of the time.

Lastly, is realizing that God's love for us doesn't mean He is going to give us everything that we want. Accepting personal responsibility means to understand that God does not owe us anything. In this entitlement society that we have, that we are owed retirement, we are owed medical care, we are owed this and that; we have to realize that God doesn't owe us a thing. We do not earn our way into God's Kingdom.

Let's go to Titus 3:7, right after Timothy. Some people today feel like the Pharisees did that if they can just get out on the twigs and branches and obey every little tiny detail, but omit the weightier matters of the law, they can earn their way into God's Kingdom.

Titus 3:7. *That being justified (that means being in a right standing with God) by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.*

It is God's mercy, God's grace and God's favor that we are saved, not by us or any greatness that we achieve. Just because we have been called, doesn't mean that God owes us salvation. Remember the parable of the talents that we read, the guy that put his talent in the ground and buried it. He went into weeping and gnashing of teeth. God doesn't owe anybody salvation.

Look at Luke, chapter 3, verses 7 and 8. Christ encouraged His disciples to do one thing here. This is something we have to focus on.

Luke 3:7. *Then said he to the multitude that came forth to be baptized of him, (They wanted baptism; they sought it.) "Oh generation of vipers, who has warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" (KJV)*

What did he tell them to do in verse 8?

8) Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance, (Not words, but fruits) and begin not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to [our] father; for I say to you, That God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.

They were saying, "We are entitled to salvation because we are Abraham's descendants. We don't have to do anything. We were just born into it." We could say the same today. "Because God called me and because I'm loyal to this man or this group, then God owes me salvation. I can warm a seat here and I will be ushered into the Kingdom of God." That is not what the Bible says. Christ said we must show fruits of repentance. Final scripture, Philippians 2:12. We know this by heart. What did Christ say?

Philippians 2:12. *Wherefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. (KJV)*

We have to do the work, and it's an individual thing, not part of a herd of a certain group going into the Kingdom of God. So, let's understand in concluding here that God doesn't owe us anything. There are no entitlements with God. Contrary to the society we live in, there are no free passes with God. God doesn't wink at sin. God doesn't just allow us a free pass when we go contrary to Him.

But, you see, we will close with the good news. The good news is, we are in control of our own destiny. It is up to us. We need to accept that we are personally responsible for our own destiny. We can go into the lake of fire or we can go into the Kingdom of God. We are personally responsible. That is the good news; it is up to us. It is up to us to bring forth fruits that lead to salvation.

So let's not follow the way of the world. Let's not follow this horrible society we live in.

Let's learn to accept personal responsibility for our attitudes, for our thoughts, for our words and for our deeds.