

LIVING WATERS NEWSLETTER

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RESPONSIBILITY IN AN IRRESPONSIBLE WORLD

Let's note some definitions of the word responsibility. In some places the Hebrew word for responsibility meant "burden." That is you may not always enjoy it, but you are committed to it. God gave to Moses the heavy responsibility to bring Israel out of bondage and through the wilderness. When the people disobeyed "Moses was displeased and he said to the Lord, 'Why have you laid the burden of all the people on me?'" God told Moses to choose seventy men to "bear the burden of the people with you, so that you shall not bear it all alone" (Numbers 11:11, 17). In the Greek it implies that we are "placed over something." Two examples: In the parables Jesus speaks of a master giving his servants certain responsibilities; "And the Lord said, 'Who is the faithful and sensible steward, whom his master will put in charge...truly I say to you; that he will put him in charge of all his possessions'" (Luke 12:42, 44). When a problem arose concerning the feeding of the widows in the early church the twelve told them to "Select from among you seven men whom we may put in charge of this task" (Acts 6:3). In Webster, it means "you are totally dependable." Ron Haskins, Senior Fellow of The Brookings Institution, wrote in their Newsletter, an article entitled *The Sequence of Personal Responsibility* and gave this definition: "Personal responsibility is the willingness to both accept the importance of standards (we would substitute the word *Bible* HB) that society establishes for individual behavior and to make strenuous personal efforts to live by those standards. But personal responsibility also means that when individuals fail to meet expected standards, they do not look around for some factor outside themselves to blame. The demise of personal responsibility occurs when individuals blame their family, their peers, their economic circumstances, or their society for their own failure to meet standards. The three areas of personal decision making in which the nation's youth and young adults most need to learn and practice personal responsibility are education, sexual behavior and marriage, and work."

Both the Old Testament and the New Testament establishes the fact that men cannot escape full responsibility for their actions. The Law stated: "If an ox gores a man or woman to death, the ox shall surely be stoned and its flesh shall not be eaten; but the owner of the ox shall go unpunished. If, however, an ox was previously in the habit of goring and its owner was warned, yet he did not confine it, and it kills a man or a woman, the ox shall be stoned and its owner also shall be put to death" (Exodus 21:28, 29). If an ox, an animal of limited intelligence, is accountable for its action, how much more so mankind. We might also note that if God held His people responsible under the Old Covenant, we, who are living this side of the cross and who have the Holy Spirit in our lives, are under more severe judgment when we are irresponsible toward God. Jesus said, "I say unto you, that every careless (*idle* KJV) word that men shall speak, they shall render account for it in the day of judgment" (Matt. 12:36). "But I say unto you, that everyone who looks on a woman to lust for her has committed adultery with her already in his heart" (Matt. 5:28). Modern man will not take responsibility for his actions, yet God holds man responsible for everything they think, say or do.

The first record of man not taking responsibility is seen when God created man and commanded him to subdue the earth and exercise dominion over it. In his calling by God man was given authority over His creation and instructions concerning his behavior. Having this authority meant that man also had a responsibility toward God. When God called Adam into account he blamed Eve and Eve blamed the Serpent. Neither took responsibility for their actions (Genesis 3:11-13). Another example is found when Aaron made the golden calf in the wilderness and declared it was the god that brought them out of Egypt. When called into account for his actions by Moses, Aaron said "they (the people) said to me 'Make us a god who will go before us' and I said to them 'Whoever has any gold, let them tear it off' so they gave it to me, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf" (Exodus 32:1-4, 23, 24). Aaron refused to take responsibility for his actions and as a result his irresponsibility brought derision from their enemies.

David F. Wells in his book *God in the Wasteland* says there is in our society today "a refusal by individuals to take responsibility for their actions. The people of our time are strongly inclined to trace all internal confusion, pain, disappointment, or lost advantage back to someone else's door." He then gives the following examples from Charles Sykes' study; *A Nation of Victims: The Decay of American Character*: "An FBI agent who was fired for embezzling from the government, and who lost his ill-gotten gain at the gambling tables, was later reinstated because his love of money was judged to be the sort of 'handicap' against which Federal law prohibited discrimination. A school district employee who was fired for being perpetually late mounted a legal defense based on the premise that he suffered from 'chronic lateness syndrome.' A professor in a Midwestern college wrote an essay detailing his experience of being treated as a minority and a social outcast. He is persecuted, he said, because he is a bicycle rider, and concludes by putting disrespect for bicyclists on par with cross burning, gay bashing, and ante-Semitic vandalism."

In considering the responsibility of Christians there are three important facts we should be aware of. First: Responsibility exists in proportion to our ability. This is seen in the parable of the talents (Matt. 25:14-30). God never requires of us more than we have the ability to do. He will hold us responsible according to our ability. Second: Our responsibility is broadened by our knowledge (Luke 12:47). God demands that His people live in accordance to the knowledge they have, and that knowledge is not limited (II Pet. 1:3). Third: Our responsibility is enhanced by our opportunity (Luke 10:13-15). With every opportunity comes a corresponding responsibility.

God has created three covenant institutions or covenant authorities which have responsibilities assigned by God: the family, the church and the state. As Gary Demar pointed out in his introduction of *The Ruler Of The Nations*: "the symbol of family responsibility is the rod (Proverbs 13:24), the symbol of the church's responsibility is the keys (Matthew 16:19), and the symbol of State responsibility is the sword (Romans 13:14)." It is with trepidation that I use the word "authorities" but

responsibility given these authorities is to be viewed in the light of fact that God is the creator of all things and is the judge who has given Jesus the authority and responsibility to execute Judgment, because he is the Son of man (John 5:27). Therefore these three covenant institutions are under the authority of Jesus Christ who establishes, through the Apostles, the conduct of the family (Eph.5:20-6:4; Col. 3:18-21) and upholds and applies the Old Testament's regulations concerning the family (Matt.5:31, 32; 19:4; Mark 10:6-16). He is "the head of the church" (Eph 5:23) and "head over all things to the church which is his body (Eph. 1:22, 23). He is "the ruler of the kings of the earth" (Rev. 1:5).

The responsibility of the family: We are living in a time when few people will take responsibility. In the family we have more absentee fathers than ever before. Some studies have shown that a father only spends a minimal portion of time each day with their child. No wonder so many young girls are trying to find a Dad in some other guy. Many children and teenagers have no respect for their parents. They would rather bad mouth their parents to their friends than to take the responsibility of being a son or daughter. Among husbands and wives the marital relationship has become a mockery in our society with about 40% national average for our divorce rate. According to the CDC's *National Statistics System* the 1980's saw the high water mark for divorces with numbers hovering around 50% for all married couples. Today that number has been lowered to 40%. It seems the last generation could not practice the responsibility of marriage so we have a generation that would rather just live together with members of the opposite sex or even the same sex.

When we speak of the rod being the symbol of responsibility in the family we are speaking of the discipline which is to reside in the home, exercised chiefly by the father: "Fathers do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4). Deuteronomy 6:2-7 is a classic example of the father teaching his children. However the mother's influence is seen in the family as well: "For I am mindful of the sincere faith within you, which first dwelt in your grandmother Lois, and your mother Eunice...from a child you have known the sacred scriptures which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation" (II Tim. 1:5; 3:15). All this says the basis our children's education is the word of God, taught by the parents, fulfilling their responsibility to God. The late Carl Henry wrote in *The Modern Flight of the Family* that the loss of the God-ordained role of the family leads to the "destruction of society then the eventual collapse of the nation." Modern society has invented and advocated all kinds of means: TV shows, books, conference, tapes, marriage encounters and special family counseling and the like to answer problems the family is facing. The last verse in the Old Testament gives the answer: "And I will restore the hearts of the fathers to the children and the hearts of the children to their fathers" (Mal 4:6).

The symbol of the church's responsibility is the keys. It is created by God and Christ is the head of the church, therefore, It is a "spiritual" entity not some kind of ecclesiastical "social organization". The Lord builds the church, not with modern merchandising and marketing techniques to sell the church program to the masses, nor by the construction of attractive edifices in a location near a growing suburb targeting an affluent clientele, nor by presenting a non-offensive, upbeat, tingling and

entertaining gospel that makes everyone feel good about themselves, but with the power of the gospel and strength of the Word of God. The church is his body; it does not belong to its members. However, the church has been given "the keys of the Kingdom" (Matt. 16:19) and this is manifested in the preaching of the word, and the disciplined lives of the members. Jesus condemns the lawyers for taking away the "key of knowledge" and hindering people from entering the Kingdom (Luke 11:52). The church, then, possesses the key of the knowledge of the truth which is the essential message of the church. The final authority and responsibility for the church's well-being is in the Elders (Heb. 13:17) who have the responsibility of guarding and shepherding the church (Acts 20:28, I Pet. 5:1-3). Having failed to recognize and accept this responsibility, the church has taken this responsibility from the Elder and given it to CEO's, Senior Ministers, church planters, youth ministers and church boards made up of both Elders and Deacons plus Deaconesses. Being a part of the church is serious and not to be taken lightly. The church having the keys of the kingdom has as its first responsibility the making of disciples by the proclamation of the Word (Matt. 28:19, 20; Mark 16:16; Luke 24:27), and by being ambassadors of Christ, who stand before the world representing Christ (II Cor. 5:20). The other responsibility is to care for the poor and needy (Gal. 2:10; James 1:27; II Cor. 9:8-12).

A little known and unrecognized fact is that the state (the civil government) is a covenant institution under God and will be held account table to Him whether an elected official or a dictatorial tyrant. "Let every person be in subjection of the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. Therefore he who resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God...it is a minister of God to you for good...the rulers are servants of God" (Rom. 13:1-6). God gave the keys of the kingdom to the church, not the state neither did He give the sword to the church. The responsibility of the state is limited to preserving order, restraining evil and punishing the evildoers. It is not the right of the state to infringe upon the family and the church as we see happening in our society.

The massive welfare entitlements which the government has instituted are an infringement upon both the family and the church and have caused both the family and the church to be negligent in their responsibility toward the needy. Biblical support of the needy, both from the family and the church is never to subsidize irresponsibility: "If anyone will not work, neither let him eat" (II Thess. 3:10). The massive government welfare programs have assumed the responsibility given to the family and the church. The state has no responsibility where God has given responsibility to the family and the church, and the church is not to assume responsibilities in political matters given the state, the Religious Right notwithstanding. Herbert Schlossberg in *Idols For Destruction* stated: Judgment falls in ways that are appropriate to the evils that provoke it. Our policies of greed have brought an end to the increase of wealth to which we have become accustomed, and we have begun to destroy the capital resources that have taken three centuries to build. In so doing we have spurned the biblical principle that we are stewards. Ancient Israel and Judah committed similar deeds, and the prophetic voices raised at that time warned that their crimes would call forth judgment." These words were written in 1983 and seems to be a prophesy of what is happening today in America.

