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**"Preaching grace in the Dispensation of grace"  
A Bible Study**

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### **The Age of Accountability**

**BY RICHARD JORDAN**

Although we have no way of knowing how many infants have died during the past, the present abortion rate in this country alone is raising the figure at a staggering pace. Add to this the various reports from around the world of mass starvations, political exterminations, etc., and it is only natural that there should be a growing interest in the spiritual state and salvation of these infants as well as those children who die before they attain an age of accountability. For those thus interested, but especially for those who have had the heartbreak of having a little one taken in death, we trust this article will be helpful.

#### **ACCOUNTABILITY**

That there *is* an age of accountability is clearly taught in Scripture. This does not mean, however, that an infant is not a sinner or that he is first "saved" and then "lost" again. If the latter were true, in what sense would he have ever been "saved"? Rather, Scripture indicates that although from conception infants have a sinful nature (e.g., Psa. 51:5) God does not hold them accountable for their sins until they reach the point of personal choice.

An important passage in this connection is Romans 5:12-14.

"Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned:

"(For until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law.

“Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression, who is the figure of him that was to come.”

Although all men were "in Adam" and thus clearly sinners by nature and descent, notice that Paul tells us that "sin is not imputed *when there is no law*"--that is, when there is no "*knowledge of sin*," for "*by the law is the knowledge of sin*" (Rom. 3:20). The Apostle says later in this same epistle:

". . . I had not known sin but by the law. . ."

"For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died" (Rom. 7:7, 9).

Clearly God does not hold as morally accountable those who have not come to a "knowledge of sin"--those who have "not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression" (i.e., those who have not knowingly violated a specific command as Adam did).

Even the Old Testament sheds light on this point, for it also clearly teaches that God recognizes some are not morally accountable. Consider the following passages:

"And should not I [the Lord] spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that CANNOT DISCERN BETWEEN THEIR RIGHT HAND AND THEIR LEFT HAND [evidently the infants]; and also much cattle?" (Jonah 4:11)

"For BEFORE THE CHILD SHALL KNOW TO REFUSE THE EVIL, AND CHOOSE THE GOOD, the land that thou abhorrest shall be forsaken of both her kings" (Isa. 7:16). "Moreover your little ones, which ye said should be a prey, and your children which in that day had NO KNOWLEDGE BETWEEN GOOD AND EVIL, they shall go in thither, and unto them will I give it, and they shall possess it" (Deut. 1:39).

From Numbers 14:29 we learn that the "little ones" referred to in Deuteronomy 1:39 were 19 years old! We would consider that to be rather old today. It should be remembered, however, that the commonly used age of 12 is based solely on religious tradition's faulty reading of Luke 2:42, There is nothing in the Scriptures that authorizes such a date.

It seems best simply to recognize that the age of accountability varies from individual to individual and especially from society to society. The fact remains, however, that the Scriptures clearly teach that God recognizes an age of accountability. When an individual reaches the point in his or her life where they do possess the "knowledge between good and evil" they have arrived. This is why it is extremely important to always keep the good news of God's love and grace before young children so that when they do perceive sin to be sin they also know of God's wonderful provision in behalf of sinners.

### **THE DEATH OF "LITTLE ONES"**

And what about little ones who die *before* they reach the point of personal accountability? Again the Old Testament is helpful. David said concerning his little child who had just died, "*I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me*" (II Sam. 12:23). Does not this imply that David had implicit faith that his little child like David himself, was saved?

Still in another dispensation than ours Christ declared:

"Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish" (Matt. 18:14).

Infants are saved if they die before becoming morally accountable. Saved—not because they are innocent, nor because of religious ceremony;( Remember that David's baby did not live long enough even to be circumcised.) they are saved because Christ died for sinners--*for them*, and because it is not God's will that even one of them should perish.

At this point Deuteronomy 1:39 is again helpful, for it indicates that God can give gifts to those who are not yet personally accountable--and that He can give those gifts apart from their personal choice. Thus He is perfectly free to save all who die before they reach the age of accountability and it is evident from Scripture that He does. He foreknew which little ones would die and He has chosen to save them. That He is free to do so is indisputable since "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them" (II Cor.5:19).

### **INFANT BAPTISM**

One further point to remember: certainly there is *nothing* in the Bible--not even half a verse--that says that babies must be baptized, much less that baptism with water could possibly save them or make them saved. Mark 16:16, Acts 2:38 and a volume of other Scriptures make it clear that the one baptized had first to believe and repent. Even when households were baptized, it was always because they had believed--as in Acts 16:33, 34, "*believing* in God with all his house."

All this, of course, maintained while water baptism was in order, but when God raised up Paul, that *other* apostle, he states clearly, "Christ sent me *not* to baptize" and informs us that now "by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body" (I Cor. 1:17; 12:13). This is the "*one baptism*" for today and has replaced the water ceremonies of the former dispensation. With water baptism no longer having a place in God's program, infant--and adult--baptism is in fact a moot point.

### **THE PARENT'S RESPONSIBILITY**

For parents of infants and young children, Proverbs 22:6 is an important principle:

"Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it."

Surely this is reason enough to bend every effort to know and understand God's Word rightly divided--else how can we train that little one "in the way he should go?" We parents have a tremendous responsibility to see that our children from the *beginning* are surrounded with such influences, examples and instructions that they will be ready to receive Christ as soon as they are capable of that choice.

For any dear reader who has experienced the sorrow of having a precious little one die, the following epitaph from an Edinburgh church graveyard expresses as clearly as possible the truth of Scripture and the confidence of our hearts:

Bold infidelity turn pale and die;

Beneath this stone four

Sleeping infants lie.

Say, are they lost or saved?  
If death's by sin, they sinned  
For they are here.  
If heaven's by works  
In heaven they can't appear.  
Ah, Reason, how depraved.  
Revere the Bible's sacredpage.  
The knot's untied:  
They live, for Jesus died.

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**WHAT WE TEACH**  
at  
*Grace School of the Bible*

We believe that Eph. 4:1-6 sets forth the doctrinal basis necessary for fellowship in the dispensation of grace. Since, however, there are many areas of doctrine which are of specific interest to believers, we have a formal, detailed statement concerning what we teach. We are publishing this statement in serial form in the *Journal*. The following is part four.

**THE NATURE AND DESTINY OF MAN**

I. We teach that man was created by God, in His own image, in a perfect and sinless state, apart from any form of evolution (Gen.1:26, 27). We further teach that man sinned and thereby incurred both physical and spiritual death (Gen. 2:17;5:5, Eph.2:1,2), and that by virtue of being a descendant of Adam all human beings are born with a sin nature and in and of themselves can do nothing to please God (Psa. 51:5 Rom. 3:9-20, 23;5:12-14,18,19).

2. We teach that God, in His infinite love and grace, has, through the cross work of Christ, paid for all the sins of all men (Rom. 5:6-8; I John 2:1,2) and has made provision for men to be taken out of their sinful condition and placed in a righteous position (II Cor. 5:21,Rom. 3:23-26). We further teach that God is absolutely sovereign and that in His own sovereign free will has chosen to save those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ(I Cor. 1:21).

3. We teach that salvation in the dispensation of grace is wholly of grace through faith in the work accomplished by the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ (Rom.3:21-4:5, Acts 13:38,39,I Cor. 15:1-4,Eph. 2:8,9). We further teach that there is not one act which man can perform which will merit him salvation.Man's only hope is to rest in the one propitiatory act of Jesus Christ. Christ alone saves.

4. We teach that all saved persons in the dispensation of grace have been made members of the Church, the Body of Christ, by divine baptism (I Cor. 12:13). By this spiritual baptism every member of the Body of Christ is placed into Christ's death, burial, resurrection, ascension and glorification (Rom. 6:3, 4, Col. 3:1-3, Eph.2:5, 6). We further teach that this union between Christ and the members of His body forms an entity known as the New Man which is a possessor of the righteousness of God (Eph.2:15;4:24,Col. 3:10).

5. We teach the eternal security of all that are saved. That is, once a person has believed the message of salvation they can never lose that salvation (Rom. 8:29-39, Eph. 1:13, 14; 4:30, Phil. 1:6). Just as there are no works that can be done to gain salvation there are no works that can be done to keep salvation (Gal. 3:1-5).Our security is completely in our position in Christ.

6. We teach that man is a triune being. That is, man is made up of a spirit, soul and body (I Thess. 5:23, Heb. 4:12, Job 14:22). We further teach that at the death of the physical body the soul and spirit continue to exist in a state of consciousness. In the case of a saved individual this existence is one of comfort and bliss (Luke16:19-27, II Cor. 5:8, Phil. 1:21-23). In the case of an unsaved individual this existence is one of torture and torment (Luke 16:19-27, Rom. 2:8, 9, Rev. 14:10, 11).

7. We teach the bodily resurrection of the saved (Job 19:25, 26, Isa. 26:19, I Cor. 15:51-53, I Thess. 4:15-18, Rev. 20:4) and the unsaved (John 5:28, 29, Rev.20:12-15). We further teach that the saved are resurrected to eternal reward and bliss (John 5:28, 29, Phil. 1:21-23, Heb. 11:18, 19) and that the unsaved are resurrected to eternal condemnation and torment (Dan. 12:2, 3, Matt.25:41-46, Rev. 20: 11-15).

### **OUR MODEL PRAYER**

Commenting on the so-called "Lord's Prayer" in Matthew 6, Brother Dee McCroskey writes in the *Last Day Messenger*:

In contrast to the Kingdom prayer, our model prayer today is Paul's prayer in Ephesians 3:14-21. Read it. Notice how it starts, "*For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.*" Paul always honors the Lordship of Christ, and God's relationship to us as "Father" only through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Note also how this prayer is filled with requests for *spiritual* blessings. The Church is a heavenly people, whereas Israel is God's earthly people, and her blessings are material ones. Paul prays for God's saints to be "*strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man*" that they will be rooted and grounded in love, that Christ may dwell in their hearts by faith, "that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God."

As we often tell people: Learn to rightly divide the Word of Truth and the Old Book will become a New Book to you!

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