

## **Self-Government And Responsibility (Part Two)**

### **Responsibility of the Church**

**John W. Ritenbaugh**

**Given 06-Feb-93; Sermon #059**

We ministers are always looking for ways to present a subject from a somewhat different angle, so that insight can be given that might otherwise slip by us. We are going to be looking at a subject today that I originally prepared as a pre-Passover self examination sermon, but when I looked at my notes after last week's sermon, I felt that there was a direct tie-in to this sermon in a number of statements that I made in that sermon.

I said in that sermon, which was about self-government, that the operation of God's government absolutely depends on each person governing himself never to go beyond the authority God has given him. But this is where the rub comes in because human nature always wants to go beyond what God has given him and take more, just like the benefactors that Jesus spoke of there in the book of Luke. Just like Adam and Eve did in the Garden of Eden, God said, "You can have all of the trees in the Garden except this one." But human nature being what it is, they wanted that one too and so they stepped beyond the bounds of the authority that God gave them, did not live within their responsibility, and they sinned.

This is why there is so much chaos on earth. This is why there is so much chaos in families—neither husband nor wife are willing to live within their roles that God designed us for because human nature wants to go beyond. In the business world, the employer wants to go beyond his responsibility, and the employee wants to go beyond his and he will go on strike in order to get what he wants. In religion, if people do not like the way the minister is doing the work, well they just up and leave, whether the doctrines are correct or not. Mankind is doing immense damage to the environment, that is, to the earth, because we are unwilling to live within the natural limits of law.

What does this produce? It produces bondage to an intense series, or measure, of marital conflict, childrearing problems, and of course then divorce. There are all kinds of instability in the economic and job market and

we have defiled the earth and it is getting to the place where we are closer and closer to the place where the earth is going to vomit us out. This is the terminology the Bible uses to indicate that the earth or the land will simply no longer support life and so the people have to leave it in order for the earth to repair itself. So when the people leave, the land has succeeded in vomiting us out. It has been caused to vomit us out because we are unwilling to live within natural law. Because we have gone beyond the limits of what the earth can take and so the earth then reacts to our excesses.

Once we have been called, our major responsibility in life becomes one of studying God's Word to search for the parameters of our authority. To find out what our attitude is to be toward authority. Whether it is family authority, civil authority, or church authority, to find out what our response is to be toward those who are under our authority. We can shorten this by saying that we are to begin a study for truth. However, it is not truth just for truth's sake, but truth for the sake of finding out what our responsibilities are to God, to our fellow man, and the environment and it is then the use of these truths, that is, in responding to them, that we are set free from the bondage that we imposed upon our self.

In the large body of Protestantism and Catholicism, it seems that the major issue in their religions is to 'get saved.' We understand that there is a great deal more to Christianity than that. One of its major purposes is the building of character.

Everybody has character, converted or unconverted, and that character, good or bad, is formed from what a person believes and what he does with what he believes. The problem in the world is that not everybody has godly character and godly character is built by means of the Holy Spirit through the combination of what we believe—faith—and responding in obedience—works—to the truth of God. We cannot respond of our own free will unless we know what our responsibilities are; that is, what we are to respond to.

**Galatians 5:13-18** For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one

another! [That is, if we go beyond the bounds of the parameters of Gods law, you see, bite and consume, as the Bible says here, that we are not using the truth of God correctly.] I say then: [You see, in order not to do this:] Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh, and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

Following the truth of God, you see that it sets the parameters of our responsibility, tells us what our authority is, tells us how our authority goes. This is not easy because human nature wants to follow one line of belief and the Holy Spirit another.

Godly character is formed by one who is fulfilling his responsibilities to the truth of God, making oneself carry out the truth of God. Human nature, though, will force a person to go to ridiculous lengths to avoid facing up to its responsibilities. It deceives. Remember the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. It deceives a person into what the psychologists calls denial.

What the person that is in denial is essentially doing is denying that he is responsible for what he is doing. It is very easy for a person to shift blame. In religious terminology, we would say rationalizing, or justifying. The person in denial has been deceived by human nature to shift blame and they do it by shifting blame to parents, to the teachers, to the police, to the environment, to the mate, to the culture, "the devil made me do it."

This is very clearly seen in children, and whether you have a child or not, it does not matter. You will be able to understand and see very clearly because children do not hide their feelings very well, their motivations, why they are doing something, and you will see this denial thing working very quickly, easily, and clearly with children.

We all have character disorders, do we not? When there is a conflict between siblings, they will almost always and immediately blame each other for starting the fighting. Both of them are denying—that is what human nature does. It will automatically move to deny responsibility, and so the children—

each will totally deny that he or she is to blame for the ruckus that is occurring between the two.

Now let us consider this: What the person in denial may be saying just might be largely true, that is, that the parents did play a part in making you or me what we are. Yes, the culture that we were in may have played a part. That is, living in a ghetto, living in a high crime area, it will tend to produce certain things in our psyche, in our personality. Maybe we will turn to become more defensive or more aggressive because of that kind of culture that we are in.

We can blame things, and maybe even somewhat truly, on our mate, husband or wife, children, for what we are, the kind of people that we work with, and so what we say in denial might be largely true. Indeed, you see, we might just be pretty much a victim of circumstances, but here is the problem. The problem is, that does not solve the problem. Instead what happens is it becomes the crutch, the justification for continuing in the problem because the person does not want to have to face up to the pain of changing his or her behavior.

So what happens is, the person goes on in his destructive ways. And it is largely because of this principle that we are talking about here in Galatians 5, where human nature wants to go in one direction and the Spirit of God wants to go in the other and the person with the free moral agency, who sits in the middle, who is responsible for controlling the one and using the other, that is, controlling the human nature by governing himself, and using the Spirit of God by setting his will to go in the right direction, instead he does not go in that direction and allows human nature to deny and continue in the old way.

Back Matthew 7, we are getting toward the end of the Sermon on the Mount.

**Matthew 7:13-14** Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.

This verse agrees with Galatians 5:16-18. Jesus is affirming that the way to life is difficult and it is difficult because human nature is applying a very

strong pressure on the person to go in the direction of the old way and human nature is working on a person's mind to deny responsibility, and human nature is discouraging because it is an ever-present pressure that a person has to deal with. Now here is a truth: All of us have character disorders, or we would not be here. Christianity is difficult because of this; that is, because of these character disorders.

As we are instructed in God's way, once we are converted and instructed in God's way, our mind is able to envision—that is, to conceive of—an ideal as it is coming out of the pages of God's Word, long before the life is able to perform it.

Enduring this is a reality that is very difficult to deal with because human nature can make us discouraged because on the one hand, we see the beauty of the ideal and on the other hand we see the reality of our record. So many failures and it becomes very difficult to persevere and to endure.

What is even more difficult, maybe, to deal with, and I have to say this: The reality is that this problem will never be solved as long as we are in the flesh. It is something we are always going to be dealing with because for the entirety of our lives, we must continually assess and then reassess where our responsibility lies because of the ever-changing circumstances that this life forces us into. So I can give you very few pat answers. There are some regarding the issues of life. Should we keep the Sabbath? There is a pat answer, yes. *How* should I keep the Sabbath? There might be hundreds, thousands of nuances to keeping it.

So, where does your responsibility lie? This is what I mean about ever-shifting circumstances that we are confronted with and that God wants us to be able to judge these circumstances so that in one situation on the Sabbath, we may not be breaking it, but in another situation, doing the same thing might not be a very good idea for us to do.

A clear example might be that what a minister does on the Sabbath would be acceptable to God, because did not Jesus say that the priests violate the Sabbath—they profane the Sabbath—and are blameless? And yet for you to do the same amount of work on the Sabbath day might be an abomination in God's eyes, because you see the Sabbath day is not a day of rest for the

ministers of God, it is one of the most intense days of labor, and that begins to teach you something about the Sabbath. It is not the amount of work that is being done, it is what is being done that counts.

You see, we have to become familiar with the Word of God in order to understand where the parameters of our responsibilities lie. So there are few pat answers. We have to come to understand the principles of God's Word, constantly studying, assessing, reassessing, evaluating, looking at our life, looking at the circumstance, coming up with a wise decision and then following through with it. That is what a judge does and that is what we are going to be. God says we are going to judge angels and I am sure there are nuances to all of these judgments we are going to make. If we are a king we are going to be judging and if we are going to be a priest, we are going to be judging in a different area.

What we are talking about here is a very important responsibility. What that means then, in regard to practical application right now, is that making proper judgments as to our responsibilities is something that we must grow into because there are so few pat answers and there are so many aspects and avenues to the spirit of the law of God, that we have to come to know to understand.

Frequently this is something we do not do very well at all, by which I mean following through on our responsibilities. But as Jesus is instructing us here in Matthew 7:4, even though it does not say the words, He is encouraging us to understand that we have got to keep going because if we abandon the path that leads to life, then the purpose of God will not be worked out.

Understand that all of these experiences that we are going through are adding to our wisdom, adding to our understanding of our responsibilities, making us into a better judge, making us into a better king, all of it has a part. But we will never fulfill those responsibilities until we are clearly able to assess our responsibilities.

Now, is it important that we are careful in regard to the carrying out of our responsibility? Let me show you something very interesting from the life of Jesus in John 20. Can you remember the time when He said to the scribes and the Pharisees in Matthew 23, they were to tithe of mint, anise, and cummin, but not reject or not forget about the weightier matters of the law?

In other words, they were to be careful, even about the little, tiny things. Are you careful about little things that fall within the realm of your responsibility? Or are you a person who tends to deal carelessly with things?

I am not talking just about spiritual things. I am talking about the things of life, taking care of your clothes, taking care of your home, taking care of your car, not being careless on the job, not being frivolous about things, but being sober in your approach and trying hard to do things right, to do things neatly and orderly. Do you think that you do not have enough time? Do you think it is beneath your dignity? Do you think that other people can take care of those things?

Look at this little vignette from the life of the most important Person who has ever trod on the face of this earth. The context in these verses is the resurrection.

**John 20:6-7** Then Simon Peter came, following him [that is John], and went into the tomb; and he saw the linen cloths lying there, and the handkerchief that had been around His head, not lying with the linen cloths, but folded together in a place by itself.

Can you imagine that? Right after the resurrection, Jesus is alive, He is very God again, not just God in the flesh, but now He is God in the Spirit. "Hey, I have things to do, zoom, let us go out there, let us meet My Father once again, let Me present Myself to Him, let us get on with this work." Before He leaves the tomb, He takes the cloth and folds it neatly and lays it aside. I think that is kind of interesting. Is God neat? Does He strew His clothing all over the room? Does He drop His clothing wherever it happens to be, or wherever He happens to be? "Oh but mom will come by and pick it up and put it in the hamper or whatever, hang it up."

No you see, He neatly folded things, He took care of it, and you can be sure that Jesus would meet any responsibility in a very careful way and the area that He was in would be well taken care of. If He moved into a place that had not been taken care of, He would not be there for very long before that place would be sparkling clean, if nothing else, and whatever bit of furniture was

there, would be in neat order and the clothing would be hung up. He would take care because He is a responsible Person and He has the authority from God to take care of those things.

Do you begin to see the principle that we are dealing with here? I do not mean that God expects us to be nitpickers, but I do believe that God expects of us a mind that is orderly and precise and careful in dealing with things. A mind, a character, that is inclined toward perfection, not being intolerant, not being self-righteous about one's carefulness, but nonetheless, always inclining one's actions, movements, words, and thoughts in that direction.

This sermon was originally put together many years after hearing a story by David John Hill, given during the Days of Unleavened Bread in Canton, Ohio, 1965 and he told of witnessing Mr. Armstrong walking across the campus in Pasadena, stooping down, picking up a cigarette butt that somebody had carelessly and unthinkingly thrown down when he was finished with it. (I do not mean an Ambassador College student, I mean somebody walking across the campus.)

You might not think that it is a very big deal, but here is a man who had been thrust into a very important job and an important responsibility and yet he felt responsible to do a job that he could have very easily ignored. He could have reasoned that he was too busy, that he did not have enough time; he could have reasoned that it was beneath him, beneath his dignity, he could have reasoned that he did not want to get his hands dirty and besides, had he not hired people to do that sort of thing? Why did Mr. Armstrong pick up that dirty butt? Because he was committed to a responsibility that motivated him to act on such a seemingly insignificant detail.

You probably have guessed by now that this sermon is on responsibility, because it is in learning our responsibilities that we come to understand where our authority lies and God has given everybody authority—authority to act—and especially to His people authority to act in His name.

Responsibility is a word that, like the word "character," it never appears in the King James Version. Its synonym, obligation, also never appears. Its synonym, duty, only appears eight times and one of those was inserted by the translators, that is, it did not appear in the original. And yet the entire Bible



is implying responsibility from beginning to end—from Genesis all the way through Revelation.

The English word "responsibility" is a word of wide application. It is the noun form of the verb "respond." Respond means to answer, to reply, to react, to undertake, or to pledge. The word "responsible" is the adverbial form of that word and it means to be answerable legally or morally for the discharge of a duty, the discharge of a trust, or the paying of a debt. The noun form of that word is "responsibility" and it means that for which the person is responsible or accountable or answerable. In other words, we are responsible to carry out a certain responsibility, we are answerable.

The synonyms duty and obligation have shades of difference between them. Duty is used in the English language in such a way to show that they tend to arise from external circumstances. In the United States, the duty of serving in the armed forces arises when a draft is imposed by the United States government. Prior to that, you do not have the duty to serve in the armed forces. So the government applies an external force and drafts you in a national emergency. A duty tends to be applied then in a circumstance in which a responsibility is externally forced on a person.

The word responsibility tends to be used as showing something that arises from one's own undertakings; that is, one makes himself responsible to do something. This is not 100% absolute, but that is the way that writers tend to use it. In other words, a person volunteers or becomes employed in taking on a responsibility.

The word obligation is like a swing word, tying the two together and it tends to be used in either way, as something externally imposed or internally imposed. A responsible person then is one who carries out that for which he is answerable and what is he answerable for, his duties and obligations.

We have to have a spiritual synonym for this. I said that the word responsibility never appears in the King James Version. The closest spiritual word is "faithful."

This sermon is given in light of Passover. I think you will all agree that we need extra time to get prepared for Passover this year. When I put this sermon together, it was with Passover self-examination in mind.

We need to begin to think about preparing for Passover and I am beginning it by getting us thinking about broad responsibilities we all bear before God. God has given us the authority to deal with these things that we are going to be talking about; they are broad things and they are things that we are commonly aware of.

**Romans 14:10-12** But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written: "As I live, says the Lord, Every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall confess to God." [Are you beginning to see responsibilities? We are not to judge, we are not to be contemptuous, our knee is to bow before God, every tongue is to confess to God, there is four responsibilities right there]. So then each of us shall give account of himself to God. [There is another responsibility].

Now let us look at it in a bigger context. The thought here is not that one should not judge. Does that seem like a contradiction to what the verse says? It is just that it is not well translated into the English. It is rather that one should not be passing judgment. There is a big difference between the two.

The responsibility that Paul is talking about here is not that we should not judge. Everybody has to judge. Everybody has to judge in order to make choices. You have to judge between this way, or this way, do you not? Sometimes you are looking at people in order to understand the wisdom of going this way or that way, and see, you have to judge what they are doing, but you do not have the responsibility from God to pass judgment on what those people are doing. You can judge that what they are doing is right or wrong, but you are not to pass judgment on them because that is God's responsibility. I hope that I have made that clear.

For instance, Paul says that we are to follow him as he follows Christ. We can apply this principle or we might say responsibility to anybody. With the

apostle Paul or Herbert Armstrong or anybody else that is part of the church of God. I can include myself here, we must judge what Paul or Mr. Armstrong, or John Ritenbaugh does as to whether he is following Christ and whether we want to do what he is doing, and so you judge the situation.

Everybody has to do this, but we do not want to pass judgment on a person as *being* evil simply because they do something that is evil. You see that is overstepping our responsibility. God is judge and we are *the judged*. That is what Paul is saying here, we are the judged along with everybody else who is passing before the judgment seat of Christ, because judgment is now on the house of God, is it not?

So we are all being judged. God is Judge and we are the judged, just as surely as the person that we might pass judgment on. It is stupid—Paul is not quite saying this, but the implication of what he is saying is that it is stupid for a person guilty of one sin to point the finger of contempt at a sinner guilty of a different sin, but just as guilty.

There is even a legal basis for this. The basis for what Paul is saying here is that a person being judged—all of us—has no legal right to pass judgment. Did you realize in the United States that when you become a convict, your legal rights are given up? There are liberals who want to change that and they are changing those things and so a lot of guilty people are going free. But it used to be that a convict lost his legal rights and he still loses quite a number of them; such as not being allowed to vote, for example. But you see that is the legal basis for what Paul is saying here, that a person being judged has no legal right to pass judgment.

The good side of this is that, mercifully, God's judgment of us is positive in that He is not seeking ways to destroy us, but rather He is looking for ways to improve us, edify us, and purge us of what is wrong.

That sets the stage for the way we approach things here, that our responsibility before God is, in this sense, to look out for finding what our responsibilities are and not be concentrating, focusing on somebody else who is not meeting theirs. We can judge, but we are not to pass judgment, as though we are the judge assigning guilt to these people for what they are doing.

In Psalms 51, we move on to another area of responsibility that everybody has.

**Psalms 51:3-6** For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against You [he says to God], You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight [now look at the purpose]—That You may be found just when You speak [you see, God is the Judge], and blameless when You judge. Behold [David says], I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me. Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts, [no self deception, not letting human nature get the upper hand, but pure in heart, pure in spirit] Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts, and in the hidden part You will make me to know wisdom.

**Psalms 51:10** Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

**Psalms 51:17** The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart—These, O God, You will not despise.

There are many responsibilities there, but the use that I am making of this Psalm here is that we need to see that we play a very important part, an important role, in what God is working out in His judgment of us. Remember I said that His judgment of us is positive, that He is not looking at us critically for the purpose of destroying us and punishing us, but rather His examination of us is not to sentence us to death, but rather to produce life. There is a big difference between the two.

You see we play a part in this and here is one of the important responsibilities that we play in this and that is, that we can never begin to reach true responsibility until we first deeply and honestly acknowledge our responsibility for what we are and what we have done. Not rationalizing and justifying that the devil made me do it (even though that maybe involved), not rationalizing and justifying that I am the way I am because of Mom and Dad, because that too may have played a part.

All of us have made choices. Mom and Dad did not do it all, the devil did not do everything, we made the choices too, and it is our responsibility to own up for that. God demands repentance, which is a responsibility for Him. Now, what is so remarkable about this confession of David's is his utter candor about his accountability. He took full responsibility for his actions. He did not blame Bathsheba, he did not blame Uriah. He could have—"If Uriah would have been home, that would have never happened. If Bathsheba had not gone up on the roof and taken a bath there, that would have never happened. Why, if she was not so attractive and pretty, that would have never happened. She put that desire in me."

It is very easy to pass responsibility on to someone else. But you see, David took the responsibility, and as long as we feel free to justify by putting the blame on others, we will never become fully responsible. You see, when push comes to shove, the ones who make the decision to do it are responsible—whatever "it" happens to be.

Today in our culture, there is a very great effort, a push, being made to justify homosexuality, or alcoholism, on the basis of a genetic cause, that there is some kind of biological link between the alcoholism or the homosexuality. If God did not say in His Book that these things are sins and sins result from wrong choices, then there might be some reason to believe that there is a genetic cause. But God says these things are sin, therefore, there have been choices made by those who are this way, to bring about the condition.

These people's conditions become these things through a combination of being uneducated, wrong thinking, and wrong choices. This is what led David to commit his sin and all of us to commit ours. Real conversion begins when we accept full responsibility for what we are and what we have done. That is everybody's responsibility. No one can shirk it.

**Deuteronomy 30:15-20** "See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil, in that I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments, His statutes, and His judgments, that you may live and multiply; and the Lord your God will bless you in the land which you go to

possess. But if your heart turns away so that you do not hear, and are drawn away, and worship other gods and serve them, I announce to you today that you shall surely perish; you shall not prolong your days in the land which you cross over the Jordan to go in and possess. I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live; that you may love the Lord your God, that you may obey His voice, and that you may cling to Him, for He is your life and the length of your days; and that you may dwell in the land which the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them."

This is everybody's responsibility. Just as everybody has the responsibility to repent, everybody has the responsibility to keep the commandments of God and when I say everybody, I mean everybody! Converted or unconverted, male or female, young, middle aged, or old, ancient, everybody who can make choices and decide, is required—responsible to God—to make choices in favor of keeping the commandments of God.

But we have to remember another principle that is in God's Word, and that is to whom much is given, from him much is required, and so there is greater responsibility on some than there is on others. To whom much is given, there is greater responsibility; because those people should know more about the nuances of God's Word and the spirit of God's law. We are held responsible for more because we are converted, because we have been taught of God, we have His Book, we have attended services, we have been taught by His ministers, we may have had years of experience in putting His Word into practice. So what God says here in Deuteronomy 30:15-20 is especially the responsibility of those who have entered the covenant with God.

Keeping the commands of God is essential because it is partly in the effort of keeping them in the letter and the spirit—that is, being responsible in doing so—that godly character is built. Here is a question: Is God unreasonable in commanding this? Is He asking too much? Is it too much to expect? Is He demanding? Is He austere in this? Is the responsibility too much to meet in this harsh cruel world, that we have had so many years to form bad habits through irresponsible attitudes and actions?

Well, some seem to think that God is unfair. I hope that you do not, because I am going to show you what His own Word says about that. So let us go to Luke 17. Is this responsibility too great to meet?

**Luke 17:7-10** [Jesus is speaking] "And which of you, having a servant plowing or tending sheep, will say to him when he has come in from the field, 'Come at once and sit down to eat'? But will he not rather say to him [that is the master to the servant], 'Prepare something for my supper, and gird yourself and serve me till I have eaten and drunk, and afterward you will eat and drink'? Does he [the master] thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? [Jesus said] I think not. So likewise you [you see the people of God, Christians], when you have done all those things which you are commanded [the Ten Commandments], say, 'We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do.'"

Notice the use of the word "duty"—it was imposed by God externally. God created us. God commanded the Law, and so duty came upon us externally and we are expected to do it.

The point of this story by Jesus is to put us in the right frame of mind regarding responsibility, and there are two points that He gets across here. Number one is that we should get it far from our minds that keeping the commands, even perfectly, will somehow put God in our debt, like He somehow owes us something. He does not owe us, when it is just our duty to do these things anyway. You see, it is our duty to keep the commands.

Certainly the way that God approaches it, He does not think it is too hard of an assignment from Him to keep them. It is something that, given the power of God, the Spirit of God, that over a lifetime, from the time of His calling, we should be able to grow into. I am sure that He does not expect for us to keep them perfectly, immediately after conversion, but He does expect us to begin to evaluate His Word, evaluate our lives, evaluate other peoples' lives, separate the wheat from the chaff, and gradually assume the responsibilities that a son of God ought to be able to, because we have been given the authority to keep the commands of God; to govern ourselves, if you will.

The power is there, and so even as we begin to grow and keep them, we always have to keep in mind that this is our responsibility anyway and He does not owe us anything because we are doing a good job in keeping His commands. He is not ever in our debt. We are always obligated to Him.

The second reason is a little different. Have not every single one of us, at sometime in our life, made a statement like this, "My work is never done"? "men work from sun to sun but a mother's work is never done." How about this one, "I have sacrificed all these things, but to what end, what good has it done?" Or, "What is the use? Everything is stacked against me."

A question: Why all this self-pity? We are all guilty here, but why, why all the self-pity? Well, part of the answer lies in what Jesus said here and it is especially focused upon His use of the word "servant" or in the King James, "slave." But regardless, the answer lies in understanding the mindset of a slave or a servant. A person with the godly attitude of a servant or slave knows—look at the words here. He knows that a field—think of a farming situation—a field will never stay plowed. What happens—you plow a field, you plant in it, you harvest it, and next year you just put your seeds back in the plowed field again? No, you have to re-plow it and the year after that and the year after that and the year after that—every year you have to plow the field again.

We are getting to the point. What happens when you plow the field, you put your seed in it and then a big rain storm comes and it washes all the seed away? You have to start all over again, you plow the field, you plant it and wait for the next rain to wash all the seed away—only joking of course.

You see, work never ends. It is a constantly repetitive cycle. The true servant's mind is so fixed on performing his duties that the setbacks that he receives and the sacrifices he makes are just part of the normal routines of life and he does not allow them to fill him with self-pity and disrupt the pursuit of what has to be done.

You see, a true servant knows his life belongs to somebody else. In this case, the owner is God and he realizes that his life, everybody's life, is filled with bumps and curves and setbacks and there are cracks to fall through, something is always happening to interrupt the routine. Like the telephone



rings. There is hardly anything more intrusive than a telephone, but it rings. It is part of modern life. Many people, a true servant, is always on call, his time is not his own, his life is not his own, and he has accepted that reality, and so he does not become filled with self-pity.

Did you realize that this is a responsibility that we have because we have been bought with a price, and the price was the life of Christ? Now we are somebody's bond slave, and if we are ever going to get through life and all its bumps and all of its curves and all of its cracks, we are all going to face them. That is the responsibility of the servant—to have in him the mindset that he is willing to take these things in stride and just go on and serve his master anyway. Is that not clear? You see, because his life belongs to someone else, he spends his time performing what his master wants him to do and what does his master want him to do? Carry out his responsibilities.

Let us turn to Romans 9 where God knocks the props further away from any argument that we might have that His command to keep His commands is unfair.

**Romans 9:14-21** What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not! [Is God unrighteous, unfair, unjust, to require of us to keep His commands?] For He says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion." So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy. For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth." Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens. You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?" But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? [Is God unfair, you see?] Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, "Why have you made me like this?" Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor?

This section begins by stating the ground of what we are and what we know in relation to God's purpose. Our being in the church and knowing what we

know is entirely dependent on God's compassion and mercy. God is not obligated! This ties right in to Luke 17. God is not obligated, because we have performed well, to do anything for us, but rather it is the appointment of God, by God, that has put us in to this position and it has obligated us. It is the other way around, if we are going to look at this responsibility correctly.

Paul shows this in the illustration about Pharaoh that is given as an example of one put under obligation to carry out God's will. God clearly shows in the book of Exodus that Pharaoh's hardness of heart was the product of his own making. God did not literally harden Pharaoh's heart. Pharaoh did that himself, but God raised him up to be the Pharaoh because God knew the way this man would react. How did He know? Because He knew the thoughts of the man and the thought of the man was, "That I will never let the Israelites go." That is something that was so against the grain of Pharaoh's mind, because these slaves represented the wealth of Egypt.

They were the ones that produced the wealth of Egypt. They were its craftsman its workers, its architects, they did the kind of engineering that was required to do things and to make Egypt beautiful. He was not going to give away the wealth of Egypt, and so he was a man ideally suited for God's purpose. So, God maneuvered so this man would be in the Pharaoh's office when the time came for God to release His people and the Pharaoh responded exactly the way God wanted him to respond. The Pharaoh still retained his own will, but he met his responsibility perfectly.

It is an interesting argument, and because the man was that way, because he did not want the Egyptian wealth to be let go through the Israelites leaving, he fought against it tooth and toenail. In reality, the Pharaoh was incorrigible—that is really the way we would look at it from a spiritual standpoint—he was incorrigible, and God simply used him to fulfill His sovereign purpose. But, as Paul was pointing out there, it is very possible that the man would never have been on the throne, except God manipulated it. So God raised him up to be there.

That brings us to verses 19-21, where there is the more direct and practical application to us, and that is that God is obviously doing His thing in our life. That thing has been through an act of His. It has come to involve us, all of

us, in a relationship called a church and that in turn has brought upon us responsibilities.

What Paul is asking here is, why do we resist fulfilling our responsibility? See, in verse 19, "Why does He still find fault, who has resisted His will?" Why does Paul ask that question? It is not quite translated properly there. In verse 20 it makes it a little bit clearer, "But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God?" for calling you into the church, for putting this on you; to overcome sin, to keep the commands of God. If we were going to put it into an English form that might be more understandable, "Who are you who makes a judgment against what God has done?"

What Paul is saying is that it does not help anything for a man to adopt this tone. Does not the potter have power over the clay? Now why would he say that? Because no man can win against God—that is the point—so why not, Paul is arguing, bend your will to carry out your responsibility and submit to God? Otherwise, you are going to lose anyway, and in the process, only make it much harder on yourself.

From *The Incredible Human Potential* book by Mr. Armstrong, page 83.  
Think of it in the light of this which we have just gone through.

Yet God has given each of us a mind of his own. If one refuses to acknowledge God or God's way [Are we refusing the call of God, that is, to yield to Him?], refuses to repent [that is to meet that responsibility] of the wrong and turn to the right, God cannot take him and create godly character in him. But the human clay must be pliable, it must yield willingly. If the human stiffens up and resists, he is like clay that is too dry and stiff. The potter can do nothing with it. It will not give and bend. Also, if he is so lacking in will, purpose, and determination he will not "stay put" when God molds him. He will be too wishy-washy and weak, lacking root of character, he will never endure to the end. He will lose out. We are, in truth, the work of His hands, yet we ourselves must do our part in this spiritual development. If we lazily neglect Bible study and prayer or if we let material interest become more important, and we NEGLECT such great salvation, we will lose out.

That is exactly what Paul is saying here. Why resist God? Again quoting Mr. Armstrong:

But if we have the strength of character to YIELD, OF OUR OWN WILL [our free moral agency], to put ourselves in God's hands, He will instill within us, by HIS SPIRIT and by it His righteousness—His character—open our minds to His spiritual knowledge. But we have to WANT IT! We have to WORK AT IT! We have to PUT IT FIRST above all else.

That is what Paul is saying here in Romans 9:19-20. You cannot win against God. Why not just yield to Him? Because you are going to lose anyway, why make it harder on yourself? Why not just meet the responsibilities that this calling has laid on us?

The keeping of the commands is the positive side of our responsibility to God and there is a negative side as well and that is not to sin.

**John 8:9-11** Then those who heard it [this is the woman taken in adultery], being convicted by their conscience, went out one by one, beginning with the oldest even to the last. And Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. When Jesus had raised Himself up and saw no one but the woman, He said to her, "Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?" She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said to her, "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more."

Simple instruction, was it not? Was He harsh in expecting her, an obvious sinner, to just leave and not sin anymore? This is the God of creation following through with what He has shown us in other portions in His Word.

Deuteronomy 30—He expects us to be able to keep His commands. It is not a burden that is too great. "Go and sin no more"—not very fancy, is it? He did not say go to the psychiatrist, He did not say go to the psychologist. I am not saying that those people might not be able to help, they may, but Jesus did not give that advice. He expected her to be able to meet it with the resources that He did not mention and undoubtedly those resources would be repentance, conversion, and the Holy Spirit of God and the vision of the

Kingdom of God and faith and those things, spiritual things. But He expected her to be able to do it.

In Ezekiel 18:2-4, again thinking about this, it is our responsibility not to sin.

**Ezekiel 18:2-4** "What do you mean when you use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying: 'The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge'? "As I live," says the Lord God, "you shall no longer use this proverb in Israel. "Behold, all souls are Mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is Mine; the soul who sins shall die.

That is pretty clear, is it not? If we want to live, we quit sinning, that is the responsibility.

**Ezekiel 18:19-20** "Yet you say, 'Why should the son not bear the guilt of the father?' Because the son has done what is lawful and right, and has kept all My statutes and observed them, he shall surely live. **"The soul who sins shall die.** The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself.

Sin is the individual's responsibility and sin will stop when the individual makes it his responsibility to stop it in himself. That is what I have been saying and teaching lately—this issue of self-government. Self-government is not making up your own rules and governing yourself. Self-government is governing yourself, controlling yourself, disciplining yourself, within the framework of God's law so that we do not sin, so that we keep the commands, so that we do these responsibilities and God has given the authority for us to manage those responsibilities. That's governing yourself. So, sin will stop when we meet that responsibility.

God knows that there are extenuating circumstances, but we have been taught by our liberal culture to place blame on everybody and everything else, and then to look for the government or some social program, or some spiritual guru, or some magic formula, to take away the problem. The

medical healing arts are largely based on this false premise that if I can just take some magic potion, the problem will go away and everything will be all right. But very little thought is given to changing lifestyle, changing diet, changing the way one thinks, changing environment, or whatever it takes to get rid of the cause of the problem.

Did you notice, Jesus did not give the woman any advice except to go and stop sinning? That was now her responsibility, and if we can confront our problems by acknowledging that we are responsible, repent, and turn with all our heart, bending our will to make the sacrifice to obey through faith, then the grace of God will be sufficient to overcome it. But we must govern ourselves within the framework of God's will.

That is our responsibility and you and I have received the authority from God to meet that responsibility. He expects it. It is our duty to keep His commands. It is our duty not to sin. It is our duty not to pass judgment on other people. But it is also our duty to judge and to judge righteous judgment and to evaluate what is going on, and to make right choices, and on and on it goes. The Book is literally crammed with responsibilities for which we are accountable in varying degrees.

So let us begin, as we enter the Passover season, to look at these things that we have gone through here, evaluate ourselves in the light of them, make any turn that needs to be made, begin to ask God for His mercy, forgiveness, guidance and power to overcome.