

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

### **Individual Responsibility**

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I do not know about you, but sometimes I am thick—you know, stupid. I just do not get it when it comes to making the right connections about either the cause of some problem, or a possible solution. A simple cause and effect connection burst into my mind as I listened to a Bible Study that I gave, maybe four or five years ago.

Have you felt during this past year that the pressures on you have been more intense and more frequent than in most years? I ask this because we are leading up to Passover and this is normally the time when we begin to feel a great deal of intensity of pressures which just seem to come upon us. As we feel the effect of these things, we begin to examine ourselves. We say, "Why is this happening? Where am I sinning? Where have I gone wrong? What am I doing here? What do I need to do in order to change things?"

Those of us who are a little bit older can look back on the '50s and think about how serene that time period was by comparison to what we are living through now. I remember the worst thing that happened at the high school I attended during the late '40s—the worst thing in four years that happened was that Herb Leach accidentally set fire to a waste basket of wet hand towels in the boys' restroom when he ditched his cigarette when a teacher came wondering into the restroom. By comparison, many of your children may be going to school where it is a very common occurrence for the police to do a sweep through the school. They find guns and knives stashed away in such numbers and with such sophistication, that maybe at times it even puts the police department in shock at seeing what the kids are carrying around and dealing with on a day to day basis.

Have you ever felt that your life was being severely pressured because things seem to be totally out of control? How about things in the world's economic situation, do you feel as though you have much control over those things? Do you realize, maybe this is an exaggeration but, some person of renown or

power can hiccup in Europe or in Japan, and the reverberations are felt all around the world, maybe in the next day or so. Almost quicker than a wink, you may be out of a job, through no fault of your own, simply because something happened a half a planet away from you.

Recently, just in this past week, there have been things in the Charlotte newspaper regarding the airline industry. It is just the latest American industry that has come under a great deal of pressure because of the worldwide economic situation, as well as things that are taking place internally. They are staggering with huge losses. I believe their losses in 1992 were somewhere in the neighborhood of about 8 billion dollars. That is a lot of money!

Think about what this means. If the airline industry cannot sell tickets because people are not riding on their planes, their income drops, then they have to cancel or cut back on the order of new equipment (usually airplanes), from somebody like Boeing, McDonnell Douglas, or Gulf Stream. If those companies cannot sell their airplanes, they in turn cannot buy parts from the suppliers from which they get the parts to build the airplane.

Think about the people in the textile industry who make the carpeting that goes in the airplane, or those who make the material that goes on the seats, or those who make the foam rubber that you sit on that is covered by the material that the textile manufacturer can not now sell because Boeing is not buying their product. How about the metal subcontractor who supplies the skin for the airplane? What about the meal subcontractor who supplies the meals for the airplanes? They cannot continue at that rate.

Let us put you into this. Here you are, working for a company that supplies nuts and bolts that hold the seat to the frame of the airplane. Through no fault of your own, you are put out of your job because the airlines are not selling tickets because Boeing cannot sell the airplane. Here you are, without a job—a man with a skill, a man with debts, you owe money on a mortgage. Let us say you have other credit card debts. Something completely out of your control occurs, and you have no job.

In addition to that, you happen to be 50 years old, you happen to be white, you are—whether you realize it or not—the most unemployable person in

the United States of America (born 30 years too soon) and having no control of it. You may be able to find a job here and there. You go out, you hit the bricks, but it is not going to be at anywhere near the rate that you formerly made. Your debt structure is at the point where you are just making it on the money that you are making, plus maybe the money that your wife is making. Maybe you have been accustomed to making \$15 to \$20, \$25 an hour using your skill. Now you go out on the street and try to get a job. You cannot make even \$10 an hour. Maybe for a short period, you might find a good job making \$12 an hour. But your debt structure is at the rate of \$15, \$17, \$20 an hour, and slowly but surely, you begin to sink into greater and greater indebtedness.

All other expenses go on, the family still gets sick, but now you do not have the insurance that you formerly had when you were working for your company. If you are going to pay the doctor or buy supplements, vitamins, minerals, whatever it happens to be, the money just is not there. The automobile still breaks down. It still has to be repaired, and the family still needs to be clothed. You cut and you cut and you cut, but there is only so much you can do. You have almost no way that you can fight against it.

Turn with me to Matthew 24, the very famous Olivet Prophecy:

**Matthew 24:21** [Jesus said] For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be.

"There shall be great tribulation," that word "tribulation" means "to crush; it means to press, to squeeze." He is saying the pressure is going to be on; you are going to be crushed; you are going to be squeezed in what is occurring. He is describing a time that comes with great pressures. If we would look all the way back at the beginning of the chapter, we see He is describing a situation in which these pressures will come in waves. You know how waves come in on the shore, one right after the other. The one breaks on the sand and it disappears, and begins to go back out into the ocean. Just as the water gets settled down, another one comes, then another one comes, and another one comes. Jesus is prophesying of the kind of time in which we are beginning to be when pressures come on us, one after the other and life is out of control.

There seems to be nothing that we can do about the situation since we have not caused it directly. Since we have not caused it, we have no control over changing it, or at least very little control over changing it.

I believe that we are at least in the preliminaries of what Jesus is talking about here and it has not yet reached the intensity that it is going to reach. According to Jeremiah 30:7, there has **never** been a time like Jacob's trouble in the history of man and there never will be again, ever.

Do you feel as though things on the world scene are gradually spinning out of control? Not only do you have no control over it, but neither does anybody else. It is as though the pressures have a life of their own and they are applying themselves to everybody everywhere.

What is so incredible about this is stated by Jesus in Matthew 24:37:

**Matthew 24:37-39** But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.

Everybody will be feeling the pressure, not just Christians. Yet life is going to go on pretty much the way that it always has, with little or no interruption, no turning from what we might say are normal routines.

To me, that is incredible! Does it not appear that people will be surrounded by trouble and will not be concerned about it; asking questions about it; demanding somebody do something about it? Let us just assume that people do ask those things, because some are. You can find books written by people who are alarmed about what is going on. One man writes a book about the morality of the United States of America; another man writes a book about the economics in the United States of America. All of these different things, whether it is health, social health, psychological health, economic health, educational health of the United States, all show pretty much the same projection. Things are going to get worse than they are now. All these people

come up with solutions. The people who write these books are pointing to things that they need to change. Even people who are alarmed and write these books must not be asking the right questions. They must not be looking in the right place for solutions, either. I think that this is confirmed by I Thessalonians 5:3:

**I Thessalonians 5:3** For when they say, "Peace and safety!" then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape.

He is talking about the same period of time that we are talking about here; the same period of time that Jesus was talking about in Matthew 24—wave after wave of distress, of pressure, coming upon people. There is an awareness of trouble and yet they are saying, "peace." They must not be asking the right questions. They must be ignoring something as well.

**I Thessalonians 5:6** Therefore let us not sleep, as others do. . .

Apparently, Paul is saying here, the people are awake and yet they are asleep. They are awake, but they are not aware. I find that incredible! Maybe they are just ignoring it because they have reached the place where the pressures are so great, the problems so complex and so convoluted that they feel a solution to them is impossible. Maybe that is part of it. If they just ignore it, maybe it will go away. I do not know what the answer is.

**I Thessalonians 5:7-8** For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation.

Other scriptures talk about this same time. Daniel 12, which has the scripture in it that describes people running to and fro, has a dual application to it. It can either describe people who are literally moving from one place to another, from one location to another, traveling, running, walking, driving, flying. However it might be, they are moving about in restlessness, from one place to another. Why they are moving about is not described in Daniel 12. The use of the word "run" indicates that they either are trying to escape

something or they are going some place, maybe to find peace or whatever it might be.

The second application of that word is that "to and fro" does not literally mean running from one place to another, traveling from one location to another. The "to and fro" is happening within the peoples' minds. They are casting about in fear and anxiety, almost like a trapped animal, asking, "Which way can I turn? Where is there a solution?" They are feeling the effects of a pressure.

Thinking about these things, let us turn back to the book of Amos.

**Amos 5:16-20** Therefore the LORD God of hosts, the Lord, says this: "There shall be wailing in all streets, and they shall say in all the highways, [Listen carefully to what Amos says:] "There shall be wailing in all streets" [the pressure is being felt everywhere! He is talking about the same period of time that Jesus calls the Tribulation, the Great Tribulation. He is talking about the same time that Jeremiah calls the time of Jacob's trouble. He is talking about the same time, that a little later he calls the affliction of Joseph.] "There shall be wailing in all streets, and they shall say in all the highways, 'Alas! Alas!' They shall call the farmer to mourning, and skillful lamenters to wailing. In all vineyards there shall be wailing, for I will pass through you," says the LORD. [And the way Amos is talking about it, it is not going to be pleasant when God passes through. It is not like He stops to help, but He just goes through on a course of destruction.] Woe to you who desire the day of the LORD! For what good is the day of the LORD to you? It will be darkness, and not light. It will be as though a man fled from a lion, and a bear met him! Or as though he went into the house, leaned his hand on the wall, and a serpent bit him! Is not the day of the LORD darkness, and not light? Is it not very dark, with no brightness in it?

Amos is describing an unrelenting awareness of pressure that people are feeling as the Tribulation develops. The people are in a situation like all of us have experienced at one time or another in the course of a bad dream. You are lying on your bed, soundly asleep. Your mind is going at 60 miles an

hour, as they say. You find yourself in this dream, almost as if you are surrounded on every side. There is some pressure visible or invisible to you (at least in the dream). It might be a lion. It might be a bear. It might be a man with a rifle or a shotgun or a knife pursuing you. The animal is pursuing you and you lack the strength to do anything. It is as if you are running through a lake of molasses. You can hardly pick up your feet and this thing is terrorizing you. You know that at any second it is going to come down on you and you are going to lose your life.

That is the kind of situation Amos is talking about here. Wave after wave of distress, of intense pressure is coming upon people. He describes it as being as if you are out for a walk when suddenly a lion confronts you. What do you do when you are confronted by a lion? You get out of there as fast as you can and you run! Finally, you breathlessly get to the place where the lion is no longer chasing you. You feel as though you have escaped him. You begin to let down your guard. Then there is a bear and the bear takes off after you. You run and run and run again. Maybe this time you climb a tree or something. You are barely out of the bear's reach. He is pawing away at you until he finally gets tired of the game and leaves the area. As you come down out of the tree, you spot a little cottage or something over there. You feel that if you can just get inside of that, you are going to be safe. You go inside, shut the door behind you, heave a sigh of relief, lean against the wall in exhaustion...and a snake comes out and bites you. Your place of safety turns out to be fatal.

What burst on my mind as I was listening to this was that Amos is describing a very modern situation. If we limit ourselves in understanding to, "Well, Amos was writing to people who were living around 760 BC and these things are not happening now," we are limiting our understanding of the book of Amos. He is describing what is just over the horizon for the people of Israel. What dawned on me was something that tied into the sermon that I gave to you two weeks ago. The reason all of this is happening is what he is describing here in the book of Amos. It is what Jesus is talking about in Matthew 24, what Paul was talking about in other places, and what Jeremiah talks about in the book of Jeremiah. All of these things are happening because people are not meeting their God-given responsibilities! It is that simple. None of this would happen if people would just do what they are responsible to do before God.

Now look at this back in Amos 2. It is very simply described. This lays the foundation for what Amos says later about what was wrong with Judah and with Israel.

**Amos 2:4-5** Thus says the LORD: "For three transgressions of Judah, and for four, I will not turn away its punishment, Because they have despised the law of the LORD, and have not kept His commandments. [That is everybody's responsibility to keep the commandments of God. Are they being responsible or irresponsible, if they have despised the law of the LORD?] Their lies led them astray, Lies which their fathers followed. But I will send a fire upon Judah, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem."

We find, continuing in chapter 2, that God has the same indictment against Israel as He has against Judah. The only difference being that He describes it by giving specific illustrations of the kinds of things they were doing that showed their despite against the law of God.

The basic responsibility of all of mankind, beginning with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, was to keep the commandments of God, shown in Genesis 2:17. There is the basic responsibility God gave to our parents, Adam and Eve. The basic responsibility for everybody, converted or unconverted, is to keep the commandments of God.

In the previous sermon, instead of Genesis 2:17, I used Deuteronomy 30:15-19, where God says that the basic responsibility of mankind is to choose life. That is just another way of saying, "Keep the Commandments." Everybody is to do that. (I am using "we" in a generic sense, for all of mankind. It can also be applied to you and me as individuals as well.) When we do not carry our responsibilities, things happen and those things are not good. "I will send a fire upon Judah." The fire is descriptive of the consequence of irresponsibility.

Have you ever worked on a job where you have been part of a team? Everybody has experienced this. Now what happens when one person on the team does not do his assigned responsibility? Does it not throw greater weight and stress upon other team members to make up for what the person

is not doing? Sure it does. Let us make this even simpler. What happens if you have a job to do and you are not working on a team, but you are the one solely responsible? The job has to be done within a certain time?

When I wrote this note to myself, I was thinking about our responsibility to the IRS. A clock is running down. It runs out of time on April the 15<sup>th</sup> when we are responsible to get our income tax return in the mail by midnight. The clock is running. Have you yet done your income tax return? Why are you procrastinating? Now what happens? What is the natural result if you keep putting it off? The time gets shorter and the feeling that you have to do something becomes...what? It does not go away. In fact, it gradually becomes more and more intense. The stress level begins to rise because a deadline is approaching and we know that there is a requirement that we have to do this thing. The procrastination—the failure to meet a responsibility—causes the intensity of stress to rise.

That simple illustration shows is what is happening on earth. Only in this case, the irresponsibility of billions of people over 6,000 years of time is coming home to roost. We happen to be living in that time when the piper has to be paid. We live in a universe that is kept in harmony by laws. The laws that carry out penalties have gained the upper hand. The earth is getting ready to vomit out the inhabitants thereof. We are living in that time. That is why the pressures are building.

Oh, it is an exciting time that we live in. Perhaps we might say that in one sense there is no better time to have ever lived. There seems to be nothing we can do about what is happening that is totally beyond our control. However, we can do something. There is something that God demands that we do.

**Romans 13:8** Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law.

We could reword that and paraphrase it, "But if we love we have met our responsibility before God." We have met the command that God gave in Genesis 2:17. We have met the command that God gave in Deuteronomy 15: 15-19, where He said to "Choose life."

**Romans 13:9-11** For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not bear false witness," "You shall not covet," and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

Brethren, God is looking for a people who will be faithful to duty. He is looking for people who will meet their responsibility and be faithful in carrying out that responsibility.

Here in summary is a major responsibility that everybody has. I have said from time to time, that we have to get out of the welfare mentality that most Americans seem to have. One of the major facets of this welfare mentality that has been impressed on the minds of many, especially those who have spent most of their lives from about 1960 on, is the notion that all of us are victims of some sort.

If we allow that concept to dominate our thinking, we will never own up to our responsibilities. It has become very popular among psychologists to blame everything on parents. Others blame having grown up in a ghetto, or growing up in a rural area, and were deprived of a good well-rounded education, or being part of a minority. Brethren, as long as we see ourselves only as victims, it is too easy to justify behavior on that basis and shift responsibility to the imagined cause.

It is now virtually accepted as a truth in our culture that claiming one is a victim frees that person from personal responsibility. This gives the victim special rights that others who are not victims do not have. People can blame almost any behavior on racism, "Well, I have been a victim of racism, and therefore I did what I did." Or, sexism: "I have been a victim of a sexist boss, and therefore I did what I did, because he made me do it." "I have been a victim of capitalism, and therefore I do not have any money." They do not say the person spent all the money they had on credit. Others might say, "I am a victim of a mental disorder," or "I am a victim of an addiction," "I am a victim of my parents," "I am a victim of the ghetto," "I am a victim of a rural upbringing," "I am a victim because I am part of a minority."

Let us ask a very simple and yet profound question. Do you think that we can go to God and claim, "the Devil made me do it"? Even the Devil cannot make us sin, that is a choice! Can we honestly go to God and say that I am an alcoholic because of my wife? Can I say that I am an alcoholic because my parents were? Am I an alcoholic because I was in the army and all of my buddies drank? Do I claim I abuse my children because my parents abused me? Can I say that I overeat because my husband does not love me? Did I leave the church because of so-and-so's offensive behavior towards me?

These things indeed may be part of the mix, but these are the very things that we have to rise above because we have a greater and higher responsibility to *love God!* Is that not that the first and great commandment, even before ourselves?

This is what makes David's statement in Psalms 51:4 so remarkable:

**Psalm 51:4** Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight [now listen to the second half of this]—That You [God] may be found just [meaning right] when You speak, and blameless when You judge [the implication is, "judge me"].

It is the second half of that verse that is so remarkable in light of this sermon. David is telling God that he is the guilty one. He took full responsibility. He is not blaming Bathsheba. He is not blaming the circumstance. He did not blame his parents. He did not blame the drink of wine that he might have had. He did not blame the fact that he might have been under pressure because of the warfare that was going on at the time (and it was). He did not blame it on Uriah, because Uriah was not home. David did not say, "If Uriah would have been home, it never would have happened." People do those kinds of things. He did not blame it on Satan. David is guilty and he is telling God he will take whatever penalty God gives because it is justified.

Brethren, we—all of mankind—are paying a frightful cost for all of this irresponsibility. It will never end until each individual takes the bull by the horns and bears the responsibility for his own life! We cannot afford to wait for somebody else to do it—like the welfare mind would do. They wait for the government to do something. Do you realize that this is the lesson

contained in Ezekiel 18? The welfare mind would try to wait for someone else, like the government, to solve the problem for him. That will not work. It cannot work.

Now let me try to picture this very simply and perhaps I am oversimplifying. I think that it will at least illustrate a circumstance that we are familiar with: the American debt, the economic debt. We have been hearing a great deal about it lately. It has been much in the news and perhaps we can make use of it in this way. The reason it is in the news is that American debt has reached alarming proportions. Every indication is, that it is like a locomotive going downhill with out any brakes, and a full head of steam. It is only going to get worse unless very drastic measures are taken to do something about it.

Now remember this, most of the solution that people are coming up with is... what? The government has to do something. Now let us think about that. Think about government in the United States and think about where the government comes from. It is very easy to blame the politicians that are sent to Washington. But wait a minute—where do those politicians come from? They come from us! They are us! They come from the same areas we live in, and they represent us. They are supposed to be examples of us. Now what I am going to conclude is, they are indeed examples of us. Because they are of us, and they do just like we do because they have basically the same set of values that we do.

Do you know that private indebtedness is the equal of the government's? In other words, the people that we elect and send to Washington act just like us when they get there. We expect different behavior from them. Why should we expect different behavior from them when we at home are unwilling to get our own budgets into shape? We private citizens are in about the same fix as the federal government. The problem with the American economy will not be corrected until each individual changes himself. Then the character of the people sent to Washington will be similar to those who remain at home. In other words, the people we are getting to represent us are pretty much what we deserve.

You have probably heard what came from the words of Walt Kelley, who wrote the comic strip "Pogo." Pogo was paddling around or doing something

in the swamp where he lived, dressed in his little army uniform. He said, "We have met the enemy and they is us."

**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 [all lives] are Mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is Mine; the soul who sins shall die.'"

God is setting the stage for what He is going to expound here. He opens it up by saying, in so many words, the responsibility for conduct lies with the individual. Now get that! The responsibility for conduct lies with the individual. This section (Ezekiel 18) was written to correct a misconception that the people had of Exodus 20:5. Right in the midst of the second commandment, it says, "the sins of the fathers will be passed to the children unto the third and fourth generation."

Think of that as it stands in the second commandment and how a people could apply it. Could it not be applied by a people to say, "Well, I am a victim. The sins of the fathers have been passed on to me and I am helpless before them." That is what the proverb says at the beginning of chapter 18. The fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge. In other words, the fathers do something and the children are helpless before the effect of what the fathers did. Action by a previous generation causes reaction in this generation. God says, "Hey, you cannot say that anymore," because that is not what He meant by Exodus 20:5, "the sins of the fathers shall be passed on to the children."

Think to whom this was written in Ezekiel 18. Ezekiel was writing or talking to a people who were already in captivity. Much like people today, they were seeing themselves as victims of their parents' sins. In other words, "My parents sinned and I have paid the penalty. I am in captivity in Babylon. It is not my sin that got me here; it was their sin that got me here." Now what developed in them was a fatalistic attitude and irresponsibility of conduct based on the concept that there was nothing they could do about it. They saw

themselves as victims of former generations' folly and of their culture. They excused their own self-indulgence on that basis. "I am just the way I am because my parents made me this way."

Exodus 20:5 has to be balanced out with what we see here in Ezekiel 18, the whole chapter. There is an overall sense. They do not contradict one another, but they balance out and modify one another. God is saying there is a corporate—that means a bodily—responsibility and there is individual responsibility. There is an effect that comes on people as a result of what other people do, like their parents. There are times when we are going to be blessed or cursed because we are part of a group. There are times when we are going to be blessed or cursed because of our own personal conduct.

Get this, if there is nothing else that you get out of this sermon. God wants to make it abundantly clear that each and everyone of us is going to be judged by Him on the merits of our **personal** conduct. That is very clear in the chapter. We are going to be judged by Him on the merits of our personal conduct. He is saying that regardless of our parents and what their conduct was like or what our environment was like in which we grew up, we do not have to be like them. We can change. He is not saying that those things do not affect us. They indeed do affect us. What our parents did and what the culture did, help to make us what we are. As God begins to give us knowledge, we are then held responsible for what we do with that knowledge.

Let us suppose that you come from a long line of people who were alcoholics and you are the last generation of that line. Let us say that everything about what they did predisposed you to alcoholism. How do you deal with that situation? Now the ball is in your court. God is going to judge you on your individual behavior, your individual conduct. You find out that you are not supposed to be an alcoholic; you are not supposed to be addicted to alcohol because that is God's will. That is His stated purpose for this area of life. You are predisposed to over-drinking. You could blame your conduct, if you turn out to be an alcoholic, on your parents, but once you have the knowledge of what is right, the choice is yours. You do not have to be an alcoholic. You have to live with the knowledge that you can drink only so much or not at all in order that you do not become an alcoholic. God is going to judge you on the basis of those choices, not on the basis of what your father did. I hope that is clear.

Even though we are affected by our parents, by former generations and by the environment, we cannot, once the knowledge of God comes, blame what we are on them. God forgives that and God expects us to change. He expects us to change because we love Him. We have a higher duty, a higher responsibility to Him, than we have even to ourselves. We are going to be judged on the basis of personal conduct.

This is why those sermons that I gave on government are so important. This is why I use the term "self-government." We have to govern ourselves within the framework of what *God's* desire for us is. We have to control ourselves, would be another way of putting it. We have to discipline ourselves within that framework. God knows that our parents and others have affected us, but we do not have to be like them. That is exactly what He wants, change for the better.

Let us go to verse 19. God gives here a nine-step explanation on individual responsibility. Watch this unfold as some of these points are overlapping.

**Ezekiel 18:19** 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.

Principle 1—Whenever anyone lives righteously, he shall live. This does not mean that the person who is living righteously will not suffer along with everybody else in the corporate body, if the body happens to be under a curse. In other words, you can live righteously in the United States of America, but if it is under a curse because practically everybody in the country is irresponsible, you are going to have to live with that. There is nothing you can do about that, because the natural laws of God are at work. God is at work. He is bringing things to pass in order that His purpose is worked out. We have to live with the curse that is coming upon the United States of America, Canada, England and everywhere else. We are in it. The responsibility for us is not to do what everybody else is doing. That means in the end, when it is all over, when your life is over, you will be in the Kingdom of God and they will not. That is profound.

**Ezekiel 18:20** "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.

We can shorten that to, Principle 2— "the unrighteous sinner who sins shall die." Now let us suppose that the unrighteous sinner is being blessed along with the corporate body, the corporate body being the United States of America or Canada. The corporate body is being blessed, but this person is choosing to be irresponsible and sins. God is saying that when it is all over and done, his life is not going to work out right because God judges him on his personal conduct. He sees what he is doing. He will not go into the Kingdom of God, even though he appears to be being blessed. You have to have things like this to judge righteous judgment. Jesus said, "Do not judge according to outward appearance, but judge righteous judgment."

Again, in verse 20 is another principle—principle 3. We do not pay penalties for each other. We may suffer because of others' sins, but that is not the penalty of our sins. In other words, because God is a righteous Judge and He judges us individually, we are going to pay the penalty for our sins. They will pay the penalty for their sins. You see all through here the encouragement toward a person to be personally responsible regardless of what others are doing.

Again, in verse 20 is a 4<sup>th</sup> principle. I said there would be some overlapping and there is. The righteous lives because of his righteousness, and the wicked dies because of his sins.

**Ezekiel 18:21-22** "But if a wicked man turns from all his sins which he has committed, keeps all My statutes, and does what is lawful and right, he shall surely live; he shall not die. None of the transgressions, which he has committed, shall be remembered against him; because of the righteousness that he has done, he shall live.

Point 5. If a sinner repents, he will live. God here is implying eternal life; his sins are forgiven and forgotten.

**Ezekiel 18:23-24** "Do I have any pleasure at all that the wicked should die?" says the LORD God, "and not that he should turn from his ways and live? [Very clear. God does not rejoice in the death of the wicked. God wants to see repentance. That's point 6.] But when a righteous man turns away from his righteousness and commits iniquity, and does according to all the abominations that the wicked man does, shall he live? All the righteousness which he has done shall not be remembered; because of the unfaithfulness [irresponsibility] of which he is guilty and the sin which he has committed, because of them he shall die.

This one is kind of interesting. Point number 7, there is never a time when a righteous person can feel free to sin. God never condones nor grants license to sin at any time. It is very tempting when we are living in a sinning society, and especially if we see the sinning society appearing to prosper, to do as other people are doing. God's encouragement there in verse 24 is "do not be fooled." What He is evaluating, what He is judging, is the end result of a person's life, not just for the moment.

**Ezekiel 18:26** "When a righteous man turns away from his righteousness, commits iniquity, and dies in it, it is because of the iniquity which he has done that he dies. Again, when a wicked man turns away from the wickedness, which he committed, and does what is lawful and right, he preserves himself alive.

Point 8—He is saying that righteousness or unrighteousness is not inherited. It does not pass from father to son, or son to father. The decision is up to the individual.

**Ezekiel 18:30** "Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, everyone according to his ways," says the LORD GOD. "Repent, and turn from all your transgressions, so that iniquity will not be your ruin.

This ought to be very clear because here is the conclusion: that even as the individual is responsible, God's judgment is also individual. "I will judge every man according to his ways." In other words, God is very fair. He bends over backwards, if we can put it that way, to make sure that we get a fair shake. He knows that what former generations have done has an affect on us. That is what He wants us to overcome, and He does consider those things. He does not allow His judgment to be fogged over because we have been somewhat victimized by former generations. We are going to be judged on the basis of our own conduct.

There are 5 basic reasons why we do not meet our responsibilities.

1. We are simply ignorant of them; we do not know what they are as the Apostle Paul said he was ignorant.

**I Timothy 1:12-13** And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry, although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. [Removing ignorance of what our responsibilities are is a lifelong responsibility before God.]

2. We have the wrong mindset regarding what we are before God.

**Luke 17:10** "So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, 'We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do.'"

There are two lessons here that God wants us to get out of this in regard to duty and responsibility. First, we should get it out of our minds that even keeping the Commandments perfectly will somehow put God in obligation to us. No, it does not. God owes us nothing. Everybody is required to keep the Commandments, converted or unconverted.

The second lesson was part of this mindset. It has to be mostly with understanding what a servant or a slave is. Jesus used the term *doulos* and that means a slave.

The definition: "A slave is one who is in a permanent relation of servitude to another, his will being altogether consumed in the will of the other." The relationship here is from us to God. We are His slaves. We are bought and paid for at the price of the blood of Jesus Christ. We owe God for our life. Since we are His slaves, He requires of us certain things. However, human nature does not want to be a slave in that way. It wants to fight against it all the time. But a slave has to have a mindset. That mindset is that his will belongs completely to somebody else, and that somebody else is God. Therefore the true servant's or the true slave's mind is so fixed on performing his duties that when other things occur, he does not look upon them as being setbacks. They are something simply that his owner has required, designed, or allowed. Therefore, he is to bear up under them and do the best he can with them.

That kind of a mindset does a great deal toward getting rid of any feelings of self-pity or being put upon, which would disrupt the carrying out of our responsibilities.

3. We do not want to do the work involved in carrying out a responsibility because of laziness or the fear of discomfort.

Proverbs 24:30-34 shows the result of slothfulness. It does not matter whether the result that is being pictured happens in an economic area, an artistic area, a marital area, or a moral area. The principle that is being taught there covers it. The principle is that the result of irresponsibility will be poverty—economic poverty, moral poverty, artistic poverty, or marital poverty. Like it or not, it is very likely the person who is in this kind of situation will feel that he has been a victim.

It is a vicious cycle that can be broken only by having truth, repenting of one's ways, setting one's will to follow the right way, and exercising discipline over oneself to go the right way. It costs something. There is no free lunch.

It costs something to have a good relationship with God. A person has to work at prayer. He has to work at Bible study and meditating. He has work at

applying what he learns. It is work because human nature does not want to do its responsibilities to God; it wants to go along the other easier irresponsible way.

4. We do not want to take the blame when something goes wrong. Here is a quote from William Hamilton, a syndicated columnist and a former Republican campaign consultant. The comment in regard to character was taken from *The Washington Post*, November 2, 1992. He said,

Character admits mistakes without dissembling [dissembling means disguising intent or hiding one's true intent or motivation] or shifting blame to others. Character tells the whole truth up front. Character provides the grit to take firm stands and not promise everything to everybody.

Again I Timothy 1:13, 15 are the same scriptures that we used in relation to Paul, where it says God forgave him because he did what he did in ignorance.

**I Timothy 1:13** although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief.

**I Timothy 1:15** This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.

Paul did not try to hide behind a façade of goody, goody two shoes regarding his past. I do not mean that he was not a good man—he was. This is what set David apart from others. He did not just accept blame as a magnanimous gesture to others. The way he stated it in Psalm 51, he was to blame. The result of that was he was then free to work on himself so that it did not happen again.

When things go wrong—and they will go wrong—why do we always look around for someone to assign blame to? Why can we not see ourselves as at least somewhat a part of the problem and then begin to work on our area? Again, think about a solution to the economic problem in the United States. It begins when the individual gets himself out of debt. In a sense, forget

about the government. Get yourself out of debt. That takes the first step. It is the only thing that you can control. You cannot control what others do. If every American would get out of debt, there would be no economic problem in the United States.

This is what God is getting at. When the Millennium comes, it will be the Millennium. It will produce all the good things because everybody is carrying out his responsibilities. The pressures of sin will not mount against others. Nobody will have that feeling of intense pressure coming upon him, as though he is chasing after vaporous fog somewhere. Nobody will be the victim of what is going on everywhere else. It begins with you; it begins with me. We have to go on from there.

One reason God used the body analogy in I Corinthians 12, is that God wants us to understand that we are part of a body, a body called the church. It is almost as though we rise or fall within it, but each one of us has to see himself as an individual as well as being part of a corporate whole. In this sense, everybody equally shares in the body's success or failure.

5. We lack the vision and the faith to motivate us to do things—to carry out our responsibilities.

**Proverbs 29:18** Where there is no revelation [where there is no revelation, where there is no scripture or vision, prophetic understanding, the people—notice this—what do the people do?] the people cast off restraint [they become irresponsible, they do their own thing. I really like the way the way the Living Bible says this, "where there is no vision, the people run wild"]; But happy is he who keeps the law [because everybody is being responsible, that is why].

So, where there is no vision, where there is no faith, where there is no belief in a great goal that needs to be accomplished, we lose our orientation. We do not go on ahead. We do not have the motivation to discipline ourselves to head toward that goal.

Hebrews 12:2-5, (this is one of the main things that motivated Christ), "because of the joy that was set before Him, He endured the cross." It

motivated Him to move in a certain direction. Brethren, this is something that God can give. He can give us vision. He can give us faith. He can give us hope. He can give us more reason to govern ourselves in the face of an irresponsible and virtually unrestrained society. Keep asking Him to do so. Be patient; God will supply our need.

I picked up a place mat at a Carl's Jr. restaurant in Glendale a few years ago. It was the preamble to a code of responsibility for Americans. The preamble said,

Freedom and responsibility are mutual and inseparable. [God has called us to liberty, but we cannot have liberty without being responsible.] We can ensure enjoyment of the one only by exercising the other. Freedom for all of us depends on responsibility by each of us to secure and expand our liberties. Therefore, we accept these responsibilities as individual members of a free society.

Then they gave 10 responsibilities, just like the 10 Commandments, and number 10 was this:

To respect the right and meet the responsibilities on which our liberty rests and our democracy depends. This is the essence of freedom. Maintaining it requires common effort all together and each individually.

That is so meaningful and so profound in the light of what we have been called to. We must learn what our responsibilities are and govern ourselves within them in order that our judgment by God will be in harmony with what He wants.