**Personal Accountability**

There is a principle that is taught consistently throughout the Scriptures and God’s dealings with mankind has reinforced it: God holds individuals responsible for their own actions.

In evaluating this premise, one must take care to make the important distinction between temporal consequences and moral responsibility. Innocent people suffer greatly because of the sins of others. It has always been so and it continues to be a painful reality. But suffering because someone else sinned is not the same as bearing the guilt of that sin.

Hardly anyone sets out to teach false doctrine. But some will accept presumptions for which there is no divine sanction, and such presuppositions will always lead to doctrinal error. Unscriptural notions about the nature of man have led to the indefensible conclusion that individuals are held accountable by God for sin that has been committed by someone else. Nothing could be further from the truth.

**There is no such thing as imputed guilt.** A person who commits a crime is guilty of that crime. A person who commits no crime is innocent. The whole concept of pronouncing one person guilty of a crime committed by someone else is the very epitome of injustice. And yet those who impute the sin of Adam on successive generations of humans do exactly that.

God stated in Ezekiel 18:9 that a man who walks in His statutes and ordinances so as to deal faithfully is righteous. The Calvinist maintains that such a man is automatically unrighteous by reason of the fact that he is a son of Adam. 1 John 3:7 reiterates God’s position on the issue: “Make sure no one deceives you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous.” No one bears the guilt of the sin of Adam. No one is responsible for the sins of their parents. A person becomes a sinner the moment they commit sin, not a moment before.

**There is no such thing as inherited righteousness.** Some people have the good fortune of having godly parents and that is a real blessing. However, having righteous parents doesn’t make a person righteous. Practicing righteousness does. Make no mistake: No one has lived perfectly and only the grace of God through the sacrifice of His Son can atone for the times we have failed him. But never for a moment assume that God doesn’t care about the choices each of us makes.

At the same time I appeal to God for His help and His mercy in my struggle to please Him, I must never forget the solemn warning of 2 Corinthians 5:10: “We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.”

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