

The Age of Accountability

Many people struggle with the idea of what is the age of accountability.

Joseph was about 17 when he was torn from home and taken into Egypt as a slave. When tempted by Potiphar's wife he said he could not do this wickedness and sin against Jehovah. It is true that this temptation came after he had been in Egypt long enough to have advanced in Potiphar's house but in these years, "The Lord was with him"(Gen. 39:21) and "he was a goodly person." By the time he left home his patterns of righteousness were set. With proper training young people are accountable at age 17 to serve God properly but not all young people are accountable at age 17. Some may be younger than 17.

Josiah was 8 years old when he became king of Judah. At the age of 16 "While he was yet young, he began to seek after the God of David his father" (II Chronicles 34:3). Then, by the time he was twenty he began to rid the land of idol worship. By the age of 26, he was repairing the house of God that had been in disrepair. Of him, from age 8 it was said, "And he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, and walked in the ways of David his father, and declined neither to the right hand, nor to the left" (II Chronicles 34:2).

Jesus went up to Jerusalem with His parents for the first time at the age of 12. He was lost from His parents for three days. When they found Him He was in the temple conversing with the doctors. All who heard were astonished at His understanding and answers. When asked concerning His whereabouts while lost He said, "Know ye not that I must be about My Father's business?" (Luke 2:49). From then on He advanced in wisdom, stature and in favor with God and man. But some would say that Jesus was divine. True! But he was also human, and we are to exemplify what He did in the flesh. If we are to be as He was when He was older, why not when He was younger?

Age of accountability is not an age at all, but a level of readiness and maturity. Parents, you must determine your child's level of maturity. Parents cannot do it because we spend limited time with your children. You have the most contact with them and can best evaluate their readiness to make a life long commitment.

Is your child only afraid of going to hell at night? Or, do they express their fears and need during the light of day as well? The "night fears" are common to children.

Does your child want to put off getting baptized until some future day--at worship, for instance? If so, then they may not see the urgency of baptism. Someone truly convicted will not want to delay. (Acts 22:16 "And now why do you delay? Arise, and be baptized....")

What sins do they claim to have committed? Have them write down all the reasons they feel they should be baptized. Keep their reasons for some future date when they may question whether they were baptized for the right reason.

Ask them what would have been the Ethiopian's reaction if Philip said he could NOT be baptized? (Acts 8:36) If they realize he would have had to have done it anyway, then ask them, "What if I said 'no' to you about being baptized?" Do they feel as if they would have to do it anyway? Are they willing to do God's will before their parent's will? Interestingly, Jesus at the age of 12 determined that he needed to be about his Father's business. At the age his Father's will was more important to him than the will of his parents (Luke 2:49).

Ask them, "how will your life be different when you become a Christian?" Do they have an "old man of sin" they needs to be crucified? (Romans 6:6).

What follows are some other thoughts from various preachers and Christians. You may agree or disagree with some of what is said. It is only offered to help you to consider some things you may not have considered before.

Thirteen is the most common age suggested for the age of accountability, based on the Jewish custom that a child becomes an adult at the age of 13. However, the Bible gives no direct support to the age of 13 always being the age of accountability. It likely varies from child to child. A child has passed the age of accountability once he or she is capable of making a faith decision for or against Christ.

Of this we are certain: God is loving, holy, merciful, just, and gracious. Whatever God does is always right and good, and He loves children even more than we do.