

together make it evident that there is an age of accountability.

When Is The Age of Accountability? Having shown that Scripture infers an age of accountability it is much more difficult to identify when that age is for each person. Is the age of twenty-one used in Numbers 14:29 an appropriate pattern? Is it rather when one come to **"know to refuse the evil and choose the good"** (Isaiah 7:16)? Each soul must make these decisions for himself. It seems that the important thing is for a person to have a mature understanding of what it means to obey God and repent of sin. The mental and emotional maturity required to keep one's commitment to Christ is essential if we are to follow Him in truth. This will surely differ from person to person. One should not take this action too early, lest he or she is unprepared to accept and understand the scope of such a decision. Yet, neither should one wait too long, imagining that one day he or she will be fully capable of flawless, mature, sinlessness. That time will never come, and none of us has the assurance of even one more day of life.

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Faithful Sayings



Services

Sunday: 9:00 AM
10:00 AM
11:00 AM
Wednesday: 7:00 PM

Elders:
Pat Ledbetter
Jeff Nunn

Deacons:
Steve Dixon
Ryan Ferguson
Arend Gressley
Ben Hight
Blake McAlister
Brady McAlister
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Kyle Pope

Is There an "Age of Accountability"?

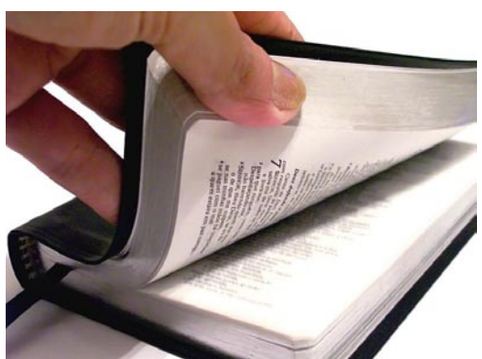
by Kyle Pope

Christians sometimes use phrases that describe concepts we believe are inferred in Scripture in spite of the fact that the phrases themselves are not biblical. In doing so great caution must be used lest we give an authority to the phrase which exceeds the Scriptural evidence that supports it. It is generally wisest to simply use "Bible names for Bible things." Yet when a doctrine is evident, though not specifically named, such labeling may be unavoidable. An example of this is our use of the phrase "the age of accountability." We use it to describe the period Scripture teaches exists when a person moves beyond the innocence of youth into a



position of accountability before God for personal misdeeds. Before this period baptism is unnecessary. After one has attained it baptism is essential. Is the "age of accountability" a Biblical concept? Let's consider three pieces of evidence that show the scriptural authority for this doctrine.

1. The Innocence of Youth. The first evidence which Scripture offers that infers an age of accountability is the very clear principle that children are innocent. In Jeremiah 19:4 when the Lord rebuked the kings of Judah for their involvement in child sacrifice they are said to have **"...filled this place with the blood of the innocents"** (NKJV). When Jesus on two occasions encountered children He declared: 1) **"... of such is the kingdom of heaven"** (Matt. 19:14), and 2) **"...unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven"** (Matt.18: 3). In the context of the last statement Jesus goes on to warn those who would cause **"...one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin..."** (Matt 18:6) that even a horrible death would be a better fate for them than to do so. All this makes it clear that there is a time in youth when sin is not reckoned.



2. "I Was Alive Once." A second piece of evidence comes from descriptions given in Scripture of coming to accountability. In Romans 7:7-9 Paul details the effect that divine law has upon man's relationship with God. Paul points out that though law is not sin itself, once it is declared it defines sin (Rom. 7:7). Thus when an individual violates law, sin comes to life and he or she dies spiritually (Rom. 7:8-9). In the midst of this discussion Paul declares **"I was alive once without the law..."** (Rom. 7:9). It is clear that Paul is not claiming innocence in ignorance (see Romans 3:19), he was born under Mosaic Law (Phil. 3:3-7). So when would Paul have been *alive without the law?* Clearly, before he reached the moral maturity to understand law and choose to violate it! Along these same lines, the prophet Isaiah, in speaking of the childhood of the Messiah describes a time **"... before the child shall know to refuse the evil and choose the good..."** (Isaiah 7:16). It is clear that there is such a time, as seen in God's dealings with the children and adults who came out of Egypt. When they refused to enter Canaan God forced them to wander in the wilderness forty more years. The adults died in the wilderness, yet those under twenty-one years of age were not held accountable for this sin and were allowed to enter Canaan. This clearly illustrates that we come to accountability with maturity.



3. New Testament Baptism. The final evidence relates to what the Bible teaches about baptism. We find that Scripture teaches that faith, repentance, and confession are all prerequisites to baptism. Mark 16:16 teaches **"He who believes and is baptized will be saved..."** Romans 10:10 declares, **"For with the heart one believes to righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made to salvation."** Finally, Acts 2:38 commands, **"... Repent and let everyone of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ..."** There is a time in a person's life when all three of these things are impossible. An infant cannot believe, confess, or repent. Second we find that Scripture is totally silent regarding the baptism of even a single child. Even when a large group turns to Christ we are told **"... both men and women were baptized"** (Acts 8:12) yet no mention is made of the baptism of children. All these factors