

Responsibility

The Western world is undergoing a profound demographic shift. The few who are aware of it find it alarming. And it's irreversible. It's this: Our population is declining, sharply. People don't want to have children! Young people don't want even to get married. The total number of people living in Europe and in America is increasing only because of migration from other parts of the world. How to account for this? We don't want to marry because that limits our personal freedoms, and having children does that to an even greater extent. We are an effete civilization that has retreated into pagan self-indulgence. We have today a crisis of narcissism. More penetratingly, we have a crisis of responsibility. We eschew responsibility.

God created Adam and immediately gave him a set of responsibilities. He had a role to fulfill, work to do, and a commandment to obey. (The Hebrew word for responsibility derives from *shamar*, the word in Genesis 2:15 that means "a duty to keep, watch over, or guard.") Man wasn't placed on earth to live as he pleased. He was (is) here to serve His Creator, and he is accountable to Him. When God gave Adam a wife, Adam then had even more responsibilities, viz., to care for her. But he was not the responsible person he should have been. He didn't throw the wicked serpent out of the Garden as he should have, and he didn't oversee what his wife was doing at the forbidden tree. Failure! Failure to be responsible is part of being in the Adamic race, of being human. Marriage and procreation ineluctably involve great responsibilities but, because of selfishness, we don't want them.

It is godly to be responsible. God is an intensely responsible Person. He is responsible for the care of His Creation by, for example, providing for its creatures. He is forever faithful to His chosen people, Israel. He fulfilled His promises in the Old Testament to redeem a sinful humanity. He took on Himself the responsibility for sin although it cost Him much suffering. Being responsible manifests God's inherent goodness. When we're irresponsible, consciously or not, we're being anti-theistic; we're repudiating our creational image and likeness of God. Being a responsible person, in contrast, mirrors God's perfect Person.

We covet autonomy so as to gratify the self. And we avoid, despise even, the responsibilities of living in family, of living in society. Family life in modern America, that is, a sense of belonging to a certain group of people with mutual responsibilities, is slowly vanishing. Young people move away, pursue their careers and their interests elsewhere, and return to parents only when . . . yes, when necessary. Parents of little ones push them into child-care, medicate them to control their behavior, send them to professional tutors and counselors, and the kids grow up (how else!) dysfunctional. Our schools—at all levels—indoctrinate young people with ideologies that promote irresponsibility, thus today's curricula obsess over sex education, Darwinism, humanism, and Marxism, to name a few. Students in our best colleges believe that good grades are an entitlement. Our pop culture is fiercely hedonistic. The work habits of Americans, especially of our young people, is laughable; employers can't get them even to show up! People on welfare believe that that's an entitlement. Government seeks to have its citizens identify, not with a traditional family, but with the nation. In Communist countries, the nationalistic movement is more overt and enforced: Government is the Party and the nation is the Party, and it's that Party that the people must identify with and be loyal and responsible to (or else). That movement is here in America, although it's covert. All modernity can be characterized by this one thing: The assiduous personal avoidance of responsibility as well as the deliberate, systemic corruption of responsibility. Although subtle, it's one of the more odious aspects of sin.

The general movement toward personal freedoms and away from responsibilities has invaded the Church, even the evangelical churches. The Gospel is not free grace! The Gospel comes with heavy responsibilities. Thus, Jesus looses us from the power of sin, so that we're free to be godly. (Most people and all secular people would hold that clause I just wrote to be incoherent; but it's not incoherent, so I'll repeat it.) If we believe in Jesus, He empowers us to repudiate sin, freeing us from our prior bondage to sin, so that we can be like God. Or, we can, if we prefer, if we so desire, continue to sin; the choice seems to be ours. But God holds us responsible for our choice. God gave us (a measure of) free will to make choices, but He expects us to respond to all that's in His Word and to His redemptive initiatives responsibly.

When we become a follower of Jesus, God adopts us as one of His sons. That means we're responsible to our Father to obey Him, to serve Him, to be like Him, and to be loyal to Him. Sonship means more than status, it means being responsible to honor Father. And Father has the right to discipline us if we fail to do as He has explicitly revealed. So we need to know God and know His Word, and commit to being a responsible son.

Being a follower of Jesus means it's our responsibility to be like Him. So we must work at being transformed into a Christ-like character. And we're responsible to grow His Church, which means sharing the Gospel and instructing converts in godliness. And we're responsible to love others in the church, to help them with their needs and to bless them. And we're responsible to be Spirit-filled fruit-bearers, working righteousness in the time we're here. We're responsible to glorify God in all that we do and all that we are. The responsibilities are unavoidable.

We have a duty to fulfill the Law of Christ (1 Corinthians 9:21b and Galatians 6:2). What's the Law of Christ? It's everything that Jesus taught and commanded, both when He was here bodily and by His Spirit thru the written New Testament. The Law of Christ is an expansion of the law to love God and to love others. Any notion that we're free from obligations and responsibilities just because we believe in Jesus (whatever we suppose that may mean) is self-deception. Please note: I am not arguing for a legalistic form of salvation! I am, rather, explaining to us modern readers, imbued with a worldly sense of liberty, that being a follower of Jesus is a call to a transcendent godly life, and that it's humble, loving obedience to the will of Christ that

Something else: Modernity has heightened individualism to such an exaggerated level that identifying with others seems forced or phony. It's not phony. We were created to be social beings. All humans are one race deriving from Adam, so we're all brothers (in a sense) with brotherly obligations. Superimposed on that is our common identity as members of Christ's body. That creates a whole additional set of responsibilities. And there's the moral imperative of knowing that God exists and that salvation from certain condemnation is freely available. We have an absolute moral duty to share the Gospel with all others, a duty that cannot be relegated or ignored. Believing the Gospel creates this responsibility.

We do not and cannot fulfill our God-ordained responsibilities by merely sitting thru a Sunday morning church service. There's no such thing as a passive believer in Jesus. To "believe," according to Scripture (James Chapter 2, for example, but elsewhere as well) demands a commitment to efface self so as to actively, fervently, lovingly and obediently exalt Jesus. We abandon whatever fantasy we may have had about "freedom" to live as we please and, instead, assume the responsibilities of discipleship, sonship and servant-hood. In all this, there is joy to be had, peace to be experienced, as well as a sense of transcendence. So, dear readers, let's be faithful in the brief time that remains.