A Special Note from Bill Cleveland, Sojourners Group Leader

Hello Sojourners!

This past Sunday's sermon from Pastor Andy on Sin & Forgiveness highlighted Romans 5:8 – "But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us." God's prevenient grace is available to us before we are aware of Him. Andy's illustration of hiding from his parents points to God's searching for us when we don't know we're lost. While this is true for individuals, it can also apply to groups. Israel was lost when they strayed from God's plan and began to worship idols. However, it is only as individuals that we find salvation from our lost-ness. An old saying is, "God has no grandchildren" meaning our belonging to a family or group does not bring us to salvation – that comes only one-on-one with our Heavenly Father. Secondly, when we are "found" by God, He begins to change us from within. He loves us just as we are, but loves us too much to leave us that way. I'm sure Andy's parents, once they found him and hugged him and kissed him, had some words of instruction to share with him regarding what appropriate behavior on his part should be. Likewise, when we are reborn in Christ, we grow from spiritual babies to responsible adults as Jesus rebuilds us in the image of the Father. Here is an article that describes the ways God's word addresses our individual responsibility for our behavior, including our attitude toward those who are different from us.

What does the Bible say about personal responsibility?

Part of growing up is taking responsibility for oneself. We start as infants with no personal responsibility whatsoever—everything that we need done is done for us. As we progress through the various stages of childhood, we take on more and more responsibility. We learn to tie our own shoes, clean our own rooms, and turn in our own homework. We learn that responsibility has its rewards—and irresponsibility has other, less-than-desirable effects. In many ways, the difference between a child and a man is his willingness to take personal responsibility for his actions. As Paul says, "When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me" (1 Corinthians 13:11).

The Bible teaches the concept of personal responsibility: "The one who sins is the one who will die. The child will not share the guilt of the parent, nor will the parent share the guilt of the child. The righteousness of the righteous will be credited to them, and the wickedness of the wicked will be charged against them" (Ezekiel 18:20). Personal responsibility is closely related to the law of sowing and reaping (Galatians 6:7–8). "Tell the righteous it will be well with them, for they will enjoy the fruit of their deeds. Woe to the wicked! Disaster is upon them! They will be paid back for what their hands have done" (Isaiah 3:10–11).

The commands of the Old Testament were attached to blessings for obedience and penalties for disobedience; in other words, the Law emphasized the responsibility of individuals to respond in morally appropriate ways to God's revealed truth. God clearly defined right and wrong, and His people were expected to do what was right. This has been the case ever since the Garden of Eden, when Adam was given a specific command and expected to obey it. Later, Adam's son Cain was warned by God that he would be held personally responsible for his actions (Genesis 4:7).

Achan was held responsible for his sin at Jericho (Joshua 7:14–15). Jonah was held responsible for his choice to run from the Lord (Jonah 1:7–8). The Levites were held responsible for the care of the tabernacle (Numbers 18:5). The deacons of the early church took personal responsibility for meeting some practical needs of the church (Acts 6:3). Paul was given the responsibility to blaze a gospel trail to the Gentiles (Ephesians 3:2).

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The Bible expects us to take personal responsibility in all areas of life. Able-bodied people should work for their food. "The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat" (2 Thessalonians 3:10). Men are to take responsibility for providing for their households (1 Timothy 5:8

At times, people try to avoid personal responsibility, usually through blame-shifting. Adam tried to blame Eve for his sin (Genesis 3:12). Cain tried to dodge responsibility (Genesis 4:9). Pilate attempted to absolve his guilt in the matter of the crucifixion of Christ: "'I am innocent of this man's blood,' he said. 'It is your responsibility!'" (Matthew 27:24). Ultimately, attempts to pass the buck are futile. "You may be sure that your sin will find you out" (Numbers 32:23).

Each one of us has the personal responsibility to "repent and believe the good news" (Mark 1:15) and then to glorify the Lord with good works (Ephesians 2:10). "Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life" (1 John 5:12). Those who choose to reject the truth of God "are without excuse" (Romans 1:20). We cannot evade our personal responsibility to exercise faith in Christ.

Source: *gotquestions.org*.