

TRAVEL AT YOUR OWN RISK

"So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God" (Romans 14:12).

As you have traveled by automobile, I am sure that you have observed the signs along the highway in conspicuous places, printed in large letters, and easily read as the car went by. The proper persons had erected these signs for the convenience, guidance, and warning of all who traveled along the highway. The signs represented the wisdom and experience of those who had traveled the roads and were familiar with them. Reading these signs, you perhaps thought of the great highway of life which all of us travel, and perhaps lifted into a higher meaning some of the roadway signs which you saw. These signs came to stand for certain basic truths and principles of life.

I am sure you have observed the sign, "Travel at your own risk." In some instances it was introduced by another statement -- "Road under construction," or "Bridge condemned." Thus the authorities not only warned the traveler to be cautious and careful, but absolved the county or state of responsibility in case of accident on that part of the road so designated. If the traveler experienced an injury on the road, he could not bring suit and get damages. He was traveling at his own risk.

I. Your Responsibility.

In the long journey of life which we are all taking, every man travels at his own risk. You are the responsible party. Your friends; your neighbors, your parents, your teachers, and your relatives are not the responsible ones, but you yourself. You do the traveling and you incur the risks, whatever they are. Another proverb expresses this in familiar language, "Every man has his own life to live."

The very beginning of the human race shows that each man travels at his own risk, and that he is a responsible and an accountable creature. He was placed in a garden where everything was fair and favorable, and where he was, nevertheless, free and responsible, and had to take the risks of a forbidden tree. If he ate of the fruit of this tree, sorrow and suffering were sure to follow. The garden of life always has its prohibitions, restrictions, and dangers. Life is great, but it has great risks and solemn responsibilities of which no man can divest himself. Some speak of life as a game where we play opposite an invisible opponent who checkmates us at our slightest blunder. Others have thought of life as a battlefield where each man must fight his own battle. There is no discharge from this warfare which is appointed unto man. When King Ahab was commanded to give battle to the Syrians, he inquired, "Who shall command the battle?" The answer of the prophet was, "Thou!" That is a word God's prophet speaks to every one of us. The battle is ours. We alone can command it. If we fail in this battle, the only one to blame is ourselves.

There are powerful currents in the world that tend to submerge the individual in a sea of collectivism. There are philosophies that say, "The state is everything; the individual is insignificant." There are schools of thought that would sacrifice all sanctities of personality to the supposed good of the community. The tendency of such types of thinking is to destroy a sense

of personal responsibility, and to cause people to move as the tides move, and to rise and fall with the waves.

In our country, as we all know, there has been a wider and wider extension of what we may call public services or socialized responsibility. In our day there has been a growing tendency to put more and more responsibility upon the state. There was a time when the functions of the government were limited to the protection of life, liberty, and property. But modern socialism wants the government to do everything for us. And, of course, socialism aims at the complete annihilation of personal responsibility. It would remove from every person the obligation to think, choose, act, and provide for himself. Do you want a job? Let the government furnish you one. Do you want to build a home? Let the government make you a loan. Do you want medical and hospital services? Let the government provide them. Do you want sickness and old-age security? Let the government guarantee you that you shall have them. On and on we go. That sort of thing is what the majority of people in our country want.

II. Your Responsibility Cannot Be Shifted.

The chapter from which the text is taken enunciates the great principle of individual responsibility and personal accountability to God. It tells us that we cannot get lost in the crowd; that we cannot transfer our responsibilities to another person or to any combination of individuals. God's Word repeatedly emphasizes man's personal accountability to God. It plainly says, "Every one of us shall give account of himself to God." Without exception we are responsible.

Many attempts are made today to relieve men of responsibility, and along life's highway many false signs are posted telling the traveler that he travels, not at his own risk, but at another's. Some have tried to relieve man of responsibility on the ground of heredity, that the invisible hand of yesterday, of the generations back of him, have pushed him along the road of his transgression. Others have tried to persuade us that our environment is the responsible party, and that what we are and what we do are the inevitable result of our surroundings. There is much in heredity and much in environment, but neither one of them absolves man of his own individual responsibility. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die."

In the case of the first journey and disaster, the man blamed the woman; and, incidentally, blamed God, too. He said, "The woman thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat." When God asked the woman about it, she blamed the serpent, saying, "The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat." How true to human nature, which always seeks to put its load of guilt on the shoulders of someone else! Yet none of those involved were relieved of responsibility or exempted from punishment. Visit any prison you please, but you will not find a prisoner who will acknowledge that he deserves to be there. Each one will blame someone else, or some set of circumstances, for his being there.

We say of man that he is a responsible being. But responsible means answerable. To whom is man answerable? To himself? Yes, certainly. He must answer at the

bar of his own conscience for every choice that he makes. But he is not the only one to whom he is responsible. To society? Yes, assuredly. Society has a perfect right to hold him to a reckoning, to exact payment, and to an accounting for everything in his conduct which has been injurious to his fellowmen. But that is not all. Beyond those tribunals is another, the tribunal of the Lord. Man must give an account to Him, Who refuses to show respect of persons or partiality. That "every one of us shall give account of himself to God" is the inevitable concomitant of life.

Somebody once asked Daniel Webster what was the most important thought that ever occupied his mind. If there were anything trifling in the spirit which prompted the question, the answer must have removed it effectually. In his slow and solemn way, Mr. Webster replied, "The most important thought that ever occupied my mind was that of my individual responsibility to God." This responsibility is one which cannot be communicated to another person. The great and famous William Edward Gladstone once remarked that to him the greatest consideration in life was a sense of his personal responsibility to God. That is the very thought that occupied the mind of Paul when he wrote our text and sought to lay those weighty words upon the minds of all who might read them, "So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God." Each of us is responsible to the living Lord, Who sees, knows, and judges.

III. Your Responsibility Involves An Accounting.

For what are you accountable to the Lord?

1. Your response to Christ the Saviour.

Like Pilate, every one faces life's most important question, "What shall I do then with Jesus which is called Christ?" You must either receive or reject Christ as Saviour. You should receive Him as your personal Saviour, and come into right relationship with Him, if you have not done so. If you have not received Christ as your Saviour, do not blame your parents, companion, children, relatives, or acquaintances. If you are not a Christian, it is your own fault, and not of anyone else. "Every one of us (not two or more of us) shall give account of himself to God." The right thing for you to do with Christ is to receive Him as your Saviour, enthrone Him as the Lord of your heart and life, confess Him before others, yield yourself to Him in full surrender, and spend your life in His service. If you refuse to receive Him as your Saviour, do not expect him to admit you to heaven. Always remember that you must render an account in person to Christ for your rejection of Him.

2. Your words.

For the proper use of your tongue you are responsible and accountable. With their tongues people sin against God, against others, and against themselves. In Psalm 106:33 we read of Moses: "He spake unadvisedly with his lips." Because of this, he was not permitted to lead the Israelites into the promised land. Who knows how often your lips have caused the Lord to withhold His blessing from you! Christ said, "But I say unto you, That every idle word that men speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be con-

demned" (Matthew 12:36-37). What solemn declarations!

3. Your deeds.

Every one of us must give an account of himself to God for his conduct in life. You can't blame others for your own misdeeds. God will hold you responsible for what you do. Temptation may come to you through others, but for what you do in the face of temptation you are responsible. God is entitled to the adoration of your heart and the obedience of your life. Your actions show what you are, just as a tree is known by its fruits. For every act that you perform you shall be held accountable when you appear before the Lord. There is no exception.

4. Your use of talents.

Every endowment which you possess has been given to you by the Lord. God has given you one or more talents. Regardless of the number of talents that you possess, you are responsible for the right use of them.

After all, you are only the steward or trustee of what you call your own. You are personally responsible for a careful and constructive use of all your faculties and abilities. If you are inclined to use the resources and faculties which God has given you in trying to please yourself, let me warn you that a day of reckoning is sure to come. Exercise to the fullest extent the ability which God has given you in the particular field in which He has placed you.

It is not a question of how much ability you have. It is simply a question of whether or not you are willing to give the ability you do possess to Christ. Are you willing?

One day in 1873, a great crowd gathered in London as David Livingstone was being laid to rest. It was said to be the largest crowd ever gathered on the streets of London up to that time. Multiplied thousands were there to pay their last respects to this great explorer and missionary statesman. He had tramped from the north to the south, from the east to the west of Africa, and had literally made a cross on that great continent. And in the very heart of Africa he had laid down his life. Loving servants cut out David Livingstone's heart and buried it there, before they sent the body to England to be laid in honor in Westminster Abbey.

In that vast crowd of people that day was seen an old man completely unkempt, long hair matted with dirt, his face covered with whiskers. He was dressed in shabby old clothes and with shoes worn out at the toes. He had on an old hat that he had pulled down over his head. The old man was weeping bitterly. Someone asked him why he wept. He said, "I'll tell you why. Davie and I were brought up in the same village. We attended the same school. We attended the same Sunday School. We worked at the same jobs together. But Davie went his way, and I went mine. Today he's honored by a nation and by all the world. I have nothing to look forward to but a drunkard's grave. I thought he was losing his life in the heart of Africa and I was happy in the choice I had made; but I see now I put the wrong world first."

The secret of whatever success David Livingstone had in Africa, in opening up that great continent for the cause of Christ and Christian missions lay in the fact that he was willing to give all the abilities that he possessed to Jesus Christ, to be used as the Lord saw fit.

You may live your life in one of three ways. You may squander that life in despicably low, sensuous, sinful living. Or, you may live your life in a manner that is exemplary and apparently noble, yet your life may be wasted if you are thinking only of yourself. Or you may invest that life for Christ and others.

5. Your influence.

Influence is that power that you exert over others by your thoughts, words, and deeds. You cannot think, speak, and act without influencing others. God sees, knows, and records everything that you think, say, and do, and you are going to give an account to Him for these things. Many things would not be said and done if you would only remember that you will have to give an account for them. You are responsible for what you are, for what you say, for what you do, and for what you purpose to do. It is for self that you must give an account to God.

Do not indulge in the hope and expectation that the law of cause and effect, of reaping as you sow, while true and operative in the case of others, will for some reason suspend its operation in your case. Multitudes act as if they could beat the system by which the moral world is run, and for some reason be exempted from its exactions and retributions. Every man travels at his own risk and must bear his own burden of responsibility.