

**A Refutation
of an
“Age of
Accountability”**

This Bible study's purpose is to refute the concept of an "age of accountability." It will use scripture verses from the King James Bible. The arguments presented "for" an "age of accountability" will appear first in plain font. The arguments "against" will appear afterward in italics.

For: That there is an age of accountability is clearly taught in Scripture. This does not mean, however, that an infant is not a sinner or that he is first "saved" and then "lost" again. If the latter were true, in what sense would he have ever been "saved?"

Against: *That is a great point! But that is exactly what the "age of accountability" means, how could it not? Having an "age of accountability" means that everyone is born going to heaven and then loses their "built-in" salvation at some point. Believers must then choose to "get it back." If it is not being "saved" as a baby and then "lost" again, what other explanation is there? The Bible teaches that salvation is permanent, a "done deal," it can never be taken away.*

For: Rather, Scripture indicates that although from conception infants have a sinful nature (e.g., Psalm 51:5) God does not hold them accountable for their sins until they reach the point of personal choice.

Against: *I think this fails to distinguish between us having a sinful nature, and being accountable for our sins. Since the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we still have a sinful nature, but no one has been held accountable for sins. We receive salvation simply by believing that Christ died to take away our accountability.*

Next is the psalm David wrote after his affair with Bathsheba. What David writes is true for all of us, even after the cross. We are conceived in sin. The difference is that now, Jesus has already paid for that sin.

Psalm 51:1-5

(To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet came unto him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba.) Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out

my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest. **Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.**

For: An important passage in this connection is

Romans 5:13-14

(For until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression, who is the figure of him that was to come. Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned:

For: Although all men were “in Adam” and thus clearly sinners by nature and descent, notice that Paul tells us that “**sin is not imputed when there**

is no law” that is, when there is no “knowledge of sin” for “by the law is the knowledge of sin.”

Romans 3:20

Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: **for by the law is the knowledge of sin.**

Against: *The argument seems to be that because babies do not know the law, there is no sin imputed to them, but this mistakes fulfillment of the law for the absence of the law. He misses the point that there is no law for us today, but the law has not gone away, Christ fulfilled it for us.*

Matthew 5:18

For verily I say unto you, **Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.**

Against: *The law has not gone away but there is no sin to impute today because Christ paid for everyone’s sin. To be saved, they just have to accept the payment!*

2 Corinthians 5:18-19

And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; To wit, **that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them;** and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.

For: The Apostle says later in this same epistle:

“...I had not known sin but by the law...”

Romans 7:7-9

What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. **Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law:** for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet. ⁸But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence. For without the law sin was dead. ⁹**For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died.**

Against: *It is like having a disease—sin—that does not manifest itself at first so you don't know*

you have it. When you do find you have this disease, then you see just how sick you really are!

Against: *The law does make a distinction about sin committed in ignorance or sin committed knowingly, but it was still sin and the priests had to make payment.*

Numbers 15:29-30

Ye shall have one law for him that sinneth through ignorance, both for him that is born among the children of Israel, and for the stranger that sojourneth among them. **But the soul that doeth ought presumptuously**, whether he be born in the land, or a stranger, the same reproacheth the LORD; and **that soul shall be cut off from among his people.**

For: Even the Old Testament sheds light on this point, for it also clearly teaches that God recognizes some are not morally accountable. Consider the following passages:

Jonah 4:11

And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, **wherein are more than sixscore thousand**

persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?

Against: *120,000 is the entire population of Nineveh, not just the children in the city. The phrase, “that cannot discern between their right hand and left hand” is not that they are so young that they literally don’t know the difference between their right hand and their left hand, but the people of Nineveh do not have any sense, they do not know right from wrong. We might use the expression, “don’t know which end is up.” They were ignorant and God wanted to spare them.*

Another verse that people “for” an “age of accountability” use to show that God recognizes some are not morally accountable, follows.

Isaiah 7:14-16, 21-22

Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. Butter and honey shall he eat, that he may know to refuse the evil, and choose the good. **For before the child shall know to refuse the evil, and choose**

the good, the land that thou abhorrest shall be forsaken of both her kings.

²¹And it shall come to pass in that day, that a man shall nourish a young cow, and two sheep; And it shall come to pass, for the abundance of milk that they shall give he shall eat butter: for butter and honey shall every one eat that is left in the land.

***Against:** These passages indicate a time period for a specific child (it is Jesus Christ,) rather than the specific age of any child. The child is to eat butter and honey so that he may know to refuse evil and choose good. But before that can happen, the land will be blighted and will lose her king. After that, there will be so few people in the land that a young cow and 2 sheep will provide butter and honey for everyone so at least they who are left will know to refuse evil and choose good.*

***Against:** Next is another verse used to show that God does not consider children morally accountable. (Remember no one is held accountable in the current Age of Grace.)*

Deuteronomy 1:38-40

But Joshua the son of Nun, which standeth before thee, he shall go in thither: encourage him: for he shall cause Israel to inherit it.

Moreover **your little ones, which ye said should be a prey, and your children, which in that day had no knowledge between good and evil**, they shall go in thither, and unto them will I give it, and they shall possess it. But as for you, turn you, and take your journey into the wilderness by the way of the Red sea.

Against: *This passage was written when God told Israel to go in and possess the land of Canaan and they refused. They were afraid of the giants and so would not go in and fight the giants as God told them to do. God said their little ones and children “in that day” had no knowledge between good and evil on that particular topic. They were not involved in the decision to disobey Him so they would be allowed to go into the land. The people who did know what God wanted and refused to do it would not go into the land.*

Numbers 13:30-33

And Caleb stilled the people before Moses, and said, Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it. **But the men that went up with him said, We be not able to go up against the people; for they are stronger than we.** And they brought up an evil report of the land which they had searched unto the children of Israel, saying, **The land, through which we have gone to search it, is a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof;** and all the people that we saw in it are men of a great stature. **And there we saw the giants, the sons of Anak,** which come of the giants: and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight.

For: From Numbers 14:29 we learn that the “little ones” referred to in Deuteronomy 1:39 were 19 years old! We would consider that to be rather old today.

Numbers 14:28-32

Say unto them, As truly as I live, saith the LORD, as ye have spoken in mine ears, so will I do to you: **Your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness; and all that were numbered of you, according to**

your whole number, from twenty years old and upward, which have murmured against me, Doubtless ye shall not come into the land, concerning which I swear to make you dwell therein, save Caleb the son of Jephunneh, and Joshua the son of Nun. **But your little ones, which ye said should be a prey, them will I bring in,** and they shall know the land which ye have despised. But as for you, your carcasses, they shall fall in this wilderness.

Against: Twenty years old and up is used because that is the minimum age of fighting men in Israel. Remember, Israel was going to have to fight to take the land that God had promised them. The men 20 years old and older could have obeyed God and fought to take the land. The ones under 20 were not required to fight, and were not going to be punished with the ones who were required and refused. BTW: The 19 years old were probably considered “children” instead of “little ones.”

Numbers 1:3

From **twenty years old and upward, all that are able to go forth to war in Israel:** thou and Aaron shall number them by their armies.

Against: *The age of 20 had nothing to do with an “age of accountability,” but with an ability “to go forth to war.”*

For: It should be remembered, however, that the commonly used age of 12 is based solely on religious tradition’s faulty reading of Luke 2:42. There is nothing in the Scriptures that authorizes such a date. (*Luke 2:42, “And when he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast.”*)

For: It seems best simply to recognize that the age of accountability varies from individual to individual and especially from society to society. The fact remains, however, that the scriptures clearly teach that God recognizes an age of accountability. When an individual reaches the point in his or her life where they do possess the “knowledge between good and evil” they have arrived. This is why it is extremely important to

always keep the good news of God's love and grace before young children so that when they do perceive sin to be sin they also know of God's wonderful provision in behalf of sinners.

Against: *This comes close to seeing the "against" position at the end, "When they do perceive sin to be sin, they also know of God's wonderful provision on behalf of sinners." Ironically, when a person knows about salvation, he finds that he is not accountable!! Christ has taken the sins from everyone.*

For: And what about little ones who die before they reach the point of personal accountability? Again, the Old Testament is helpful. David said concerning his little child who had just died, "I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me" (2 Samuel 12:23.) Does not this imply that David had implicit faith that his little child, like David himself, was saved?

2 Samuel 12:23

And he said, While the child was yet alive, I fasted and wept: for I said, Who can tell whether GOD will be gracious to me, that the child may live?

But now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? can I bring him back again? **I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me.**

Against: *We cannot apply all scripture to ourselves. That is the basis for studying the Bible dispensationally. We cannot assume that what applies to this baby applies to every child who dies. God knows everyone before he/she is conceived. It is not a stretch to believe that God knows the hearts of each and every person before he/she is born. He knows which hearts accept Him and which hearts do not. God may have even told David that he would see his child again.*

For: Still, in another dispensation that ours, Christ declared

Matthew 18:14

Even so **it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish.**

For: Infants are saved if they die before becoming morally accountable. Saved—not because they are innocent, nor because of

religious ceremony, they are saved because Christ died for sinners, for them, and because it is not God's will that even one of them should perish.

Against: *RJ wrote earlier in this article:*

This does not mean, however, that an infant is not a sinner or that he is first "saved" and then "lost" again. If the latter were true, in what sense would he have ever been "saved?" I find this contradictory.

The following verse tells us that God will have all men to be saved. Sadly, we know that does not happen.

1 Timothy 2:4

For this is good and acceptable in the sight of **God our Saviour; Who will have all men to be saved**, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.

Against: *There is no doubt that God does not want anyone, no matter their age, to perish. The problem is, when people have free will, some will choose to perish, regardless of how old they are. Using RJ's reasoning, "Christ died for sinners, for*

them, and it is not God's will that even one of them should perish" is not a good argument for saying that all children below a certain age are saved. If that were true, since He doesn't want anyone to perish, why not argue that He saves everyone?

For: At this point Deuteronomy 1:39 is again helpful, for it indicates that God can give gifts to those who are not yet personally accountable—and that He can give those gifts apart from their personal choice.

Against: *Here is an even better verse to explain that God does just that—for everyone!*

Romans 5:8

But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, **while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.**

Against: *This is a no-brainer, Christ has done this! All of us have been given a gift, forgiveness, apart from our personal choice. Everyone is forgiven, without asking to be. We don't have to accept the gift, but it was given.*

For: Thus He is perfectly free to save all who die before they reach the age of accountability and it is evident from Scripture that He does. He foreknew which little ones would die and He has chosen to save them.

Against: *So close...He knew the hearts of those children (and us) before the foundation of the world. He didn't need to wait for any of us to attain a certain age to know which of us were going to choose Him.*

Ephesians 1:4-6

According as **he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself,** according to the good pleasure of his will, To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.

For: That He is free to do so is indisputable since “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them”

2 Corinthians 5:19

To wit, that God was in Christ, **reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.**

Against: *The previous verse applies to everyone, not just babies and children. God knows each of us intimately, before we are ever conceived. God, in His foreknowledge, knows who will accept Him and who will not. Ironically, it is for our learning that God gives us the chance to accept His forgiveness. When we are given the chance, we accept Jesus Christ. This is not news to God, He knows us intimately.*

Against: *Why, then, does God even have us believers “go through the motions” of life here on this earth? If He knows who will end up in heaven already, why not just take us there? The next passage tells us why God endures the unbelievers with longsuffering.*

Romans 9:22-24

What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, **endured with much**

longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory, Even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?

Against: *God endures the “vessels of wrath fitted to destruction” (unrepentant unbelievers) for our sake. He shows us (the vessels of mercy which He had afore prepared unto glory) the riches of His glory by demonstrating how much He has done to save all people. We have God’s word that His grace unto salvation “hath appeared to all men.” That is something that has already happened, to everyone, so everyone has the chance to be saved. God is preparing the people who choose Him for service.*

Titus 2:11-14

For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our

Saviour Jesus Christ; **Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.**

Against: *God has a specific purpose for each person as He forms them in the womb.*

Romans 12:6-8

Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; Or ministry, let us wait on our ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching; Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness.

1 Corinthians 12:18

But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him.

Isaiah 44:24

Thus saith the LORD, thy redeemer, and he that formed thee from the womb, I am the LORD that maketh all things; that stretcheth forth the

**heavens alone; that spreadeth abroad the earth
by myself;**

Elihu told Job that it was the Spirit of God that made him and God's breath that gave him life. It is the same with all of us.

Job 33:4

**The Spirit of God hath made me, and the breath
of the Almighty hath given me life.**

Against: *If there were an "age of accountability" we would be wise to celebrate all of those babies who were conceived but never born, and the babies and young children who died before the "age of accountability" because their salvation was assured!*

Against: *The parents of babies who are born and make it to adulthood always face the possibility that their child(ren) will not accept Jesus Christ and will spend eternity in hell. It cannot be that there is cause (assured salvation) to celebrate lives ending before they begin, or after so little time on earth.*

Babies and children are saved, or not saved, like the rest of us, by faith. God knows the content of each person's heart, whether he is a baby, child, or adult. He knows each of us, intimately, before we are even conceived. In fact, it is God that prepares us for His service. It is only for our benefit and learning that we, who grow to adulthood, are given the chance to choose eternal life by accepting His forgiveness, or choose eternal damnation by refusing to accept His forgiveness. People who do not grow to this point are saved or not saved based on God's perfect knowledge of their hearts.