

Although this hierarchy of responsibilities is grossly oversimplified and admits of exceptions, it can be used in helping us to answer the question, "For whom are we responsible?"

However, there is an additional dimension. We are asking not only "for which persons are we responsible?" but also "for which needs are we responsible?"

Responsibility, in terms of what human beings ought to be or to do, is ultimately fixed by God. Our obligations to God, to the state, to the church, to our family, to other individuals, and to ourselves, are defined by the general principles and the specific teachings, commands, exhortations, and examples found in those portions of God's Revelation that are directed to our obedience. Do the Scriptures tell us for which kinds of needs Christians are responsible? And further, is our responsibility somewhat conditioned upon our ability to meet those needs, in terms of certain practical limitations?

Notice what is not being advocated here. The doctrine that "ability conditions responsibility" (reminiscent of Pelagianism) is not being advocated as a general principle. We are responsible to obey the Law of God perfectly, even though as fallen, depraved persons we are morally unable to fulfill this responsibility.

But does God hold a person responsible to provide for the poor, if that person has nothing? Does God hold a person who is an invalid responsible to assist those who carry heavy physical burdens? Does God hold a person who has no musical ability responsible to join those who are providing music for the services of worship in the church? Does God hold a person who has very little intellectual ability responsible to teach other Christians in a formal teaching setting? Does God hold a person who is swallowed up in deep, physiologically-based depression responsible to counsel those who are having severe emotional problems?

The question here is, if a person is completely unable to do a particular thing (even with the aid of God's grace), is he nevertheless responsible to do that thing?

It does not seem reasonable that God would hold him responsible in such a case. But we must check the Scriptures, to see if what we think is reasonable or unreasonable in this connection comports with the revealed will of God!

Upon examination, the Bible is found to contain some references that appear to relate our responsibility to help others in need to our ability to provide such assistance.

In I Corinthians 16:1-2, Paul directs the Corinthian believers how to make the collection for the poor saints in Jerusalem. On the first day of each week, each believer is to