

# CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY

What is it? and Why is it important?

by

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By “corporate responsibility” we mean the biblical teaching that there is no such thing as a merely private, personal or individual faith. According to the Scriptures (1 Cor. 12:12-16), the people of God are like a body. The members of the body are related one to another. They are affected by the condition of the body (the church). And we do not think in a biblical way about ourselves, or others, if we do not take our corporate unity seriously. But, sad to say, this is a very common error. There is in American Evangelical thought, for example, the idea that one can belong to the invisible church regardless of what one’s visible affiliation may be. This tract seeks to demonstrate, from the bible, that this really is not true.

To begin with, then, please read 1 Kings 11:9-13. It tells of a very important period in the history of ancient Israel. The nation of Israel came to its greatest outward glory in the days of Solomon. But it was also in the days of Solomon that the outward glory was undermined from within. We know, for instance, that Solomon installed pagan temples for his wives right there in Jerusalem (1 Kings 11:7,8). So there was—before the death of Solomon—already a marked decline in zeal for the things of God. Solomon just did not have it to the same degree that David did. I point this out because we need to recognize that a period of decline always precedes great spiritual disasters. So the underlying cause of what came later was this decline in faithfulness. It characterized the entire body of the nation of Israel, but was especially seen in the acts of its leaders.

If you will now turn to 1 Kings 12:1-19, you will see what happened after Solomon died. The old united kingdom was now divided. It is also clear that both sides contributed to this tragic division. Solomon himself laid the groundwork for it. And then, later, Rehoboam’s folly greatly advanced it. But we also need to see that there was a reckless disregard for the Messianic promise—which had been given by God to the House of David—on the part of the ten tribes that rebelled to form the Northern Kingdom. So the division became a fact, and God said through his servant that—in the ultimate sense—even this calamity was of him. We must realize, in other words, that divisions of this kind are ultimately a manifestation of the sovereign will and control of God.

Had it stopped there it would not have been such a serious matter. But now the realities of the situation began to come out, 1 Kings 12:25-33 tells us what happened. Then a man of God—a prophet—was sent from Judah to denounce the altar which was then set up for worship in this new kingdom. What you had then—in the Northern Kingdom at this time—was a very serious act of apostasy. It was a deliberate and willful rejection of the divinely instituted house of worship, and plan of worship, revealed by the one true God. It was an official act of rejection of the divinely instituted sacrifices, the Levitical priesthood and temple (concerning which the Lord had said that he would cause his name to dwell there).

As a consequence of this, there were some—perhaps even some who had rashly followed

Jeroboam— who now thought better of it. If you consult 2 Chronicles 11:13-17, you will see what happened. It became clear that the Northern Kingdom—by the official acts of its leaders—had become apostate! They had, in other words, rejected God’s ordained way of worship in order to institute their own. Godly people, therefore, saw this as an inescapable time of decision. They realized that they had to make the decision not to remain involved in the apostasy, but to cleave and adhere to Rehoboam, the king of Judah. Even though many of them probably objected to his high-handed ways, yet they saw a vital difference between the kingdom that only had a man-made religion and the one that had a God-ordained religion. That was the difference between these two realms at this time in history. The religion of the Northern Kingdom in many ways aped and imitated the religion of Judah, but it was not the same religion at all because God had only ordained one place to which men could bring acceptable sacrifices, and that was his temple in Jerusalem.

By the way, we should not imagine that Jeroboam—when he set up calf worship—said, ‘Folks, I want you to worship a different god.’ That is not what the Hebrew tells us. What he said was, ‘Here, folks, here is Elohim! Here is your God!’ In other words, he employed the same religious terms—the same God words that they had always used—but he filled them with an entirely different meaning. We need to see that. He didn’t use a different word for God, but he did completely change the definition, or content of that word. Therefore, if you worshiped Elohim up there in the Northern Kingdom, you were worshiping with a different concept of God than you would if you went down to the Southern Kingdom and worshipped the true God at the place and in the manner that he had ordained.

As a consequence of this, God declared his judgment on the religion of the Northern Kingdom, and it came about in this manner (read 1 Kings 14:1-17a). In the sixteenth verse we find one of the momentous statements of the bible on the subject of corporate responsibility: “*...He will give Israel up because of the sins of Jeroboam, who sinned **and made Israel to sin.***” Look again at 1 Kings 15:30, which gives the reason why this marked the beginning of the end for the house of Jeroboam. What it says is this: everyone who continued to adhere to Jeroboam was unavoidably involved in the guilt, sin, and punishment of Jeroboam. Now that is what we have in mind when we talk of corporate responsibility. Everyone who remains in a church after it becomes apostate shares in its guilt and judgment.

Please turn now to 2 Chron. 13. Here we read that the King of Judah, Abijah, came up to the Northern Kingdom, and that there was war between Abijah and Jeroboam. The king of Israel—and the people who still followed him—vainly imagined that they could defeat God’s people. Abijah, on the other hand, was conscious of the difference between a true and a false kingdom. He knew the difference between those who really are God’s people and those who are not. And he was vindicated that day in a most remarkable way when, in spite of this clever entrapment scheme of Jeroboam, the Lord delivered his people. So we see that the calamities that came over the Northern Kingdom did indeed involve all of those who continued to adhere to Jeroboam. And if you know your bible, and the rest of the Old Testament story, you will know that the Northern Kingdom was carried into captivity at a much earlier time than the Southern Kingdom. It was carried away into Assyria, never to return again. But the Southern Kingdom of Judah, though it was carried into Babylonian captivity at a later time, yet had a remnant which was spared according to God’s unbreakable covenant promise.

The principle is this: the bible says Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, sinned **and made the people of Israel sin**. And the only way any Israelite could escape involvement was to do what certain Levites and other godly people of the Northern Kingdom did! When they realized what had happened they left the Northern Kingdom and went down and became part of the Southern Kingdom of Judah. And—in principle—the very same thing happened again in the first century when the Jewish church rejected Jesus as the Messiah. There is no need to go into great detail. But, in the first century, you had the people who claimed to be the people of the Messiah. If you went anywhere in the Roman Empire and asked, ‘Do you know anything about a people who believe in a Messiah?’ they would have said, ‘Oh, sure, there’s a synagogue of the Jews up the street and they are always talking about a Messiah who’s supposed to come.’ So there were two religious organizations at that time, both claiming to be people of the Messiah. But only one of them really was the people of the true Messiah. The other one had rejected Him.

In Matthew 23 we read of the judgment of God on the people of Israel in the first century. It was even more severe than the one that came in the time of Jeroboam (note, especially, Mt 23:37-38). In the first century—because the Jews redefined the meaning of the word “Messiah” so as to eliminate all thought of a humiliated, suffering, dying Christ, in favor of one who would only be victorious, powerful, and king-like—they became an apostate people. The words of the apostles about them are really quite strong. In Revelation 2:9 and 3:9 we see that Jesus himself called them Synagogues of Satan. Now just imagine that! Some of the members of the early Christian churches were related to people in those Synagogues. But Jesus says, “Those people are not members of a Synagogue of God, but of a synagogue of Satan.” So again the corporate principle is clear: it was no use to imagine that all was well with these people who stayed in the old church of the Scribes and Pharisees, instead of joining the Christians. It was no use pretending that they would still be acknowledged as God’s people.

Can you imagine the people of the churches at Smyrna or Philadelphia gathering together for ecumenical bible study or worship with members of the synagogue of Satan? ‘But,’ you might say, ‘couldn’t there have been some real believers there in the old Jewish organization?’ Yes, of course. But they were in mortal danger. That is why God said “*Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues*” (Rev. 18:4). And, if you look at John 12:42,43, you can see the proof that there were such people. In their heart of hearts they knew they were in the wrong assembly, but they had too much to lose in terms of this world so they decided to stay there. But you can’t do that without consequences, because God says in His Word, “*Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers.*” And He also says we had better leave or share in the plagues that are coming. One of the difficult things the Reformers had to deal with was precisely this problem: members of Reformed churches, at the time of the Reformation, would still foolishly gather for fellowship and worship with Roman Catholics. Well, it wasn’t right, and Calvin wrote a very powerful tract against it. So did John Knox in Scotland.

The same thing happened all over again in the events that led to the formation of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Did you ever hear of the Auburn Affirmation? It was signed in 1924 by almost 1,400 ministers of the Presbyterian Church. Do you know what the doctrines were that were called into question in that document? Well, here they are: (1) the inerrancy of the bible, (2) the virgin birth of Christ, (3) his substitutionary atonement, (4) his miracles and (5) his physical, bodily resurrection. The modernists said, ‘You don’t have to believe these things to be a Christian.’ And the people who led in the formation of the OPC said, ‘Oh yes you do. You don’t have the real Christ unless

you have the One who was born of the virgin Mary, worked mighty miracles, died to pay the terrible price of sin for his people, and rose on the third day in the self-same body in which he was crucified.’ Dr. Machen rightly said that the Modernist redefinition of Christian words had resulted in a different religion. He rightly said that the Presbyterian Church, at that time, was experiencing a clash between two religions, and that they could not coexist in peace. So our church came into existence. He was deposed from the ministry to punish him for his defense of the truth.

It would be nice to be able to say the Presbyterian Church in the USA has improved in the fifty years since the OPC came out of it, but they have not improved. They have become even worse. It has reached the place where a young man, who wants to be ordained in the Presbyterian Church, will not be ordained if he is not willing to ordain women to the ministry (because the bible says not to). But a man who denies the deity of Christ can obtain ordination. That is the kind of thing that separates us, and what I am troubled about is the fact that some of our people do not see that people who are involved in this apostasy are not ‘good Christians’ according to the bible. It is wrong to call them ‘good Christians’ for the same reason that it was wrong to call those people who stayed in the Northern Kingdom ‘good Israelites.’ You wouldn’t call those Jews who stayed under the Scribes and Pharisees—instead of the Apostles—‘good Israelites,’ would you? We don’t deny that they may be people who have conviction in their heart of hearts about Jesus. But the bible says you have to act in a manner consistent with your faith to have the biblical right to be acknowledged as a Christian. And we should not recognize those who remain yoked with unbelievers as ‘good Christians.’ Should we witness to them? Yes. Call them out? Yes. Say to them, ‘Don’t go on supporting that unbelief. Don’t go on paying for it. Come out from among them?’ By all means. But recognize them as they are in their complacency as ‘good Christians’? No. That just is not biblical.

We should be glad, at any time, to meet with other people in the community in a forum in which these issues are brought up, so that they can be challenged, and so that we can talk about the unbelief in which they are involved. But to act as if all is well, when it isn’t, dishonors our God—and it doesn’t help these people. How would you like it if you were paying money to support enemies of the Gospel, putting yourself under God’s judgment, and nobody warned you? Yet that is exactly what some are doing. People who live right up the street from us are putting money in the plate that goes to the World Council of Churches. They are financing enemies of the Gospel. I knew a missionary in New Zealand who was murdered in cold blood by terrorists in Thailand. And some of the Liberal churches have given money to terrorists! The fact that members of such churches don’t know about this, or care about this, doesn’t absolve them of responsibility. We can’t pretend that all is well just because we live in a nice peaceful neighborhood and want to get along. No, the issue is too big, too serious.

Think about it. Jeroboam the son of Nebat not only sinned himself, but **also made Israel sin.** No Israelite could escape this fact so long as he remained a part of that nation. May the Lord use this to stir your conscience so that you will act in consistency with what the bible teaches about ‘corporate responsibility.’