

## October 22 Adult Spiritual Growth Class Synopsis

### Life Worth Living Study – Week 6 – Chapter 3: Who Do We Answer To?

Chapter 3 of Life Worth Living is entitled “Who do we answer to?” The authors begin by re-visiting the introduction where it was suggested that our lives might, much to our dismay, be subject to judgment. It is stated that the whole book is driven by the thought that we might live more or less worthy lives – that one can in fact fail or succeed at being human. The chapter explores this question of who has standing to render this sort of judgement? Who do we answer to?

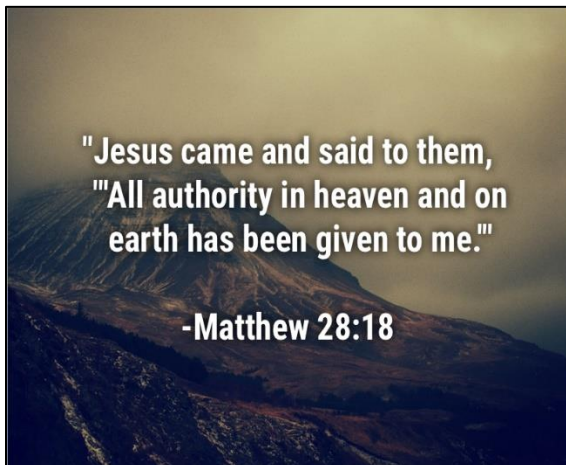
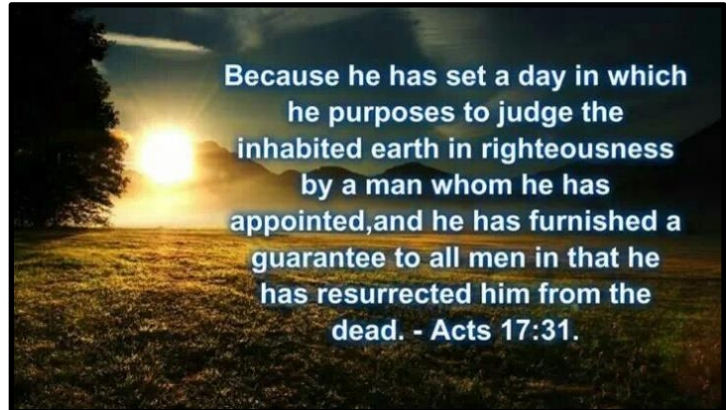
As followers of Christ, we look to Scripture for the answer. *Acts 17:31* tells us that Jesus is to be our righteous judge and thus we can await in expectation and hope, knowing and claiming *Romans 8:34*:

*Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.*

Jesus, the one who intercedes, instructs us in *Matthew 7*: “*Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?*”

God's standard of judgment is defined by his holy character. At birth, we are all deserving of His judgment. But, out of His infinitely rich mercy and steadfast love, He sent the perfect Lamb, Christ, to be the perfect sacrifice for our sins. Christ took on the judgment we deserved. Jesus did not teach against judging. He taught against a specific kind of judging. The type of judging He spoke against was a blind, ignorant, hypocritical, self-righteous judging that overlooks one's own faults, failures and sins and only sees faults, failures and sins in other people.

### Righteous Judgement



Because Jesus is both God and man, He is the perfect judge of mankind. He is not like sinful human rulers who at times judge unfairly and seek to fulfill their own agendas. Instead, Jesus states, “*I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me.*” (*John 5:30*) In *Matthew 28:18*, Jesus says, “*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.*” Similarly, in *John 5:27*, it is stated that God has given Jesus “*authority to execute judgment because he is the Son of Man.*” We can be assured that Jesus, our Intercessor, is a fair judge and will enact judgment according to His wisdom and righteousness.

The authors use the analogy of Smokey the Bear to lead into the topic of Smokey responsibility – ‘only you can prevent wildfires.’ Three distinct senses of responsibility are captured: First, there’s the “only you” – the *agent* of responsibility, the responsible self. It is stated that you have an inalienable responsibility for your life, choices, and actions. Even if you tried to give this responsibility away, that would still be a way of exercising it. The forest is the scope of your responsibility. To get a full understanding of our responsibilities, we have to answer the crucial question, ‘How big is our forest?’ The authors defer this question to Chapter 6.

## Who Is Our Authoritative Source?

### Smokey Responsibility



**Agent**



**Scope**

Here Smokey is the authoritative source of our responsibility to prevent forest fires. He represents the one to whom we are responsible. He defines the rules that put us under the obligation to handle fires responsibly. He assesses whether we are doing what we can and should prevent forest fires and he calls us to account when we fall short. Smokey is the lawgiver, judge and law enforcement official in one.

It is in this context that the chapter focuses on the question, ‘Where does our responsibility to live a certain kind of life come from?’ The authors speak to the perspective of us being our own “Smokeys”. If all responsibility comes down to ‘only you’ responsibility, the source of our responsibility is simply our own choices and whims. The problem is that if we answer only to ourselves to living whatever sort of life that we ourselves deem worthy, it is all too easy for our lives to feel arbitrary. Being the source of our responsibilities, we may be free to pursue our every whim, but we may be left with the suspicion that we are just products of those whims. The authors state that while we may have a profound responsibility to ourselves, we each have a conscience to which we should pay attention. The conscience must be an internalized impression of some nonarbitrary (and quite possibly external) source of responsibility. It is stated that if we want our choices to be meaningful, there is no escaping the bear. We need some ultimate source of our responsibilities beyond our choices.

The authors present a vision of life as given by Confucius, a Chinese philosopher, politician, and teacher of the Zhou Dynasty, whose message of knowledge, benevolence, loyalty, and virtue were the main guiding philosophy of China for thousands of years.

The key to Confucius' vision of life is:

'A man who respects his parents and elders would hardly be inclined to defy his superiors. A man who is not inclined to defy his superiors will never foment a rebellion. A gentleman works at the root. Once the root is secured, the *Way [Dao]* unfolds. To respect parents and elders is the root of humanity.'



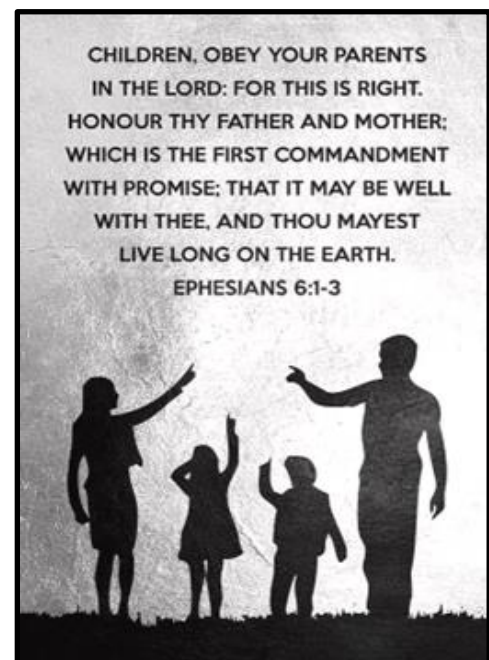
The authors point out that while the ancient world was gendered, Confucius was speaking of the well cultivated, flourishing human being. If you want a life worth living – if you want to pursue the Way, you will want to work at the root of what makes a human being truly *humane*. It is stated that we are constituted by the traditions we live in and by the relationships that gave (and gives) us life. Therefore how we live is not arbitrary at all. We live under the responsibility to those who gave us life. They mediate to us, to use Confucius' term, the very Way of heaven. Everything else follows from this responsibility to those who have come before us. It is the root of the dignity of the self, the peace of one's neighbors, the peace of all.

The authors put forth the question of what happens if something breaks the connection between root and branch as the history of civilization has shown. For Confucius, the local sources of responsibility only mediate and never supplant the ultimate source of responsibility: the Way of heaven itself.

It is asked: If heaven is what really counts, then might it not be best for heaven to speak for itself?

As Christians, we look to Scripture where God speaks. In *Ephesians 6:1-3*, Paul refers to the Torah, which is the first five books of the Old Testament. The commandment is originally found in *Exodus 20:12*, which states '*Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.*'

Paul notes that, of the Ten Commandments, this instruction is the first which comes with an explicit consequence. The promise is that of a blessed, long life. Specifically, this is a promise to Israel. But, in a generic sense, this is a common-sense truth which applies to everyone. Children who grow into disrespect and disobedience towards their parents usually have a much harder life. Learning to respect legitimate authority is key to personal success.



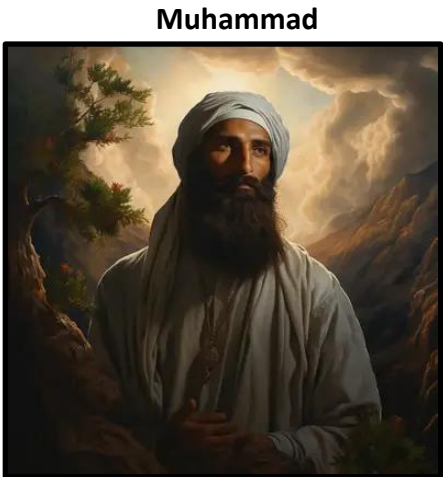
We also know from Scripture that history is filled with sin, brokenness and emptiness that has been the root of man inherited from generation to generation since the Garden. However, the Way has been made known. In 1 *Peter* 1:18-19, we are told: *'For you know that God paid a ransom to save you from the empty life you inherited from your ancestors. And it was not paid with mere gold or silver, which lose their value. It was the precious blood of Christ, the sinless, spotless Lamb of God.'*

Muhammad was an Arab religious, social, and political leader and the founder of Islam. According to Islamic doctrine, he was a prophet divinely inspired to preach and confirm the monotheistic teachings of Adam, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and other prophets. Muhammad was born into the most powerful tribe in Mecca, the Quraish, around 570 A.D.

The authors present one of the revelations of Mohammed given in the Quran that is a story of responsibility. At the very beginning, when God created humans, before any of them entered the world, God asked them, "Am I not your Lord?" Every single one of them answered yes.

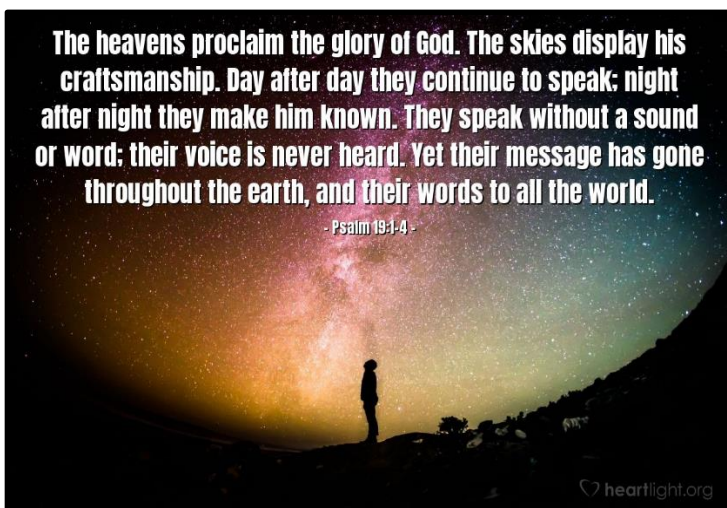
God took note, so that no one who disregarded God's commands in their earthly life could plead ignorance.

Muhammed's visions led him to believe that before we entered this life that we recognized God's lordship and committed before God to live by God's commands.



While you may not remember it, the Quran's claim is that it happened. The point of the story is that come Judgment Day, there is no claiming that you did not know. The Quran claims that we are not sovereign agents. We are accountable to a Judge who has authority over us by virtue of having created us, an authority we have already acknowledged. Modern Muslim interpretation is that in some sense you do remember, at least faintly, possibly by way of conscience.

The authors ask if ultimately you answer to God for the shape of your life. then how would your life have to change?



As Christians, we do not plead ignorance but lean on Psalm 19:1-4, claiming that we know God's glory through the resounding voice of His creation.

We adhere to the words of *Jeremiah 1:5*:

*Before I formed you in the belly, I knew you; and before you came forth out of the womb, I sanctified you...*

From Psalm 139:13-16, we attest to God who made us according to His plan and

purpose, giving praise for His wonderful work and thanks for being known even before we were born.

### **Psalm 139 13-16**

*<sup>13</sup> For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb.*

*<sup>14</sup> I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.*

*<sup>15</sup> My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth.*

*<sup>16</sup> Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.*

The authors provide the perspective of responsibility as conveyed by Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), a German academician and philosopher who focused on ethics, the philosophical study of moral actions. His thought was that reason is our defining quality as humans and that in the end we answer to the reason inside us. A moral life is one that heeds the commands of reason. It is pointed out that Kant's view of moral autonomy seems to deny dignity to those with limited cognitive ability in addition to the appearance of parochialism, with the habits and inclination of a highly educated well-off European man.

Immanuel Kant  
Reason is our defining quality as humans



Looking to Scripture, from James 3:17, we know that God's wisdom is much more than open to reason. We also know that our God is not characterized as a God of reason but One of Wisdom and Love.

### **Proverbs 3:5:**

*Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding;*

### **James 1:5**

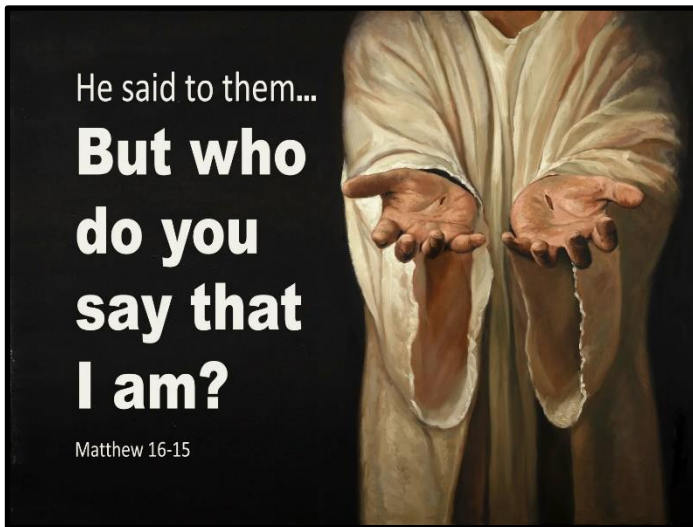
*If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.*

### **1 John 4:8-10**

*<sup>8</sup> Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. <sup>9</sup> This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. <sup>10</sup> This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.*



The authors conclude stating that questions of worth and value appear only when we have to take seriously the possibility that we answer to someone or something beyond our desires. We are asked to take time and consider: Who do you answer to?



Jesus asked in Matthew 16:15-17:

<sup>15</sup> "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" <sup>16</sup> Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

<sup>17</sup> Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven."

And what about you?

## Looking ahead – Sunday October 29

Read Chapter 4 'How Does A Good Life Feel?' Pages 49-60

Answer "Your Turn Questions" on Page 61

