

When You Want to Blame Others
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Ezekiel 18:1-32

Opening question: **In what ways are you like your mother or father, either in personality or physical qualities? Perhaps we should ask your spouse to get the most accurate response?**

It's a fact, we inherit characteristics from our parents. It's also a fact we likely carry some kind of baggage from decisions they made and actions they took in raising us. However, here's the BIG IDEA of this lesson: When it comes to SIN, God holds each of us accountable for our own actions. The GOOD NEWS is: He graciously gives new life to anyone who repents.

George Carlin's FATALISTIC observation was: *"Life is tough, then you die."*

In Ezekiel's day the exiles in Babylon had a saying they used a lot. It expressed both their FATALISM over their captivity and served as an EXCUSE for their own sinful behavior. Let's read about that in the first four verses of chapter 18:

Ezekiel 18:1-4 (ESV)

The Soul Who Sins Shall Die

18 The word of the Lord came to me: 2 "What do you mean by repeating this proverb concerning the land of Israel, 'The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge'? 3 As I live, declares the Lord God, this proverb shall no more be used by you in Israel. 4 Behold, all souls are mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is mine: the soul who sins shall die.

- God instructs Ezekiel to take the people to task for this PROVERB or SAYING: *"The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge."*
- **What do you think that saying means?**
- **Based on this proverb, where did the Israelite exiles lay the blame for their trouble?**
- In our society today there's something we call the "BLAME GAME." **What does that mean? Where do you see examples of it in our society? An example of the "BLAME GAME" are some of the ridiculous law suits in our court system.**
- **Here are some selections voted MOST RIDICULOUS LAWSUITS:**

A group of Idaho inmates are suing 8 brewers for not warning them of the dangers of alcohol. "I have spent a great deal of time in prison because of situations that have arose because of people being drunk, or because of situations in which alcohol played a major role," one inmate wrote. "At no time in my life, prior to me becoming an alcoholic, was I ever informed that alcohol was habit forming and addictive."

Sterling Regional High School in Somerdale, NJ, says they kicked a student off the track team because of his unexcused absences. But that didn't stop the boy's father from filing a \$40 million lawsuit, claiming the dismissal will cost his son college scholarships.

A Lehigh University graduate student who claims that her future career was ruined after she received a C+ is now suing the university for \$1.3 million. The student, who was attending for free because her father is a professor, says she was the target of a conspiracy to hold her back, but her professors say the poor grade is due to her unprofessional behavior that included swearing in class.

A man who says he became addicted to pornography after accidentally visiting an adult website is suing Apple for not blocking them. According to the plaintiff, the sites “appealed to his biological sensibilities as a male and led to an unwanted addiction with adverse consequences,” including “desiring, younger more beautiful girls featured in porn videos than his wife, who was no longer 21.”

<http://www.facesoflawsuitabuse.org/2013/12/the-top-ten-most-ridiculous-lawsuits-of-2013/>

- The BLAME GAME.
- *“The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge.”*
- *“I’m in the mess I’m in because of the sins of my parents.”*
- **God told the people to stop using this saying and we’ll see why in a moment.**
- **First, what GERM OF TRUTH exists in the saying regarding how their suffering was the result of sin?**

Considering the actions and circumstances that put us WHERE we are, and made us WHO we are, FACTS don’t equal EXCUSES. The circumstances of our past; actions of others; and the baggage they left; are REAL...they are FACTS. However, they should not be used as EXCUSES when we CHOOSE to disobey God.

- **So, why did God tell them to stop using this saying?** (End of verse four)
- The prophet Jeremiah preached against this same saying in Jeremiah 31:30 saying, *“Everyone shall die for their own iniquity...”*
- Some of their justification for this idea was likely a misinterpretation of another Old Testament verse. **Anyone remember a verse that talks about God carrying out judgement on future generations?**

Larry Richards writes:

“The saying misapplies Ex. 20:5, which teaches that children tend to follow the example set by parents. There is no implication in that O.T. saying about “punishing the children for the sins of the fathers to the third and fourth generation” that the children’s own acts are not the basis of the punishment!” (Bible Readers Companion)

- Verse four: “The soul who sins shall die.” Let’s clarify the meaning of that verse.

Quoting Larry Richards again:

“The Heb. word “soul” (nephesh) is frequently used as a reflexive pronoun, standing for “the person himself.” And “death” here is physical, not a euphemism for eternal punishment. What Ezekiel is saying is that in the coming invasion God will so order things that wicked persons will be killed, while He will preserve the life of the righteous.”

When it comes to sin, it’s every man (and woman) for himself (and herself). The consequences of disobedience to God are an INDIVIDUAL matter.

- Ezekiel continues in verses five through 20 with three hypothetical men.
- There's a man who lived a righteous life...not perfect, but righteous in obedience to God.
- Then he has a son who is wicked and disobedient to God living in a pattern of sin.
- That man has a son who lives like the grandfather and not his sinful father.
- Ezekiel says, the righteous man will live. The sinful man will die. The grandson will also live because he is not judged on the sins of his father, but on his own choice to obey God.
- **Question: Is he talking about WORKING FOR OUR SALVATION?**
- I like the way our Explore The Bible writers put it: *"Passages, such as Ephesians 2:8-10 and James 2:14-26, specify that good works are evidence of salvation, not a means of salvation."*
- Remember, this chapter speaks to the CONSEQUENCES of sin in this life. Of course, a pattern of sin in this life can also lead to the one sin that determines our eternal destiny: the choice to repent and believe in Christ, or reject Him and be eternally punished.

Ezekiel 18:21–23 (ESV)

21 "But if a wicked person turns away from all his sins that he has committed and keeps all my statutes and does what is just and right, he shall surely live; he shall not die. 22 None of the transgressions that he has committed shall be remembered against him; for the righteousness that he has done he shall live. 23 Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, declares the Lord God, and not rather that he should turn from his way and live?"

- We have a choice to obey God or to rebel. Verse 23 says God takes no pleasure in punishing the wicked. But God is JUST and HOLY. He has a STANDARD and He cannot "wink" at sin.
- As they say in the justice system, *"If you do the crime, you have to do the time."*
- The GOOD NEWS is God has made a way for us to be forgiven for sin IF we'll turn from it.
- The Israelites protested just like any three-year-old who's being punished: *"That's NOT FAIR!"*

Ezekiel 18:25–27 (ESV)

25 "Yet you say, 'The way of the Lord is not just.' Hear now, O house of Israel: Is my way not just? Is it not your ways that are not just? 26 When a righteous person turns away from his righteousness and does injustice, he shall die for it; for the injustice that he has done he shall die. 27 Again, when a wicked person turns away from the wickedness he has committed and does what is just and right, he shall save his life."

- **Question: Why was God being absolutely fair and just?**
- It's amazing how our view of JUSTICE changes depending on who the ACCUSED is?
- If someone commits a crime they should be punished, right? That's fair and just.
- On the other hand, when WE break God's commandments we're all about mercy.

Warren Wiersbe writes:

"They were saying that God wasn't "playing fair" with His people. But Ezekiel pointed out that it was the people who weren't being fair with God! When they obeyed the Lord, they wanted Him to keep the terms of the covenant that promised blessing, but when they disobeyed, they didn't want Him to keep the terms of the covenant that brought chastening. They wanted God to act contrary to His own Word and His own holy nature."

- It's important to clarify verse 26 so it's not misunderstood. That verse is NOT saying a believer can LOSE our salvation due to a sinful act. Some Christians disagree with the concept of ETERNAL SECURITY but I'll give you my opinion:

- If I could wipe-out what Jesus did for me on the cross with one sin...then He died in vain.
- I don't just base that on my opinion, but on scripture.

Jesus said in John 10:28 (NASB)

28 and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand.

- I am convinced verse 26 is referring to the physical consequences of specific disobedience, not a loss of our eternal salvation.
- In verses 30-32 God gives both the judgment and an INVITATION:

Ezekiel 18:30–32 (ESV)

30 "Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, declares the Lord God. Repent and turn from all your transgressions, lest iniquity be your ruin.

- God told them to REPENT. Repentance isn't just feeling sorry or guilty.
- Repentance means CHANGING OUR MIND about sin and CHANGING OUR DIRECTION away from sin and TOWARD God.

31 Cast away from you all the transgressions that you have committed, and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house of Israel?

- **What's the difference between getting "a second chance" and getting "a new heart and a new spirit"?**

Finally, God says in verse 32:

32 For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Lord God; so turn, and live."

So, What's The Takeaway?

- It can be so easy to say: *"I'm in the mess I'm in because of others."*
- It may be a FACT the decisions of others have impacted who we are and where we are.
- But when it comes to SIN we cannot allow that FACT to become an EXCUSE.
- When it comes to disobedience to God's commands in scripture, the FINGER OF BLAME is always pointing to me, because SIN is a choice. MY choice.
- As long as we're human we won't be SINLESS. But through Jesus we can have a *"new heart and a new spirit"* that causes us to SIN LESS.
- God is JUST and He cannot tolerate SIN. But, He's so LOVING that He sent His own Son to pay the price for MY sin and YOUR sin.
- Even though I'm TO BLAME for my own sin...I can TURN, REPENT, and be FORGIVEN.