

Wednesday Night Discussion

Date: 3/20/24

Text and Topic: *In Ezekiel 18:1-32, the Prophet explains that the only sins that God holds against us are our own!*

1. **1** The word of the Lord came to me: **2** “What do you mean by using this proverb concerning the land of Israel: ‘The fathers eat sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge’? **3** As I live”—this is the declaration of the Lord God—“you will no longer use this proverb in Israel.
2. **4** Look, every life belongs to me. The life of the father is like the life of the son—both belong to me. The person who sins is the one who will die. **5** “Suppose a man is righteous and does what is just and right: **6** He does not eat at the mountain shrines or look to the idols of the house of Israel. He does not defile his neighbor’s wife or approach a woman during her menstrual impurity.
3. **7** He doesn’t oppress anyone but returns his collateral to the debtor. He does not commit robbery, but gives his bread to the hungry and covers the naked with clothing. **8** He doesn’t lend at interest or for profit but keeps his hand from injustice and carries out true justice between men. **9** He follows my statutes and keeps my ordinances, acting faithfully. Such a person is righteous; he will certainly live.” This is the declaration of the Lord God.
4. **10** “But suppose the man has a violent son, who sheds blood and does any of these things, **11** though the father has done none of them. Indeed, when the son eats at the mountain shrines and defiles his neighbor’s wife, **12** and when he oppresses the poor and needy, commits robbery, and does not return collateral, and when he looks to the idols, commits detestable acts, **13** and lends at interest or for profit, will he live? He will not live! Since he has committed all these detestable acts, he will certainly die. His death will be his own fault.
5. **14** “Now suppose he has a son who sees all the sins his father has committed, and though he sees them, he does not do likewise. **15** He does not eat at the mountain shrines or look to the idols of the house of Israel. He does not defile his neighbor’s wife.
6. **16** He doesn’t oppress anyone, hold collateral, or commit robbery. He gives his bread to the hungry and covers the naked with clothing. **17** He keeps his hand from harming the poor, not taking interest or profit on a loan. He practices my ordinances and follows my statutes. Such a person will not die for his father’s iniquity. He will certainly live.
7. **18** “As for his father, he will die for his own iniquity because he practiced fraud, robbed his brother, and did among his people what was not good. **19** But you may ask, ‘Why doesn’t the son suffer punishment for the father’s iniquity?’ Since the son has done what is just and right, carefully observing all my statutes, he will certainly live.
8. **20** The person who sins is the one who will die. A son won’t suffer punishment for the father’s iniquity, and a father won’t suffer punishment for the son’s iniquity. The righteousness of the righteous person will be on him, and the wickedness of the wicked person will be on him. **21** “But if the wicked person turns from all the sins he has committed, keeps all my statutes, and does what is just and right, he will certainly live; he will not die.
9. **22** None of the transgressions he has committed will be held against him. He will live because of the righteousness he has practiced. **23** Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked?” This is the declaration of the Lord God. “Instead, don’t I take pleasure when he turns from his ways and lives?
10. **24** But when a righteous person turns from his righteousness and acts unjustly, committing the same detestable acts that the wicked do, will he live? None of the righteous acts he did will be remembered. He will die because of the treachery he has engaged in and the sin he has committed. **25** “But you say, ‘The Lord’s way isn’t fair.’ Now listen, house of Israel: Is it my way that is unfair? Instead, isn’t it your ways that are unfair?
11. **26** When a righteous person turns from his righteousness and acts unjustly, he will die for this. He will die because of the injustice he has committed. **27** But if a wicked person turns from the wickedness he has committed and does what is just and right, he will preserve his life. **28** He will certainly live because he thought it over and turned from all the transgressions he had committed; he will not die.
12. **29** But the house of Israel says, ‘The Lord’s way isn’t fair.’ Is it my ways that are unfair, house of Israel? Instead, isn’t it your ways that are unfair? **30** “Therefore, house of Israel, I will judge each one of you according to his ways.” This is the declaration of the Lord God. “Repent and turn from all your rebellious acts, so they will not become a sinful stumbling block to you.
13. **31** Throw off all the transgressions you have committed and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit. Why should you die, house of Israel? **32** For I take no pleasure in anyone’s death.” This is the declaration of the Lord God. “So repent and live!

Let's Dive Deeper

One: In Ch. 18, Ezekiel refuted another proverb: *The fathers eat the sour grapes, but the children's teeth are set on edge* (see *Lamentations 5:7*). The Lord expressed shock that anyone would think that he would punish one generation for the sins of another. When all the events unfolded and the full implications of the judgment were known, they would not use this proverb any longer in Israel (18:1-3). In refuting the implications of this proverb Ezekiel touched on two basic doctrines of Scripture.

Two: Doctrine of Personal Responsibility (18:4-20). The basic principle of divine justice is simply this: *"...all souls are mine."* Each person is a separate entity before God. *"The soul who sins will die."* Each person is accountable for his or her own life (18:4). After stating this basic principle, Ezekiel offered three illustrations of what he meant. *One: The fate of a righteous man (18:5-9).* A man who was righteous by the standards of the Old Testament law would live. Ezekiel cited sixteen identifying marks of a righteous man. Seven are negative characteristics or things a righteous man did not do. A righteous man not (1) eat on the mountains in pagan rituals, (2) lift his eyes to idols, (3) defile his neighbor's wife, (4) approach a menstruous woman, (5) oppress anyone through fraudulent dealings, (6) commit robbery, (7) lend money to a needy person on the condition of receiving interest. On the other hand, the righteous man possessed nine positive attributes. He (1) executes justice; (2) practices righteousness; (3) restores to the debtor his essential collateral; (4) feeds the hungry; (5) clothes the naked; (6) keeps his hand free from crime; (7) executes true justice between men; (8) walks according to the law of God; and (9) deals faithfully (sincerely). *Two: The fate of the wicked son (18:10-13).* A righteous man might have a wicked son who was the exact opposite of his father. He must bear full responsibility for his conduct. *Three: The fate of the righteous son (18:14-20).* Occasionally a wicked man might have a son who rejected the activities of his father and demonstrated all the characteristics of a righteous man. In no case would he die for the sins of the father. The wicked father, however, would "die for his iniquity" because he "did what was not good among his people." The basic question, then, was this: "Why should the son not bear punishment for the father's iniquity?" Simply because God is perfectly fair. The son who was just, righteous, and obedient to God would live. "The soul that sins," however, would die. "The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, nor shall the father bear the iniquity of the son." Each person bears the ultimate responsibility for his conduct. The "righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked will be upon himself."

Three: Doctrine of Free Will (18:21-32). The doctrine of free will implies that a sinner can repent. Men are not locked into a life of sin. They can change. He may decide to live his life by the law of God and to deal justly and righteously with people. Therefore, the penalty for that man would be canceled and his sins would not be remembered. God has always been thrilled to see a wicked person turn from their evil ways (18:21-23). However, a righteous man may choose to turn from his righteous ways to practice all the abominations of the wicked. Such a man's righteousness would not be remembered because of his "treachery." Therefore, he would die in his sin (18:24). The people objected, saying *"...the way of the Lord is not right."* Their argument seems to be that if a man who was once saved is then lost, then God is inconsistent. Ezekiel responded to this argument decisively. God's ways were consistent; Israel's ways were inconsistent. Backsliders would die in their sins. Those who repentant—would live. God would judge everyone separately. Therefore, a man's fate is determined by his own free choices (18:25-30a). Ezekiel concluded this section with a strong appeal for repentance. He urged Israel to "return," to go back to the point where they got off the path. He called upon his audience to "throw off" all their wrongdoings. On the positive side, he encouraged them to get for themselves *"a new heart and a new spirit," i.e., develop a firm resolve to be faithful and obedient.* The alternative to such repentance was death. Yet God did not delight in the death of the wicked. Therefore, he urged them one last time to repent so that might live (18:30b-32).

7:30—7:45 Think Through the Main Scripture Individually

Personal Study: Take a few moments to reread the main scriptures and highlight or jot down what stands out to you.

I observed in verse _____ that: _____

I observed in verse _____ that: _____

Study Question: Compare Deuteronomy 24:16 and Exodus 34:6-7, 20:4-6. What is the *key line* that reconciles these scriptures?

Contemplative questions: Take a few minutes to consider the following questions *thoughtfully* and *reflectively*.

Concerning our sins, why should we desire grace rather than fairness from God? _____

How well do we echo this message of repentance to others? _____