

7. What responsibility?

January 16, 2014

In January 23, 2010, president Obama declared, "We're the most transparent and ethical administration in U.S. History." I've been here in America since 1981. I've never seen any U.S. government that is more corrupt than the current administration. No one in this government and the Congress takes responsibility of their wrong doings. It was rather refreshing to see New Jersey governor Chris Christie says, "I am sorry," for the bridge controversy.

Knowledge and privilege come with responsibility and accountability which are rather rare nowadays. Irresponsibility is rampant and very few people are willing to take the blame for wrongs committed or mistakes made. Obviously Obama and his officials don't lose sleep over that.

In his Devil's Dictionary, the cynical Ambrose Bierce, a 19th Century journalist defined responsibility as "a detachable burden easily shifted to the shoulders of God, fate, fortune, luck, or one's neighbor." After our first parents sinned, Adam blamed Eve and Eve blamed the serpent, but God still held Adam and Eve responsible for their disobedience and punished them accordingly.

Responsibility is one of the main themes of three chapters we are going to study tonight. The Jewish exiles in Babylon were blaming their ancestors for God's terrible judgment that were upon them even though they were doing exactly the same things as their ungodly ancestors did. So Ezekiel explained that God judges people individually for their own sins, not for someone else's.

This went for the same with the Jewish leaders for their own sins in chapter 19. In chapter 20, the Lord systematically reviewed their long history of irresponsibility.

A. GENERATIONAL CURSE

Ezekiel 18:1-9 The word of the Lord came to me again, saying, 2 "What do you mean when you use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying: 'The fathers have eaten sour grapes, And the children's teeth are set on edge'? 3 "As I live," says the Lord God, "you shall no longer use this proverb 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. 5 But if a man is just And does what is lawful and right; 6 If he has not eaten on the mountains, Nor lifted up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, Nor defiled his neighbor's wife, Nor approached a woman during her impurity; 7 If he has not oppressed anyone, But has restored to the debtor his pledge; Has robbed no one by violence, But has given his bread to the hungry And covered the naked with clothing; 8 If he has not exacted usury Nor taken any increase, But has withdrawn his hand from iniquity And executed true judgment between man and man; 9 If he has walked in My statutes And kept My judgments faithfully -- He is just; He shall surely live!" Says the Lord God.

Ezekiel 18:19-20 "Yet you say, 'Why should the son not bear the guilt of the father?' Because the son has done what is lawful and right, and has kept all My statutes and observed them, he shall surely live. 20 The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself.

The Israelites were using a popular proverb to pass the blame to their ancestors as if they were the innocent victims. In a fancy psychological term, it is 'irresponsible fatalism.'

Our God is a just and righteous God who shows no partiality. If He withholds punishment, it's only because of His grace and merciful long-suffering.

Where did these Jewish people get the idea that God punished the children for the sins of their fathers? This concept came from two sources:

1) A misinterpretation of what the Lord had said in His law, that He visited the sins of the fathers upon the children.

Exodus 20:5 you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me

But this implies that the Lord punishes the children if they commit the same sins as their fathers committed.

2) The Jewish idea of the oneness of the nation. According to the Law of Moses, innocent animals could suffer and die for guilty sinners, but nowhere was it taught that innocent people should be punished for sins committed by guilty people.

In fact, Moses taught just the opposite:

Deuteronomy 24:16 Fathers shall not be put to death for their children, nor shall the children be put to death for their fathers; a person shall be put to death for his own sin.

Whether people lived under the Old Covenant or the New Covenant, before or since the cross, the way of salvation is the same: faith in the Lord that is evidenced by a new life of obedience.

Habakkuk 2:4 "Behold the proud, His soul is not upright in him; But the just shall live by his faith.

Hebrews 11:6 But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

Some of you know a heresy that is known as "Generational Curse". It is the same concept as these Jewish people's faulty theology:

The idea of Generational Curse has captured the thinking of many charismatic denomination Christians because it sounds so reasonable. Without doubt, parents have an influence on their children through inherited traits and parental teaching and example. But God holds individuals responsible for their choices and sins, not the sins of ancestors.

The people who are in the camp of Generational Curse use Exodus 20:5 as their main text like the Israelites did. The main problem they have with their wording is that there is no word 'curse' in that verse. Let's go back to the verse:

Exodus 20:5 you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me

If they are right, who is the one putting curse on these future generations? Human parents cannot cast curses. Neither is Satan mentioned as the source of such a

curse. And if God who justly punishes sin places the curse on the children, who could break a curse instituted by God?

There is no question about the fact that heredity and environment do pass some things on to descendants. But nowhere in the New Testament do we find any reference to this concept. Jesus has never mentioned it, nor did Paul or any other apostles. In other words, this is a demonic cunning invention of some people who would like to put blame on someone else rather than owning up to their faults.

If someone in our family ancestors did wrong things in the sight of the Lord, we should learn from their sins and not repeat it. I like what George Santayana, a 20th Century philosopher once said, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."

There is no Generational Curse in the Bible. Some of the TV preachers and evangelists use it to market themselves and to drum up more business. And biblically ignorant people fall for it.

From early 1990s still to this date, another group of people made a lot of money through the similar concept – Kevin Leman and Randy Carlson with their "Unlocking the Secrets of Your Childhood Memories" and "Birth Order". People, especially many Christian women fell for their psychological heresies.

Their main concept is that all the problems you have now as grown-ups come from your childhood upbringing as well as your birth order. It never ceases to amaze me how many gullible and biblically ignorant Christians there are in America, because they think that these psychologists are on 'Focus on the family' Christian radio talk shows, they believe everything these so-called doctors talk about as the Bible truth. Actually, what they claim is very much secular and unbiblical.

It doesn't matter what kind of childhood background or birth order we might have had. We make our conscientious decision for each action we take whether it is for the Lord's glory or against it. We are accountable and responsible for those decisions and actions. We should not and cannot blame others, childhood upbringing, or birth order for our sins.

B. LEADERSHIP RESPONSIBILITY OF ISRAEL

Ezekiel 19:10-14 'Your mother was like a vine in your bloodline, Planted by the waters, Fruitful and full of branches Because of many waters. 11 She had strong branches for scepters of rulers. She towered in stature above the thick branches, And was seen in her height amid the dense foliage. 12 But she was plucked up in fury, She was cast down to the ground, And the east wind dried her fruit. Her strong branches were broken and withered; The fire consumed them. 13 And now she is planted in the wilderness, In a dry and thirsty land. 14 Fire has come out from a rod of her branches And devoured her fruit, So that she has no strong branch--a scepter for ruling.'" This is a lamentation, and has become a lamentation.

Of course, the mother in here is the ancient Israel that was led by ungodly kings and their officials. Rather than being obedient to the Lord and worship Him with their lives, they led the people of Israel to idolatry of their pagan neighboring kingdoms' idols. It was not because the Lord didn't provide them or protect them. In their sinful pride, they chose to follow after worthless idols rather than the true God.

Whether we read secular or Christian history, we discover that people become like their leaders. The same people who applauded Solomon when he built the temple for the Lord also applauded Jeroboam when he set up the golden calves and started idol worship in Northern Kingdom Israel. The same people who welcomed Jesus as the Messiah on the Palm Sunday also demanded His crucifixion to Pilate three days later by the leading of the high priests and the Pharisees.

One of the hardest tasks of Christian leaders today is to keep our churches true to the Word of God so that people don't follow every wind of doctrine that runs contrary to Scripture. It appears that being popular and being successful in the eyes of men are more important to many pastors today than being faithful to the Lord.

Ephesians 4:14 that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting

C. NATIONAL RESPONSIBILITY

Ezekiel 20:1-3 It came to pass in the seventh year, in the fifth month, on the tenth day of the month, that certain of the elders of Israel came to inquire of the Lord, and sat before me. 2 Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 3 "Son of man, speak to the elders of Israel, and say to them, ' Thus says the Lord God: "Have you come to inquire of Me? As I live," says the Lord God, "I will not be inquired of by you."

Nothing is more frustrating than counseling a Christian who has no intention to do what the Lord wants him or her to do but wants me to give my blessing to one's decision. Because their minds already made up to do whatever they choose to do before they came for the counseling, they just wanted my approval which they were not going to have.

That is the case in point here. The elders of Israel came to Ezekiel to inquire of the Lord, but they were not going to do anything the Lord wanted them to do. To them, it was nothing more than pretending to be spiritual and merely following the formality.

When someone reads chapter 20, it would be easy for that person to think that God is with the people of 'Generational Curse', but that wasn't what the Lord was saying to Ezekiel. By reviewing the history of the nation, God was judging that current generation because they were guilty of the same sins of unbelief and rebellion as their ancestors did. Jeremiah said that his generation of Jews was even worse than their fathers.

Jeremiah 16:12 And you have done worse than your fathers, for behold, each one follows the dictates of his own evil heart, so that no one listens to Me.

D. THE RESTORATION OF ISRAEL

Ezekiel 20:37-38 "I will make you pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant; 38 I will purge the rebels from among you, and those who transgress against Me; I will bring them out of the country where they dwell, but they shall not enter the land of Israel. Then you will know that I am the Lord.

What the Lord described here is not about the Jewish people returning to their homeland from the exile in Babylon in 538 B.C. This applies to that time in the future that Ezekiel will mention in chapters 33-48, when Christ will return and the promised kingdom will be established.

E. APPLICATION

Walk with the Lord obediently according to what He tells us to do in the Bible. When you sin against the Lord, own up to your sins and repent. It is not anyone's fault except yours.