

SOUR GRAPES

By Jon Quinn

Ezekiel 18

How do people ever come to the point where they can treat one another so badly as many do today. They have lost all sense of compassion as they have lowered themselves, in behavior at least, to the level of animals, ruled by instinct and oblivious to any sense of right and wrong.

A favorite way to deal with one's misdeeds today is to simply blame them on somebody else. It is the parents' fault, or the husband's, or the wife's, or peers', or society's. And, oh! What misdeeds the previous generations did to bring us to such. It's all their fault, of course, that we are reeling from the upheavals that plague our nation. It's not our fault! Is it?

This is not the first generation to excuse its rotten behavior and the physical suffering it produces on previous generations. It is not the first to echo the plaintive cry, "We are not responsible!" Notice what the Lord had to say when people of Ezekiel's day made a similar complaint:

"Then the word of the Lord came to me saying, 'What do you mean by this proverb concerning the land of Israel saying,
'The fathers eat the sour grapes,
But the children's teeth are set on edge'?
As I live,' declares the Lord God, 'you are surely not going to use this proverb in Israel anymore.'" (EZEKIEL 18:1-3).

It had become a fashionable thing to say, a common excuse to blame the plight of the nation of Israel on the previous generations. It is not that those generations were without fault, they were not, it is just that the present generation shared the responsibility for their plight. They had drawn a clever picture of a parent eating a sour grape but the children's teeth being set on edge as if to say they were only innocent victims and not to blame for their suffering and error. The Lord told them to stop using that ridiculous proverb because it wasn't true. It's not true today either.

BACKGROUND TO EZEKIEL

"Then He said to me, 'Son of man, I am sending you to the Sons of Israel, to a rebellious people who have rebelled against Me to this very day; they and their fathers have transgressed against Me to this very day.'" (EZEKIEL 2:1-3). Ezekiel was a young man when he had been taken into exile. He was of the priestly family, and he received the summons of God to become a prophet among the captives in Babylon. It was in Ezekiel's fifth year of captivity that he received his call; about 592 B.C. and he prophesied from then until 570 B.C.

These were some of the most distressing times in Judah's history. It is during this period that Jerusalem is destroyed. The people are crushed and know little of the God they had abandoned. Ezekiel's message explains the judgment that the nation was receiving from the Lord as a result of their apostasy, as well as foretells of a brighter future and calls the people to repentance. Many of Ezekiel's generation were blaming their fathers for their predicament, which was easy to do but served no purpose. In fact, it worked against them, because as long as they were blaming someone else for their problems they would not be seeking to make the needed corrections in their own lives. That is the essential message of the eighteenth chapter; Wake up and accept responsibility for yourselves and do something to make things better. It occurs to me that the same message is sorely needed by our own society today, where more often than not, the chief defense in courts of law is no longer "I didn't do it" but rather "It's someone else's fault I did it." Tragically for our society and our families, it seems to be working. One can literally get away with murder!

THE WAY IT REALLY IS

"Behold, all souls are Mine; the souls of the father as well as the soul of the son is Mine. The soul who sins will die." (EZEKIEL 18:4). The people were somewhat bewildered by their captivity. They were complaining and becoming cynical. Yes, they agreed, Manasseh had been a very wicked king and had led the nation into the worst kinds of idolatry. What they failed to realize was that they, too, had many shortcomings, certainly not to the same extent as Manasseh, but things in their own lives needed correcting.

What God wants out of his people in any dark age is courageous heroism. He desires the kind of man or woman who will take their stand based upon what is right and stay there even if their society is swept away. Ezekiel points out that each soul is directly responsible as an individual unto God. Also, the destiny of each soul directly relates as to whether one is willing to accept his or her responsibility for conduct, turn from sin and unto righteousness, and serve God.

"...if he walks by My statutes and My ordinances so as to deal faithfully - he is righteous and will surely live..." (EZEKIEL 18:9).

PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

"Yet you say, 'Why should the son not bear punishment for the father's iniquity?' When the son has practiced justice and righteousness, and has observed all My statutes and done them, he shall surely live. The person who sins will die. The son will not bear the punishment for the father's iniquity, nor will the father bear the punishment for the son's iniquity; the righteousness of the righteous will be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked will be upon himself." (EZEKIEL 18:19,20). God declares that we are all individually responsible for our own conduct. Ezekiel affirms that none of us are condemned to spiritual death because of another's sins. My father's righteousness will not save me, nor will his wickedness condemn me. I do not inherit my spiritual standing with God from my ancestors. Though I may suffer some of the consequences for their sins, as well as enjoy some of the consequences of their righteousness, my standing with God is based upon my own actions.

Also, notice it is not enough to merely know the way of righteousness, or agree with it, but one must practice it. How fashionable it is today to suggest that obedience unto God is unimportant. Mark it down! The one who fails to obey the commandments of God will suffer spiritual death (ROMANS 6:23).

GOD IS JUST

"Yet you say, 'The way of the Lord is not right.' Hear now, O house of Israel! Is My way not right? Is it not your ways that are not right?" (EZEKIEL 18:25). It is blind and foolish men who will say that their ways are right and God's ways are wrong! Yet, we find that is exactly what many are saying today, just like in Ezekiel's day.

Our nation seems to have cast aside the Scriptures as the moral foundation for our system. The farther we move away from it, the worse things become. Humanist and atheistic influences grow stronger in higher places such as government and the media, and as they do the suffering in our country increases. They insist that God's word is obsolete as they cast aside its moral and ethical teachings. For example, the Scriptures condemn homosexuality, but the politically correct says homosexuality is a fine, noble thing. In this, they echo the words of those of Ezekiel's day: "The way of the Lord is not right." to which the answer comes; "Is My way not right? Is it not your ways that are not right?"

Those that continue to live by the Scriptures are openly ridiculed as ignorant or bigoted. Things will not get better for any nation that turns away from God. Yes, God needs heroes of faith today. You should be one of them!

GOD IS PATIENT

"Do I have any pleasure in the death of the wicked,' declares the Lord God, 'rather than that he should turn from his ways and live.'" (EZEKIEL 18:23). The Lord has no pleasure in the condemnation of the wicked. There is one way to get out of this mess happy, hopeful and blessed. We must simply repent of the wrong in our lives and obey God. Judgment is coming.

"Therefore, I will judge you, O house of Israel, each according to his conduct,' declares the Lord God. 'Repent and turn away from all your transgressions, so that iniquity may not become a stumbling block to you. Cast away all your transgressions which you have committed, and make for yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! For why will you die, O house of Israel?" (EZEKIEL 18:30,31).