

WEEK OF AUGUST 21, 2022

LESSON AIM: **Repent and turn away
from your sins.**

UNIT: Ezekiel (Part 1)

THEME: Sin & Consequences

LESSON TEXT: Ezekiel 18:1-18, 22

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: 2 Corinthians 5:10; Psalm 18:20-27;
2 Peter 2:4-9

THE SOUL THAT SINS

BY MARK SCOTT

There is certainly some mystery in the Bible about family life. Many a parent has leaned into Proverbs 22:6: “Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it” (*English Standard Version*). They read a proverb like a promise. Then, when junior becomes a prodigal son, the parent goes into a spiritual funk. In the Bible good kings sometimes had bad sons (2 Kings 23:25; 23:36-37), and bad kings sometimes had good sons (2 Kings 16:2; 18:3).

“Generational sin” is real. Who would doubt that the effects of systemic sin can be passed from one generation to the next—at least in terms of its results (Exodus 20:5; 34:7)? While parents can be intentional and cut their losses by working hard to pass their faith along to their children (Psalm 78:2-4), the sins of the fathers can be “visited” on the generations that follow. In this lesson text, however, the exilic prophet Ezekiel taught that the soul that sins is the one in trouble—the refrain in verses 4, 13, and 17 make that clear. Ultimately a child cannot pass the buck of blame for sin to mom or dad. Each individual must stand before God personally.

The Righteous Man*Ezekiel 18:1-9*

Righteousness can best be passed along through family commitments. But so can unrighteousness. The *word of the Lord* that came to Ezekiel concerned a well-worn proverb (a short, pithy statement almost like a riddle). If parents eat sour grapes you would expect the tartness to affect them. But, no—the children’s teeth are *set on edge*. In other words, the parents’ activities did impact the children. But that is only half true. Since *everyone* (all souls) belongs to God (which of course included parents and children), then everyone has to stand before God—on their own merit.

The *righteous man* (labeled such in the bracket verses of 5 and 9) will stay to God’s standards. This person will do what is *just and right*. This person *follows God’s decrees and faithfully* (truthfully) *keeps God’s laws*. Righteousness partially consists of what one does positively. But righteousness can also consist of what one does not do.

Ezekiel listed at least six couplets that describe what the righteous man does not do. (1) He does not act idolatrously. This would include not bowing down to *mountain shrines*. (2) He does not engage in sexual

misconduct. This would include not “polluting” his neighbor’s wife and having intercourse with a woman during her period. (3) He does not financially *oppress* (vex or destroy) anyone; instead, he returns items taken as pledges for loans. (4) He does not rob people by being stingy with food or clothing. (5) He does not charge exorbitant usury and then make an ungodly profit. (6) He does not make unfair judgments *between two parties* (man to man). We are defined by what we do and what we do not do.

The Violent Son*Ezekiel 18:10-13*

A righteous man could have a *violent son* (robber or destroyer) who commits all of the above. Even though the father set a good example, it does not mean the son will follow in his father’s steps. The list is almost identical to what the father did not do. But this violent son embraced all of these wicked things. The list is a bit abbreviated due to being fleshed out in the previous paragraph.

Ezekiel asked the rhetorical question, “*Will such a man live?*” Heaven’s answer is no. The violent son committed these *detestable* (abominable) *things*. Without Christ’s anointing death on the cross, the unrighteous man’s *blood will be on his own head*. He will only have himself to blame for his eternal destiny.

The Good Grandson*Ezekiel 18:14-18, 22*

Now the violent son sees the way his father acted and decided *not to do such things*. More than one child of an alcoholic determined never to even taste alcohol because of the carnage it caused in their home. The list of sins remained the same. This grandson followed God’s laws and decrees. The result he receives is life. He is not about to repeat his father’s *extortion* (oppression), robbery, and doing *what was wrong among the people*.

The last verse of our text (v. 22) held out the possibility that if a wicked person turned to the Lord and repented, then his *offenses* (transgressions) *will not be remembered*. God will regard *righteous things* (and certainly righteous things as reckoned in Christ in the new covenant) as a guarantee of life. To a group of people so oriented to communal living, this call to individual righteousness must have seemed strange. ■

APPLICATION

I AM WHO BY DAVID FAUST

When I was a boy, my older brother, John, and I were playing catch in the yard and a softball crashed through our house's dining room window. I blamed John and said, "He threw it too high." John blamed me and told Dad, "He should have caught it." Frowning as he replaced the broken glass, Dad wasn't happy with either of us.

People have tried to avoid responsibility ever since the Garden of Eden. Adam blamed his wife and told God, "The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it" (Genesis 3:12). Eve basically said, "The devil made me do it." ("The serpent deceived me, and I ate"—Genesis 3:13.) It's human nature to make excuses and shift the blame. But the fact is, even in a perfect environment, Adam and Eve made poor decisions that got them into trouble.

Stop Passing the Buck

God's prophet wrote, "The one who sins is the one who will die" (Ezekiel 18:4). It doesn't help to play the blame game. Yes, prior generations of parents and grandparents have passed along their own habits, hang-ups, and hurts, but eventually we must stop blaming others and take responsibility for our own actions.

At the Last Supper, Jesus announced that one of his disciples was going to betray him. "They were very sad and began to say to him one after the other, 'Surely you don't mean me, Lord?'" (Matthew 26:22). How terrible it was to realize that one of Jesus' closest followers was on the verge of betraying him—even while the disciples' feet were still moist from Jesus washing them! Yet, if we're honest, we all know the answer to the question, "Is it I, Lord?" Yes, *it is I*. Like Judas, I have betrayed innocent blood, and so have you. Like Peter, I've had

my own moments of bitter failure when I have denied Christ by word and deed. And so have you.

Who is a sinner? I am who, that's who. "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8).

Keep Receiving God's Grace

Thankfully, the Bible's very next verse offers relief. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). We must accept responsibility for our own actions and admit our sins to God. We all need to repent, respond to God's grace with personal faith, and be baptized in response to the gospel (Acts 2:38). Neither our parents, our friends, nor any minister at church can make that decision for us; we must decide for ourselves.

Who is a sinner saved by God's grace? I am who, that's who.

Joshua said, "Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve" (Joshua 24:15). Every day we must make that choice anew. After we are forgiven and empowered by the Holy Spirit, we have an ongoing responsibility to use the gifts and opportunities God bestows. Who will wash others' feet? Who will serve those in need? Who will spread the good news of Christ? Who will support the Lord's work with time, talent, and treasure?

Will you dare to say, "I am who, that's who"?

Personal Challenge: Offer to the Lord this two-part prayer: (1) "Father, I am sorry for my sin of [blank]." (2) "Father, in gratitude for your mercy and grace, I want to serve you by [blank]." ■

DISCOVERY

BY MICAH ODOR

1. Have you ever gotten in trouble for something someone else did wrong? What about the reverse?
2. What's something you admired about your parents that you've tried to emulate?

Ask two people to read aloud **Ezekiel 18:1-18, 22** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then, as a group, quickly restate the passage in your own words.

3. This passage has three versions of what's essentially the same list, with minor (but instructive) differences. Work your way down the list, comparing the first entry in each (mountain shrines), the second entry in each (neighbor's wife), and so on. What similarities or differences do you see?
4. Do you see all the entries in this list as carrying equal weight? Which ones seem especially bad to you? Which ones seem less bad?
5. Is our ranking of "really bad sins" and "not so bad sins" supported by the text, or are we more likely to excuse things we're comfortable with? What examples do you see?
6. Ignore the specifics of the list for a moment. What larger principle is God teaching in this passage?
7. What do you think of the punishments here? What would it be like to live under the Old Covenant instead of the New Covenant?
8. What does this passage teach you about God?
9. What does it teach you about yourself?
 - Where in your life are you taking credit for someone else's right actions?
 - Where in your life are you beating yourself up for someone else's mistakes?
10. With whom can you share this lesson?
11. Based on our study and discussion, complete this sentence: "This week, I will . . ."

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **Ezekiel 9:1-7; 10:1-5, 18-19; 11:22-23**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study. ■