

Message #21

Ezekiel 18:1-32

Dr. H. A. Ironside once observed that there are two principles that run throughout Scripture that many N.T. believers don't understand. **One is the grace of God and the other is the government of God (Ezekiel, p. 115).**

Now most believers truly do love and know something about the doctrine of the grace of God. It is an amazing doctrine. The grace of God actually means more than just unmerited favor; it also means unmerited favor to those who merit just the opposite. The salvation we have is by grace and we don't deserve it. But the truth is not only do we not deserve or merit; we actually merit and deserve just the opposite. What we deserve is hell. What we actually merit is condemnation, not justification. So the grace of God is a rich, wonderful doctrine.

But what most believers don't understand is the doctrine of the government of God. They do not realize that **God's grace does not eliminate God's government.** God's government demands that the works of a person be judged, whether that person is a believer or not. If the person is not a believer, the government of God will reward them with hell. If the person is a believer, the government of God will reward them with rewards. Without respect of person, each individual will be the recipient of a judicial decision due to the government of God.

Now this point is critical to this chapter. This is not a chapter that is dealing with the grace of God and how one may be saved. This is a chapter that is teaching the government of God will not let anyone get away with sin. That is very obvious from this chapter:

GOD, IN HIS GRACE, GIVES ALL INDIVIDUALS AN OPPORTUNITY TO REPENT OF THEIR SIN AND LIVE; BUT IF THEY DO NOT REPENT, GOD, IN HIS RIGHT-EOUS GOVERNMENT, WILL JUDGE THEM AND HOLD THEM ACCOUNTABLE AND THEY WILL DIE.

When we read this chapter there is no question that it screams individual responsibility and accountability before God. There is individual responsibility and accountability for nations and for humans. Israel as a nation has its own sin case and so does the United States. I have my own sin case and you have your sin case. Grace gives us time to resolve our sin case, but God's government will not just overlook a sin case that is not resolved.

What we have been seeing in Ezekiel is that God sends negative judgments to get people's attention. If people will turn away from the sin that is prompting the judgment and turn to the Lord, God's grace will forgive them and bless them. If people do not turn away from the sin that is prompting the judgment of God, God's government will judge them.

We want to analyze this important chapter by breaking it down into nine divine judgment realities:

DIVINE JUDGMENT REALITY #1 – All souls of people belong to God and the soul that sins will die. **18:1-4**

Now **verse 1** says that the Word of the LORD came to Ezekiel. God wants to stress again that the data in this chapter is by direct revelation from God.

It is clear from **verse 2** that around Israel there was a proverb that basically taught the parents' actions were inherited by the children. The parents eat sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge. This must have been a well-known proverb because it was also quoted by Jeremiah (Jer. 31:29-30). The point was that the father's choice to eat sour grapes had some effect on the children's teeth and what they ate.

In Exodus 20:5 we read that God will visit sin to the third and fourth generation if it is not faced. What was happening in Ezekiel's day is that Israel was blaming their judgment on their parents. They were apparently saying God was not fair or just.

Apparently what the people were saying was that they were suffering and experiencing the judgment of God because of the parent's sins and not their own sins. They were delusional in thinking and saying we are innocent and the reason why we are experiencing trouble is because our forefathers committed sin. The people had taken a fatalistic view that blamed the parents and the ancestors for their own trouble.

People do this all the time. They want to blame the parents for their own problems rather than take responsibility for their own decisions.

Well, God says in **verse 3**, this is a false proverb and I am about to put a stop to your thinking. You are not going to use this proverb anymore. When He identifies Himself as the Lord GOD, He is identifying Himself as being the Sovereign God.

In **verse 4**, God sets the record straight. **All souls belong to Him and all souls are accountable to Him.**

Those who support abortion need to take a serious look at this verse. All souls belong to God. The soul of a father and the soul of a son and all souls are accountable to God and the soul that sins will die. All souls are subject to God. God is the one who ordained the soul of every human being and if one ends up receiving a penalty judgment of God, such as death, it was due to his own sin issue.

In other words, every person is individually accountable to God. This is true in every dispensation. We cannot blame our parents for our own sin. We cannot blame our forefathers for our sin choices. All are individually accountable to God.

DIVINE JUDGMENT REALITY #2 – God assesses the case of a righteous man. **18:5-9**

Now God gives His first judgment or assessment of one He judges as righteous. This man is not sinless, but he is classified by God as righteous.

Trait #1 - A righteous man practices justice. **18:5a**

Trait #2 - A righteous man practices righteousness. **18:5b**

Trait #3 - A righteous man does not associate himself with false religion. **18:6a**

The idea of eating at the mountain was the idea of participating in the idolatrous worship services that were conducted up on the mountain areas.

Trait #4 - A righteous man does not involve himself in immorality. **18:6b**

Trait #5 - A righteous man does not oppress others. **18:7a**

Trait #6 - A righteous man pays his bills. **18:7b**

Trait #7 - A righteous man does not rob others. **18:7c**

Trait #8 - A righteous man shares some food and clothing with the needy. **18:7d**

Trait #9 - A righteous man does not lend money and charge interest. **18:8a**

Trait #10 - A righteous man keeps his hand from iniquity. **18:8b**

Trait #11 - A righteous man judges justly between man and man. **18:8c**

Trait #12 - A righteous man governs his life by God's Word. **18:9**

Any individual who faithfully lives life this way is honorable and will live and not die prematurely as a judgment of God.

The idea of “live” in the Old Testament not only refers to the duration of life, but the fullness of life and the blessings of God in life. A meaningful, blessed life comes from pursuing the righteous ways of God.

DIVINE JUDGMENT REALITY #3 – God assesses the case of a wicked son. **18:10-13**

Now a father could be a righteous man, but have a wicked son. A wicked son has certain traits:

Trait #1 - A wicked son is violent. **18:10a**

Trait #2 - A wicked son does not do righteous things to his brother. **18:10b**

Trait #3 - A wicked son involves himself in false religion. **18:11a**

Trait #4 - A wicked son involves himself in immorality. **18:11b**

Trait #5 - A wicked son oppresses the poor and needy. **18:12a**

Trait #6 - A wicked son does rob others. **18:12b**

Trait #7 - A wicked son does not pay his bills. **18:12c**

Trait #8 - A wicked son involves himself in things abominable. **18:12d**

Trait #9 - A wicked son lends on interest to make interest. **18:13a**

God says this wicked son will not live; he will die. He will be put to death and the blood is on his own head.

DIVINE JUDGMENT REALITY #4 – God assesses the case of a righteous son who has a wicked father. **18:14-18**

Now God brings up another reality, which is the reality of a son who grows up watching a wicked father but he decides he will not follow him or his evil.

Trait #1 - He does not involve himself in false religious worship like his dad. **18:15a**

Trait #2 - He is not involved in immoral things like his dad. **18:15b**

Trait #3 - He does not oppress people like his dad. **18:16a**

Trait #4 - He does not commit robbery like his dad. **18:16b**

Trait #5 - He helps needy people unlike his dad. **18:16c**

Trait #6 - He does not take advantage of people like his dad. **18:17a**

Trait #7 - He lives life according to God's Word unlike his dad. **18:17b**

In this case the son will live (v. 17), but the father will die (v. 18).

DIVINE JUDGMENT REALITY #5 – God assesses the case of judgment against individuals.
18:19-20

The point here is that the son's teeth were not affected by the fact that the father ate sour grapes and chose to live an evil life. God will judge the righteous son on the basis of what he did and he will judge the evil father on the basis of what he did.

DIVINE JUDGMENT REALITY #6 – God assesses the case of the wicked man who turns from sin to pursue righteousness. **18:21-23**

These verses offer amazing grace. No matter how far one has drifted into evil and wickedness, if one will turn away from it and turn to the Lord, he will not be punished but will live and experience the blessings of God.

A wicked person has two options.

(Option #1) - Continue in a lifestyle of wickedness contrary to God;

(Option #2) - Turn from the wicked lifestyle to pursue the Word and will of God.

If the wicked person turns to God, God will grant grace. He does not want to punish people. He finds no pleasure in that. He would rather grant His life and blessings to His people.

DIVINE JUDGMENT REALITY #7 – God addresses the case of the righteous man who turns to sin to pursue wickedness. **18:24**

If a righteous man turns away from righteousness to pursue wickedness, his righteousness will not be remembered and he will be judged and he will die. God will not let His people dabble in abominable things forever. He gives them time to repent; but if they don't, he will execute them.

Just because a person was once righteous does not let him off the hook so he can pursue evil.

DIVINE JUDGMENT REALITY #8 – God addresses what people say versus what He will do.
18:25-29

It is quite obvious from **verse 25** that the people of Israel were saying God's way of doing things was not right, just or fair. God says you are the ones who are not right.

Verse 26 says if a righteous man turns from his righteousness, he will die. **Verse 27** if a wicked man turns away from his wickedness, he will live.

Why will he live? Because as **verse 28** says he thought it through and decided he wanted to walk in the ways of God and not continue in the ways of sin.

God says in **verse 29**, Israel is so deluded in their thinking that they don't think this is right. God says you are the ones who are not right.

DIVINE JUDGMENT REALITY #9 – God warns of judgment but offers grace. **18:30-32**

God gives a gracious invitation to all people—wicked or righteous. The invitation is to repent and turn away from “all your transgressions” so that iniquity does not become a stumbling block to you.

Go after a new heart that is dedicated to obeying the Scriptures and you will live a long, blessed life. God does not delight in killing someone. But at times He does it. We can avoid negative judgment by responding to the Word of God.

God promises that one day Israel will have a new heart and new spirit (36:26-27). This will be a national reality. But it can be an individual reality here and now.

Now one difference between law and grace is clearly seen by comparing this chapter to Ezekiel 36:26-34. In this chapter the emphasis is on “do and live or not do and die.” In Ezekiel 36 the emphasis is on a new heart that guarantees one will live.

We receive a new heart that makes us a new creation the moment we believe in Jesus Christ. We have received a clean slate and if we pursue that which is righteous, one day we will be rewarded. But if we pursue that which is unrighteous, we will lose.

Do not ever forget that God is a God of grace, but He is also a God of government.