

**“The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge.”** This is an old Israelite proverb and is quoted in Jeremiah 31 and Ezekiel 18. It represented the way Israelites, in times of captivity and suffering, thought about the Justice of God. It was an attack on God’s fairness and used as an agent of the adversary to keep people from changing their lives (they felt hopeless).

It says that because of the sins of a father, the children will be found guilty and suffer. It hints to an angry God who sweeps judgment across a nation, pronouncing them all guilty because of the sins of a few. And it makes people feel inadequate to make themselves right with God and further fed their grief and sinful living. What’s the use?

Jeremiah announced that days are coming when the people would see the foolishness of this and understand the truth: **“But everyone will die for his own iniquity; each man who eats sour grapes, his teeth will be set on edge.”** The truth is, there is judgment and many may get hurt – but each person is right or wrong before God, lives or dies before Him, based on his own choices, his faith.

I’m concerned that similar faulty ideas about God’s Justice and Fairness exist today:

**1** – Some people believe God is angry and sweeps judgment far beyond the one doing the sinning. So we are caught up in God’s wrath. Therefore what use is their to appeal to God for help or life?

**2** – Some people believe they can’t be good, always caught in the shadow of their parent’s sin, their heritage of sin, or the traditions or tendencies passed down to them by others.

What both of these things do is misunderstand the Goodness of God and underestimate the power of You, of every person, to be right with God if that is the choice you make by faith.

**Exodus 20:1-6** – Maybe this wrong idea of God’s Justice started back at Mount Sinai

- God is jealous and expects to be worshipped and served as Holy
- To those who choose not to do so, He will punish them, even unto 4 generations
- But it seems clear His hope is not to do so, but to show loving kindness to thousands who love Him and keep His commandments.
- So let’s be clear, whatever punishment might be handed down and however long it may last, it is not God’s will or desire for that to happen.
- There are two possible explanations for what we read here
  - o **First**, there seems to be indication that hate for Him continued. Perhaps what He is saying is that the hate the father had was passed down by example to the children and they hated Him as well, and so the sin and judgment just kept going.
    - **Isaiah 65:6-7** – Often it is clear sin has permeated multiple generations and that judgment is just upon both generations for sin passed down and chosen.
    - **Deut 5:9-10; 24:16** – Whatever it means, you are not guilty of sin and subject to being punished for it for who your father is nor who your son is.
  - o **Second**, there is no question that consequences for one’s sin can, in fact, affect generations. It doesn’t mean the next generation is guilt of sin, but it does mean they will have to suffer because of what their father did. (We see this today)
    - **Jeremiah 16:10-11** – Here the great captivity into Babylon was the result of the sins of their fathers. So there were consequences that affected many others. However, **v12-13** – once again, the sins of the children are brought in – *they followed the sin of their fathers and so God has not relented in judgment.*
- So here is what I know:
  - o God doesn’t want to punish, hurt or visit iniquity of any kind on anyone.
    - So know that you serve a God who wants to bless you above all else.
  - o He is forced to do so and will do so for all who replace or forsake Him

- Know that His justice demands that your sin is addressed
- This can lead to consequences for generations – not meaning he children are sinners by nature, but they may suffer for what their fathers did.
  - Understand that your sin can hurt the innocent in terms of consequences
- However, most often it seems the sin of the father influences the sons to also choose sin, and this is largely why God does not relent but continues punishment.
  - Consider that most dangerously, your example can pass sin down.
- SO... GOD IS JUST. God is holy. God seeks to heal and bless.
  - None of this is an indictment against the Holy and Righteous Creator.

All of this is explained plainly and powerfully in one chapter: **Ezekiel 18**. This is right in the middle of Judah's darkest days. God has been livid with them. Punishment is coming from the North. If ever God would emotional, unjust and just wipe them out across the board, this would have been that time.

1. The Proverb is Wrong (18:1-3) – This does not accurately represent God's relationship with people. This is an affront to His justice and leads to faulty conclusions and choices.
2. All Lives matter to God (18:4,32) – He made all and seeks to preserve all. He takes no pleasure in ending lives, so turn to Him. But make no mistake: The one who sins is subject to death.
3. A Righteous man will Live (18:5-9) – He both “does not” do the things God hates and “does” the things that please God. God will look out for that man. He will bless him. He may die untimely. He may suffer at the hand of another, but he will not be guilty to God or punished by God.
4. His Violent Son will Die (18:10-13) - If his son departs from the Truth, and begins to live against the will of God, he will be punished by God. This is his own doing and his own fate.
5. His Righteous Son will Live (18:14-17) – If his sons sees that sin and chooses to forsake it and turn to God, then God will not hold the fathers' sin against the boy. He will be saved. (Note: **v18** – the father still dies in his sin. The son's faith does not save him.)
6. God is Fair to Each and All (18:19-20) – Each person makes choices and God responds – to life if they live rightly and to death if they chose to forsake Him.
7. God saves Sinners that Repent (18:21-23) – Not to say that consequences may not still exist, but God's anger and the guilt the person possesses before God goes away. God wants to save!
8. God punishes Faithful who Turn Away (18:24) – No more than previous sin keeps from being right with God later... previous righteousness does not preserve anyone if they turn to sin.
9. Man's Ideas on all this Don't Matter (18:25-29) – These are God's ways – in a strong sense, they always have been and always will be. This is just and absolute. We must accept it.
10. Each Person must Repent to Live! (18:30-33) – Remember, God was so angry at them at the time. As hot in anger as anywhere in Scripture. And yet, he would forgive the penitent. What a great God!? *He wants to save us. And everyone can be saved if they repent and do what is right!*

This is a description of God – of His ways - Of His fairness - His justice - Him. Why does this matter? So many things are different today: JESUS has come and died and made salvation available to all men, not matter where they are from or what they have done. He beckons for us to repent from wherever we are, trust Him with our faith and do what is right, and He will save us. Wait... maybe things aren't that different. That sounds exactly like Ezekiel 18! We have so much more in Jesus, readily available, and the life we get is eternal... but God. Is. God. He is always the same. Will you honor Him?

**II Corinthians 5:9-10,14-15** – Those who do this will live. Only those who do this.