

**Divide-The-Truth Sunday School Preview Notes**  
**Ezekiel 18**  
**Sunday School Lesson for June 26, 2005**

**Introduction:** In 16:44 Ezekiel wrote, “As is the mother, so is her daughter.” In more modern translations (NASB, NKJV, and NIV) the verse sounds more familiar to us, “Like mother, like daughter.” I have heard this Biblical proverb used many times. Most of the time it refers to bad or negative qualities found in the mother that are also found in the daughter. Ezekiel wrote these words to reveal to Israel that the nation had taken on the heathen lifestyle of the land of Canaan. Israel was affected by the godless environment rather than infecting it with her godliness. The book of Proverbs tells us, “Bad company corrupts good morals.” How true this is in our lives also. We must be careful who we become closely associated with; otherwise our godly standards become corrupted by the world’s ungodliness.

Perhaps no other chapter in the Old Testament and possibly the New Testament is as clear as Ezekiel 18 regarding responsibility and personal accountability. It is a message that is desperately needed today. Last week as I was studying for this message I read in the paper about a CEO of a very large corporation who agreed to pay \$1.5 million back to his company because the Internal Revenue Service ruled the expenses to be personal and not corporate. He paid them back but his attorney made the statement that this was not an admission of guilt. If he was not guilty, then he should have contested the IRS finding. No, his payment was an admission of guilt. Since creation man has always attempted to shift the blame for his wrongdoing to someone else. When Adam and Eve sinned in the garden, Adam blamed Eve and Eve blamed the serpent, but God put the blame squarely on them. Just once I would like to hear someone on the news say, “I did it and I am willing to pay the consequences for it.” No one in our society wants to take responsibility for his actions. If they get caught in wrong behavior, they want to blame it on the way they were raised, “like mother, like daughter.” I will be the first to admit, environment (how you were raised) plays a significant role in how you turn out. This is why the Scriptures tell us “to raise up a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not depart from it” along with many other verses found throughout the Bible. If environment cannot be used, we say “it is in our genes.” In other words, some of us are genetically predisposed to certain types of wrong behavior. Among these wrong behaviors are homosexuality and alcoholism. I believe these scientists and medical doctors may be on to something for the Bible tell us, “As by one man sin entered into the world and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.” Scientists are right, we all have a predisposition to sin. In regards to certain genes causing us to sin in certain ways, I have only one thing to say, “Hogwash!”

**1-2** When Ezekiel’s listeners heard his statement, “Like mother, like daughter,” they responded with a common proverb, “The fathers (predecessors) have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge.”

When I was growing up, my grandfather had some grapevines. In the summer months when the grapes began to ripen, I would sneak over and eat them right off the vine. Being a little boy I did not always pick the most ripened ones. Many times I would bite into one that was not ripe. Nothing tastes as sour as a grape that is not fully ripe. Literally it would pucker your lips, which is what is meant by the “teeth being on edge.” Jeremiah dealt with the same saying in Jeremiah 31. The parents had eaten the sour grapes but the children still had the aftertaste in their mouths. The proverb literally means that the Israelites were blaming their present misfortune on their parent’s past disobedience. The LORD tells Ezekiel, like He did Jeremiah, “What mean ye, that ye use this proverb concerning the land of Israel.”

It was true that Israel was suffering and had been humiliated badly, but those suffering thought that the suffering was not because of their sin but because of their parent’s sin. Rather than accepting the blame for their personal sinfulness, they shifted the blame toward their parents, and since it was their parents fault they flung up their hands in denial and said, “We can’t do anything about it.” Also, since they felt that the situation was hopeless, they felt like God was unjust toward them (Ezekiel 18:25). They were innocent victims of an unfair God.

Like all false teaching and false doctrine, there is just enough truth mixed with the false to make the teaching, doctrine, or attitude completely incorrect. Satan is a mastermind at this. However, human nature

(flesh) being what it is, fallen and deceived, always attempts to wiggle out of the blame. This is especially true when our problems are not of our own making.

**Class Interaction:**

- Turn to Exodus 20:5 and Deuteronomy 5:9. What does God mean when He states that he visits the iniquity of the fathers on the children, and on the third and fourth generation?

At first it appears that these verses affirm what the Israelites were saying in v.2. The word “visits” refers to punishment. The verses say that the punishment for the father’s sin goes to the third and fourth generation. The same warning was stated in Exodus 34:6-7 and even Ezekiel traced God’s future judgment back to the people’s past actions (Ezekiel 16:15-19).

- Turn to Deuteronomy 24:16.

Even before Ezekiel wrote this passage of Scripture, God made it clear that each person is accountable for his own sin. The point of these passages is that the effects of sin have serious and lasting consequences. God does punish each individual for his own sin, but my sin could adversely affect my children, my wife, other family or friends, or complete strangers. People are wrong when they say, “It’s my body and I have the right to live as I please because it does not affect you.” The man who drives while drunk and then hits and kills someone I know, his sin had effects on me. The person who receives a blood transfusion from HIV infected blood is affected by the person’s sin who gave that blood. I, like you, could go on and on with example after example of how someone else’s sin affected me.

**Point:** Though our children will not be held accountable for our sin, they will be held accountable for their sin that they learned from us, and the consequences of our sin may be so dire that they also reap those consequences. King David is the perfect example of this (II Samuel 12:11-20).

3 The LORD responds to the heredity or environmental principle with, “Enough is enough.”

**Class Interaction:**

- Have you ever heard someone say, “I swear” or “I swear on a stack of Bibles”? This sort of statement is made when someone doubts your word. The book of James tells us that our “yes” should mean yes and our “no” should mean no. A believer’s word should be so solid that there is no doubt or lack of clarity as to what it means or that you will be true to it.

In v.3 God forbids the use of this proverb because it was not true. God’s judgment was so severe against this false thinking that He took an oath against Himself. “As I live.”

4 Instead, the LORD gave them a new principle to live by and one for us also, “The soul that sinneth, it shall die.” We must understand that the word “soul” does not refer to the spiritual or the eternal part of the person, but rather it refers to the entire person. Thus it could be read, “The person who sins is the one who will die” (HCSB). This portion of this verse has been frequently misused to refer to spiritual death and separation from God. However, that is not what it is referring to. We must remember that the LORD was speaking to His covenant people. They may have been dreadfully sinful, as we to are, but they were His chosen people. The Mosaic covenant was given to a people who had already received the Aramaic covenant. The Mosaic covenant was given to those who had already trusted the LORD in faith. The purpose of the Mosaic covenant was not for salvation but to give the Israelites practical guidelines to live by. Thus, the Mosaic covenant was for their sanctification. If they lived by the Mosaic covenant they were promised God’s blessings and physical life. If they failed to live by the Mosaic covenant they would receive God’s judgments even to the point of physical death.

They entered into eternal life by faith like we do. The only difference between Old Testament believers and New Testament believers is that they looked forward to Calvary for forgiveness and we look back to Calvary. This is what Paul spoke of in Romans 3:24-26 when he wrote, “Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare, I say, at this time His righteousness: that He might be just, and the Justifier

of him which believeth in Jesus.” The expression “for the remission of sins that are past” is better understood “for the pre-remission of sins.” When we are saved, God forgives our sins (past, present, and future). It also means that God forgave the sins of those who lived and died before Christ (past, present, and future) in light of Christ’s redemptive work on Calvary. This may seem difficult for us to understand but we must remember that Jesus Christ was the “lamb slain before the foundation of the universe.” It is difficult for us to understand because our minds cannot grasp time in regards to eternity. For us, everything has a beginning and an end. With God, there never was a beginning and there will never be an end.

God had the power and authority to make this overarching principle to apply to all because “all souls are mine.” Since God is the creator and sustainer of all life, He has the right to say there are do’s and don’ts, rights and wrongs. He has the right to say, “You belong to Me.”

**Point:** Judgment doesn’t just happen; God controls it.

**5** With the principle stated, Ezekiel presented three examples in vv.5-20 to prove his point: A righteous father (vv.5-9), an unrighteous son (vv.10-13), and a righteous grandson (vv.14-18). Ezekiel may have had in mind the reviewing of three generations: a father, son, and grandson. In each case Ezekiel described the actions of the individual and then described the actions of God. As we read this chapter, you will notice that death is frequently mentioned (vv.4, 13, 17-18, 20-21, 23-24, 26, 28, and 32). Once again we must understand that Ezekiel was not referring to spiritual death but rather physical. Jews who did not exercise saving faith toward the Lord were lost just as Gentiles who did not exercise saving faith toward the Lord. Old Testament or New Testament, the way of salvation is the cross. Once saving faith has been exercised in a person, Jew or Gentile, it is evidenced by doing what is “just, and do that which is lawful and right.”

The first case is the man who was “just.” The word “just” means right or righteous. More modern translations like the HCSB translate it this way. It speaks of moral integrity. It speaks of a man who chooses to do what is right morally and lawfully, which is why he adds “lawful and right.” There are a lot of things in life that are legally right but morally wrong. A man of integrity will not use the law to sinfully advantage himself.

**Point:** God’s righteousness that is imputed in a believer upon salvation will always result in righteousness in the life of the believer.

**6-9** Beginning in v.6 and continuing to v.9 the LORD provided for them eight negative offenses and eight positive virtues that define what a “just” man is. Because the negatives and the positives are mixed together in these verses I will put them in a table for us and then we will discuss them.

Negative Offenses

1. “Hath not eaten upon the mountains” - v.6
2. “Neither hath lifted up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel” – v. 6
3. “Neither hath defiled his neighbor’s wife” – v.6
4. “Neither hath come near to a menstruous woman” – v.6
5. “Hath not oppressed any” – v.7
6. “Hath spoiled none by violence” – v.7
7. “Hath not given forth upon usury” – v.8
8. “Neither hath taken any increase” – v.8

Positive Virtues

1. “Hath restored the debtor his pledge” - v.7
2. “Hath given his bread to the hungry” - v. 7
3. “Hath covered the naked with a garment” – v.7
4. “Hath not given forth upon usury” – v.8
5. “Hath executed true judgment between man and man” – v.8
6. “Hath walked in my statutes” – v.9
7. “Hath kept my judgments” – v.9
8. “Deal truly” – v.9

All of these offenses and virtues are mentioned in the Mosaic Covenant, which was given to the people of Israel so that they might live pure and sanctified lives before the nations. The law was to help the people live a life that gave evidence to their faith.

The first evidence of a righteous man dealt with worship, “hath not eaten upon the mountains, neither hath lifted up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel” (v.6). The term “eaten upon the mountains” refers to pagan feasts that occurred on high places (hills and mountains). There they would dedicate the food to the idols and then consume it all in the name of worship. The term “lifted up his eyes to the idols” speak of

worshipping false gods. The picture is of one who bows or falls to his knees and must look up in order to give reverence to the idol. However, it also refers to not even giving a glance at such things. I find it interesting that it says the “idols of the house of Israel” and not the idols of the pagans. The spiritual idolatry in Israel had become so bad that they no longer had to rely upon the pagan idols. They created their own! God’s Word clearly prohibited false worship. The Hebrew people were not to have any part of it, not even a casual glance (Exodus 20:3-5).

**Point:** The just man worships the one true God alone.

The second evidence of a righteous man dealt with moral purity, “neither hath defiled his neighbor’s wife, neither hath come near to a menstruous woman” (v.6). Sexual relations outside the bounds of marriage were clearly prohibited in the Law (Exodus 20:14) but so were sexual relations between a husband and wife during the time of her menstrual cycle (Leviticus 18:19 and 20:18). Thus the man exercised self-control toward his own wife.

**Point:** The just man carefully guards his life against sexual immorality and maintains marital fidelity and moral purity.

The third evidence of a “just” man is how he dealt with his neighbor.

Negatively, the “just” man does not take advantage of others, “hath not oppressed any.” This speaks of taking control over a man or his property when he is down. Positively, he “restored to the debtor his pledge.” Rather than taking advantage of someone when they were down and unable to help themselves, the “just” man helps him get back on his feet (“restored”).

Negatively, the “just” man is not guilty of extortion, “hath spoiled none by violence”, and positively helps those in need of help, “given his bread to the hungry” and “hath covered the naked with a garment...”

**Point:** The just man treats his neighbor or others with kindness and generosity knowing that it will not likely be returned.

The fourth evidence of a “just” man reveals how he conducted his business.

Negatively, he has “not given forth upon usury.” Usury is the charging of extremely high interest rates. In Old Testament and New Testament times banks did not exist. If someone was in need of money, he would go to the wealthy for a loan. The charging of interest was prohibited among Israelites but was allowed toward non-Israelites. However, the interest charged to non-Israelites was never to be beyond a reasonable amount. Unfortunately, the lust for money was greater than the concern for their fellow brethren and the Israelites were charging extremely high rates. This in itself was contrary to God’s written law, but when the loan could not be paid back, the collateral was seized in very violent ways, “spoiled by violence.” “Spoiled by violence” describes the lender entering houses and robbing people.

Negatively, the “just” man “hath not taken any increase” and positively “withdrawn his hand from iniquity.” Both of these actions again speak about how one conducted his business affairs. It was not wrong for the Jews to make a profit in their business. Nor is it for us. However, the wrongful treatment occurred when the Jews would charge outlandish prices for goods knowing their brethren needed them but could not afford them. This of course led to the lending of money which we just spoke about in the preceding paragraph. During the captivity times and the times preceding it the economy was very bad. The rich got richer and the poor got poorer. The wealthy businessman was taking advantage of his Jewish brother. God said it was not characteristic of a just man to charge an unreasonable profit or take advantage of people’s misfortunes. Instead, the just man was to make sure his business practices were on the up-and-up, “executed true judgment between man and man.”

**Point:** The just man carries out business fairly and free of corruption.

The last evidence of a “just” man is how he relates to God.

Positively, he walks in God's "statutes", keeps God's "judgments", and "deals truly." All of these words and phrases refer to the man's attitude toward God and His Word. I find it interesting that Ezekiel starts with the just man's worship, followed by negative actions and positive attributes, and closes with the just man's attitude toward God.

**Point:** When man has the correct actions in regards to worship and a correct attitude in regards to God and His Word, he will demonstrate a lifestyle that reveals his faith toward God.

**Class Interaction:**

- What is the result of a man living justly and doing that which is lawful and right?

Answer: "He shall surely live." That is he will not die prematurely or suffer punishment for sin.

- Turn to Ephesians 2:8-9 and Titus 3:5-8 and read. How does Paul reveal God's gift of salvation come to man in Ephesians? What about in Titus?

Answer: "By grace are ye saved through faith" (Ephesians 2:8)

Answer: "But according to His mercy" (Titus 3:5)

- How does Paul reveal that salvation does not come to us?

Answer: "Not of works, lest anyone should boast." (Ephesians 2:9)

Answer: "Not by works of righteousness which we have done..." (Titus 3:5)

- What does Paul tell us will be one of the outcomes of our salvation?

Answer: "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works..." (Ephesians 2:10)

Answer: "that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works" (Titus 3:8)

**Point:** There is no real faith if there are no works to prove your saving faith (James 2:17).

**10-13** Beginning in v.10 and continuing to v.13, Ezekiel moves to the second example. Here he deals with an unrighteous son. Ezekiel directly addresses the proverb of v.2 in vv.10-13 for the son of vv.10-13 was the son of the "just" man addressed in vv.5-9. The Israelites were complaining of their teeth being on edge because of the sour grapes eaten by their fathers, so Ezekiel will show them their belief is false.

Ezekiel list ten offenses against God's law in these verses and three of them, "murder", "idolatry", and "adultery", were considered capital offenses punishable by death. As you read these verses it is apparent that what ever the father did in righteousness the son did in unrighteousness, and what the father refrained from doing because he was righteous the son did because he was unrighteous.

God's verdict was clear, "he shall surely die, his blood shall be upon him." The son would stand on his own in regards to judgment. The righteousness of his father would do him no good. This also corrected another false belief of the Jews. They thought their relationship to father Abraham placed them in a proper relationship to God no matter how they lived. We have much the same tendency also. Many believers think they are in right standing with God because they were raised in a Christian home. Their mother and father are saved, therefore they are. Nothing could be further from the truth. Each person stands before God on his own. If His righteousness is not your righteousness (II Corinthians 5:21), then you will one day hear God's voice say unto you, "I never knew you; Depart from me" (Matthew 7:23).

**Point:** God's dealings with man are impartial.

**14-18** Ezekiel continues the example in vv.14-18. It seems difficult to understand how an unrighteous son could come from a righteous father, but even more difficult to believe is how a righteous son could come from an unrighteous father. However, we do see an example of this in the life of King Hezekiah. King Hezekiah was a godly king. His son Manasseh was an ungodly man who did later repent of his evil ways. Manasseh's son, Amon, was evil, but Amon's son King Josiah was one of the greatest and godliest kings

that Judah ever had. As we have already noted, Proverbs tells us to “train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not depart from it” (Proverbs 22:6). The proverb is meant to encourage godly parents to not give up in the years of raising their children. However, the proverb also works the other way. If an unrighteous man trains up his son in unrighteousness, the son will more than likely be an unrighteous man who will not turn from it. However, thanks be unto God that God can break through the many years of unrighteous training and save the least likely to be saved!

Like vv.10-13 we are to understand that this man is a continuation of the same family. Thus this would be the grandson of the “just” man in vv.6-9 and the son the unrighteous man in vv.10-13, making this the third generation.

Twelve godly characteristics are listed in vv.14-18. While slightly different than the just man of vv.6-9, the point of the passage reveals that the son resisted the evil influence of his father.

Just as a righteous father’s good behavior cannot shield and unrighteous son’s bad behavior, so an unrighteous father cannot hinder his son’s righteousness.

As I read this chapter, it gives me great hope and it confirms to me the great responsibility I have in living like the “just” man. God has placed within us the freedom of choice. I can choose to live for the Lord or I can choose to live for myself. I do not have to pay for the sins of my father or grandfather. That is very liberating. I can be raised in godliness and continue in it or I can be raised in godliness and deny it. I can be raised in ungodliness and live in it or I can be raised in ungodliness and deny it. Also, I can return to the Lord if I have departed from Him. No matter how I live or don’t live, no one pays the price of my sin as I do, “The soul that sinneth, it shall die...” (v.20). However, the long lasting consequences of my sin may be destructive to those around me.

God makes a promise to those who repent of their sin, “His transgressions that he hath committed, they shall not be mentioned unto him.” It is not that God forgets, but rather He considers the case closed.

**Class Interaction:**

- Why would God allow a guilty sinner forgiveness?

The answer is found in v.32, “For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God.”

Do you know him as your Savior and Lord? If not would you ask Him to forgive you and come into your heart? Would you in faith repent (turn) from your sin and in faith turn to Jesus to be your Savior and Lord? The Bible tells us, “Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” (Romans 10:13)

Maybe you already have a personal relationship with Jesus, but the Lord, through the teaching of His Word, has pricked your heart about someone who is not living according to his statutes and judgments. Believers also need to repent of sin.

“For why will ye die?” asks the LORD. (v.31)

**To God be the Glory!**

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