

PRESENT TRUTH

A Teaching Letter of Lifestream Teaching Ministries

For this reason I will not be negligent to remind you always of these things, though you know and are established in the present truth. (2 Peter 1:12 NKJV)

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Consequences

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Introduction

This past week I was asked to teach in an adult Sunday School class at one of the denominational churches. Their normal teacher had a family issue that prevented her from doing her normal duties so I was asked to fill in. They use their denomination's Sunday School Quarterly and the lesson for that Sunday was from Ezekiel 18 with the key verse being verse 20. The focus of the quarterly was one's personal responsibility for sin—a son is not punished because of the father's sin and the father is not punished for the son's sin. Each is responsible for his own sin. While this is completely true, it seems to contradict another Scripture, Deut. 5:9, where it says that the sins of the fathers are visited on the children unto the third and fourth generation. Since I don't believe that Scripture ever contradicts itself, but, that it is our understanding that is the problem, I began to ponder the issue of these two sets of Scripture.

Individual versus Corporate

The first thought I had was about the difference in emphasis between the Old Testament and our modern understanding about the individual. The Old Testament emphasized the corporate, the nation, the group, the family and said little about the individual. We, on the other hand, emphasize the individual, especially the Western Church. Our emphasis is personal salvation, personal relationship with Jesus, personal promises, personal responsibility, etc. We completely neglect the idea of the corporate, the group, the family by placing all of our emphasis on the individual. However, it seems to me that there should be a balance between these two areas. While it is true that we have individual salvation, we are being built together into a corporate entity—the Temple of God, the Body of Christ, the Bride. Therefore, it would make sense that there are some things that apply to the individual primarily and that there are some things that apply to the corporate primarily and, probably, some things that apply to both. If that is the case then our understanding of the Scriptures need to take this into account.

I think that this is probably the situation with Ezekiel 18:20 and Deut. 5:9. It seems obvious that Ezekiel is talking about the individual and the individual's sin. Looking at the context of

Deuteronomy, it would seem that it might be applicable to a corporate understanding.

Consequences

There is a difference between sin and the consequences of sin in this life. We understand the consequences after death because we have all heard sermons about Heaven and Hell. However, we are not always as clear about the consequences of sin in this life.

The thief on the cross beside Jesus received forgiveness for his sins, because Jesus said that he would be with Him in Paradise that day. However, the thief still had the consequences for his sin in this life. He died because of them. Forgiveness of sins does not relieve one of the consequences of those sins. A married person can have an affair that results in a pregnancy. The adultery can be confessed and forgiven but the consequences of the adultery affects two families and a new life.

The Lord can be merciful. In some cases He may remove the consequences or reduce their impact on us and others. In other cases He may not do that and we receive the full impact of the consequences in this life. He is the sovereign Lord and, as the Scriptures say, will have mercy on whom He will have mercy.

Cultural and Environmental Impact

This brings us to the idea that we should think about Deuteronomy 5:9 from the viewpoint of the consequences of corporate sin. If we use the idea of idolatry or the worship of false Gods as the corporate sin, consider the cultural environment that is created, which would effect all in the group. This effect would be especially powerful within the family and could possibly be felt through multiple generations, even to the third or fourth one.

I can see in this three problem areas that would be created within a family that later generations would have to deal with in order to overcome the consequences.

1. It would be easy for future generations to repeat the same sin since it would become a part of the family's traditions and beliefs.
2. It would open the door to demonic involvement in the family life allowing these demons to continue their activities through the future generations.
3. It would provide the basis of the family coming under a curse. This would be a God allowed curse as a consequence of the sin. This curse would continue to future generations until it is broken and overcome by active faith in the Lord Jesus, who became a curse for us by bearing the curse of the Law so that the blessings of Abraham might come upon us.

I believe this to be the warning of Deuteronomy 5:9. The consequences of sin within the family group can have an effect on future generations. While individuals in the future generations walk before God accountable only for their own sins and actions, they can be under the shadow of consequences that began in previous generations.

We can be free of all of this in Christ Jesus. However, it requires an active faith and the willingness to walk it out before the Lord. We have received little teaching on how to do this but we need to learn. If the Lord wills, the next couple of issues of Present Truth Teaching Letters

will take a detailed look at each of these three problem areas. Each one of them is dealt with in a different manner so we need to learn how to deal with each one scripturally.

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