



THE REFLECTOR

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CONCERNING DIVINE REVELATION

"UNTO YOU"



(Only rarely and for special reasons do we publish an article without the name of its writer. The following is such an exception.)

God sent His church a "telegram". Many feet long and transmitted in sections, it was kept for centuries to be delivered to us. This reminds us of a dying young father who leaves a letter to be given to his child years later. The operators who copied the message of the living God were the prophets of old. To pursue this further turn to First Peter 1:10-12 and consider the following thoughts.

Many an operator has copied many a message addressed to someone else. Just so, it was revealed to the prophets that the things they transmitted were "not unto themselves". They "ministered" them "unto you", Christians, us! We should be thankful that these messages were "testified beforehand" for our benefit. They were written aforetime for our learning (Romans 15:4), and our admonition (I Cor. 10:11). All along it was planned that we would be the recipients, the beneficiaries.

Certain truths in the "open" night-letters were of benefit to the people then. But the main content, "these things", were not understood until announced by gospel preachers long afterward. The failure of the prophets to understand was not due to any lack of interest on their part. They "sought" and "searched diligently" to decipher the grace and the glories told about in their copy. But they were so limited that they could not even pin-point the time element.

"What time" was referred to? Daniel could tell that the everlasting kingdom would be set up during the days of the kings of the fourth empire. But when? How long after his time? He could but wonder, and

seek, and busily search.

"What manner of time?" also baffled them. What sort of era could sustain and maintain such marvels as were foretold? They were in the dark; but they groped. They strongly desired to see and to hear, as Jesus said (Matt. 13:16-17).

What subjects were covered? To answer this fully we would need to quote the entire Old Testament. But God's spokesman, Peter, gave us an outline of certain main points. "Salvation" was one. How it was planned, prefigured, brought about, and accomplished were hinted-at mysteries to them. They are revealed and clearly-understood, precious truths to us. The "grace" that should come unto us was "prophesied of" by them.

It is no wonder that the prophets were puzzled by predictions that a divine one should suffer. That was also hidden from the very ones who were witnessing it. With all that is "announced" unto us we can understand it now.

The "glories" that followed His sufferings were also testified by the Spirit and copied by God's operators.

The long and detailed message was laid by to be delivered to the church and explained by a later message, which was the New Testament. By reading the few references cited above we can see that there was practical purpose in this for us. It is for inspiration and motivation to us in our living. It is to the intent that we might have endurance, through comfort, and hope. At once the lessons are to warn and to encourage us. How blessed we are! What advantages are ours! Indeed we are those favored ones "upon whom the ends of the ages are come". ■

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THE PROVERB OF THE SOUR GRAPES

By the time of the Babylonian Captivity, the Jews had developed and accepted the concept of hereditary guilt, and stated it in a proverb: "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge. . ." (Ezek. 18:2b). As they went about their heavy tasks in the heat of Babylon perhaps they sought a release from the guilt of sin that had brought on their enslavement and by this "sour grapes" proverb could neatly place the blame upon their fathers. Thought they, "God told our fathers this would happen if Judah did not straighten up. We are being punished for our fathers' sins!" In short, "We are not to blame — it's not our fault!"

This philosophy is current today. No one seems to be responsible for sin now. Freud and Dewey held fairly close to the "sour grapes" philosophy that the young generation's "teeth are set on edge" (they do wrong) because of the preceding generations. So no one is to be blamed as an individual. Blame the past, blame environment, blame society but "don't blame me!" As the Soledad Brother said to the "Amens" of Angela Davis and her followers, "It is impossible for a Negro to commit a crime in the oppressive society in which we live in the United States." This excuses the individual from individual responsibility and accountability. As one noted psychiatrist asked, "What ever became of *sin*?" Sin has been labeled sickness. Drunkenness is the disease of alcoholism. Fornication is called free love seeking the right mate for a lasting marriage. And who ought not be in favor of strengthening marriage and home?! If a boy steals, perhaps he has "a felt need" for the article of his theft and needs it more than the one possessing it. So — place the blame within the "sour grapes" proverb if possible, and if not, label it a disease. Such is widely accepted as a philosophy of life today. It has leavened homes, schools, courts and society in general. Even some churches have been tainted. But it is as false today as it was in Ezekiel's day, the 6th century B.C.

Is There An Element of Trust In the Proverb?

It is true that when fathers eat the "sour grapes" of sin their children often suffer the consequences — "their teeth are set on edge." When God gave the Ten Commandments to Israel He exhorted their obedience to His will expressed therein, saying, "for I Jehovah thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, upon the third and upon the fourth generation of them that

hate me. . ." (Exod. 20:5). When the fathers introduced idolatry into the land the following generations suffered the consequences of their fathers' sins.

In our daily observation of life we see children suffering, not because of their sins, but as a result of their sinful parents. A father's laziness or mismanagement; a mother's loose morals; parents on the drug kick — all these and other sins can cause a child to suffer from poverty, shame, hunger and even physical and mental disease, and yet the child is completely innocent. His "teeth are on edge" because of what his parents "ate!"

As children grow up they suffer further in that they tend to acquire the habits and appetites of parents. If parents are intemperate it is likely the child will be. If the child grows up in an immoral atmosphere his chances of accepting loose morals are indeed great. Having acquired these wrong attitudes and practices, then the child-now-grown will reap what he sows (Gal. 6:7-8), and will be accountable to God for himself.

The Falsity of the "Sour Grapes" Proverb

God does not inflict *real punishment* on the innocent, and Ezekiel makes this plain as he attacks this proverb and shows it to be false. The entire 18th chapter of Ezekiel deals with this question, but let us in this article consider a few of the verses:

What mean ye that ye use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying, The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge? As I live, saith the Lord of Jehovah, ye shall not have occasion anymore to use this proverb in Israel. Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine; the soul that sinneth it shall die (Ezek. 18:2-4).

While the innocent suffer because of other men's sins, there is no element of divine anger toward these innocents. Paul stressed this truth to Timothy, writing, "Yea, and all that would live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (II Tim. 3:12). Paul himself had suffered such persecution at the hands of sinful men (II Tim. 3:11), and felt such could be used for discipline in Christian living. He could endure this suffering for it was not punishment — there was no anger from God in it at all.

Neither is the repunishment and anger from God toward the victims of other men's vices. God holds no anger toward the newborn baby that was conceived in

sin: He condemns the illicit relationship of the parents of such a child. There is no sin inherited by the child in such situations, howbeit, he may meet unhappy consequences because of others' sins. Individual accountability is the principle all need to see. As John stressed this point:

Everyone that doeth sin doeth also lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness. . . Whoso abideth in him sinneth not; whoso sinneth hath not seen him, neither knoweth him. My little children, let no man lead you astray, he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous; he that doeth sin is of the devil. . . " (1 John 3:4,6,7. cf. Jn. 15:6).

Who Is The Just Man?

Ezekiel makes it as clear as language can do so that Jehovah judges each of us according to our own individual behavior. He quotes God as saying:

If a man be just and do that which is lawful and right, and hath not eaten upon the mountains, neither hath lifted up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, neither hath defiled his neighbor's wife, neither hath come near to a woman in her impurity, and hath not wronged any, but hath restored to the debtor his pledge, hath taken nought by robbery, hath given his bread to the hungry, and hath covered the naked with a garment; he that hath not given forth upon interest, neither hath taken any increase, that hath withdrawn his hand from iniquity, hath executed true justice between man and man, hath walked in my statutes, and hath kept mine ordinances, to deal truly; he is just, he shall surely live, saith the Lord Jehovah (Ezek. 18:5-9).

The Son That Sins: Who's to Blame?

Ezekiel next considers the question of the just man who has a sinful son and establishes accountability in such cases.

If he beget a son that is a robber, a shedder of blood, and that doeth any one of these things, and that doeth not any of those duties, but even hath eaten upon the mountains, and defiled his neighbor's wife, hath wronged the poor and needy, hath taken by robbery, hath not restored the pledge, and hath lifted up his eyes to the idols, hath committed abomination, hath given forth upon interest, and hath taken increase; shall he then live? he shall not live: he hath done all these abominations; he shall surely die; his blood shall be upon him (Ezek. 18:10-13).

The just father is not held accountable for this sinful son's actions. The son, as the father, has a free-will. He is able to think, reflect, decide and act, and is therefore responsible for his own decisions and actions. So many parents forget this, then blame themselves for their children's sins. "Where did I go wrong? Where did I fail? It must be my fault!" Of course, as parents we have the responsibility to train

our children by precept and example. We are imperfect, we do make mistakes in rearing our children. But if we instruct our children as to God's will and live a life of a Christian before them, are we to blame if when they grow up they make decisions and take actions that are sinful? Ezekiel says we are not. Was God to blame when Adam and Eve "went wrong"? Certainly not! God instructed them both clearly. They understood His will. They exercised their power of choice (free-will) and made the wrong choice. They sinned. They were to be blamed. Perhaps your child has sinned. If so he must answer to God for it. Blaming yourself for his wrong-doing will not help. It is the false "sour grapes" concept Ezekiel laid to rest, telling the Jews not to use it anymore.

The Father that Sins, but his Son does not

Having discussed who is the just man, the case of the sinful son, now Ezekiel concludes by noting the father that sins must bear his own guilt — that it does not pass to the son who lives a righteous life.

Now, lo, if he beget a son that seeth all his father's sins, which he hath done, and feareth, and doeth not such like; that hath not eaten upon the mountains, neither hath lifted up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, hath not defiled his neighbor's wife, neither hath wronged any, hath not taken aught to pledge, neither hath taken by robbery, but hath given his bread to the hungry, and hath covered the naked with a garment, . . . hath executed mine ordinances, hath walked in my statutes; he shall not die for the iniquity of his father, he shall surely live. As for the father, because he cruelly oppressed, robbed his brother, and did that which was not good among his people, behold, he shall die in his iniquity.

Yet ye say, Wherefore doth not the son bear the iniquity of the father? When the son hath done that which is lawful and right and hath kept all my statutes, and hath done them, he shall surely live. The soul that sinneth, it shall die: the son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son; the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him (Ezek. 18:14-20, Emphasis mine, E.L.F.).

The verse emphasized above (Ezek. 18:20) destroys the "sour grapes" proverb. It is the soul that sinneth that shall die. Neither righteousness nor iniquity can be transferred from father to son or from son to father. Paul expresses it clearly: "So then each one of us shall give an account of himself to God" (Rom. 14:12). Sin is self-willed rebellion against God (1 Jn. 5:17; 3:4; 11 Jn. 9), and therefore each one (each "self") is accountable for his attitudes and decisions and actions.

False Proverbs are Hurtful

The "sour grapes" proverb was discouraging to the

children for it taught, like Calvinism, hereditary sin. It offered an excuse for impenitence to fully grown men and women. Some modern-day false proverbs are: "All sincere faith is equally good." "One church is as good as another. Join the church of your choice." "I can worship alone on the Lord's Day as well as with an assembled group of Christians" "God will save all good people in all the churches." The religious teacher, like Ezekiel, needs to seek out and destroy all such false proverbs for believing them can destroy men's souls. Jesus met false notions and corrected them (Luke 13:1-5). Paul corrected misconceptions held by men (Rom. 2:25). It is the truth that sets men free. What freedom to soul and mind Ezekiel brings us is showing the falsity of the proverb of the "sour grapes"!

An Advance in Revelation

God has never in any dispensation revealed all truth in one instance. In *Genesis* he revealed many truths. In *Exodus* the Decalogue was given, and in *Leviticus* it is enlarged upon (as in *Numbers* and *Deuteronomy*). God took 70 years in the completion of the New Testament revelation.

As revelation advances it dissolves moral and spiritual difficulties, and clarifies our vision of divine righteousness and justice. The mirror of revelation becomes increasingly clearer as we receive the fuller, more complete revelation (1 Cor. 13:12). Having the complete revelation one can know the mind of God (1 Cor. 2:16), can understand the gospel of Christ (Eph.

3:3-5), and will be condemned if he obeys it not (11 Thess. 1:7-9). Let us diligently study God's revelation, His word, and not be misled by the proverbs invented by men. If sin is in the life of a father or a son they can be forgiven. Ezekiel urges upon the sinners of his day to turn from sin and to live.

But if the wicked turn from all his sins that he hath committed, and keep all my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, he shall not die. None of his transgressions that he hath committed shall be remembered against him; in his righteousness that he hath done he shall live. Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked? saith the Lord Jehovah; and not rather that he should return from his way and live? . . .

Therefore, I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, saith the Lord Jehovah. Return ye, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin. Cast away from you all your transgressions, wherein ye have transgressed; and make you a new heart and a new spirit; for why will ye die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord Jehovah" wherefore turn yourselves and live (Ezek. 18:21-23, 30-32).

How wonderful to know when pressed hard by the guilt of sin that our loving father takes no pleasure in seeing us die in that lost condition but pleads with us to forsake and turn from a life of sin and death and to live. If such were true in the Old Testament under the blood of animals how much more is it true and available under the precious blood of Christ. ■

From VANGUARD

Teen-age Marriages in the U.S.

54%

End in divorce when both
bride and groom are teen-
age.

36%

End in divorce when only
the bride is teen-age.

18%

End in divorce when both
bride and groom are 20
years of age or older.

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