



Today: Looking at the "PUNISHMENT" and "LOVE" issue.

"... I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God,

punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me,

but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments."

Exodus 20:5b-6 (NIV)

The problem:

"Children being punished for the sins of the parents?" Most people instantly conclude that this is unjust – and if it really does happen, they accuse God of being "unfair"!

But what does Scripture say?

We will follow "RULE #1," as we did previously.

If you come across a passage that offends you...

- ✓ First, find out if that's what it really says. It might say that. But make sure that you didn't misunderstand it. Also, you might want to check another Bible translation, to see how it translates the passage.
- ✓ Second, if it really does say that, remind yourself: The problem isn't God or the Bible. The problem is: ① we live in a world that constantly presents a distorted view of reality, and ② our minds have been influenced by the sinful nature we were born with.
- √ Third, look in Scripture for other passages that say something similar. They might help you to understand the passage better.
- Finally, it's OK to admit we don't understand everything in the Bible. Some things are difficult to understand (compare to 2 Peter 3:15-16). In eternity, anything we need to know will become clear to us.

Two minor translation issues.

⇒ #1 – The word "generation":

... the third and fourth generation ... a thousand generations ... From Exodus 20:5-6 (NIV) ... the third and the fourth generation ... thousands ... From Exodus 20:5-6 (ESV)

• In each passage that contrasts "third/fourth" and "thousands": The word "generations" is not present in the original text. It is implied by the context – and translators usually add it to the text (though not always after the word "thousand").

Regardless of how we interpret it, the emphasis is on the contrast between "a very small number" and "an extremely large number."

There are other passages that mention only the "thousands" and the word "generations" does occur there.

⇒ #2 – The word "punishing":

THE BASIC

... punishing the children for the sin of the parents ...

Exodus 20:5b (NIV)

MORE WORD-FOR-WORD

... visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children ...

Exodus 20:5b (ESV)

- This is a difficult-to-translate phrase. The "literal" translation is "visiting iniquity." But this phrase sounds quite awkward and (for some) difficult to understand.
- We know the basic meaning it refers to punishment of sin (iniquity). Many translations will say it that way (focusing on translating according to meaning, rather than doing it word-forword); and it accurately communicates what is meant.
- This "visiting" concept seems to have a greater focus on the purpose or consequence of the "visit," rather than on who is doing the visiting. Often the focus is on judgment (as it is here); but sometimes the purpose may result in blessing.

PASSAGES THAT FOCUS ON THE SECOND COMMANDMENT ISSUE.

We will look at passages that say the same thing (or similar).

⇒ The Second Commandment.

"... punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me,

but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments."

Exodus 20:5b-6 (NIV); repeated in Deuteronomy 5:9-10.

Observations:

- ✓ This command is found twice in Scripture. What it says is the same in both passages.
- ✓ We begin by simply observing what the passage says. Doing so, we find a set of contrasts between two groups of people, as well as two responses by God.

Actions and responses in this commandment:

The people's actions:	<u>Hate</u> God	Love and obey God
God's response:	Punishing the children for the sin of the parents	Showing <i>love</i>
Extent:	To the third and fourth generation	To a thousand generations

Even if we don't understand the reasons for the consequences...

- ✓ We should heed the warning: HATING GOD HAS SERIOUS CONSEQUENCES! So don't choose to do it!
- ✓ If we are willing to love and obey God, we won't have to concern ourselves with the consequences of hating him.
- ✓ Note the contrast: The "3 and 4" is *very small*, compared to the "1000"! We should be focusing on the *greatness* of God's love!

⇒ The 2nd Commandment's teaching reaffirmed. (The 1st Commandment is also affirmed.) RESCUE But it was because the LORD loved you and kept the oath he NOT swore to your ancestors that he brought you out with a mighty DESERVED hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the OR EARNED power of Pharaoh king of Egypt. [1ST COMM.] Know therefore that the LORD your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commandments. But [2ND COMM.] those who hate him he will repay to their face by destruction; he will not be slow to repay to their face those who hate him. Therefore, take care to follow the commands, decrees and PROPER -RESPONSE laws I give you today. Deuteronomy 7:8-11 (NIV)

We learn more about the relationship between God and people ...

- ✓ This passage does not mention the "punishing the children..." part, but emphasizes the fact that punishment is certain to come to those who hate God.
 - A First Commandment reminder is seen in the phrase:
 "the LORD your God is God."
 - Second Commandment instructions: Here, we learn more about God and his response to our love or hatred.
- ✓ A reminder (from God): They did not deserve or earn this opportunity to be redeemed from slavery. This is a picture of the human condition, because we humans were born as slaves to sin. We deserve wrath, not redemption and a new opportunity to love (and obey) God (Romans 1:16-24).
- The only right response to this opportunity is to love and obey God! (If the love is genuine, there will be a desire to obey him. Not obeying God is an expression of hatred for him.)

Actions and responses in this passage:

The nature of God:	Faithful – You can trust him to do what he says he will do.	
The people's actions:	<u>Hate</u> God.	Love and obey God.
God's response:	Repaying to their face by destruction; not slow in doing so.	Keeping his covenant of love.
Extent:	-	To a thousand generations

Since God can be trusted...

These promised consequences are guaranteed. The only right response to love and obey him! Any other response is morally foolish and insane!

God's <u>NAME</u> tells us that he is the one who loves/punishes.

Then the Lord came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, the Lord. And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming,

"The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.

Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation."

Exodus 34:5-7 (NIV)

Observations:

- ✓ Here, God tells Moses who he is (his "name" indicating not just who he is, but what he does). He is the God who does these things.
- $\checkmark\,$ This passage includes the "punishing the children" statement.

God has two types of responses: (Based on our conduct.)

The nature of God:	The "LORD" (the name apparently refers to God's absolute self-existence and unchangeableness), compassionate and gracious, slow to anger.		
God's response to people (two ways):	He does not leave the guilty unpunished. He punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents.	Abounds in love and faithfulness; maintains love; forgives wickedness, rebellion and sin.	
Extent:	To the third and fourth generation.	To thousands (perhaps referring to "generations").	

Observations:

 God graciously offers forgiveness... but warns those who choose to remain in sin, that their punishment is guaranteed.

How did Moses respond to this?

- ✓ A God-<u>hating</u> person would respond by criticizing God or accusing him of wrong-doing! They would be putting themselves in danger of receiving the *consequences* that God *promised* to those who respond in such a *hateful* manner.
- But Moses was a God-<u>loving/obeying</u> person... so he responded with worship.

Moses immediately bowed down to the ground and worshiped.

Exodus 34:8 (BSB)

The devil loves "half-truth."

People who respond the *wrong* way are not always 100% wrong.

They may accept *half* of the truth; but it gets *distorted*, when they ignore the other *half*.

So when it comes to our views about God, a refusal to accept <u>all</u> the truth about God is an expression of <u>hatred</u> toward God.

Applying this "principle" in a real-life situation (#1): Exodus 34.

✓ The context: Israel had just made the golden calf – a violation of the Second Commandment. Right after God revealed his "name" to Moses, Moses appealed to one of the characteristics that God included in his "name": "forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin."

"O Lord," he said, "if I have indeed found favor in Your sight, my Lord, please go with us. Although this is a stiff-necked people, forgive our iniquity and sin, and take us as Your inheritance."

Exodus 34:9 (BSB)

 $\checkmark~$ God's response? He lived up to his "name," and did forgive.

And the LORD said, "Behold, I am making a covenant. Before all your people I will perform wonders that have never been done in any nation in all the world. All the people among whom you live will see the LORD's work, for it is an awesome thing that I am doing with you. ..."

Exodus 34:10 (BSB)

⇒ Applying this "principle" in a real-life situation (#2): Numbers 14.

- ✓ The context: Israel continued to rebel against God. When they were about to enter the land that God promised them, they:

 ⊕ refused to trust him, ⊕ claimed that God just wanted to kill them, ③ rebelled against Moses (and threatened to kill him), and
 ⊕ said that they were better-off as slaves in Egypt.
- ✓ The threatened judgment: At this point, God offered to destroy the Israelites, and replace them with descendants of Moses.

And the LORD said to Moses, "How long will this people treat Me with contempt? How long will they refuse to believe in Me, despite all the signs I have performed among them?

I will strike them with a plague and destroy them—and I will make you into a nation greater and mightier than they are."

Numbers 14:11-12 (BSB)

This is what Israel deserved; but it was not what was going to happen. Instead, Moses interceded for the people.

First, Moses appealed to God's reputation.

✓ The surrounding nations had already heard about God's greatness. But if God destroyed Israel, the nations would conclude that God was too weak to keep his promises.

But Moses said to the LORD, "The Egyptians will hear of it, for by Your strength You brought this people from among them. And they will tell it to the inhabitants of this land. They have already heard ① that You, O LORD, are in the midst of this people, ② that You, O LORD, have been seen face to face, ③ that Your cloud stands over them, and ④ that You go before them in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night.

If You kill this people as one man, the nations who have heard of Your fame will say, 'Because the LORD was unable to bring this people into the land He swore to give them, He has slaughtered them in the wilderness.' "

Numbers 14:13-16 (BSB)
(Circled numbers added to the passage.)

Second, Moses appealed to God's name.

- ✓ He used God's own self-description (Exodus 34:5-7) as the basis of his appeal.
- ✓ Judgment would have to occur; their sin was too great. But Moses mentioned both "halves" of God's nature – in hope that the "forgiveness" part would also occur.

"So now I pray, may the power of my Lord be magnified, just as You have declared: 'The LORD is slow to anger and abounding in loving devotion, forgiving iniquity and transgression. Yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished; He will visit the iniquity of the fathers upon their children to the third and fourth generation.'

Pardon, I pray, the iniquity of this people, in keeping with the greatness of Your loving devotion, just as You have forgiven them ever since they left Egypt."

Numbers 14:17-19 (BSB)

The end result? Pardon and judgment.

- ✓ God responded in a way that demonstrated both "halves" of his name – the "forgiveness" part, as well as the "judgment" part.
- The nation (as a whole) wouldn't be destroyed, but those who sinned (as individuals) would never get to see the promised land – they would die in the wilderness.

"I have pardoned them as you requested," the LORD replied.

"Yet as surely as I live and as surely as the whole earth is filled with the glory of the LORD, not one of the men who have seen My glory and the signs I performed in Egypt and in the wilderness—yet have tested Me and disobeyed Me these ten times—not one will ever see the land that I swore to give their fathers. None of those who have treated Me with contempt will see it."

Numbers 14:20-23 (BSB)

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Some specific details:

✓ Those who had rebelled would <u>die</u> over the space of nearly 40 years. Their children (and grandchildren) would enter the land; but would first have to <u>endure</u> the years of delay. They experienced <u>consequences</u> of their parent's sin.

"So tell them: As surely as I live, declares the LORD, I will do to you exactly as I heard you say.

Your bodies will fall in this wilderness—all who were numbered in the census, everyone twenty years of age or older—because you have grumbled against Me.

Surely **none of you will enter the land** in which I swore to settle you, except Caleb son of Jephunneh and Joshua son of Nun [= two men who had not joined the rebellion].

But I will bring your children, whom you said would become plunder, into the land you have rejected—and they will enjoy it.

As for you, however, your bodies will fall in this wilderness."

Numbers 14:28-32 (BSB)

OTHER ISSUES AND CONCEPTS TO CONSIDER.

We will look at passages that say the opposite or give a different perspective.

Some passages mention God's covenant love to "a thousand generations," with little or no mention of punishment to those who hate him.

> He is the LORD our God; His judgments carry throughout the earth.

He remembers His covenant forever, the word He ordained for a thousand generations ..

Psalm 105:7-8 (BSB)

- ✓ In this passage, the focus is on the *Abrahamic* covenant.
- ✓ Though the general concept of "justice" is mentioned, it does not focus specifically on the "punishment" aspect.
- ✓ This passage is quoted (almost identically) in 1 Chronicles 16:14-15.

Many passages (both Old and New Testament) tell us that people will be judged according to their own conduct – and not another's.

These verses occur in several contexts. Some of them specifically refer to the final Judgment Day, at the end of the age.

✓ Deuteronomy 24:16 tells us that people are to be judged for their own sins.

Fathers shall not be put to death for their children, nor children for their fathers; each is to die for his own sin.

Deuteronomy 24:16 (BSB)

- This was a "people-people" issue a civil regulation that dealt with justice between people (if the sin was serious enough to warrant death).
- This was <u>not</u> a "people-God" issue. It was not related to a violation of the Second Commandment.
- There is an example of this command being obeyed in 2 Kings 14:5-6. The passage even quotes the Deuteronomy verse.

✓ A person's conduct will determine his reward.

"I the LORD search the heart and examine the mind, to reward each person according to their conduct, according to what their deeds deserve."

Jeremiah 17:10 (NIV)

Here, the deeds of the GROUP would determine their punishment as a <u>group</u> (a nation or society). The people of Jerusalem were given the opportunity to repent. But if they refused to do so...

I will punish you as your deeds deserve, declares the LORD.

I will kindle a fire in your forest that will consume everything around you.

Jeremiah 21:14 (BSB)

 At the future Day of Judgment, people will be judged as INDIVIDUALS.

... the hour is coming when all who are in their graves will hear [Jesus'] voice and come out—those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.

John 5:28b-29 (BSB)

For the Son of Man will come in His Father's glory with His angels, and then He will repay each one according to what he has done.

Matthew 16:27 (BSB)

✓ Revelation 20:11-14 describes the *final* judgment. *How will* we be judged?

... each one was judged according to his deeds.

Revelation 20:13b (BSB)

✓ God is capable of rewarding us according to what we have done.

God has enough POWER to judge; and enough LOVE to be merciful to all who repent and trust him.

"Power belongs to you, God, and with you, Lord, is unfailing love"; and, "You reward everyone according to what they have done." Psalm 62:11b-12 (NIV)

Reminder: We need to begin with an "attitude adjustment."

- ✓ It is not natural for us to appreciate the seriousness of sin, because we were <u>born in sin</u>, and are used to living under its influence.
- ✓ If we had been <u>born in righteousness</u>, we would have been totally horrified at how anti-God sin is, and totally shocked that God would even consider the possibility of having love, mercy and forgiveness for sinners (which required the death/resurrection of Jesus Christ).
- ✓ To see things correctly, we need to learn what Scripture says, and let it change the way we think – the "renewed mind" of Romans 12:2.

⇒ Ezekiel 18 gives us many details about people being judged as individuals.

- Context: People were claiming that their punishment was their parent's fault (and it may have been partly true); but they were denying their own sin.
- ✓ Four scenarios are described (along with their judgment):
 - Righteous people.
 - · Wicked people.
 - Wicked people who repent and become righteous.
 - Righteous people who change and become wicked.
- √ The prevailing theme is:

The soul who sins is the one who will die.

Ezekiel 18:4b (BSB)

✓ In this passage, God also responds to those who falsely accuse him of being unfair...

Who is being unfair? It's NOT God!

✓ God does not desire anyone's death. He warns them about <u>judgment</u>, but offers them <u>life</u>, if they are willing to repent.

"Yet the house of Israel says, 'The way of the Lord is not just.'

Are My ways unjust, O house of Israel? Is it not your ways that are unjust?

Therefore, O house of Israel, I will judge you, each according to his ways, declares the Lord GOD.

Repent and turn from all your transgressions, so that your iniquity will not become your downfall. Cast away from yourselves all the transgressions you have committed, and fashion for yourselves a new heart and a new spirit. Why should you die, O house of Israel?

For I take no pleasure in anyone's death, declares the Lord GOD. So repent and live!"

Ezekiel 18:29-32 (BSB)

✓ See 2 Peter 3:9. God delays judgment, giving us time to repent. He does not delight in people having to perish!

⇒ The book of Jeremiah contains a passage with BOTH themes:

① "Love to thousands" and "punishing the children"; and
 ② each being judged according to what they have done.

You show love to thousands but bring the punishment for the parents' sins into the laps of their children after them.

Great and mighty God, whose name is the LORD Almighty, great are your purposes and mighty are your deeds. Your eyes are open to the ways of all mankind; you reward each person according to their conduct and as their deeds deserve.

Jeremiah 32:18-19 (NIV)

✓ Later, he describes what happened when judgment came to Jerusalem. The people weren't innocent, but the sins of their ancestors also had an influence on what they were experiencing. This is part

of Jeremiah's prayer:

Our fathers sinned and are no more, but we bear their punishment.

Lamentations 5:7 (BSB)

⇒ A few additional observations ..

- Generations can overlap. We tend to think of "three and four generations" as a long time a hundred years or more. But some have suggested that the "three and four generations" might involve people who were all living at the same time. Parents, children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren can all be alive, when a calamity suddenly occurs. This means they could all experience it.
 - Examples: Genesis 50:22-26 and Job 42:17 both mention four generations of people being alive at the same time.
 - Even if this overlap is sometimes the case, we can also find instances in which, years later, people suffer because of sin committed by previous generations.
- Unjust situations do exist. For instance, the book of Proverbs tells us many things that we can expect to happen, if we choose to live wisely. Yet it also points out that sometimes things don't "work" the way they should. In these cases, the final judgment will make things right.

- Scripture describes a few situations in which entire families were put to death, because of the sins of a parent.
- These situations involved sins committed directly against <u>God</u> (whether or not they were *also* committed against <u>people</u>).
 - **Example: Korah's rebellion** (Numbers 16): Those who initiated the rebellion, along with their families and all that they owned, were destroyed. The earth opened up and "swallowed" them.
- Example: Achan. At the destruction of Jericho, he stole things that belonged to God (Joshua 7) His sin hurt the whole community, and about 36 others died because of it. He, along with his family and everything he owned, were destroyed.
- Example: The Canaanites. Their sin against God had climaxed to the point that entire nations had to be destroyed. Yet the few who chose to follow God (such as Rahab – Joshua 2 and 6) were spared. [Abraham was told, more than 400 years prior, that this would occur, once the people's wickedness had reached its peak – Genesis 15:16.]

People tend to follow the ways of their sinful parents/ancestors. This means that they deserve the same punishment that their parents received. In this case, "punishing the children" occurs because the children are doing the same thing that their parents did.

Many Scriptures give examples or warnings of this.

- Matthew 23:29-36 The religious leaders of Jesus' day were guilty of this
- Psalm 78:57-58 They were faithless like their ancestors.
- 2 Chronicles 30:6-9 "Don't be like your fathers!"
- The book of Judges Over and over again, the people abandoned the God of the Bible... and received the consequences of doing so.
- Stephen pointed this out, just before they killed him:

You always resist the Holy Spirit, just as your fathers did.

Acts 7:51b (BSB)

What can we conclude, regarding the children being punished?

- ➡ This is a complex issue, with many dimensions to it. But from the evidence we have seen, we can be confident that it all fits together, consistent with the righteousness of God, and the natural way things occur in this present world.
- ✓ There are different types of judgment as an individual vs. as a group; now vs. when Jesus returns; etc. The nature of the judgment will vary, depending on the situation. We may (or may not) experience a variety of judgments in this present life, but all of us will face the final judgment.
- ✓ All the "3 and 4 generations" passages have something to do with sin against <u>God</u> – usually a Second Commandment violation. If nothing else, this should convince us that sin against God – wrongly "imaging" him (= a wrong view about who God is) and wrongly worshiping him – is an <u>extremely serious matter</u>.
- ★ We can trust God in any matter that we still don't understand. ★

⇒ Some of the influencing factors:

- ✓ The "3 and 4 generations" may all be alive at the same time; so if
 judgment falls upon the parents, the children may also suffer.

 (Example: Judgment that comes as a defeat in war.)
- Children tend to repeat the sins of the parents. This could be a reason for them sharing in the judgment, even if the parents died many years previously.
- ✓ In this world, some judgments apply to *individuals*; some to *groups* of people.
- Even in daily life (something we can observe by looking around us) <u>SIN HAS CONSEQUENCES!</u> A person's sin often affects others who didn't commit the sin.
- Regardless of what happens now, if there is injustice at the present time, it will be dealt with at the final Day of <u>Judgment</u> – which we could also call the Day of <u>Justice</u>.

What about "generational curses"? Are people doomed to suffer the consequences of their ancestor's sins?

- ✓ Sometimes people do suffer because of what others have done; but it's not always because of the sins of their ancestors.
- ✓ Human responsibility needs to be considered: Our choices are also a factor. We are not always "hopelessly doomed" to passively endure the consequences of other people's sins!
- ✓ Consider also the mercy of God, and the life-changes that occur
 with salvation. These may have some type of influence on the
 consequences (or at least on our response to the consequences).
- ✓ There is injustice in the world; so things don't always work out (in this life) the way we think they should.
- The final judgment will resolve all issues that are not "the way they should be."

Your MISSION

Take this matter seriously!

Violating the Second Commandment is a *serious* matter!

✓ The main focus of the "punishing for three/four generations" issue is that SIN HAS CONSEQUENCES. <u>But so does righteousness!</u>

SO HOW SHOULD WE RESPOND?

Pursue the love of God, which comes from obeying the Second Commandment. Those who do this will have nothing to fear at the final judgment.

Sopremental Good Offers US THE POWER TO DO THIS! (We can't do it in our own power.)

Credits

SCRIPTURE

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