

God and the Law of Heredity

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Exodus 20

² I am the Lord your God, which have brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

³ You shall have no other gods before Me.

⁴ You shall not make unto yourself any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth:

⁵ You shall not bow down yourself to them nor serve them: for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate Me;

⁶ And showing mercy unto thousands of them that love Me, and keep My commandments.

The first two commandments tell us quite clearly that we should have no other gods besides the one true God. We should put nothing in His stead (e.g. an image) and we should serve and bow down before Him alone. Jesus called this the first and greatest commandment. He expressed it in different words in

Deuteronomy 6

⁵ And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.

Why does He want us to serve only Him with all our strength? From the light of Calvary we know that God has no selfish reasons for giving this command. He knows that He is the only one who is able to give and maintain the life of His creatures. Only when we have Him as our personal God can we have life, for there is no life apart from God (see *1 Timothy* 6:16, *John* 1:4, *Deuteronomy* 6:24, 25). So we see clearly that this holy, good, and just commandment is given to us for our own benefit (*Ezekiel* 20:11).

Our God is a merciful God. If we love Him (keep His commandments), we will experience God's mercy. On the other hand, if we hate God (transgress the commandments), we will experience that God is a jealous God, visiting our iniquities upon our children unto the third and fourth generation.

God Is Jealous and a Consuming Fire

What does God mean when He says that He is jealous? We cannot conclude that God's jealousy is like our jealousy. God is not like man (*Isaiah* 58:8). We can find the answer to this question only from the revelation He Himself gives us about His own character in the inspired word. A chapter of great interest is *Deuteronomy* 4.

Deuteronomy 4

²⁴ For the Lord your God is a consuming fire, even a jealous God.

But in *Deuteronomy* 4:31 it is written:

Deuteronomy 4

31 (For the Lord thy God is a merciful God;) He will not forsake thee, neither destroy thee, nor forget the covenant of thy fathers which He swear unto them.

Both texts must be in harmony for they express the character of Him who is unchangeable.

James 1

¹⁷ Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variability, neither shadow of turning.

Unlike man, God does not change. When there is a change of relationship between God and man, the change is always in man. For example, some like the taste of good, healthful food. Others do not. Though it is the same food, good to promote health, different men judge it differently.

The cloud guiding Israel was darkness for some, while it was light for others.

The first time Jesus cleansed the temple, the eyes of those engaged in their unholy traffic were riveted upon His face. They could not withdraw their gaze. They felt that this man read their innermost thoughts and discovered their hidden motives. Some attempted to conceal their faces, as if they could hide their evil deeds from those searching eyes. They were overpowered with terror and fled from the temple court. Christ was indeed a consuming fire to them. "Jesus" did "not smite them with the whip of cords..." which He, as a symbol of divine power, held in His hand. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 158.

The Desire of Ages, p. 162:

And why did the priests flee from the temple?...they realized, as they had never realized before, their true position as hypocrites and robbers.

But others did not see Him as a consuming fire.

The Desire of Ages, p. 163:

...the poor remained behind; and these were now looking to Jesus, whose countenance expressed His love and sympathy. With tears in His eyes, He said to the trembling ones around Him: Fear not; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me. For this cause came I into the world. The people pressed into Christ's presence... Peace came to their minds.

This was repeated when He cleansed the temple the second time. The

The Desire of Ages, p. 592:

...priests and traders fled from His presence, driving their cattle before them. On the way from the temple they were met by a throng who came with their sick inquiring for the Great Healer. The report given by the fleeing people caused some of these to turn back. They feared to meet One so powerful, whose very look had driven the priests and rulers from His presence. But a large number pressed through the hurrying crowd, eager to reach Him who was their only hope. When the multitude fled from the temple, many had remained behind. These were now joined by the sick and dying, and once more Jesus ministered to them...The children

were foremost in the rejoicing.

Is it not strange that the poor, the sick, and the children liked to be in the presence of the consuming fire? For these people, Jesus was certainly not a consuming fire, but a merciful God who would not forsake them neither destroy them.

We find this same truth in *Deuteronomy* 4. For those who turn to the Lord their God and are obedient to His voice, He is a merciful God who will not forsake nor destroy (see *Deuteronomy* 4:30-31); while the disobedient can see God only as a consuming fire and a jealous God (see *Deuteronomy* 4:23-24).

It is a sad fact that when one person hates another, he cannot even bear his presence. So it is with God. If we hate Him, even His presence will become a consuming fire to us. Therefore it is the hate of man, not the power or glory of God, that causes man's destruction. In His mercy, God does everything possible to prevent this destruction (*Isaiah* 54:8). Because their hate has blinded them, God is to them a jealous and consuming God.

Counsels on Health, p. 49:

Our ancestors have bequeathed to us customs and appetites which are filling the world with disease. The sins of the parents....are with fearful power visited upon the children to the third and fourth generations....Are these ills visited upon the race through God's providence? No; they exist because the people have gone contrary to His providence, and still continue to rashly disregard His laws.

Must Children Suffer For the Sins of Their Parents?

So far it is clear that God's jealousy is not at all like man's jealousy; but what about the law of heredity?

Jeremiah 31

²⁹ The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge.

Is this proverb a correct description of the law of heredity

and *Exodus* 20:5? Is it fair that the children are punished for the sins of the parents?

In *Ezekiel* 18 (one would do well to read the whole chapter) we read:

Ezekiel 18

² What do you mean, that you use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying, The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge?

³ As I live, says the Lord God, you shall not have occasion any more to use this proverb in Israel.

Ezekiel 18

²⁰ 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.

On the other hand we read:

Lamentations 5

⁷ Our fathers have sinned and are not; and we have borne their iniquities.

Does the Bible contradict itself? In *Deuteronomy* 24 we read:

Deuteronomy 24

¹⁶ The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers: every man shall be put to death for his own sin.

See also *2 Kings* 14:6. The Bible as a whole is one inspired system of truth and therefore does not contradict itself. When we see a contradiction it is only because of our ignorance and we must ask for wisdom from above (*James* 1:5).

The solution to this problem is found in:

Jeremiah 31

²⁷ Behold, the days come, says the Lord, that I will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the seed of man, and with the seed of beast.

²⁸ And it shall come to pass, that like as I have watched over them, to pluck up, and to break down, and to throw down, and to destroy, and to afflict; so will I watch over them, to build, and to plant, says the Lord.

²⁹ In those days they shall say no more, The fathers have eaten a sour grape, and the children's teeth are set on edge.

³⁰ But every one shall die for his own iniquity: every man that eats the sour grape, his teeth shall be set on edge.

³¹ Behold, the days come, says the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah:

³² Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which My covenant they broke, although I was a Husband unto them, says the Lord:

³³ But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, says the Lord, I will put My law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be My people.

³⁴ And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall know Me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, says the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.

The Lord is speaking here of the new covenant and that He will have a people who will experience this covenant fully. This eternal covenant was made long before the Lord ever took Israel out of Egypt. This is the covenant that God made with Adam (*Genesis* 3:15) and Abraham (*Genesis* 17:19; *Genesis* 22:17-18 compare with *Jeremiah* 31:27), so it never ceased to exist (*Galatians* 3:16-18). It was a “new” covenant for most of the Israelites who had not yet experienced it.

Jeremiah 31:28 shows that even though they had broken the covenant, God was constantly working for the best for His people. But one thing He could not do was to abolish the law of heredity. He Himself had made this law in order that mankind could constantly increase in knowledge and love for

Him, that their dominion over every living thing that moves upon the earth would increase (*Genesis* 1:28), and so that they would become more and more like God in character (*Matthew* 5:48).

The Ministry of Healing, p. 371-373:

What the parents are, that, to a great extent, the children will be. The physical conditions of the parents, their dispositions and appetites, their mental and moral tendencies, are, to a greater or less degree, reproduced in their children....if the mother unswervingly adheres to right principles, if she is temperate and self-denying, if she is kind, gentle, and unselfish, she may give her child these same precious traits of character.

This holy and just law of heredity which was ordained to ennoble mankind, has been perverted and become a terrible curse—an instrument of sin.

Romans 7

¹⁰ And the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death.

Temperance, p. 38:

The drunkard's corrupt tendencies are transmitted to his posterity, and through them to the coming generations.

This demonstrates the seriousness of sin. The law of heredity as it is used by sin, puts man in such a position that he cannot escape from its effects. He cannot do good (see *Romans* 7:18).

Romans 5

¹² Wherefore, 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.

The effects are twofold: there is degeneracy both on the human side (see *The Desire of Ages*, p. 117), and on the spiritual side (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 373).

Counsels on Health, p. 49:

Are these ills visited upon the race through God's provi-

dence? No; they exist because the people have gone contrary to His providence, and still continue to rashly disregard His laws.

Even though man disregarded God's providence of life and has chosen death, God in His mercy gave mankind a second opportunity. Through His providence we may escape from the law of heredity as it is perverted by sin. This is illustrated by the words:

Genesis 12

¹ Now the Lord had said unto Abram, get out of your country, and from your kindred, and from your father's house, unto a land that I will show you.

The “land that I will show you” is the heavenly Canaan (*Hebrews* 11:8, 16), and the new covenant (*Hebrews* 12:22), as it is written:

Jeremiah 31

²⁹ In those days they shall say no more, The fathers have eaten a sour grape, and the children's teeth are set on edge.

It can now be correctly said,

Jeremiah 31

³⁰ But every one shall die for his own iniquity: every man that eats the sour grape, his teeth shall be set on edge.

It is up to every individual as to whether he will enter into the new covenant (law of heredity as God designed it to be—righteousness and life), or remain in the old covenant (law of heredity perverted by sin—sin and death).

God wants the law of heredity to become as He had originally planned it—a means of furthering righteousness.

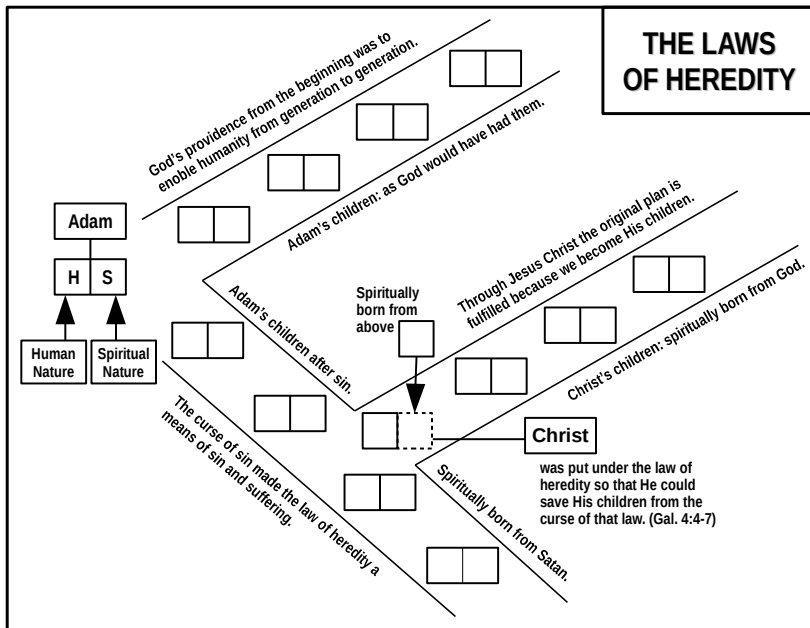
Genesis 18

¹⁹ For I know him [Abraham], that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment...

The Ministry of Healing, p. 373:

If the mother unswervingly adheres to right principles, if

she is temperate and self-denying, if she is kind, gentle, and unselfish, she may give her child these same precious traits of character.



Conclusion

We all may inherit the spiritual nature of Christ.

Romans 5

¹⁷ ...much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by One, Jesus Christ.

¹⁸ ...by the righteousness of One the free gift come upon all men unto justification of life.

¹⁹ ...by the obedience of One shall many be made righteous.

Romans 8

¹⁰ And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness.

We may also inherit an immortal body.

1 Corinthians 15

²⁰ But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the

firstfruits of them that slept.

²² ...in Christ shall all be made alive.

Indeed God is showing mercy unto thousands of them that love Him and keep His commandments. See *Exodus* 2:6.