

He Will By No Means Clear the Guilty

Ex. 20:5-6

Introduction:

1. This text prohibits the worship of false gods.
2. But the worship of false gods is only secondary to what this text is teaching.
3. It teaches first and positively that we are to worship the Lord and Him only.
4. It explains the reason for that, "I am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments."
 - a. There are two aspects of God's nature that make Him the exclusive object of worship. First, He visits the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations. Second, He shows lovingkindness to thousands.
 - b. The fact that He shows lovingkindness to thousands is greater than iniquity visited only on the third and fourth generations.
 - c. However, this should not cause us to overlook the severity of iniquity visited on the third and fourth generations, because it is severe indeed!
5. This is a fact made clearer and clearer to us in the series, "THE MEANING OF THE CROSS." The cross is a manifestation of the severity of God's wrath against sin. It is not a matter to be taken lightly.
6. In this lesson we will reflect on the nature of God as one who "visits the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations." We will examine the texts where this idea is repeated and try to draw relevant conclusions that will help us in the worship of the Lord our God.

Discussion:

- I. There are at least 6 instances in the O.T. where this statement is repeated.
 - A. Ex. 20:5-6.
 1. Traditionally, commandments 1 and 2 are divided: 1) You shall have no other gods besides Me; 2) You shall make no idol or image. But these two are really only one: "You shall worship only the Lord!"
 2. The reason is founded upon His nature. And His nature is evident in His doing what is right in punishing the guilty and forgiving the penitent.
 3. Note that this instruction is at the top of the list of the ten commandments and is fundamental to all the rest.
 4. Note also that "visiting iniquity" is first and "lovingkindness" is mentioned second.
 - B. Ex. 34:6-7.
 1. Moses has asked God, "Show me your glory!" (33:8ff).
 2. God said, "I Myself will make all My goodness pass before you, and will proclaim the

name of the Lord before you; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show compassion on whom I will show compassion, but you cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live!”

3. Here it is the graciousness and compassion of God’s nature that is emphasized. It is mentioned first.
 4. BUT, “He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren, to the third and fourth generations.”
 - a. Sin has an intergenerational effect.
 - b. Hopefully that effect will cause coming generations to reconsider and turn away from rejecting God as their fathers had done! Cf. Acts 7:51-53.
 - c. Ezekiel corrected a charge against God in Ezek. 18.
 - 1) Their proverb was, “The fathers eat sour grapes, but the children’s teeth are set on edge.” Their idea was my fathers sinned but not me. “I am being unjustly treated.”
 - 2) Ezekiel said, “The person who sins will die. The son will not bear the punishment for the father’s iniquity, nor will the father bear the punishment for the son’s iniquity; the righteousness of the righteous will be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked will be upon himself” (20).
 - d. Paul wrote, “These things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction” (1 Cor. 10:11).
 - 1) He reminds of the death of 23,000 in one day (Num. 25:1ff).
 - 2) And of those who were destroyed by serpents (Num. 21:6ff).
 - 3) And of those destroyed by the destroyer (14,700) (Num. 16-17).
 - 4) Each of these examples were reflective of out and out rebellion against God and death was the result.
 - 5) Note that all these are cases in Numbers in the context we have been studying in chapters 14-15 about “defiant sin.”
 - e. God does not clear the guilty, nor leave the guilty unpunished. This does not mean that God is an ogre, nor that He treats men unfairly. Quite to the contrary, He is fair, but that does not mean that He sweeps sin (even rebellion) under the carpet and pretends that it is nothing.
- C. Num. 14:18-19, 33
1. This passage concerns the situation when Israel sent spies into the land of Canaan.
 2. Ten gave a bad report and rebelled against the Lord.
 3. Only Joshua and Caleb said the Lord will give us this land.
 4. The congregation said to stone Joshua and Caleb and so they rebelled against the Lord.
 5. Moses appealed for forgiveness on the basis of God’s lovingkindness.
 6. But that generation that rebelled against God died in the wilderness. God said, “Surely you shall not come into the land . . . except Joshua and Caleb. Your children, however, whom you said would become a prey—I will bring them in, and

they will know the land which you have rejected. But as for you, your corpses will fall in this wilderness. Your sons will be shepherds for forty years in the wilderness, and they will suffer for your unfaithfulness, until your corpses lie in the wilderness” (Num. 14:30-33).

7. God does not clear those who are guilty of rebellion.

D. Deut. 5:9-10.

1. This passage is a repeat of the Ten Commandments as recorded in Exodus.
2. It reiterates the same things we have already considered.

E. Deut. 7:9-11.

1. This passage reminds of God’s faithfulness. He keeps His covenant as evidenced by the promises made to the forefathers and by His redeeming their descendants from Egypt.
2. God manifests His lovingkindness to “a thousandth generation.” Not just to thousands of individuals but to the thousandth generation. The thousandth generation seems to be what is under consideration in the other texts as well (by comparison to visiting iniquity to the third and fourth generations).
3. The contrast is between those who love Him and keep His commandments versus those who hate Him.
4. “Therefore, you shall keep the commandment and the statutes and the judgments which I am commanding you today, to do them.”

F. Jer. 32:18ff.

1. This passage declares that the wrath of God rests on Jerusalem. The Lord said, “It is given into the hand of the king of Babylon by sword, by famine and by pestilence” (v. 36).
2. Why? Jeremiah says, “They did not obey Your voice or walk in Your law; they have done nothing of all that You commanded them to do; therefore you have made all this calamity come upon them. Behold, the siege ramps have reached the city to take it; and the city is given into the hand of the Chaldeans who fight against it, because of the sword, the famine and the pestilence; and what You have spoken has come to pass” (23-24).
3. God speaks in verses 26-35. “I taught them but they would not listen. They have turned their back to Me and not their face.”
4. And yet, God is faithful. Though these that reject Him will be destroyed His lovingkindness will remain (33:11) and He will restore the fortunes of the land. He has promised David that he would never lack a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel (14ff). God says, “I will restore their fortunes and will have mercy on them” (33:26).
5. N.T. writers indicated that God did this with the coming of Jesus. He is the Divine King (Acts 2:30-36). Those who submit to His kingship, acknowledging Him as Lord (Matt. 16:16) constitute the faithful today. But woe be unto us, if we like those of old, turn back from serving the Lord (Heb. 3:12-19; 6:4-8; 10:23-31).

II. It is always the principle of God's lovingkindness that allows for forgiveness.

- A. Psa. 103:8-14.
- B. Psa. 145:8-9: "The Lord is gracious and merciful; slow to anger and great in lovingkindness. The Lord is good to all, and His mercies are over all His works."
- C. Jonah knew that God was slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness (4:2). That's why he did NOT want to go to Ninevah, but fled to Tarshish instead.
- D. To reject His lovingkindness is to reject Him. Rejecting what He has done for us on the cross is the ultimate insult.
 - 1. Those who reject Him deserve to be brought to a wretched end (Matt. 21:41).
 - 2. They deserve to be destroyed (Matt. 22:7).
 - 3. They deserve to be cut in pieces (Matt. 24:50-51) and assigned to a place with weeping and gnashing of teeth.

III. Those transformed by the lovingkindness of God who respond to others with lovingkindness enter eternal life. Those who do not respond to others with lovingkindness go away into eternal punishment.

- A. This is the foundation of forgiveness and those who do not forgive are handed over to the torturers (Matt. 18:34-35).
- B. It is the distinguishing feature in the judgment and those who do not manifest it go away into eternal punishment (Matt. 25:45-46).

Conclusion:

- 1. "God does not clear the guilty." I take that to mean that those who refuse Him will bear the consequences to their sin.
- 2. The texts are clear. There are many instances where physical death is the result of rebellion against God.
- 3. Life is given to those who believe in the Lord so as to trust His kindness for forgiveness, but death is the result of rebellion.