

**15<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost  
September 25, 2011**

Ezekiel 18:1-4, 25-32 "Like Father, Like Son?"

Sometimes when we observe a child growing up in a family, we notice that there is something about that child that reminds us of the mother or father. Maybe it is a talent or skill that is passed down to the next generation, maybe it is a favorable or unfavorable trait, or maybe it is something else we observe. At such times we might say, "Like father, like son."

On another level, it's not unusual that if the father is a democrat, so also become the children who follow in his footsteps. If the father confesses he is Christian, the children will also make that same confession. If the father travels frequently with his children when they are young, they will very likely do the same when they have their own children. "Like father, like son."

Ezekiel tells of a proverb used in Israel of a father and his children eating sour grapes. The children experience what their father does when they bite into the grapes. They share the same experience and the same judgment – sour grapes. They could use such a proverb to explain the worship practices within the family. If the father worships idols, so will the children. However, as Ezekiel explains, it doesn't have to be that way. What God has to give to us as our Savior is something that can be received by the father or the child or both. So if the father worships idols, it doesn't have to be that way for the child. God's desire is to save people. God wants people to turn back to him and live, Even if he can't reach the father, he will not give up trying to reach the son, or vice versa.

So where do people stand before God? Ezekiel reminds us in the Old Testament reading today that all living things belong to God because God is the creator. However, people are unique from all other living beings because they have a soul. Just as our bodies belong to God, our creator, so also do our souls. When God created Adam and Eve, he gave them souls that were fully-devoted to God in love and service. He gave them pure souls, not unlike that described by St. Paul in the Philippians reading today – innocent and blameless, shining as lights in the world, holding out the word of Christ, pure in worship. God created them with souls that loved God perfectly with their whole heart and mind and strength. Their worship of God was pure and without sin.

However, when Adam and Eve sinned, they caused death to come into the world and our separation from the creator. Since then, we are not always wholly-devoted to God in our worship. We do not love God with our whole heart. We do not love our neighbors as ourselves. Sin separates every living soul from God – here, in Ghana, and around the world. So, for example, Pastor Black went to Ghana to encourage the pastors and church there because sin separates all people from God. The church in Ghana is working very hard to reach the unsaved people, just like we do at St. Paul's.

It doesn't seem fair that all people should come into this life separated from God. Why didn't God just nip sin in the bud at the very beginning with Adam and Eve and fix the problem then? Instead, God allowed the problem to continue for generations afterward. God had another opportunity later to fix the problem with Noah and his family when all other created life was destroyed, but God didn't do anything about sin and our separation from God at that time either. And so the population of the world continued to grow and spread through the whole earth until the very present with billions of people coming into the world in this sinful condition.

Back in Israel the people had another complaint about God. Why did God condemn the person who once was righteous, but then turned away from God? It goes against what some people might believe today, "Once saved, always saved." Or stated another way, why should someone who began life as a Christian later be declared damned if he or she chooses a different spiritual direction to follow in life later on?

The natural response is to put the blame on God because he allows us to continue in this sinful condition. Those who put the blame on God today, however, are no different from the people of Israel in Ezekiel's time who sometimes blamed God for what was wrong with the world. Some would say, since God allows people to sin or to slip through his fingers, it must be God's fault.

The people of Israel had still another complaint about God. Why did God permit wicked people to receive salvation? After all, they showed themselves unworthy of God because of their terrible sin. How could God accept such people? How can the murderer or criminal of our own time receive salvation? How can our enemy become acceptable to God and receive heaven and eternal life?

When people think this way, they criticize God for his mercy and they also forget that they were once separated from God because of their sin. They also minimize their own sin which they still commit day after day. The truth is that it doesn't matter how terrible a sin we commit. We all stand guilty before God. We all deserve God's wrath and judgment because of our sin. Only in the crucified and risen Jesus Christ is there forgiveness and reconciliation and life. Ultimately, where a person stands in relationship to Christ determines where we stand with God now and for eternity.

So the answer for us is not who is to be blamed, but where do we stand in relationship to Christ. God loves all people and wants them to be free from sin, but because of God's holiness he could not leave our sin unpunished. He placed our sin on his own Son at the cross, and he took the punishment we deserve for our sins. Jesus has cast our sin far from us. His death and resurrection make possible our reconciliation with God. And because our sins were taken from us at the cross, God calls us to repent and turn back to him. What sins seem to hold onto you and will not let you go? Turn them over to God. Where do you find yourself struggling? Turn it over to God. What sin has your friend or neighbor confronted you about. Repent, and turn it over to God.

When we have confessed our sin and turned to God for forgiveness, then we can take the new heart and spirit that God gives. The Epistle shows us what this new life looks like when Paul states that we are to have the attitude of Christ, do all things without grumbling or questioning, hold fast to God's Word, and be blameless and innocent. Ezekiel writes that we should share our food and clothing with those who need these things. We are to be lights shining in a world where sin still seems to rule and control people's lives. Because our sins are paid for and forgiven in Christ, we are no longer slaves of sin. We can live for Christ, and God's Word and church can help us do so.

God is glad that you are here and getting ready for eternity in heaven. That's why he sent Jesus. It is the reason that Pastor Black and Ron are at Ghana right now. God desires that the people of Ghana turn to him through Jesus Christ and live now in the church and eternally in heaven. Pastor Black is encouraging the church and its pastors to stand strong in the Gospel of Jesus Christ as they bring Christ to their nation and world. God is doing this same work at St. Paul's through us. God's desire for all people is that they will come to know Jesus Christ and receive forgiveness for their sins, because he doesn't want anyone to leave this life eternally separated from him.

Although all people are guilty before God because of their sin, God also desires that all people come to him and live. Out of love for his creation and the souls of men and women, God sent Jesus to be our Savior and reconcile us to him. All who place their trust in Christ and the forgiveness of sins are reconciled to God and belong to Christ. Therefore, there is no “like father, like son” mentality with God. The Gospel of Jesus Christ gives a new heart and Spirit to those who love Jesus. Therefore, turn to Christ and live.

*solī deo gloria*