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“The Theology of Responsibility”

Ezekiel 1 – 3

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We are living in a time when it is easier to blame others than to take personal responsibility for something. Blame-shifting has been going on since the beginning of human history. When God confronted Adam and Eve about their disobedience, Adam blamed Eve, and Eve blamed the serpent. The theology of responsibility is simply this – every person is accountable to God for his/her own life. We cannot blame others or make excuses for our behavior or our lives. The word responsibility comes from two words: response and ability. The ability to choose a response that no longer blames others or makes excuses for one’s actions is very important for every Christian, because when we take responsibility, we can turn to God with humility and repentance and find his mercy and forgiveness.

Historical Background

1. The book of Ezekiel
 - a. This book is named after Ezekiel, the prophet who wrote it.
 - b. When Ezekiel was 25 years old, he was deported to Babylon during the second captivity, circa 597BC. ¹
 - i. The prophet Daniel was among the first wave of exiles (606BC).
 - ii. By the time Ezekiel arrived in Babylon, Daniel was already well known, having already served nine years.
 - iii. Daniel’s name is mentioned three times in the book of Ezekiel.
 - iv. Ezekiel’s name is not mentioned in the book of Daniel.
 - v. It’s likely that Daniel didn’t know Ezekiel personally, because served in the king’s palace.
 - c. Like the prophet Jeremiah, Ezekiel was born a priest, but he served as a prophet to the Jewish exiles in Babylon during the same timeframe as

¹ There were three waves of Jewish exiles who were deported to Babylon: 606BC, 597BC, and 586BC.

- Jeremiah, who was a prophet to the Jews who lived in Judah.
- d. Ezekiel started to prophesy six years before the Temple was destroyed.
 - e. Ezekiel prophesied 22 years.
 - f. The book of Ezekiel is somewhat mystical and an enigma.
 - g. Because of the difficulty in understanding the book, rabbis prohibited men under the age of 30 from reading it.
 - h. The book of Ezekiel is broken down into two sections: near prophesy and far prophesy.
 - i. Near Prophesy
 1. Destruction of Jerusalem - Chapters 1-24
 - ii. Far Prophesy
 1. Reestablishment of Israel - Chapter 37
 2. Battle of Armageddon - Chapters 38-39
 3. The Millennial Age - Chapters 40-48
 4. The Millennial Temple - Chapters 40-48
 - i. There are many similarities between the book of Ezekiel and the book of Revelation.
 - i. Visions of the Throne of God
 - ii. Gog and Magog ²
 - iii. New Jerusalem out of Heaven
 - iv. Waters of Life
 - j. The dominant theme of this book: *"... and they shall know that I am the LORD."*
 - i. This phrase is found 62 times in the book of Ezekiel.
 - ii. Pastor Gary said: "[God] has a desperate desire for people to know him, and God will go to great lengths to reveal himself to people so they will not have to die in their sins."
 - k. Ezekiel started his prophetic ministry at the age of 30, in what is modern-day Iraq.
 - i. **Ezekiel 1:1** - *"Now it came to pass in the thirtieth year..."*
 1. The book of Numbers tells us that priests and rabbis started serving at the age of 30.
 2. The River Chebar was a tributary of the Euphrates River.

The Theology Of Responsibility
Every Person Is Accountable To God For His/Her Life

2. Pastor Gary said: "We are living in a time when it is easier to blame somebody than to take personal responsibility for something. It's really nothing new; this has been going on since the beginning of time, at least as it relates to humanity. Blame-shifting has been going on since the Garden of Eden."

² A reference to Russia

- a. Pastor Gary summarized Genesis 3
 - i. God placed Adam and Eve in the Garden.
 - ii. They were free to eat the fruit of any tree in the Garden of Eden except one: the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.
 - iii. “The only reason God put that one tree in the garden [was] so that the relationship that mankind would have with God would be based on the freedom of choice, [and] a love relationship, and not some kind of obligation or coercion. And yet, the one [tree from which God told them not to eat or they would experience death, they ate. Adam blamed God for giving him Eve, and Eve blamed the serpent.] ... We are all experts at this, [because] this is the kind of thing we do. And, if we don't blame somebody, we will make excuses for ourselves and we'll talk about our parents, and we'll talk about our family of heritage, and we'll make excuses for ourselves. We will say things like: 'I am the way that I am because my mom never really gave me any hugs.' [Or we will say,] 'Mom and Dad weren't really around, and Dad was a drinker...' Or we will say things about our own heritage! 'The reason I drink a little too much is because I'm Irish, [and] you know how the Irish are!' ... 'I know I have a temper, but I'm Italian, and you know how the Italians are!' ... 'I know I'm cheap, [but I'm Scottish, and you know how the Scottish are!' ... 'I know I'm irritable but that's because I've got low blood sugar; I just need to eat some food!'
3. “He that is good for making excuses is seldom good for anything else.” – Benjamin Franklin ³
4. “We have not passed that line between childhood and adulthood until we move from the passive voice to the active voice – that is, until we have stopped saying ‘It got lost,’ and say, ‘I lost it.’ ” – Sydney Harris ⁴
5. Pastor Gary said: “The sociology of responsibility basically says today, ‘It's not your fault, blame somebody else.’ The psychology of responsibility says, ‘If you take responsibility, [that will empower] you; when you blame others, you victimize yourself. ... The theology of responsibility says, ‘Every person is accountable to God for his/her own life.’ ”
6. **Ezekiel 3:17** – *“Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; therefore hear a word from My mouth, and give them warning from Me...”*
 - a. The phrase “*Son of man*” (Messianic reference) is used to refer to Jesus more than 80 times in the Gospels.

³ https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/benjamin_franklin_383794

⁴ <https://www.quotes.net/quote/7872>

- b. Ezekiel is called “*son of man*” a total of 93 times in this book, and the meaning behind it is that God was saying that he was God’s representative, sent to warn the people about their sin.
7. **Ezekiel 3:18-19** - *“When I say to the wicked, ‘You shall surely die,’ and you give him no warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life, that same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at your hand. Yet, if you warn the wicked, and he does not turn from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered your soul.”*
- a. God held Ezekiel responsible for warning the wicked, but the wicked, not Ezekiel, were responsible for their sin.
8. **Ezekiel 3:20-21** - *“Again, when a righteous man turns from his righteousness and commits iniquity, and I lay a stumbling block before him, he shall die; because you did not give him warning, he shall die in his sin, and his righteousness which he has done shall not be remembered; but his blood I will require at your hand. Nevertheless if you warn the righteous man that the righteous should not sin, and he does not sin, he shall surely live because he took warning; also you will have delivered your soul.”*
- a. God held Ezekiel responsible for warning the righteous, but the righteous, not Ezekiel, were responsible for their sin.
9. Pastor Gary said: “The good news is that God wants every single one of us to take responsibility for our sin. [He wants us to take responsibility] for our sinful condition, our sinful practices, [and] our sinful thoughts. He wants us to take responsibility to own our sin. [The] good news is that he has provided a way, through Jesus, for us not to suffer the consequences for our sin. ... [To confess simply means to agree with God.] It’s basically agreeing with God’s evaluation of the condition of humanity, [which is] that mankind is fallen [and] we are all sinful... If we would acknowledge [that we are sinful] and agree with God, and then confess... and then receive from him, his free gift of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, then we own our sin, but we don’t have to suffer the consequences for it. ... The pension plan for sinners is called death! ... [The free gift of God is eternal life.]”
- a. **Romans 6:23** - *“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

The Theology Of Responsibility
No One Is Responsible For The Sins Of His/Her Parents

10. Pastor Gary said: “I know a lot of people who believe that they are destined to repeat the sins of their parents or at the very least are defined by the sins of their parents. Neither is true.”

11. **Ezekiel 18:1-3** - *“The word of the LORD came to me again, saying, ‘What do you mean when 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?” ‘As I live,’ says the Lord God, ‘you shall no longer use this proverb in Israel.’ ”*
- a. The way the word “*proverb*” is used is unlike the book of Proverbs.
 - b. This usage describes a common saying that, when repeated over and over, would begin to ring true to those who repeated it.
 - c. meaning is that this would be a common saying, and that a saying like this, having been repeated over and over, ad infinitum, that people believe it is true.
 - d. Ezekiel was instructed to tell the people that this was completely untrue and God wanted them to stop believing a lie!
 - i. **Jeremiah 31:29-30** - *“In those days they shall say no more: ‘The fathers have eaten sour grapes, And the children’s teeth are set on edge.’ But every one shall die for his own iniquity; every man who eats the sour grapes, his teeth shall be set on edge.’ ”*
 - ii. At the same time that God was using Ezekiel to speak to the Jews who were deported to Babylon, God was also using Jeremiah to tell the Jews living in Judah to stop repeating and believing the same lie.
 - e. The basic understanding of this statement would be that because parents ate sour grapes the children tasted the tartness in their mouths, or because our parents sinned, we are suffering the consequences.
 - f. Pastor Gary said: “You have to be responsible for your own life. You can no longer blame mom or dad, and you cannot believe the lie that what mom or dad did you are destined to repeat. Every person is individually accountable and responsible to God. ... God [was] saying, ‘I swear by my name this shall not be uttered any more in Israel.’ ... [God] knew the damage that this was causing. [People] were shirking responsibility and [shifting the blame]. ... There’s not doubt about it that some people have had it harder than others... [We’ve] got to get to the place where we own our responsibility and stop blaming our decisions and our choices and our lives on other people. ... Irrespective of what happened in the past, [we need to stop blaming other people].”
 - i. This concept started as a distorted understanding of the second commandment.
 1. **Exodus 20:5** - *“... For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations...”*
 - a. The Israelites stopped reading this commandment at this point.
 2. They left out the rest of the commandment regarding God’s judgment upon *“those who hate Me...”*

- a. **Exodus 20:5** - *“... For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of **those who hate Me...**”* (Emphasis added)
3. Pastor Gary said: “By the way, this has been translated in modern terms to something that you ought to eliminate from your vocabulary: generational curses. Get rid of that! It’s the same philosophy. ... The third and fourth generation, in Hebrew times, lived under one roof. God [was] not saying that this was something that was [going to be] perpetually handed down from generation to generation. He was saying the residual effect within one household, when one father is wicked before God, will [have an effect on everyone in that household]. But the rest of the verse says that [God] will give mercy to a thousand generations [who love him]! ... The greater impact of a [person who] loves God will be felt in successive generations, more so than the family that hates God. ... [Stop thinking to yourself or believing the] lie that what your parents did you are destined to repeat, [and] what was done to you, will now be done by you. It’s the whole victim becomes the victimizer and the abused becomes the abuser mentality, [which is] that you are bound to your past and you are a product of your environment. Listen, friends, in Christ you are a new creation! ... I’m not denying that environment shapes a person. Who raised you and how you are raised can play either a positive or negative role in your development, and some people get a better head start than others, and some people have more to overcome than others. All I am saying is this, if you believe in the power of God to raise Jesus from the dead, then why should you think anything less concerning the power of God to transform a life? ... **In Christ, the power of your spiritual heritage is greater than the influence of your natural parentage.**” (Emphasis added)
 - a. **Exodus 20:6** - *“[But] showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.”* (1984 NIV)
 - b. **2 Corinthians 5:17** - *“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.”*

The Theology Of Responsibility
God Takes No Pleasure In The Death Of The Wicked
God Wants All To Turn From Sin and Turn To Him

12. [Ezekiel 33:11](#) - *“Say to them: ‘As I live,’ says the Lord God, ‘I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die, O house of Israel?’ ”*
13. [2 Peter 3:9](#) - *“The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.”*
14. Pastor Gary said: “It is the ability to choose a response that no longer blames others or makes excuses for [ourselves], and then respond to God’s mercy with humility and repentance.”

Discussion Questions

1. Read [Ezekiel 1:1-3; 2:1-5; and 3:16-21](#) to provide a foundation for your Bible study time.
2. Provide an overview of the historical background Pastor Gary shared. (See #1 above)
3. Read and discuss Pastor Gary’s remarks concerning the “blame game.” (See #2 above)
4. Allow the people in your group to share examples of times when they placed blame on someone/others, instead of accepting responsibility. (See #2a above)
5. Read and discuss quotes from Ben Franklin and Sydney Harris. (See #3 through #5 above)
6. Read and discuss [Ezekiel 3:17-21](#). (See #6 through #8 above)
7. What role has the Lord called you to play concerning being a “watchman”?
8. Spend time talking about Pastor Gary’s comments regarding the good news that God has made a way for the responsibility of our sin to be placed on Christ. (See #9 above)

9. What is your understanding of the term “generational curse”?
10. Read and discuss [Ezekiel 18:1-3](#). (See #11 above)
11. Read and discuss Pastor Gary’s comments on “generational curse.” (See #11d above)
12. Allow the people in your group to share their story about the ways the Lord has made them into a new creation.
13. Read and discuss [Ezekiel 33:11](#) and [2 Peter 3:9](#). (See #12 through #14 above)
14. Close your time in prayer and allow the Holy Spirit to lead your time of prayer.