

Teaching E-mail 65 Do You Understand Biblical Consequences?

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“Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.”

George Santayana

During our years teaching at a retreat center we found an interesting phenomenon: *generations of the same families* came there at one time or another. For instance, on a men’s retreat we’d meet the grandfathers and fathers of a family; on a women’s retreat we’d get to know their wives; and on youth retreats we interacted with their children and grandchildren. A sad factor became clear as we dealt with these multi-generational family members: the same *worldly, unChrist-like motives and actions* had been passed along by those who lived in compromise.

Bondage to the sin nature’s sway persisted for generations in these families for several reasons:

1. Typically their religious leaders focused almost totally on *teaching at* people. Because there was little motive or opportunity for the hearers to discuss biblical truth together, few took seriously applying God’s Word as a way of life. And because there was no mutual discussion to role model putting God’s Word into action, few families discussed God’s ways at home. The generations remained stagnant in their spiritual lives as being hearers only.
2. Most of their congregations divided families into *homogeneous groups*—adult Sunday school, children’s graded classes, youth group, college and career section. Families were never integrated and guided into cooperating together to identify and transform any unChrist-like traits that hindered them. Again, nothing changed at home either.

3. The religious leaders *denigrated or eliminated the Older Testament* as the key source of examples for learning about our God’s holiness and the *consequences* when His people disobey His commands. Contemporary Christianity too often disregards the reality of consequences for sinful actions and behaviors. *Misusing grace* to cover willful sinfulness blasphemes a holy God whose reputation is defiled by wickedness among those who call themselves His. When authentic repentance is disregarded, the tendency to sin in specific ways passes on to the next generations.

These common factors in generational complacency are probably no surprise to you. The majority of “Christian” families fail to discuss and discern where they may be sinning against God, violating His loving and holy ways. Many prefer to criticize the wrong they see in others, and evaluate *themselves* as “good” because they’re not committing particular sins. But self-appraised “goodness” isn’t holiness; as Jesus said, “No one is *good* except God alone!” Comparing how “good” you think you are with how “evil” someone else is overlooks the reality that we are ALL sinners. NONE are righteous in themselves no matter how *good* they seem!

The *holiness* that’s portrayed in the Bible is a characteristic of God. The work of holiness is inherent in our “new self” when we commit our lives to Christ and receive His Spirit; the “old self” and its slavery to sin is put off (Ephesians 4:22-24). To be holy is to be set apart for our Lord’s use through His Spirit; in other words, to live apart from the world’s ways

and values.

God could have wiped out the Older Testament if He considered it useless to the people He'd be calling out in Christ as His own. But He didn't! Instead He refers to it time and again as THE source for both our *instruction in righteous living* and as *a warning to us* of the consequences when we willfully set our hearts on evil and give way to sin:

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2Timothy 3:16,17). The Older Testament was the only Scripture in existence when Paul penned these words. This text was God's handbook for learning and applying the righteous way of living which would result in good works.

“Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did. . . These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come” (1Corinthians 10:6, 11). We wouldn't need to learn from these warning examples if there wasn't a possibility that we might give way to evil ourselves.

God made sure we were equipped with the examples found in the Older Testament because *He loves us*. He's deeply concerned that we *grow in holiness* so we'll be light in the darkness as we live righteously and abide by His commands (1John 2:3-6).

Should we through laziness and self-will *repeat the mistakes* of the Israelites by remaining ignorant of the Older Testament? Out of grateful love for our Lord we should *want* to know the righteous commands of our God, the rebellious and wicked choices that Israel made, and the

consequences that their disobedience triggered. Jesus indeed fulfilled all the righteous requirements of the Levitical priestly system (see Hebrews 7:22-28). Our God's commands in *both* Testaments revolve around love and obedient trust.

Our God calls us to love Him, expressing that love as we obey His commands; that is, we make them a way of life with all our being. (See Exodus 20:5,6; Deuteronomy 6:5-9; Luke 10:27; 1John 5:3; 2John 1:6.)

As Paul urged Timothy, make use of *everything* that's in the Older Testament, especially God's commands, because they're *useful* for our teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness. As we put the many facets of the Hebrew Scriptures into practice by the power of His Spirit in us, we become equipped to fulfill God's Kingdom purposes for us.

God's commands help you understand your relationship with Him and how He wants you to treat others. Our Lord Jesus summed up the Law and the Prophets (major components of the Older Testament) with this command: **“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind”; and, “Love your neighbor as yourself”** (Luke 10:27). Love entails obedience to the way our Father would have us love! As we peruse the Older Testament, however, we clearly see how *rebellious defiance and self-serving disobedience* brought about consequences that impacted entire generations.

How Adept Are You In Recognizing the Consequences of Disobedience?

Jeremiah witnessed firsthand the troops of Nebuzaradan conquer Jerusalem and take captive its residents (Jeremiah 40). But while the deceived

Jerusalemites believed they were defeated because they *failed to worship the demonic Queen of Heaven* (Jeremiah 44:17,18), even the heathen commander of the Babylonian army recognized the truth: the fall of Jerusalem was the *consequence* of violating God's commands:

"The LORD your God decreed this disaster for this place. And now the LORD has brought it about; He has done just as He said He would. All this happened because you people sinned against the LORD and did not obey Him" (Jeremiah 40:2,3).

Destruction didn't come about due to the sin of just one generation. Rebellion against their holy God and self-gratification through pagan religious practices had been going on for generations. They couldn't understand that the consequences of failing to love God and keep His commands affects *generations to come*—a concept today's individualist population gives little thought to as well. Whenever you've seen the Ten Commandments posted, was the *last phrase* of the second command expressed too—an essential warning and promise?

"...I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers 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 20:5,6).

Our God is loving and compassionate, and *jealous* for the love of His people. He will not tolerate spiritual adultery. Therefore He warns that consequences will be passed along to at least three succeeding generations when people *hate* Him by *not loving Him and keeping His commands*.

Examine your own family lineage; are you experiencing the blessings of a heritage of those who love and obeyed Jesus as Lord? Or, are you experiencing the consequences of the sins of prior generations because you've given way to them too? If you've been predisposed to indulge areas of darkness in your life, do you want that pattern to continue in the lives of *your children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren*?

"These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come" (1Corinthians 10:11).

The kings of Judah from David to Zedekiah are examples for us today to perceive the consequences of one generation's sin upon succeeding generations. Twenty monarchs comprise this list:

David	Uzziah
Solomon	Jotham
Rehoboam	Ahaz
Abijah	Hezekiah
Asa	Manasseh
Jehoshaphat	Amon
Jehoram	Josiah
Ahaziah	Jehoahaz
Joash	Jehoikim
Amaziah	Zedekiah

Let's investigate several of these kings and their influence on subsequent generations. Many of these accounts serve as timeless warnings for us today. Regardless of their position, each of these individuals was as human as we are, with the same penchant to sin (Genesis 6:5; Romans 3:23). As you read the verses below, recognize the involvement of our God in their lives: He *blessed the wholehearted* and *chastised* those who weren't. And

notice that *succeeding generations* either received blessing or suffered the consequences of their ancestors' choices.

Our God doesn't change (Numbers 23:19). In His longsuffering compassion He repeatedly sent prophets to His chosen people to confront their sinful indulgence so they might turn from their wickedness and return to Him (2Chronicles 24:19). But then and now, they *enjoyed their sin* and *scoffed at His messengers*, refusing to respond with repentance (2Chronicles 36:16). The sorry pattern continues, then and now: grandparents, parents and children receive the due consequences for their ongoing disobedience.

So many of these kings were raised by their parents to be *enemies of God*. Today many Christian parents do the same by encouraging their children to pursue the goals and values of this world, turning them away from wholeheartedly following Jesus as Lord of their lives and fulfilling His purposes in and through them (James 4:4; 1John 2:15-17).

The trust relationship between King David and his God is well-known. That wholehearted devotion passed on to his Solomon—until he entangled himself through marriages with women whose idols drew the king into spiritual adultery. His son Rehoboam abandoned the Lord entirely, influenced by his Ammonite mother. The evil didn't stop there. His son Abijah walked the same pathway of sin as his father.

Finally God intervened to break the cycle of evil. *"Nevertheless, for David's sake the LORD his God gave him a lamp in Jerusalem by raising up a son to succeed him and by making Jerusalem strong"* (1Kings 15:4).

Starting with this son, Asa, let's look at the influence, for good and for evil, of parents and grandparents on Judah's kings and on the people at large. All too often, as the monarch went, so went the populace in their spiritual walk. (All references that follow are from 2Chronicles unless otherwise indicated.)

King Asa—Wholehearted toward God despite his father's unfaithfulness, Asa even deposed his grandmother because of her evil idolatry.

- Asa's career began with a godly focus which extended even to Judah's inhabitants.

"Asa did what was good and right in the eyes of the LORD his God" (14:2);

"He commanded Judah to seek the LORD, the God of their fathers, and to obey His laws and commands" (14:4).

- Because of his obedience and trust, God gave the entire people rest:

"The land is still ours, because we have sought the LORD our God; we sought Him and He has given us rest on every side." So they built and prospered" (14:7).

- Tragically, in his later years he turned for help to a pagan king; when confronted by a prophet, he cast the man into prison. His failure to repent perhaps lit a fire of holy fear upon his son, Jehoshaphat, when he observed his father's painful decline. Suffering severely from foot disease, yet again Asa ignored God and relied on the ineffectual treatments of physicians.

King Jehoshaphat—He too was initially wholehearted toward God, Who securely established his kingdom and brought fear of Himself on the surrounding nations.

"The LORD was with Jehoshaphat because in his early years he walked in the ways his father David had followed. He did not consult the Baals" (17:3).

- Turning straying Judah back to God (although a superficial repentance), Jehoshaphat also established judges in each fortified city

with a warning that they were representing God in their verdicts. Later, however, he gave way to greed and pride, disregarded God's plan to set Judah apart, and made alliances with evil kings.

"Now Jehoshaphat had great wealth and honor, and he allied himself with Ahab by marriage" (14:4);

"Jehu the seer, the son of Hanani, went out to meet him and said to the king, "Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the LORD? Because of this, the wrath of the LORD is upon you" (19:2).

- Jehoshaphat passed along his prideful ways by showering his sons with vast wealth. The consequence of his imprudence was brutal: Jehoram, his firstborn, whom Jehoshaphat named as his successor, slew all his siblings.

King Jehoram—Since Jehoshaphat had "helped the wicked and loved those who hated God", his son forsook God and followed the path of his father by marrying another daughter of Ahab. His spiritual adultery with his wife's demonic gods led all of Judah astray.

- *"Jehoram received a letter from Elijah the prophet, which said: "This is what the LORD, the God of your father David, says: 'You have not walked in the ways of your father Jehoshaphat or of Asa king of Judah. But you have walked in the ways of the kings of Israel, and you have led Judah and the people of Jerusalem to prostitute themselves, just as the house of Ahab did'"* (21:12,13).

- Because of his evil ways, surrounding lands rebelled against him and prevailed. Finally God struck Jehoram with an incurable, agonizing disease. *"He passed away, to no one's regret"* (21:20).

King Ahaziah— The generational pattern of sin continued. Wholly wicked as his father, he was spurred on by his mother Athaliah to follow the evil counsel of her pagan relatives.

"He too walked in the ways of the house of Ahab, for his mother encouraged him in doing wrong" (22:3).

"He did evil in the eyes of the LORD, as the house of Ahab had done, for after his father's death they became his advisers, to his undoing" (22:4).

- God brought about his downfall during a visit to his evil brother-in-law, the king of Israel: *"When Ahaziah arrived, he went out with Joram to meet Jehu son of Nimshi, whom the LORD had anointed to destroy the house of Ahab...[Ahaziah] was brought to Jehu and put to death"* (22:7,9).

King Joash—Rescued as an infant from his murderous grandmother (Ahaziah's mother), Joash was initially wholehearted because of the righteous influence of his godly aunt and her husband, the priest Jehoiada.

"Joash did what was right in the eyes of the LORD all the years of Jehoiada the priest" (24:2).

- Under the care of the priest, Joash restored the temple through the glad contributions of the people. But when Jehoiada died, Joash forsook the Lord:

"After the death of Jehoiada, the officials of Judah came and paid homage to the king, and he listened to them. They abandoned the temple of the LORD, the God of their fathers, and worshiped Asherah poles and idols.

- Out of love, God sent His prophets to warn the apostate people, who refused to repent. Instead, by order of the king they murdered Jehoiada's son, the prophet Zechariah:

"King Joash did not remember the kindness Zechariah's father Jehoiada had shown him but killed his son, who said as he lay dying, "May the LORD see this and call you to account" (24:22).

King Amaziah—Raised during the time of his father Joash's apostasy, Amaziah was at best "half-hearted" toward God initially in his reign. Prophetically warned against hiring mercenaries from Israel, he prevailed in battle because he obeyed. Yet his lack of faith was evidenced by his spoils:

“When Amaziah returned from slaughtering the Edomites, he brought back **the gods of the people of Seir. He set them up as his own gods, bowed down to them and burned sacrifices to them**” (25:14).

- Just as God had sent prophets to warn his father, He sent messengers to Amaziah that he might repent. But like his father, he paid no attention.

“The anger of the LORD burned against Amaziah, and He sent a prophet to him, who said, ‘Why do you consult this people’s gods, which could not save their own people from your hand?’ Amaziah, however, would not listen, for God so worked that He might hand them over to [Jehoash], because they sought the gods of Edom” (25:14,20).

King Uzziah—Just a teenager when he came to power, Uzziah remained wholehearted during the early part of his reign.

“He sought God during the days of Zechariah, who instructed him in the fear of God. As long as he sought the LORD, God gave him success” (26:4,5).

- He prospered on all fronts, from the battlefield to the economy. But with fame came pride.

“His fame spread far and wide, for he was greatly helped until he became powerful. But after Uzziah became powerful, his pride led to his downfall. He was unfaithful to the LORD his God, and entered the temple of the LORD to burn incense on the altar of incense” (26:15,16).

- Because of his disobedience he was afflicted by God, and his governing authority given to his son Jotham.

“...the Lord had afflicted him. King Uzziah had leprosy until the day he died. He lived in a separate house—leprosy, and excluded from the temple of the LORD” (26:20,21).

King Jotham—Having witnessed the perils of disobedience in his father, Jotham was wholehearted in serving God. The hearts of the people, however, were compromised with corrupt practices.

“He did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, just as his father Uzziah had done, but unlike him he did not enter the temple of the LORD. The people, however, continued their corrupt practices” (27:2).

- As with his father Uzziah, God rewarded his obedience with military victory and economic prosperity.

“Jotham grew powerful because he walked steadfastly before the LORD his God” (27:6).

King Ahaz—The pattern of obedient kings was broken by Jotham’s son, Ahaz. Driven by an evil, unrepentant heart toward God, he added to the wicked idolatry practiced by the people of Judah by sacrificing his own sons in fire. Therefore all of Judah suffered heavy loss:

“In one day Pekah son of Remaliah [of Israel] killed a hundred and twenty thousand soldiers in Judah—because Judah had forsaken the LORD, the God of their fathers” (28:6).

“The LORD had humbled Judah because of Ahaz king of Israel, for he had promoted wickedness in Judah and had been most unfaithful to the LORD” (28:19).

- Rather than calling for repentance during his time of distress, Ahaz increased his spiritual wickedness and that of his people.

“He shut the doors of the LORD’s temple and set up altars at every street corner in Jerusalem. In every town in Judah he built high places to burn sacrifices to other gods and provoked the LORD, the God of his fathers, to anger” (28:24,25).

King Hezekiah—Appalled by the wickedness of his father, Hezekiah was dedicated in seeking God. He immediately took action to restore the Levites and the defiled temple to purity in service to God.

“In everything that he undertook in the service of God’s temple and in obedience to the law and the commands, he sought his God and worked wholeheartedly. And so he prospered” (31:21).

- After God delivered Judah from the

Assyrian army, peace reigned. Then serious illness struck. Hezekiah wept bitterly for healing, and God extended his life. The king's heart, however, grew arrogant afterward.

*"In those days Hezekiah became ill and was at the point of death. He prayed to the LORD, who answered him and gave him a miraculous sign. **But Hezekiah's heart was proud and he did not respond to the kindness shown him; therefore the LORD's wrath was on him and on Judah and Jerusalem.***

• Repentance prevented catastrophe in Hezekiah's time, yet his shortsightedness revealed the self-centeredness in his heart regarding the next generations. When Babylonian officials came to extend well wishes, the prideful monarch exhibited to them all "my treasures" in "my palace." Rebuked by the prophet Isaiah for his pride and warned of the devastation to come, Hezekiah focused only on the fact that he wouldn't have to go through it.

"And some of your descendants, your own flesh and blood, that will be born to you, will be taken away, and they will become eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon." 'The word of the LORD you have spoken is good,' Hezekiah replied. For he thought, 'Will there not be peace and security in my lifetime?'" (2Kings 20:18,19).

King Manasseh—Born during the extended years Hezekiah had pleaded for, he was raised surrounded by both pride and the decline in his father's relationship with God. The ground gained spiritually in Judah during Hezekiah's earlier years was demolished by this boy-king.

"He sacrificed his sons in the fire in the Valley of Ben Hinnom, practiced sorcery, divination and witchcraft, and consulted mediums and spiritists. He did much evil in the eyes of the LORD, provoking Him to anger" (33:6).

• If indeed Hezekiah had told the boy about the prophesied catastrophe to come, the youngster didn't repent. Rather, he rebelled against anything to do with God and caused the entire

populace to live wickedly as well.

"Manasseh led Judah and the people of Jerusalem astray, so that they did more evil than the nations the LORD had destroyed before the Israelites" (33:9).

• His son Amon followed in his evil steps but was assassinated after a two-year reign. Fed up with this evil, the people of the land made Manasseh's young son Josiah king in his stead.

King Josiah—Only a child when he took the throne, Josiah was obviously trained and guided by those who yearned to see the God of Judah restored.

"He did what was right in the eyes of the LORD and walked in the ways of his father David, not turning aside to the right or to the left" (34:2).

• Destroying everything that was idolatrous in God's sight, Josiah inspired integrity in everyone who took part in restoring the temple. His heart was devastated when the Book of the Law was finally found and he realized how far Judah had strayed from God.

"Great is the LORD's anger that is poured out on us because our fathers have not kept the word of the LORD; they have not acted in accordance with all that is written in this book" (34:21).

• God told Josiah that because of his humble response before Him, he wouldn't experience to the coming wrath. But unlike his grandfather Hezekiah who focused only on his own security, Josiah took steps to help the people return to God.

"The king...renewed the covenant in the presence of the LORD—to follow the LORD and keep His commands, regulations and decrees with all his heart and all his soul, and to obey the words of the covenant written in this book. Then he had everyone in Jerusalem and Benjamin pledge themselves to it; the people of Jerusalem did this in accordance with the covenant of God, the God of their fathers" (34:31,32).

• After Josiah was killed in battle against an Egyptian king, Josiah's heir Jehoahaz was taken captive to Egypt. Another of Josiah's sons was appointed king. In the steps of his *grandfather Manasseh* this man was evil in God's sight and did "detestable things" before being carried away by the king of Babylon. His brother Zedekiah continued in wickedness as well, refusing to turn to the God of Israel.

"Furthermore, all the leaders of the priests and the people became more and more unfaithful, following all the detestable practices of the nations and defiling the temple of the LORD, which He had consecrated in Jerusalem" (36:14).

• God sent prophetic words again and again, but the people scoffed at their warnings and aroused God's wrath to the point that "there was no remedy." All were handed over to Babylon.

You probably noticed that the evil inclinations of one generation often passed to the next even among kings who started out wholehearted. By failing to run their life course in holiness, those who started the race well gave way to compromise. Often *pride*, that worldly egotism and self-importance which God opposes (Proverbs 3:34, apperceived in James 4:6) led to their downfall. The children who had witnessed this sad change of heart in their fathers then followed that evil pathway themselves.

In light of these brief generational accounts, look at your own family life and discern the influences and consequences of past generations on you. Your heavenly Father sees "family" as intergenerational. He's well aware of who preceded you and who will follow you. You have received the consequences (positive and negative) of those who went before you, as those after you will receive the consequences of your choices.

If the sinful choices of your ancestors have passed down to you a predisposition in that area, humble yourself and repent for their sins and yours. Repenting for the sins of prior generations is biblical, a pattern we see in the prophets Nehemiah, Jeremiah, and Daniel as they sought forgiveness for the sins of prior generations:

"Let Your ear be attentive and Your eyes open to hear the prayer your servant is praying before you day and night for Your servants, the people of Israel. I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father's house, have committed against You" (Nehemiah 1:6; see also Jeremiah 3:25; Daniel 9:8).

These prophets hadn't walked in sin themselves, but they bore spiritual responsibility for not only their own burden but also that of their ancestors. They knew how critical it was to *reestablish fellowship* with a holy God. As Scripture makes clear, *confession and repentance* is the only way to do this—a privilege we in Christ are called to practice as well (see 1John 1:9; 2Timothy 2:29).

If You Have Children and/or Grandchildren, What Heritage Are You Leaving Them—Blessing or Chastisement?

Bearing the responsibilities of someone else's choice may be hard for people today to understand. For the past several generations, *self* has reigned in this land. The deep-rooted influence of humanism in public education combined with the emphasis on individualism by the Reformers have dulled people to their mutual responsibilities to each other. Yet our Father recognizes the *interconnectedness* of

generations; those in Christ are *communally* responsible to live righteously.

The sense of mutual responsibility has diminished greatly in this culture. While people are quick to write a check or donate food or clothing to meet the needs of victims of disaster, the personal contact of an authentic relationship is becoming rare. Decades ago, elementary school teachers often had faster learners help out slower ones. During the 1960s and 70s, if one person in a military unit did wrong, the entire unit was held responsible. However, when the American Civil Liberties Union objected, this practice was ended and relational cohesion diminished.

Interpersonal responsibility to one another was far more prevalent in previous eras than among the newest generations. A close friend ministers in a youth detention center in which the young men are placed in small groups. In the past they'd been held responsible for the actions of each other in their group. However, state policy changed and this interpersonal responsibility and account-

ability was removed.

Because they have no sense of responsibility for one another, the boys are disconnected and emotionally isolated. Feeling accountable to no one, the majority return to detention after they're released. The goal of humanism is apparent in these tragic young lives: "I only have to to be responsible for myself!"

Take a long look at your own life and that of your family. Are you being blessed in these relationships, or are you being chastised by Him? If you're being chastised, identify where sin may lie, whether in your family members or from an ancestor whose life evidenced unrepentance. Humbly repent and receive the forgiveness and cleansing that restores fellowship with our Father and His Son Jesus.