

Do Children Inherit the Sin of Their Parents?

Kyle Butt, M.A.

Understanding the nature of God's interaction with man is no small task. The sincere Bible student often comes across things in the biblical text that are puzzling. Others, who are perhaps somewhat less sincere, twist these initially puzzling passages "to their own destruction" (as described in 2 Peter 3:16-1). One such idea that has been abused is the alleged contradiction between how Jehovah dealt (and still deals) with the children of sinful people. Steve Wells, author of the *Skeptic's Annotated Bible*, insists that there is a discrepancy in the Bible regarding this subject. He lists Exodus 20:5, which states: "For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me." Wells then presents Ezekiel 18:20 as a contradictory verse: "The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself" (Wells, 2003).

Is there a legitimate contradiction between these verses? Or, to pose the question differently, "Is there any possible way that both these statements can be true? The fact of the matter is that both statements can be true, without a contradiction occurring. What Mr. Wells and others who twist these verses into an alleged contradiction do not recognize is that there is a difference between bearing the guilt of a parent, and suffering negative physical and emotional consequences due to that parent's bad decisions.

It often is the case that the children of wicked people suffer terribly. Sometimes these children suffer because the parent physically or emotionally abuses them (in direct violation of Scripture; cf. Matthew 7:12; Colossians 3:21). At other times, the child suffers as a result of the parent's irresponsible behavior. For instance, suppose a man addicted to gambling wastes his salary on gambling, instead of using it to feed his family. As a result, his children suffer hunger, shame, and poverty.

Yet, even though the children of sinful people often suffer physical consequences, they do not inherit the **sin** of those parents. The book of Jeremiah provides an interesting commentary on this subject. In Jeremiah 16:1-6, God told Jeremiah that the prophet should not take a wife and/or have children in the land of Israel. God explained His reasoning to Jeremiah as follows: "For thus says the Lord concerning the sons and daughters who are born in this place.... 'They shall die gruesome deaths;

they shall not be lamented, nor shall they be buried, but they shall be as refuse on the face of the earth' " (16:4). Why was this going to happen? Wells is quick to refer to this chapter, especially verses 10 and 11 where the children of Israel pose the question, "Why has the Lord pronounced all this great disaster against us" (vs. 10)? Wells then records Jeremiah's answer: "Because your fathers have forsaken Me," says the Lord" (vs. 11). Wells, however, does not cite the very next verse (12), which states: "And you have done worse than your fathers...."

These Israelites were suffering due to the sins of their fathers—and **due to their own sins**. Their children were going to die gruesome deaths. The skeptic is quick to seize upon this fact, and demand that any time innocent children die, it is a travesty against justice that a loving God never would permit (a fallacious idea that I have refuted elsewhere; see Butt, 2004).

Do children sometimes die horrible deaths due to their parents' wrong decisions? Absolutely. The Israelites had adopted the practice of sacrificing their own children to a false god named Baal (Jeremiah 19:5). The iniquity of the parents, then, can be visited upon the children in the form of physical suffering. But do those children bear the guilt of that sin? Absolutely not! Ezekiel wrote by inspiration of the Holy Spirit: "The **soul** who sins shall die. The son shall not bear the **guilt** of the father, nor the father bear the **guilt** of the son" (Ezekiel 18:20, emp. added).

Notice the words **soul** and **guilt**. Does the Bible ever insinuate, for example, that a child is guilty of idolatry because his parents were idolatrous? No (read Matthew 18:3-5; Luke 18:16-17). Bearing the **guilt** of sin is altogether different than bearing the **physical consequences** of the actions of others. As is often the case, the skeptic has confused the two, and has alleged a biblical contraction where, in fact, none exists. This is still another example in which the allegation against the Bible fails, but "the Word of the Lord endures forever" (1 Peter 1:25).

REFERENCES

- Butt, Kyle (2004), "The Skeptic's Faulty Assumption," [On-line], URL: <http://www.apologeticspress.org/scrspeak/2004/ss-04-12.htm>.
- Wells, Steve (2001), *Skeptic's Annotated Bible* [On-line], URL: <http://www.skepticsannotatedbible.com/1cor/index.html>.

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Q What type of proof is available to show the Bible is inspired of God?

A There are any number of proofs which document that the Bible is inspired of God. But The Book's uncanny brevity is one obvious proof of its divine origin. Throughout history, humans have been quite verbose in articulating their ideas and thoughts—from multi-volume encyclopedias, history books, and biographies, to the pronouncements of religious authorities via their councils, disciplines, and sundry theologies. In stark contrast to this human inclination, the books of the Bible are incredibly brief. Consider, for example, that Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John were given the weighty responsibility of reporting to the world for all ages the momentous events surrounding the life of Christ while He was on Earth. John even admitted that there were so many activities that occurred during Jesus' life that, "if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written" (John 21:25). So what should be included, and what should be excluded in such a critical literary endeavor?

In reporting the events in the life of an extremely eminent figure in world history, what human writer would omit the birth—as Mark and John did? What author would skip over the first thirty years of the person's life—as all four of the Gospel writers did (with Luke's one exception of an incident in Jesus' life at the age of twelve)? The baptism of Jesus is told in twelve lines by Matthew, and in six lines by Mark and Luke. Of the twelve post-resurrection appearances of Jesus, two are noted by Matthew, three each by Mark and Luke, and four by John. In Acts, Luke provided the only inspired report of the first thirty years of the history of the church and the spread of Christianity—and he did it in just twenty-eight chapters! The untimely death of the first apostle, James, which must have been a tremendous blow to the early church (on the order of, say, the assassination of President John F. Kennedy to Americans), is recorded in a short eleven words. With such cataclysmic, earthshaking subject matter, how did these authors produce such succinct, condensed, concise histories consisting of only a few pages? The answer? They wrote under the overruling influence (in this case, restraint) of the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:21).

Dave Miller

IN THE NEWS

It was described as "the most powerful search yet for the Universe's missing matter" (Brumfiel, 2004). Scientists have been hard at work, trying to identify "dark matter" that can help explain why the Universe behaves the way it does. Past observations revealed that the Universe was expanding in such a manner that the physical matter of which we were aware could not explain the results we were seeing. Scientists concluded that we must be missing a "vital component." Thus, the search for this vital component—dark matter—was launched.

The latest effort, however, has also come up empty handed. Reporting on the most recent failed attempt to detect dark matter, science writer Geoff Brumfiel noted:

The new detector is four times more sensitive than any previous experiment. To shield it from high-energy particles from outer space, the machine is based 700 metres underground in an abandoned iron mine in Soudan, Minnesota. The detector is also chilled to within a tenth of a degree of absolute zero to reduce vibrations from surrounding molecules.

Brumfiel went on to comment:

The detector itself consists of sensors attached to six germanium and silicon crys-

tals. If a particle strikes one of the crystals, it causes the crystal to ring like a bell, and the sensors detect vibrations.

The test began looking for a type of theoretical particles called weakly interactive massive particles (WIMPs) in November 2003. However, it has yet to record even a single WIMP. These results are in direct contradiction of a less-sensitive dark matter detector based at the National Laboratory of Gran Sasso, Italy. That detector has been active since 1996, with researchers suspecting they may have detected WIMPs in the past.

Harry Nelson, a physicist at the University of California, Santa Barbara asserted "CDMSII isn't exerting an annoying pressure on theorists yet. But they're starting to feel it" (as quoted in Brumfiel, 2004). Evolutionists insist that dark matter (and dark energy) **must** exist—because otherwise, people might suspect that a Supernatural Creator played a role in creating the Universe—an option that no self-respecting evolutionist can stomach.

REFERENCE

Brumfiel, Geoff (2004), "Particle No-Show Pans Former Find," Science Update, [On-line], URL: <http://www.nature.com/nsu/040503/040503-7.html>.

Brad Harrub