

Disputing the Justice of God Part I
Closing the Door to Cosmic Fatalism

Ezekiel 18:1–20

Veritas Adult Community

November 17, 2019

The Text

A. The People’s Thesis

^{8:1}The following message of YHWH came to me: ²“What do you mean, you who are quoting this proverb concerning the land of Israel: ‘Parents eat sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are blunted!’”

The LORD’s Counter Thesis

B. The Principle of Divine Justice

³“As I live—the declaration of the Lord YHWH—, you shall never quote this proverb again in Israel. ⁴Look! Every living person belongs to me! Like the life of the parent, so is the life of the child; both belong to me. It is the person who sins who shall die.”

C. Three Case Studies in Divine Justice

<p>1. The Case of the Righteous Person</p> <p>⁵“Now if a man is righteous, and practises justice and righteousness—</p> <p>⁶He does not eat on the mountains; And he does not raise his eyes to the dung pellets of the house of Israel; And he does not defile his neighbor’s wife; And he does not have sexual relations with his wife during her menstrual period; ⁷If a man does not exploit anyone— He returns his debt-pledge; He does not commit robbery; He shares his food with the hungry; And he covers the naked with clothes; ⁸He does not lend money with interest, And he does not demand a profit; He restrains himself from injustice; He promotes true justice within the community; ⁹He conducts his life according to my ordinances, And he observes my judgments by acting with integrity— He is righteous! He shall surely live!</p> <p>The declaration of the Lord YHWH.</p>	<p>2. The Case of the Wicked Son</p> <p>¹⁰“Now, should he father a violent son—a murderer—who commits any of these [crimes] ¹¹(though he himself has not done any of these)— Instead he eats on the mountains; And he defiles his neighbor’s wife; ¹²He exploits the poor and needy; He commits robbery; He does not return the pledge; And he raises his eyes to the idols; He commits abominable deeds; ¹³He lends money with interest, And demands a profit— Shall he live? He shall not live! He has committed all these abominable deeds; He shall surely be put to death! His blood shall be upon himself!”</p>
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2. The Case of the Righteous Grandson

¹⁴“Now look! Should he father a son who observes all the sins that his father has committed, who takes heed, and does not behave the same way—

¹⁵He does not eat on the mountains;
And he does not raise his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel;

He does not defile his neighbor’s wife;

¹⁶If a man does not exploit anyone—

He does not accept a debt-pledge;

And he does not commit robbery;

He shares his food with the hungry;

And he covers the naked with clothes;

¹⁷He restrains himself from the poor;

He has not demanded interest or profit;

He carries out my demands;

He conducts his life according to my ordinances—

He shall not die for the iniquity of his father!

He shall surely live!

¹⁸As for his father—

If he practises extortion;

He commits robbery against his brother;

And he misbehaves in the midst of his people—

Look! He shall die for his own iniquity!”

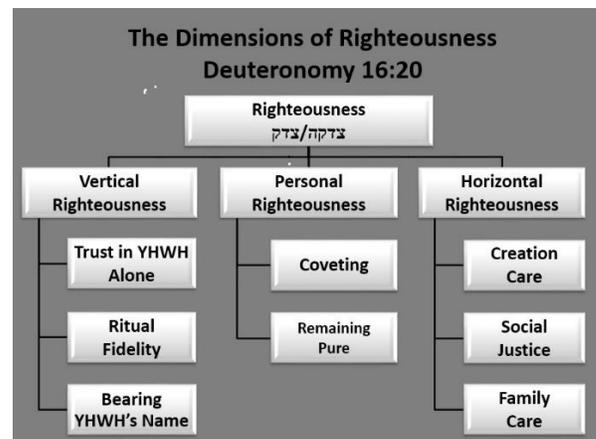
D. The Rejoinder and Reply

¹⁹“But you ask, ‘Why should the son not share in the guilt of his father?’ The son has practised justice and righteousness. He has observed all my statutes and kept them—He shall surely live!

²⁰It is the person who sins who shall die!

A son shall not share in the guilt of his father;
nor shall a father share in the guilt of his son.

The righteousness of the righteous shall be credited to him alone; but the wickedness of the wicked shall be charged to him alone.”



Exposition

Introduction

A. The People’s Thesis: The Illusion (vv. 1–2)

B. YHWH’s Counter-Thesis: The Reality (vv. 3–4)

1. We can never truly understand human experience if we do not recognize God’s claims to our lives.
2. We can never have a true understanding of human experience if we do not recognize the true relationship between guilt and punishment, sin and retribution.

C. Three Case Studies in Divine Justice (18:5–18)

1. The Case of the Righteous Person (vv. 5–9)
2. The Case of His Wicked Son (vv. 10–13)
3. The Case of His Righteous Grandson (vv. 14–18)

D. The Rejoinder and Reply

1. The Question of Divine Justice (v. 19)
2. The Answer (v. 20)

Theological and Practical Lessons

1. We must repudiate any systemic doctrine of sin and retribution that allows one person to blame another for his/her fate.
2. To claim the status of a *šaddiq*, a “righteous person” requires that we demonstrate that righteousness in life.