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Scripture

Ezekiel 18:1-4, 25-32

¹The word of the LORD came to me: ²What do you mean by repeating this proverb concerning the land of Israel, "The parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge"? ³As I live, says the Lord GOD, this proverb shall no more be used by you in Israel. ⁴Know that all lives are mine; the life of the parent as well as the life of the child is mine: it is only the person who sins that shall die.

²⁵Yet you say, "The way of the Lord is unfair." Hear now, O house of Israel: Is my way unfair? Is it not your ways that are unfair? ²⁶When the righteous turn away from their righteousness and commit iniquity, they shall die for it; for the iniquity that they have committed they shall die. ²⁷Again, when the wicked turn away from the wickedness they have committed and do what is lawful and right, they shall save their life. ²⁸Because they considered and turned away from all the transgressions that they had committed, they shall surely live; they shall not die. ²⁹Yet the house of Israel says, "The way of the Lord is unfair." O house of Israel, are my ways unfair? Is it not your ways that are unfair?

³⁰Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, all of you according to your ways, says the Lord GOD. Repent and turn from all your transgressions; otherwise iniquity will be your ruin. ³¹Cast away from you all the transgressions that you have committed against me, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house of Israel? ³²For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, says the Lord GOD. Turn, then, and live.

Devotional

"Setting teeth on edge" is an old phrase, but its meaning is clear. Perhaps you too have had your teeth set on edge by some distasteful drink or fetid foodstuff. But imagine if you bore tortured taste buds because of another's putrid palate. Someone else samples the forbidden fruits, but you bear the consequences. Surely you would name such a system unjust.

The Israelite children do the same by leveling their accusation against the Lord. While the truth of their proverb lies in the communal nature of sin (for no sin is without corporate consequence), the ultimate price tag to wickedness, the wage, as Paul calls it, is death, and under the Old Covenant, "the one who sins is the one who dies." This is "eye-for-an-eye" in action.

Thank our God that it doesn't end there! Though it's clear that injustice is found in the hands of us sinners, the Lord allows us to repent, to consider the compounded folly of our ways, and to turn away from them. In echo of David, the Prophet pleads for us to take on a new heart and a new spirit. The ones we wield will only wipe us out.

Prayer

Holy One, we are grateful for a season of self-reflection. Help us discover the distaste deep in our souls for the sin in our lives and in our communities. May we purge our lives of our unjust inclinations, and in your Cross and Empty Tomb, may we find hope to live. Amen.