

Q. Are generational sins or generational curses something Christians should be concerned about?

A. Generational sins or generational curses refer to the idea expressed in the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20:5: "I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and on the fourth generation of those who hate me" (see also Exodus 34:7; Numbers 14:18; and Deuteronomy 5:9). In other words, the guilt for someone's sin would pass from one generation to the next. When God would actually execute His punishment on Israel for the generational curse was to be up to Him, not the civil leaders. They were not to punish people for the sins of their fathers. So God explained to them in Deuteronomy 24:16, "The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers: every man shall be put to death for his own sin."

The concept of generational curses has become a fad among certain Christian groups and even governments. Some preachers, for example, tell people who are having trials that their problems are because they are under a generational curse. They tell these people they will continue to have troubles unless they pray a special prayer to break free of the generational curse (see, for example, "Generational Curse Breaking Prayer" <http://www.freedomdeliverance.org/GenerationalCursePrayer.htm>; the last subheading under "Deliverance Prayers" http://www.greatbiblestudy.com/deliverance_prayers.php; and "Breaking Generational Curses!" <http://thelightofgodministry.org/breakinggenerationalcurses.html>).

We also now see public ceremonies or statements confessing and asking forgiveness for the generational sins of a nation or group of people. Often, these take the form of one nation or race expressing sorrow for the way its ancestors oppressed another nation or race. Thus we have white North Americans repenting of their ancestors' mistreatment of Native Americans, white people in the U.S. apologizing to African Americans because their ancestors had African slaves, modern Lutherans asking for forgiveness for the way sixteenth-century Lutherans persecuted Anabaptists, the Episcopal Church in

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America repudiating the fifteenth-century Doctrine of Discovery that made all lands not subject to a European Christian monarch fair game for conquest, the United Methodist Church in the United States asking for forgiveness for the Sand Creek Massacre in Colorado on November 29, 1863, during which two hundred Cheyenne and Arapaho people were massacred, and so forth.

I want to make clear that there is a difference between merely owning up to a problem and actually confessing generational sins. Honestly facing the fact that a wrong occurred in the past may be, in some instances, a step in helping present conditions. For example, we might imagine a scenario in which People A oppressed People B several centuries ago and People B are still discriminated against and disadvantaged because of what started back then. In such a case, People A admitting that what their ancestors did to People B was wrong would be a step toward correcting the situation as it is now.

But confessing generational sins is an attempt by one generation to be forgiven for sins committed by previous generations. In other words, you believe that your ancestors' sins have actually been passed to you and you want God to forgive you for them. Churches and other ministries that offer generational curse breaking prayers certainly believe that sins can be passed from one generation to the next and that these sins can only be forgiven when specifically prayed about. On the other hand, the public ceremonies and statements I mentioned often do not specifically mention the concept of generational sins. It may be a matter of what is in the mind of each individual involved with these public confessions. Some may believe that they are removing God's curse upon their generation, and others may not.

We have seen that the idea of generational sin comes from several Scriptures associated with Old Covenant law. But does the Bible say that generational curses continue today?

I'll base the answer on three biblical points. The first point is that Jesus said that He had come to fulfill the law (Matthew 5:17). As I clarify in "In what way did Jesus fulfill the law?" (<http://www.wordofhisgrace.org/jesusfulfilllawqa1.htm>), this means that Jesus completed the law, and that it then ended.

The second point is that the Old Covenant ended and the New Covenant began with Jesus' death on the Cross (see "When Did the Old Covenant End and the New Covenant Begin?" (<http://www.wordofhisgrace.org/newcovenantstart.htm>)).

The third point is that in Jeremiah's prophecy concerning the ending of the Old Covenant and beginning of the New, God clearly announces the ending of generational sins and curses.

In those days they shall say no more, The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge. But everyone shall die for his own iniquity: every man who eats the sour grapes, his teeth shall be set on edge. Behold, the days come, says the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they broke, although I was a husband to them, says the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law in their inward parts, and in their heart will I write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people

Jeremiah 31:29-33

The Old Covenant has ended, and generational sins and curses have ended with it. God holds no one guilty for what his or her ancestors did.

Today, the only sin that we did not commit that brings guilt on us is the sin of Adam. The New Covenant specifically states this. In Romans 5:12-14, Paul writes, "Therefore, as sin entered into the world through one man, and death through sin; and so death passed to all men, because all sinned. For until the law, sin was in the world; but sin is not charged when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those whose sins weren't like Adam's disobedience, who is a foreshadowing of him who was to come." Adam sinned by transgressing a command of God. But those who descended from him died even though they did not transgress a command of God. Since death is the result of sin, this must mean that God had imputed Adam's sin to his descendents. This is the doctrine of original sin. It is not generational sin. We are held responsible for Adam's sin because he was the head of the human race, and when he fell into sin, we fell with him. His sin is imputed to us.

But God removes this guilt from those who believe in Jesus Christ as their Savior and, again using the principal of imputation, God puts

Christ's righteousness on believers because Jesus Christ is the Head of all born again Christians: "For as through the one man's disobedience many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the one, many will be made righteous" (Romans 5:19); and "that if you will confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (Romans 10:9).

Today, there is no such thing as generational sin for anyone. But those who do not put their trust in Jesus are under the guilt of their own sin and the sin of Adam and will be condemned by these sins. But, for faithful Christians, "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who don't walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit" (Romans 8:1).

You were dead through your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh. He made you alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, wiping out the handwriting in ordinances which was against us; and he has taken it out of the way, nailing it to the cross; having stripped the principalities and the powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it.

Colossians 2:13-15

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