

# The False Theory of Generational Curses

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**Abstract:** The modern fad of generation curses as an excuse for sin is a major cause of many people's deception.

An earnest young lady approached her pastor prior to the Sunday morning worship service: "Pastor, would you pray for me?" He said he would and asked if there was something of particular concern.

"Yes," she replied, "I need deliverance from an ancestral curse." "No," the pastor assured her, "you do not have an ancestral curse." "But, pastor, you don't understand," she continued, "my dad had a violent temper, and now I am also bothered by a bad temper."

The godly pastor explained that although she was reacting as her father had, it was learned behaviour, and that the teaching of *ancestral curse* is not Scriptural. He reminded her that outbursts of wrath are one of the works of the flesh and that the Holy Spirit gives her power to overcome it (Gal. 5:16, 20). The young lady was relieved and happy as the Truth set her free.

## The power of parental influence

When we ponder parental influence, we understand why some believe people can be victims of *ancestral curses*. It is difficult to overestimate the power of parental example. The primal chance to shape the character of a new human being is an inestimable privilege and an awesome responsibility. Parents can make a home a place of happiness and peace or a *living hell*. God's Word gives both instructions and examples. In the Old Testament He commanded His people to teach His Word to their children diligently and daily (Deut. 6:7-9). In the New Testament Paul wrote: "Fathers, provoke not your children to wrath, but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4).

**Fathers** are given the main leadership and responsibility. God said of Abraham, "I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord" (Gen. 18:19). Conversely, we see David who was "a man after God's own heart" but too busy and too indulgent to discipline his sons (1 Ki. 1:6). He lived to experience the bitter sorrow of a rebellious son's untimely death. "O my son Absalom! My son Absalom! Would God I had died for thee. O Absalom my son, my son!" (2 Sam. 18:33).

**Mothers** also wield tremendous influence. Paul congratulated Timothy for "the genuine faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice" (2 Tim. 1:5). By contrast, we see a young woman who could be considered under a *generation curse*, if such were possible. Her dancing was so alluring that her step-father, Herod, the tetrarch, promised her anything she desired. We read the tragic results:

"And she, being before instructed of her mother, said, Give me here John Baptist's head in a charger... And his head was brought in a charger and given to the damsel; and she brought it to her mother" (Mt. 14:8, 11).

## The difference between *influence* and *curse*

Since the term *generation curse* (GC) is not in the Bible, we must ascertain its meaning by literary usage. According to Webster, a *generation* is “a single step in the line of descent from an ancestor; the average span of time between the birth of parents and the birth of their children” (348). In the same source, we learn that a *curse* is “a prayer or invocation for harm or injury to come upon one; the evil that comes as if in response to imprecation or retribution; to call on divine or supernatural power to send injury upon someone” (204).

We readily see that a new factor has entered the equation when the term *curse* is understood. Either God or Satan has been invoked and is somehow involved in “harm or injury” upon the victim. Those under *generation curses* would be born already destined to commit certain sins, dominated by a force beyond human control. This is a different realm from mere parental influence, requiring some sort of intervention by a power greater than the force of the *curse*. Form this proposed scenario has come the teaching of *generation curses* and the ministry of *breaking curses*.

## The popular appeal of the GC theory

There are many reasons for the popularity of the *generation curse* concept. An obvious one is the reluctance of most humans to take blame for their wrongdoing. Psychological theories have convinced many people that they are not really sinners, but rather victims of society in general and parents in particular. Most of those who teach the GC concept also claim to be able to break curses for those who come forward in their meetings. In an age of instant solution to just about everything, the promise of quick moral transformation is appealing. If the GC teaching is true then every believer should be involved in getting curses broken. I intend to show it is **not** true and **why** it is not true. Every doctrine must stand the test of God’s plumb-line: “To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak **according to this Word**, it is because there is no light in them” (Isa. 8:20). The Word of God **is** Truth – inerrant, immutable, and absolute (2 Tim. 3:16-17). We will examine the GC theory by the Word.

## Is the GC theory Scriptural?

Most *generation curse* teachers start their Scriptural basis with Exodus 20:5-6. In order to prove their point, they then make iniquity a specialised category of transgression. God said:

“You shall not bow down to them [images] nor serve them. For I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.”

## Is *iniquity* a unique sin?

GC advocates arbitrarily treat the term *iniquity* as a synonym for *generation curse*, implying that iniquity is a unique sin. In *Break the Generation Curse, Part 1*, Marilyn Hickey has written, “You can come under a curse for which you are not responsible but have inherited” (p. 15).

She bases much of her argument on the use of the term *iniquity*, making it a special kind of sin: “If a sin is repeatedly committed, it becomes an iniquity which can be passed down through the bloodline... [the] curse of family iniquities passes on through your blood” (Ibid., Part 2, p. 12, 50).

Is *iniquity* a special category of sin? Not at all. The biblical languages have a number of terms to express wrongdoing, but all of them mean *sin*. Parallelism and repetition are common features in the Scriptures:

“I acknowledge my sin and my iniquity have I not hid” (Ps. 32:5). “And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more” (Heb. 10:17). Luke 13:27 shows that all sinners are “workers of iniquity.”

The plain fact is that all iniquity is sin and all sin is iniquity.

### What God actually said in Exodus 20:5-6

No one would need be misled by generation curse teaching if careful attention is given to exactly what God said.

1. The term *curse* is not there. God was warning of His **judgement** on the sin of idolatry, which spawns many other sins.
2. God wanted His people to know that an idolatrous culture would have a disastrous impact on their progeny to the third and fourth generations.
3. The phrase “third and fourth” is not to be taken as an exact stopping point for the results of sin, because each succeeding generation starts the cycle over again. And – take note – the **judgement** would fall **those who hate God**.

GC teachers rarely point out that in the same verse, God promises mercy to a thousand generations of **those who love God**. As Paul wrote, “Where sin abounded, grace abounded much more” (Rom. 5:20).

### Is the family bloodline cursed?

In addition to trying to make *iniquity* a special kind of sin, GC teachers have attached *family* to it, resulting in one of their key phrases: *family iniquity*. They then say iniquity is passed to persons through the family blood. Here are basic facts with scriptures for you to pursue further study:

1. The only family totally affected by sin (iniquity) is the **human family**. By **one man** sin entered the world (Rom. 5:12). As a result of our first parents’ sin, all humans have been born with a nature that is inclined to sin (Eph. 2:3).
2. Every baby is conceived with this sinful nature inherent (Ps. 51:5), but children are not held accountable until they personally commit sin. “Sin is not imputed when there is no law” (Rom. 5:13). Paul describes coming to “the age of accountability” (Rom. 7:9).

3. The **only bloodline** that is involved with the sinful nature is that from Adam (Rom. 5:17-19) and Eve (1 Tim. 2:14). “God has made of **one blood** all nations” (Acts 17:26). Human blood may transmit physical disease, but it cannot carry spirits or iniquities.

A blood transfusion from the vilest sinner could not defile one spiritually; likewise, blood from the the most Christlike saint cannot make one holy.

4. There is **cleansing in the blood** of the last Adam (1 Cor. 15:45)! By **His blood** the Church is purchased (Acts 20:28), justified (Rom. 5:9), and purified (Heb. 9:22).

### **Do familiar spirits pass curses?**

Many GC teachers say evil spirits can be passed from parents to children. Teresa Castleman gives the following shocking instruction for dealing with **Christians** who have habits from which they desire deliverance:

“In a deliverance session we handle this in the following manner: Call forth those curses that have been allowed through the generations by way of a Familiar Spirit – we break the hold and command in the Name of Jesus that it flee. We command that it go to dry places and tell the curse it is not allowed to go into any future generations. Its power and hold is broken forever (p. 25).

Like the bloodline theory, this is unscriptural and dangerous teaching. Though the terms *family* and *familiar* come from the same root and are related in meaning, the term *familiar spirit* is not associated in Scripture with a human *family*. The spirit is called *familiar* because a demonised person has been made *familiar* with evil spirits who give information that could not be known any other way. In the Old Testament, God commanded that anyone “who has a familiar spirit shall surely be put to death” (Lev. 20:27). In the New Testament believers are given power to cast familiar spirits out of demonised sinners who desire deliverance (Mk. 16:17; Acts 16:18).

### **Should one *disown* ancestors' sins?**

Neil Anderson advises believers to say:

“As a child of God, I here and now reject and disown all the sins of my ancestors... I cancel all demonic working that has been passed on to me from my ancestors... I now command every familiar spirit that is in or around me to go to the pit and to remain there until the Day of Judgement” (p. 158).

There are three errors in this statement:

1. You do not own the sins of your ancestors, so you cannot dis-own them; you only own *your* sin (Jer. 31:30).

2. No demon is **in** a child of God (1 Jn. 4:4).
3. God has not given us authority to send familiar spirits to the pit; Jesus Himself sent some into pigs, but not to “the pit” (Mk. 5:13).

### **Is a house a generation?**

In *Break the Generation Curse*, Part 1, Marilyn Hickey says that since *house* (Gr. *oikos*) can in some instances be translated *household*, the term in Matthew 12:43-45 means *generation*. Then she goes on to say the “house all cleaned up by Jesus” can describe a person with a generational curse (p. 27).

However, Greek lexicons allow for no such definition of *oikos* as used her. In context, *oikos* means the heart of a person, a dwelling place for either Jesus or Satan. “When an unclean spirit goes out of a man” (Mt. 12:43) shows Jesus was speaking not of a household and not of a generation, but of an individual. The only house in danger was one that was empty. **The house that is occupied by Jesus is in no danger from demons!**

### **The Sour Grapes and Teeth on Edge theory**

Israelites had a well-developed **theology of generational curses**: “...the fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children’s teeth are set on edge” (Ezek. 18:2; Jer. 31:29). Hickey uses that saying as explanation for the curse on children (*Ibid*, Part 1:124). God, however, told His prophets to tell Israel not to use it! “As I live, say the Lord God, you shall no longer use this proverb. Behold, all souls are Mine... 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” (Ezek. 18:3-4, 20). Jeremiah wrote, “Every one shall die for his own iniquity, every man that eateth the sour grape, his teeth shall be set on edge” (31:30).

We have discussed the power of parental influence. Of greater magnitude is the power of **individual choice God has given to every person**. The first two children had the same heredity and heritage. One became the first murderer and the other the first martyr of faith (Gen. 4:8-16; Heb. 11:4).

We see this same principle in Israel’s kings (2 Chron. 28 to 35). Wicked Ahaz was the father of godly Hezekiah; his son and grandson, Manasseh and Amon, were idolators, but Josiah, son of Amon, led a great revival in Israel. In a message entitled *Generation Curse: Is It True?* Pastor Eddie Gwin showed the fallacious thinking behind the theory. His words of wisdom brought both heart-searching and comfort:

“Your entire lineage may be ungodly; why are you so different? Because you chose to serve the Lord. Some of you righteous parents have wayward kids. It is not your fault! They made the choice. *Free will* is a mystery, but yet a reality. We have to respect God’s sovereign wisdom in bestowing this gift on every person. We must never stop praying for unsaved loved ones, and we must never excuse wrongdoing by calling it a generation curse.

## Who places a *curse*?

One question I have repeatedly asked those who believe in GC teaching is: "If there is a generation curse, who placed the curse?" Some say, "The parents did," but then realise Scripture never says that. There is no Scriptural basis for saying Satan places a curse (despite all the harm he does do). Finally, the answer is, "God places the curse." Then I ask, "Do you think you can break a curse God placed?" The usual reply is, "I had not thought of it that way."

The solemnising fact is that God has indeed cursed sin and sinners (Mt. 25:41). The original curse of Genesis 3 affects every human being and all of creation (Rom. 8:19-23). Some examples of specific curses placed by God are: Cain (Gen. 4:11); all who would curse Abraham or his seed (Gen. 12:3); all Israelites who were guilty of sins enumerated in Deuteronomy 27 and 28; and God-robbers (Mal. 3:9). There are others, but none is *generational*. No one can break a curse placed by God – except God Himself! He delights in breaking curses as soon as people turn to Him in repentance. A prime example is Nineveh (Jonah 3:10).

One of the most beautiful examples of God's deliverance is that of Ruth the Moabitess. Because of the Moabites' unusual sin, God had excluded them from Tabernacle worship: "No Moabite or any of his descendants may enter the assembly of the Lord, even down to the tenth generation" (Deut. 23:3). That would include Ruth as well as her great-grandson, David. When Ruth said, "Thy people shall be my people and thy God my God," she was accepted as an Israelite (Ruth 1:16-17). She was signally blessed and placed in the lineage of Christ Jesus (Mt. 1:5)!

God's chosen people should have known better than to ever use a *generational curse* excuse for sins. How could they forget their history recorded in Numbers 22–24? When Balaam tried to curse God's people, he could not. He had to tell the frustrated and furious King Balak, "How shall I curse whom God has not cursed?... God is not a man that He should lie... I have received a command to bless; He has blessed and I cannot reverse it" (23:8, 19-20). To be a believer is to be blessed, and all curse is revoked. No one can bless whom God has cursed, and no one can curse whom God has blessed.

## Mercy to a thousand generations

Stanley Horton, highly respected theologian, was asked, "Does a Christian need to do something about breaking a generational curse?" He replied, "The so-called generation curse refers to the Second Commandment (Ex. 20:4-6). The word *hate* in the Hebrew is a participle indicating characteristic or continuous action. Thus, the children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren who keep on hating God reap a cumulative effect of God's judgement. On the other hand, those who turn from hatred of God and choose to love Him reap something far greater. They become part of a line that reaps the benefits of God's love on a thousand generations of godly people who preceded them. Thus, loving God will not suffer any judgement or curse from what their parents or ancestors did.

The psalmist sang, "He remembers His covenant forever, the Word which He commanded for a thousand generations" (Ps. 105:8). Every person on earth can claim this glorious promise of blessing simply by turning from hating God to loving Him. The moment you turn to Him, you become heir to the benefits of your godly ancestors. Even if you have to go all the way back to Noah, you do have at least one godly ancestor, and he lived less than a thousand generations ago!

The Good News of the Gospel is: "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us; (for it is written, 'Cursed is every one who hangs on a tree') that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:13-14). We need not and cannot add to the finished work of Calvary! There is no curse on those who are in Christ. When you encounter people talking about *generation curses*,

**tell them how to receive *generational blessings* !**