

Ancestral Iniquity

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Are the hardships we experience a normal part of the Christian life or can we put a stop to some of them, and in stead “prosper and be in good health, just as your soul prospers”?¹

Too many Christians unnecessarily endure hardships that are the result of the iniquities of their forefathers. What are they? Why, and how, do they affect us? What can we do about them? The answers to these questions can have a major impact on you and your offspring.

Iniquity

Iniquity is a word seldom used today and to properly understand it we need to go to its original use and intention. For our interest it first comes on the scene in Exodus 20, in the body of the Ten Commandments:

You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments. (Exodus 20:3-6)

This same warning is repeated in Exodus 20:5; 34:7, Numbers 14:18, and Deuteronomy 5:9. The father’s iniquities are visited on the offspring through to the third and fourth generations and in one case this extends to ten generations.²

The Hebrew word here for *iniquities* means *guilt, punishment for guilt, infraction, crooked behavior*³ and represents the consequences of an ancestor’s sin. In other words if one of our ancestors committed a sin such as idol worship or similar occult practice he and his offspring will suffer the consequences of that act. We are not guilty or accountable for their sin, but we can be afflicted as a consequence of their sin. What those consequences are varies with each family

and the sin involved. We will discuss indicators of the presence of these iniquities further on.

It is important to know that this is not an issue that affects our salvation. All our sin has been forgiven if we are a Christian and we have received the Holy Spirit as a guarantee of that salvation. These iniquities do affect the quality of our life on earth. Satan, our enemy, looks for ways to steal, kill, and destroy any facet of that life where there is an opening through which he has influence—whether we are aware of it matters not.

This is primarily an issue of the father’s or male side of the family line. That this is the case must be true since Jesus, being totally human, was without sin. He was born of a woman but had no earthly father for whose iniquities he would be accountable. This could only be the case if maternal issues are not passed down. The reason for this may be that the male sperm introduces life into the woman’s more passive ovum. The resulting zygote with the full number of chromosome can now divide and develop. In spite of this I would not hesitate to pray for any issues that may be ‘visiting’ from the mother’s side of the family line, since prayer can do no harm.

Objections to these Visits

There are some who object to the New Testament application of ancestral iniquities and this comes primarily from the following verses:

In those days they will not say again, 'The fathers have eaten sour grapes, And the children's teeth are set on edge.' But everyone will die for his own iniquity; each man who eats the sour grapes, his teeth will be set on edge. (Jeremiah 31:29-30)

What do you mean by using this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying, 'The fathers eat the sour grapes, but the children's teeth are set on edge '? 'As I live,' declares the Lord GOD, 'you are surely not going to use this proverb in

Israel anymore. Behold, all souls are Mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is Mine. The soul who sins will die.” (Ezekiel 18:2-4)

There was an Old Testament practice wherein the whole family was put to death when the father committed a sin. An example of this was Achan, the man who took some articles from Jericho in disregard of God’s command against doing so. His greed cost not only his life, but the lives of his entire family as well.

Then Joshua and all Israel with him, took Achan the son of Zerah, the silver, the mantle, the bar of gold, his sons, his daughters, his oxen, his donkeys, his sheep, his tent and all that belonged to him; and . . . all Israel stoned them with stones; and they burned them with fire after they had stoned them with stones. (Joshua 7:24-25)

Apart from God’s instruction to do so, this practice that was forbidden by the Law.

“Fathers shall not be put to death for their sons, nor shall sons be put to death for their fathers; everyone shall be put to death for his own sin. (Deuteronomy 24:16)

Another objection comes from verses like the following:

But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. (Isaiah 53:5 NIV)

If Jesus was crushed for our iniquities, then we do not have to be crushed by them. To understand this objection we need to understand the phrase coined by the theologians, namely, that our salvation seems always affected by “the already but not yet.” God already sees as the righteousness of God in Christ⁴ but yet we struggle with sin. We are seated in heavenly places in Christ Jesus⁵ and yet we struggle here on earth. This duality runs throughout our Christian experience.

The key to understanding this lies in our need to see that these truths apply to our spirit while our present experiences pertain to our soul and bodies. Paul tells us that we are spirit, soul, and body.⁶ Ultimately God’s gift of salvation will affect each of these aspects of our being, with the culmination of these occurring at the return of Christ when we will all be changed. Until then our spirit enjoys the full benefit of every Biblical truth in its fullness while our soul advances, through the process of sanctification, to increasingly enjoy those benefits and our bodies wait for that final redemption. While our souls are in the process of becoming holy, Satan uses whatever he can find in us as an opening, legally available to him, to afflict our souls emotionally and our bodies physically. Let us continue to be diligent to work out our salvation in fear and trembling,⁷ to progress and to press on into holiness so we too can say as Jesus did, “the ruler of the world is coming, and he has nothing in Me.”⁸

That iniquities continue to be visited upon the offspring is supported by scripture. The most obvious example of this comes from Adam’s sin in the Garden of Eden. Because of his disobedience (not Eve’s) sin reigns in the hearts of every human today, in fact all of nature suffers from the consequences, the iniquity, of his action.

Jesus’ rebuke of the scribes and Pharisees’ is another example of iniquity visiting the offspring:

So you testify against yourselves that you are the descendants of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up, then, the measure of the sin of your forefathers. . . How will you escape being condemned to hell? . . . And so upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berekiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. I tell you the truth, all this will come upon this generation. (Matthew 23:31-36)

That generation did pay dearly in 71 AD when Titus destroyed Jerusalem and massacred

the people—as a consequence of the iniquities of their forefathers.

We too may find ourselves afflicted because of the iniquities of our ancestors. If you find no adversity in your life you need not be concerned, but too many of God’s children are afflicted and because of wrong teaching or lack of understanding they suffer needlessly.

Understanding the Rules

There seems to be a hurdle facing us that we need to put behind us. That concerns God’s part in the afflictions that we may face.

“Why would God do this to us?”

“I thought God was love?”

“It doesn’t seem very just to me!”

Although these are good questions or objections, they come from misunderstandings that I would like to clear up.

Here are two principles that are good to commit to memory:

- God is good and only does good
- Satan is evil and only does bad

We need to see God’s statements as warnings rather than edicts against us. When a father tells a child not to play on the road, does he do so to spoil the child’s fun or to put undo restrictions on the child? Is it simply to exercise control? Although this is a bit simplistic we understand that the father wants the child to enjoy a prolonged life, recognize there are others that use that road who have no interest in the well-being of the child. Granted, God established the rules from the beginning and because he is good it was for good reasons. I believe he uses to these rules or codes of conduct as a means of discipline in the lives of his children to encourage us toward holiness. You will need to read my book, *Fathered by God: Incentives to Holiness*, for a more in depth discussion on this.

Satan and his realm are our enemies and as legalists they will press to their advantage any

willful infraction of the law in order to “steal, kill, and destroy” our quality of life while still on earth.

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly. (John 10:10)

In society today, we have laws that require the parents’ outstanding debts are to be paid out of the children’s inheritance. It is this same principle that is at work in our lives. It is the rulers, the authorities, the powers of this dark world, and the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms⁹ who are our enemy, not God.

Why does God allow the enemy to afflict us? To a large extent these afflictions should motivate us to press on into personal holiness, to close the legal loop holes in repentance. As long as our enemy has a legal right to afflict us they will do so and God must allow it—although I believe he does place restrictions on what is allowed. These restrictions come from the principle of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.¹⁰ We see these restrictions placed on Satan in the first two chapter of Job as well:

*“on the man himself do not lay a finger”
Job 1:12*

“but you must spare his life” Job 2:6

These were restrictions on the degree of the affliction, not a denial of their right to afflict. What do the afflictions look like? How do we recognize them?

The Afflictions

A key to identifying generational afflictions is to look for patterns in the family line. The law that stands against us states that the consequences of our forefather’s sin is visited or passed on to the children through three and four generations. Therefore look for patterns in your family line where there is a recurring problem. For example, one lady wrote the following account:

“This past week my brother was taken to the hospital because he was suffering from chest pains. I brought him home yesterday and on returning received a call from my sister informing me that one of

our brothers had been taken to the hospital. He will be undergoing triple bypass surgery on Monday. Before all this, my younger brother found out that his heart is functioning at 25%. A few years back, three of my siblings died, within months of each other, all due to heart problems. They were all in their fifties. The heart problems are hereditary.”

Do you see a pattern? Notice too, that medical science labels these health problems as hereditary, recognizing the pattern, but denying any spiritual roots to the malady. Whenever I hear of a hereditary condition I look for generational roots—ancestral iniquities.

Look for patterns of poverty in your family line, specific diseases as the heart problems in the example above. The affliction may present as relationship difficulties, a pattern of car troubles or propensity toward buying lemons. I have seen families where their first born sons died prematurely, or where there were miscarriages of a particular sex or either. Patterns, not just in your life but that are common to others in the family line—aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents, great grandparents, etc. Look for patterns of alcoholism, drug addictions, divorce, sexual issues, and anything ungodly that may be afflicting you family. Don't tolerate it any longer.

When we identify a pattern, how do we correct or remove the enemy's right to afflict us?

Rectifying the Iniquity

Even in regard to our forefather's iniquities, Jesus' sacrifice is more than sufficient:

But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. (Isaiah 53:5 NIV)

The solution is simple and comes from Leviticus 26:

But you will perish among the nations, and your enemies' land will consume you.

. . . If they confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their forefathers, in their unfaithfulness which they committed against Me . . . then I will remember My covenant with Jacob, and I will remember also My covenant with Isaac, and My covenant with Abraham as well, and I will remember the land. (Leviticus 26:38-42)

We see in chapter 9 of Daniel that the prophet followed this same tact. He became aware that through Jeremiah the prophet God had set 70 years as the length of Israel's exile into Babylon. In response he began to confess the sin of his people, those who had brought this exile upon them.

So I gave my attention to the Lord God to seek Him by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth and ashes. I prayed to the LORD my God and confessed and said, "Alas . . . we have sinned, committed iniquity, acted wickedly and rebelled, even turning aside from Your commandments and ordinances. . . Open shame belongs to us, O Lord, to our kings, our princes and our fathers, because we have sinned against You. . . Indeed all Israel has transgressed Your law and turned aside, not obeying Your voice; so the curse has been poured out on us, along with the oath which is written in the law of Moses. . . O Lord, hear! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, listen and take action! For Your own sake, O my God, do not delay" (Daniel 9:3, 4, 5, 8, 11, 19)

In summary, the steps are simply these:

1. become aware of the presence on an iniquity
2. confess (agree with God) that they had sinned against him
3. ask forgiveness for any way you may have added to this sin
4. ask God to quickly take action, restoring all that was taken from you

There may be an understandable desire to go dredging, that is, to dig deep into our past to look for every iniquity. Although the intent is admirable it is better to leave that work in God's

hands, allowing him to bring to our attention the next issue that, together, we work to remove. These issues pertain to our sanctification, and as such are God's responsibility.

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them. (Ephesians 2:10)

There are two good reasons for not delving into these issues by ourselves.

The first is that by embarking on a crusade ourselves we being to enter into sanctification by works. This we should already know will fail since we have tried to do so using the Law. In Romans 7 we have Paul's description of the struggle he endured until he learned to defer to God, since we cannot sanctify ourselves.

The second involves a principle found in Exodus 23:28-30:

I will send hornets ahead of you so that they will drive out the Hivites, the

Canaanites, and the Hittites before you. I will not drive them out before you in a single year, that the land may not become desolate and the beasts of the field become too numerous for you. I will drive them out before you little by little, until you become fruitful and take possession of the land.

God will deal with the issues in our lives in a proper, timely fashion. We need to trust that work to him—in faith—since whatever is not of faith is sin.¹¹

For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His. (Hebrews 4:10)

Rest in the fact that God is even more interested in our freedom from the iniquities of our fathers than we are, we know this because he gave his life so that we might have an abundant life, fullness of joy, and peace. Enter into his rest; there, we rest from all our works and our efforts.

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¹ 3 John 1:2

² Deuteronomy 23:2

³ עוֹן, The Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament, by R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., Bruce K. Waltke, originally published by Moody Press of Chicago, Illinois, Copyright © 1980.

⁴ 2 Corinthians 5:21

⁵ Ephesians 2:6

⁶ 1 Thessalonians 5:23

⁷ Philippians 2:12

⁸ John 14:30

⁹ Ephesians 6:12

¹⁰ Exodus 21:24; Lev. 24:20; Deut. 19:21; Matt. 5:38

¹¹ Romans 14:23