

## Generational sins can make a difference

The disciples were walking along the road with Jesus. When they saw a blind man begging, his disciples asked him, “Rabbi, why was this man born blind? Was it because of his own sins or his parents’ sins?” “It was not because of his sins or his parents’ sins,” Jesus answered. “This happened so the power of God could be seen in him” (John 9:2-3). There was a popular understanding in that day that all misfortune was a result of personal sin. If things were going well, God was blessing, but if things were going badly, then that was punishment for someone’s sin.

Generational sin is an interesting and often misunderstood biblical teaching. In the Old Testament, God said, “I lavish unfailing love to a thousand generations. I forgive iniquity, rebellion, and sin. But I do not excuse the guilty. I lay the sins of the parents upon their children and grandchildren; the entire family is affected — even children in the third and fourth generations” (Exodus 34:6-7).

But the Bible is clear that each person must stand on his own before God.

“Parents must not be put to death for the sins of their children, nor children for the sins of their parents. Those deserving to die must be put to death for their own crimes” (Deuteronomy 24:16). So which is it? Are we responsible only for our own sins, or do the effects of sin pass from one generation to the next? The answer is yes to both.

I believe that generational sin, or what some people call “family strongholds” are real, but not determinative. By that I mean, because of our family history and upbringing, we will be more susceptible to certain sins. When we sin, we don’t just damage ourselves, we damage others, especially those who are closest to us like our family and children. But our parents’ sin does not mean we have to follow in their footsteps. Generational sins do not determine someone’s salvation or eternal destiny. It simply means they are going to be impacted by and more tempted in some areas than others.

For example, I have dealt with men whose dads and grandfathers were unfaithful to their wives. This is what was modeled for them, and it left them wide open for Satan to tempt them to do the same. The Kennedy family is an example of this. Each man was fully responsible before God for his own sin, but the generational sin made him more susceptible to that particular sin. I have seen generational sin in areas such as alcoholism, child abuse, anger issues and sexual issues.

Some totally dismiss generational sin as just some people looking for someone else to blame for their sin. “I cheat on my wife because my dad did, so I’m not responsible.” In order to try to close this loophole, they just totally ignore or explain away generational sin. Others go to the other extreme. They give far too much power to generational sin, saying you need to go back into your family, discover all the sins of your ancestors, and repent of them so they don’t haunt you and to free you from a “curse.” That is more like animism or voodoo than Christianity. The apostle Paul tells us, “There is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus. And because you belong to him, the power of the life-giving Spirit has freed you from the power of sin that leads to death.” “So if the Son sets you free, you are truly free” (John 8:36). Live free from any sin in Christ.

Bob Felts is lead pastor of Brookwood Church. You can reach him at [bobfelts@brookwoodchurch.com](mailto:bobfelts@brookwoodchurch.com). For updates on his health, visit [www.brookwoodchurch.com](http://www.brookwoodchurch.com) and click on the “Pastor Bob’s Health Updates” link on the left side.