

Is there such a thing as a generational curse?



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In Exodus 34:6-7 God declares this about himself, **"The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation."** These verses almost seem to contradict each other or make God out to be like a bi-polar teenager. In one verse God says that he is compassionate and forgiving and then in the next verse He says he punishes children for the sins of their parents to the third and fourth generations.

Let's break this down, first God says about himself, that he is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion, and sin. In other words, God is sympathetic and kind, long-suffering and loyal in love and trustworthiness and he maintains a love for thousands and he forgives misdeeds and evil-doing. Now here is where the confusion comes in, God's nature is love, the apostle John makes that very clear but God's nature also is that he is holy and righteous and as the prophet Isaiah writes, "the LORD is a God of justice". God is long-suffering and forgiving but God is also a God of justice so he will bring to justice the sinners and will not leave the guilty unpunished. God can be both, a God of love and a God of justice, which side you experience will depend upon you but this still doesn't answer why God punishes the children for the sins of their parents or why God pronounces a generational curse on families.

I believe the key to this is found in Proverbs 22:6 where we are told, **"Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it."** God doesn't pronounce a generational curse in the sense that innocent children are punished for the sins of their parents but rather in the sense that children will follow in the footsteps of their parents unless taught otherwise. As parents you are "teaching" your children in the way that they will go as adults and the only way to break this cycle is if a radical change takes place. It all comes back to personal responsibility, in the same way that I am not automatically saved just because my parents are saved and I have to make my own decision to follow Jesus as my Lord and Savior, I also have to make my own decision whether or not to follow in my parent's sins. It all comes back to personal responsibility, the Psalmist tells us that God will not reject a broken and repentant heart. Even Jesus said, **"Anyone who comes to me I will never turn away"**. God's judgment is not for those who come to faith in Jesus but those who rebel against him

will one day be punished for their rebellion. Those who come to faith in Jesus will break this generational curse, they will break the cycle of rebellion and punishment for their sins, but it is only up to each individual to do this no one can do it for them.

One last thing to make note of in this passage is that even though God punishes up to the third or fourth generation he also says in Exodus 20:6 that he shows love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commandments. Yes the guilty will not go unpunished, and yes the sins of the parents carry onto the third and fourth generations but God's love is unending towards those who keep his commandments. Who are those who keep his commandments? Jesus said it's those who love God and love their neighbor (Mark 12:28-34).