

The Doctrine of Ancestral Curses - The Bible view

The belief that people's misfortunes are due to curses they inherited from their forefathers is fast gaining popularity among a growing number of churches in Africa and other parts of the world. Consequently, millions of professed Christians are flocking to pastors for deliverance from perceived "ancestral curses". Since Christians are to be guided by the words of God in the Holy Bible and not by the precepts of men, we must seek the guidance of the Scriptures in order to be on safe grounds on all issues of doctrine.

Writing on the issue of ancestral curses, Mr. Opoky Onyinah, stated in the "Cyberjournal For Pentecostal-Charismatic Research", published in the internet, that ancestral curse is "the belief that the consequences of the sins committed by the progenitors are recurrent in their family lines". He quoted leading advocates of this doctrine such as Dickason, Kraft and Hagin, as asserting that virtually all Africans inherit curses because their forefathers served demons or fallen angels who, after they were expelled from heaven, inhabited rivers, seas, mountains, rocks, trees and possessed human beings.

A booklet entitled 371 Personal Deliverance Prayers written by Evangelist Paul G. O. Moses, contains prayers against lineage curses, premature deaths in the family, divorces, poverty, accidents, frequent breakdown of marriages, abnormal behaviour, etc. It is said that at present, several churches include "deliverance" programmes in their activities "since failure to do so amounts to losing members to churches that include such activities".

Mr. Sunday Agang, writing in Christianity Today magazine, published on the net, stated that during a typical mass deliverance service, people are asked to form queues at which time some pastors sell special canes "that can slay demons".

This belief in ancestral curses has become quite widespread. It would be recalled that due to their belief in ancestral curses, five youths from Malawi, in early September this year, threw themselves into a fire after saying their night prayers. It was a bizarre case of mass suicide. Their father told a local newspaper that when he noticed his children's strange behaviours recently, he complained to local authorities that the children had established a strange church in his house and that they commenced their prayers around 10.00 p.m. each day. He had tried stopping them without success. On that fateful night, the youths, in the course of praying, made fire with some household items which they had soaked in petrol. At a stage they took off their clothes and jumped into the fire holding copies of the Bible. Three of them died on the spot but two were rescued and taken to a local hospital.

The young men were said to have acted on the advice of a local pastor who told them that their parents were responsible for their joblessness and their not getting married. He advised them to burn the items in their home because that was where the parents hid their magic. The village head blamed the churches, whom he said were misleading the people for this horrible incident. He promised to summon the religious leaders in the area so that they could explain "what type of worshipping this is". The Guardian Thursday September 16, 2010, page 68.

The belief in ancestral curses is so prevalent that church leaders have devised elaborate prayers for their followers to overcome its hold on them. Dr. Opal Reddin of the Central Bible College, Springfield, Missouri, in his work The false theory of generational curses, believers are advised not only to reject and cancel all demonic working that has been passed on to them by ancestors but to command every familiar spirit that is in or around them 'to go to the pit and to remain there until the Day of Judgement'.

We must point out that no human being has any power to command a spirit to do anything, much more to command the spirit to go into the deep. Spirit creatures are far more powerful than human beings and only God can punish or destroy them. (Psalm 103:20; Matthew 8:29) The best one can do is to pray to God through Jesus Christ for protection from the devil and his agents. See Hebrews 2:14,15; John 8:31,32,36.

Misapplied Texts

Writing in the book *How to cast out demons and break curses* Bill Suritzky, reputed to be a “worldwide evangelist” made reference to Exodus 20:1-5 which states among other things, “...Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.” See also Exodus 34:7; Numbers 14:18; etc.

This text in no way supports the belief in ancestral curses. What it means is that it is the children who do iniquity like their fathers, and show hatred for God by not keeping His commandments that He punishes. This is clearly signified by the expression “of them that hate me”. Logically therefore, if the children do not follow the evil ways of their parents, God will not punish them. Children whose parents were working contrary to the will of God should therefore be taught to turn to righteousness so as to be blessed by God rather than being told they are suffering for their parents’ sins. What we should understand is that God will never punish children for the sins of their parents because that will be contrary to divine justice. The Bible says: “He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he.” – Deuteronomy 32:4.

Writing on this point, Dr. Reddin, stated: “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”. Stanley Horton, a theologian, responding to the question as to whether a Christian needs to do something about breaking a generational curse, replied, among other things, thus: “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. Those loving God will not suffer any judgement or curse from what their parents or ancestors did.”

Another text some cite to support the doctrine of ancestral curses is the belief among the Jews of old that “The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge?” (Ezekiel 18:2) In other words, they believed that the sins of their fathers were visited upon the children, independent of the moral conduct of the latter. It is important to note that God rebuked the Jews for such belief as He does not deal with men in that way. Hence in verses 3 and 4 God stated: “As I live, saith the Lord GOD, ye shall not have occasion any more to use this proverb in Israel. Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die.” (See also verse 20)

The matter is further clarified in the succeeding verses: “If a man be just, and do that which is lawful and right ... he is just, he shall surely live, saith the Lord GOD. ...Now, lo, if he beget a son, that seeth all his father’s sins which he hath done, and considereth, and doeth not such like, ... he shall not die for the iniquity of his father, he shall surely live. (Ezekiel 18: 5-9, 14-17) The passage continues in verse 19 thus: “Yet say ye, Why? doth not the son bear the iniquity of the father? When the son hath done that which is lawful and right, and hath kept all my statutes, and hath done them, he shall surely live”.

Furthermore, the law of God in Deuteronomy 24:16 says: “The fathers shall not be put to death

for the children, neither the children for the fathers: every man shall be put to death for his own sin". If God Almighty says children cannot inherit the sins of their parents, who are human beings to propagate a contrary doctrine? It is therefore obvious that the belief in ancestral curses is certainly not from God.

Examples

It was because of the understanding that children should not be punished for the sins of their fathers that King Amaziah, while dealing with those who killed his father, Joash, did not kill their children. – 2 Kings 14:5,6.

To show that each person bears responsibility for his own actions, God accepted Ruth the Moabitess into the congregation of Israel, such that King David and our Lord Jesus Christ came from her lineage, even though God had declared that: "No Moabite or any of his descendants may enter the assembly of the Lord, even down to the tenth generation" – Deuteronomy 23:3

Another point to note is that some difficulties people face today are not of their own making but are due to the oppression of the devil. A case in point is that of the man born blind as recorded in the book of St. John. When the disciples of Jesus Christ asked him whether he was in that state because of his sin or that of his parents, Jesus said no, showing that it was the devil that put him in that condition but God allowed it because He would later manifest His grace on him. – John 9:1-3. See also 1 Peter 5:6-9.

However, granted that the devil frequently interferes in the affairs of men, it should be pointed out that the doctrine of ancestral curses is thriving because a number of people do not want to take responsibility for their wrong actions. Rather they always want to place the blame elsewhere.

For instance, some people are lazy, they waste money on personal pleasures and neglect their basic needs and they fail to plan for their future. But instead of examining themselves and putting their houses in order, by working hard, living according to their means, saving for the future with faith in God, they cover up their mistakes by blaming their woes on ancestral curses.

The Bible says: "The slothful man saith, There is a lion in the way; a lion is in the streets. The slothful hideth his hand in his bosom; it grieveth him to bring it again to his mouth. The sluggard is wiser in his own conceit than seven men that can render a reason."- Proverbs 26:13,15,16.

Freedom of Christ

Those who have come to Christ must understand that they have been freed from enslavement to superstitions and fears and had been delivered into what St. Paul called "the glorious liberty of the children of God". They should therefore not allow themselves to be brought again into bondage through belief in ancestral curses. (Romans 8:21; Galatians 5:18; 1 Corinthians 2:18)

Jesus Christ stated: "Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." (John 8:31,32) And in verse 36 he stated "If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed." Those who believe they are under the protection of God and still fear ancestral curses as to be easily deceived into spending large sums of money for prayers to break such

so-called curses are guilty of faithlessness. St. Paul warned: "Howbeit then, when ye knew not God, ye did service unto them which by nature are no gods. But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage?" (Galatians 4:8, 9) Indeed, true Christians must "refuse profane and old wives' fables" and false teachers who through covetousness shall with feigned words seek to make merchandise of them. 1 Timothy 4:7; 4:4; 2 Peter 2:1-3.