

A Critical Analysis of Generational Curses



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Background

My family and I have had the privilege to serve in Mongolia for approximately eight years. During these years I met and was challenged by the subject of Generational Curse. This concept was totally new to me in spite of being widely recognized among Mongolian Christians. At several occasions I heard testimonies like these:

My mother is now almost blind... she even has got cancer. I'm not sure, but is there a curse on her? ... I wonder if God is sending this curse back upon her because of her sin. Or sometimes I wonder if it's because of me. Have I done so much wrong that a curse comes upon my mum? Does she suffer because of my sin?

From a seminar on inner healing I learned that we might have to carry the punishment of our ancestors' sin. This might be called "the curse of innocent blood". Due to the deeds of Chinggis Khan, when he slaughtered and extinguished people and tribes, a curse was brought upon the people of Mongolia through witnesses and by defeated tribes. Through our ancestors this curse has also come upon us.

It puzzled me to hear committed Christians utter such words. Personally I have been used to think that a believer who lives in fellowship with God cannot be subject to any curse. I have believed that the truth of the Gospel creates faith and that Christ has set us

free to not again be entangled “with a yoke of bondage” (Gal 5:1). On the contrary, the testimonies I heard from Mongolian Christians made me think that they were led into bondage and fear by the teaching of Generational Curses. To find out more and be able to teach the biblical view of the concept, I got challenged to do research on and analyze the subject of Generational Curses by myself.

Worldwide several authors have discussed the concept of Generational Curses. In Mongolia, however, the main influence seems to be the book *Blessing or Curse: You can Choose* by the English/American theologian Derek Prince. Before his complete book was published in Mongolian in 2008, articles had been published in Maranatha and advocated in Bible teachings throughout the country. The position of Derek Prince has thus had a great impact on both Mongolian theologians and laymen. In my article I will therefore focus on Derek Prince and his teaching on Generational Curses.

Derek Prince holds that it is possible for redeemed believers of Christ to be subject to curses. The causes for curses are often sin among ancestors, and the contemporary generation might thus suffer the consequences of their ancestors' sin by being subject to curses. I find Prince's position to be questionable and wonder if his understanding of Generational Curses is possible to unite with the Bible as a whole. In my article I will therefore first present Derek Prince's teaching of the concept by referring to the most crucial elements in his book. I will concentrate solely on the part of his teaching that is related to generational curses even though his teaching also cover other types of curses, either self-imposed or caused by others. After explicitly stating the aspects of Prince's teaching that are worth discussing, I will then present my own analysis and the results of my research before sharing some personal reflections with the readers.

It should be noted that I will not deal with the situation in Mongolia as such, but by analyzing Derek Prince's teaching I hope to be of help for both theologians and laymen as they strive to understand the concept of Generational Curses on a biblical basis.

Biographical facts about Derek Prince

Derek Prince was born in 1915 into a family of nominal members of the Anglican Church. He was an exceptional student but lost his personal faith in God. While serving in the army he read the Bible as a piece of classical literature. At the same time, he was invited to a Pentecostal Assembly of God Congregation where he met Jesus as his Savior.

Even though Prince became a Pentecostal theologian, he nevertheless developed an independent theological system. He was one of the first theologians to implement the concept of Generational Curses. In the growing Charismatic Movement, Prince became known as a systematic teacher who wanted to build sound foundations for faith. However, partly due to personal ambitions, he was involved in what turned out to be sectarianism. After more than a decade he renounced from the sect and repented.

In spite of his death in 2003, Prince's voice is still heard worldwide through publications of his teachings.

Blessing or Curse: You Can Choose

Already the title of his book, *Blessing or Curse: You Can Choose*, points to an important aspect of Prince's concept: There is a choice in the matter of blessing or curse in one's life. How this choice is related to each individual we will look into later.

Wrestling with Shadows

An example of two men leads us straight into the matter of discussion: One man has a successful life; the other man's life is filled with failures and frustrations. Even though the frustrated man tries to develop his skills and increase his potential, he doesn't succeed. He feels like wrestling with shadows and realizes that also his father was a failure, exactly like himself. Prince uses this example to argue that the forces behind success and failure in life are blessings and curses, respectively.

Prince suggests that the cause of the problems might be curses "going back to preceding generations", and continues, "A curse could also be likened to a long, evil arm stretched out from the past. It rests upon you with a dark, oppressive force that inhibits the full expression of your personality."

The curse, however, does not always cause failure to a person. He or she might experience real success in life, but be plagued with frustration and not be able to enjoy the success. Here Prince points to his first, and main, biblical reference for curses, saying that "according to Exodus 20:3-5, God had pronounced a curse on idol worshipers down to the third and fourth generations."

Curses might even serve as invisible barriers that withhold blessings from believers, or hinder them to realize that there is a blessing to be received. Therefore, Prince's ultimate

goal is not to discourage believers, but helping them to see the remedy from curses that God has provided for them, and how they can enter into the blessings from God.

The Spiritual Realm

As Prince continues to develop his concept, he claims that visible and invisible forces determine history. Success in life “depends upon being able to apprehend and relate to that which is invisible and spiritual”. In this realm, where both blessings and curses belong, believers will find true reality.

These two aspects of the spiritual realm, blessings and curses, have two important features in common. First, their effects often extend to a whole family, tribe or community. They are seldom limited to a mere individual. Second, the effects of blessings or curses tend to be inherited from generation to generation, if not cancelled. This is why situations or behavior might be difficult to explain by searching in one’s own personal experience or lifetime. Instead, the origin might be in previous generations, maybe thousands of years earlier.

The Requirement for a Blessed – or a Cursed – Life

Prince continues by stating that there is always a reason behind every curse. As all blessings come from God, “curses, too, often proceed from God, even if He is not the sole source”. The reason for God to send a curse is rebellion against God. Curses are one of God’s “main ways of bringing judgment on the rebellious”.

With reference to Deuteronomy 27–28, Prince clarifies the requirement for blessings or curses: listening to and following God’s commandments will render blessings (Deut 28:1–2), while not paying attention and being disobedient will cause curses to come upon the people (Deut 28:15). He specifies that “the conditions for enjoying the blessings are: first, listening to God’s voice; second, doing what he says.”

This requirement does not only apply in the Old but also in the New Covenant, since the character of God is the same both in the Old and the New Testament. God is still “a God of mercy and of judgment”, Prince affirms. For a blessed life the basic requirement will therefore always be to hear the voice of the Lord and be obedient to his instructions (Ex 19:5 and John 10:27), while the result of disobedience and rebellion against God might thus be curses in both covenants.

But how can we know if there are curses lurking in the shadows of our lives? By comparing Moses' list of curses in Deut 28 with his personal observations, Prince comes up with a list of symptoms that indicate curses. Although the Holy Spirit alone can provide an accurate diagnosis, the probability of a curse is high if several of the following problems occur in a person's life:

1. Mental and/or emotional breakdown
2. Repeated or chronic sicknesses (especially if hereditary)
3. Barrenness, a tendency to miscarriage or related female problems
4. Breakdown of marriage and family alienation
5. Continuing financial insufficiency
6. Being "accident-prone"
7. A family history of suicides and unnatural or untimely deaths

Obedience or Disobedience?

In the second section of his book Prince goes deeper into why people are struggling with curses. He states that curses proceeding from God are "one of the main ways in which he [God] brings judgment on the rebellious and the ungodly. Second, the basic cause of such curses is the failure to hear God's voice and do what He says – or, in one simple word, disobedience." If there are several of the symptoms of curses mentioned above in a person's life, it points strongly to disobedience. But in whose life? Or when?

To understand this, Prince explains more about the term disobedience. Disobedience is divided into two forms. Those that respect any other god besides the one and only God, or offer worship to any artificial representation of God, commit primary disobedience, or idolatry, as stated in Exodus 20:3-5. Prince affirms that God's judgment on such iniquity "bears the characteristic mark of a curse", since it continues on through ages, at least to the fourth generation (Ex 20:5). Occult practices of any kind, among others witchcraft and fortune telling, are included in the commandment against idolatry. Believers who commit spiritual adultery, deliberately or unaware of the danger, are consequently exposed to the curse pronounced over those who break the first commandment.

A person who has idolaters in his family background becomes an heir of a generational curse caused by his ancestors. Prince affirms that all believers need to be aware of this danger, since idolaters among their ancestors might have caused generational curses on their descendants.

The secondary form of disobedience can be found in all sorts of moral and ethical sins, as in Deuteronomy 27:15-26, or any other form of “disobedience upon which God has pronounced a curse”. Examples of these are: disrespect for parents; oppressions and injustice, especially when directed against the weak and the helpless (provoked abortions); and all forms of illicit or unnatural sex (also sexual activities outside marriage). Prince admits that these records of sin and curses were given to Israel, but adds that: “Nevertheless, these alternatives are not confined to Israel. They apply equally to all who would enter into a covenant relationship with God. Under the New Covenant, just as under the Old, God offers the same two alternatives: either blessing for obedience or curse for disobedience.”

The Divine Exchange

After presenting the concept of curses, Prince introduces a solution. It is possible to escape the shadow of curses and enter into the sunshine of blessings, he states, and moves on by explaining the importance of Jesus’ sacrificial death on the cross. His death comprehends every need of humans, as stated in Phil 4:19: “God will meet all your needs ... in Christ Jesus”. And “...all your needs...” includes the release from curses.

Prince further affirms that the divine purpose of the cross is summed up in Isaiah 53:6. The word iniquity used in that passage covers the rebellion against God, but also the just punishment of God as well as its evil consequences. However, “Jesus endured in our place all the evil consequences that were due by divine justice to our iniquity. In exchange God now offers us all the good that was due to the sinless obedience of Jesus.” Prince specifically holds forth that Jesus became a curse for us so that we might receive a blessing. In Deut 21:23 it is written that a man executed on a tree is a curse for God, and Jesus was defined as “the curse of the Law.” By his death the curses listed in Deut 28 came upon Jesus. Due to His obedience we might obtain full release from curses and enter into the glorious blessings of God.

From Curses to Blessings

Even though Jesus became a curse for us so that we might receive God’s salvation and blessings, no one enters into all provisions of salvation simultaneously, Prince says. There might be obstacles on the way to full freedom. Curses often function as barriers that prevent believers from God’s blessings. Therefore, a believer must admit his state of being haunted by curses. Then he must respond to the provision of God and make a choice.

Prince uses Moses as a reference. After having renewed the covenant with the people, Moses states: “This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live.” (Deut 30:19) God gives even us a choice between “life and blessing or death and curses”, Prince professes. The choice can be made by executing the following seven steps:

1. Oral confession of Christ completes faith in the heart,
2. Acceptance of personal responsibility,
3. Repentance from rebellion by asking forgiveness of sins that might have opened for a curse or release from the consequences of your ancestors’ sins,
4. Forgiving those who sinned against you,
5. Renounce all contact with occultism,
6. Prayer of release,
7. Believe that you have received release.

After having taken these steps, a believer is free to enter into the glorious realm of God’s blessings, Prince states. The promised blessing from God can be described by three aspects: First, the blessing is the blessing of Abraham, given to all who meet God’s condition of faith. Second, we cannot earn blessings; they come depending upon our relationship with Jesus. Third, the blessing is also defined as the promise of the Spirit.

Then Prince continues by referring to a progressive part of our salvation, that resembles the teaching of sanctification. On one side we are “made perfect”; on the other hand, we “are being made holy” (Hebrew 10:14). Legally we have got it all; we are heirs of God (Rom 8:17). However, experientially we are at the beginning of a process that is not completed before heaven. Prince illustrates his point of view by referring to the conquering of the Promised Land in the Old Testament. God said to Joshua: “I will give you every place you set your foot” (Joshua 1:3). The promise of the land was clear, but the Israelites had not yet entered. “As they placed their feet on each place, it became theirs not just legally, but in actual experience”, Prince concludes. In the same way believers must move from legal right to the actual experience of the redemption of curses.

Findings

The presentation of Prince’s concept of Generational Curses lifts up certain aspects that we need to examine further. The first aspect has to do with biblical foundation. Prince uses Ex 20:5 as main support of his view without making any closer analysis of the passage and

its context. Neither does he take into consideration other important scriptures that deal with issues that could be related to generational curses. Thus his concept seems to have a very weak biblical foundation.

Above we looked into the requirements – or conditions as Prince calls them – for enjoying God’s blessings, namely to obey the voice of God and keep the terms of the covenant. We also saw how Prince said that these requirements apply equally to believers in the New Covenant. This gives us two more aspects worth studying. One has to do with the application of the Law of Moses. How can Prince apply this law, with its blessings and curses, on contemporary believers without any discussion of how the Mosaic Law is to be applied in the New Covenant? The other has to do with the condition of receiving the blessings of Christ. On one hand side, Prince states that God’s blessings are given to all those who believe and have a relationship to Jesus Christ. On the other hand, he seems to hold that the blessings of Christ do not follow faith, but are achieved through the condition of obedience. I will come back to both these aspects in my further analysis.

In general Prince states that curses are caused by disobedience, and thus they might come upon those who do not obey God and keep the terms of the covenant; on disobedient believers. However, when we study Prince’s argumentation, we see that curses might even come upon obedient believers. In other words, contemporary believers might be subject to generational curses regardless of their own relationship with God. Thus an important question arises: Does not the phrase “of those who hate me” in Ex 20:5b imply that the punishment is meant for those children who reject God, and not for the children “who love me”?

It strikes me that Prince has a very clear and sound teaching of how the Cross of Christ brought redemption to all curses. This part of Prince’s teaching is well worth reading. However, I have a problem following him when he states that a believer still can be subject to curses, regardless of the cross of Christ. He argues that in order to receive everything, a forgiven believer must engage in the exchange from curse to blessing in the same way as the people of Israel chose between “life and blessings or death and curses.” Is this really true?

Following the above statement is Prince’s view of the Christian life as “...a progression from the legal to the experiential.” By this formulation Prince implies that redemption from curses are conditional; it depends on how the believer is exercising the authority he has received. Thus Prince places freedom from curses not under justification, but under

the lifelong process of sanctification. The result is that a believer who has entered into the grace of God, and thus has received blessings that come through faith in Jesus Christ, might at the same time still be subject to curses. I find this to be a contradictory view that needs examination.

Analysis

As we move into my analysis of the concept of Generational Curses, we will start out by examining and broaden the biblical background and material. To do this, we need to introduce the concept of collective retribution.

Collective Retribution in Old Testament Passages

The concept of Generational Curses as presented by Derek Prince could be defined as Trans-Generational Collective Retribution – a retribution that hits vertically across numerous generations due to corporate responsibility. At the time of the Babylonian exile, the Israelites experienced what they understood to be collective retribution, as they were suffering due to the iniquities of their fathers (Lev 26:39-40; Lam 5:7). At that time the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel had to deal with misunderstandings of collective retribution that was expressed in a popular proverb (Jer 31:29; Eze 18:2). What is then the biblical understanding of trans-generational collective retribution?

Individual and Corporate Responsibility in Ex 20:5-6

Let us first take a closer look at Prince's main passage of reference. A perspective of collective retribution is certainly carried out in Ex 20:5b-6, that reads: "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."

The collective retribution in Ex 20:5 is due to corporate responsibility within a solidarity group. However, it should be noted that other passages in the Pentateuch challenge the view of collective retribution due to corporate responsibility, and instead stress the individual responsibility that limit divine retribution to be executed upon the guilty man (Deut 7:9-10 and 29:15-21). The juridical laws for the courts of Israel do not require punishment upon the solidarity group after a crime (Ex 21:12-17; Lev 24:17; Num 35:10). That is further confirmed in Deut 24:16 that read: "a person shall be put to death for his own

sin.” However, these passages do not restrict collective retribution from God, but emphasizes that earthly authorities may not do the same.

To understand the aspect of collective retribution, though, we will move on to studying solidarity groups in Israel. Every individual was part of a social and religious fellowship, the solidarity group, which was supposed to be faithful to the Lord. In Ex 20:5 the people are differentiated into individuals that either “hate God” or “love God and keep his commandments”. Faith and obedience are in the deepest sense the business of every individual, although always in relation to the surrounding community.

The most important collective unit in Israel was the “house of the father”. This solidarity group signified the closest fellowship within the extended family. The oldest father was the leader of the extended family that included all descendants born within this father’s lifespan. Often three or even four generations were included (Gen 46:6–8; 50:23; and Job 42.16) and religious matters and moral codes should be in conformity (Joshua 24:15). Every single member had his individual part of responsibilities and influences, and also freedom to influence his own close family – his wife and children – as is seen in the negative examples of the sons of Eli and Samuel (1 Sam 2:12; 8:1–5). Thus we see that a father who is an idolater exposes his family to collective retribution. Included in the unit that might suffer due to the retribution are the “children to the third and fourth generation”; those belonging to one extended family unit. But this also makes clear that the solidarity group exposed to the retribution is limited to those who possibly would be living at the same time.

In the context to Ex 20 God is about to enter into a Covenantal relationship with an entire nation. In Ex 20:5 God warns that retribution for idol worship will not be limited to the idolater alone, but will come upon his descendants for generations. On the contrary, the reward for loyalty and obedience will far exceed the retribution for disobedience, and submit mercy and blessings to thousand generations. God is a jealous God, but also merciful; the retribution of the father’s iniquity is limited to one extended family unit – those that the father would live to see. This indicates that the intention of trans-generational retribution is the suffering a father has to endure while seeing his descendants suffer because of his own sin.

The phrase “those who hate me” is connected as a qualifier to every family line in the group of responsibility; from the great-grandfather to the sons of the sons. It indicates that retribution will come upon every family line until the fourth generation if every generation

hates God in the sense of continuing the idolatry of the ancestors. The positive statement in Ex 20:6 makes this interpretation necessary. God will not be merciful unto thousand generations regardless of the coming generations' relationship with God, just because of one father's love and obedience. His children will nevertheless enter into the group of "those who hate me" if they become idolaters. In the same way "those who hate me" also implies that repented children, who turn away from the sin of their ancestors, will escape the retribution due to the sin of their ancestors. The reciprocal solidarity within the extended family is supposed to stop where the solidarity with the Lord demands it, as a single member that loves the Lord might need to break with his family in order to save himself (Ex 32:27; Deut 13:13-19; 33:9).

Due to corporate responsibility we can deduct from the above that the prerequisite of collective retribution is that the fellowship is united in sin. Where the members of the solidarity group have the same religious and ethical basis in sin, all the individuals have contributed to the corporate guilt and are thus exposed for collective retribution (Lev 26:39; Jer 16:11). Only the children who continue in the sin of their father are subject of retribution. On the contrary, a repentant man who leaves the wicked way of his father does not carry the retribution. God is merciful; he is willing to forgive the iniquities when people repent (Ex 34:6-7). In this way, the iniquity of earlier generations is visited upon those who are guilty themselves. The ethical personal relationship in the Covenant is far from being a mechanic, mystic or magic transfer of punishment for sins of earlier generations. Consequently, Ex 20:5 does not give Derek Prince the necessary foundation for his teaching on Generational Curses.

Ezekiel 18

Theological writers that reject the teaching of generational curses often point to the prophetic literature to pinpoint unbiblical arguments. Both in Jeremiah and Ezekiel there are passages that seem to reject the understanding of collective retribution. Derek Prince, on the other hand, does not even mention these passages in his presentation.

I have chosen to focus on Ezekiel 18 in order to broaden our biblical perspective, as Ezekiel here deals with a popular proverb that resembles the teaching of generational curses. The proverb reads: "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge" (v 2b). God, however, asks the people through the prophet, "What do you mean when you use this proverb concerning the land of Israel" (v 2a)? The people answers that "the way of the Lord is not fair" (v 25). By the proverb the people expresses that the

exile into Babylon has happened because of an unjust action of God. He has punished the innocent children because of their ancestors' sin. The wrong persons have become objects of God's wrath.

The people fail to admit that they have done wrong. In the end of his argumentation (vv 30-32) the prophet infers his main point. The contemporary exiled Israelites need to acknowledge their own guilt and repent to a forgiving God: "Repent, and turn from all your transgressions, so that iniquity will not be your ruin" (v 30).

Since the people believe that they suffer because of their fathers' sin, they see no hope. However, God wants to offer a new chance of repentance and forgiveness. If the Israelites admit their own guilt and put their trust in God, he will give them hope (v 32). Confession of sin will restore them and eventually there will be no reason to blame their dead ancestors. Therefore, the prophet says "you shall no longer use this proverb in Israel" (v 3).

The people were partly right when they understood the fall of Jerusalem and the Babylonian exile to be a result of their ancestors' rebellion against God (2 Kings 21-24; Jer 15). But Ezekiel affirms that the present generation is not innocent. "The soul who sins shall die" (v 4) Ezekiel asserts. To verify his stand, he gives a case study (vv 5-18). First there is a man who is righteous and thus properly rewarded (5-9). He gives birth to a son that as a grown-up has a wicked and evil behavior, and thus "His blood shall be upon him" (vv 10-13). This wicked man also in turn has a son who "sees all the sins which his father has done", and chooses to live otherwise and righteous, as his grandfather did (vv 14-17). Retribution upon the sinfulness of the middle generations is not transferred to the son, neither to his father. Instead, the guilty must be responsible himself and carry the punishment for the sins he committed.

Even though the Israelites find the essence of the proverb (v 2) to be unjust, they do believe it describes the real intention of God as presented in the Decalogue (Ex 20:5). They believe that the children are punished due to the sins of the fathers regardless of their own relationship with God. Thus they ask, "Why should the son not bear the guilt of the father" (v 19)? The people of Israel seem to have forgotten the qualifier of "those who hate me" in Ex 20. Therefore, Ezekiel clarifies a misunderstanding among the people, and affirms that God does take the personal relationship into consideration when dealing with trans-generational retribution.

Ezekiel further challenges the people to do something with their own situation. He asserts that there is hope for restoration (vv 21-28). As it is possible to move from righteousness to wickedness, it is also possible to move from wickedness to righteousness. When the people repent, God will forgive and renew the fellowship.

Ezekiel does not say that innocent suffering for other people's sin does not exist. Ezekiel's life would contradict such a claim; he was himself taken into Exile. Other passages in the book of Ezekiel also imply that innocent members of the community might sometimes suffer along with the guilty (9:5-6; 20:23-26; 21:8-9; 24:21). But in the relationship with God, every generation that chooses another path than the previous generation did, will be judged according to its own relation to God.

We can then deduce that the main intention of Ezekiel is to correct the misunderstanding that was spread among the Israelites at his time. By supporting the original intention of Ex 20:5 he underscores the importance of a personal relationship and responsibility towards God. If Prince had included Ezekiel 18, or similar Old Testament passages in his biblical foundation of generational curses, he might have come up with another conclusion. As it is now, Prince's biblical foundation for his concept is so weak that he could as well have deduced his theory from his own experience and then found a passage that could suit his own view.

The Mosaic Law in the New Covenant

After having broadened the biblical perspective on Generational Curses, we will move on to studies about the Mosaic Law. The alternatives of blessing and curse in Deut 27-28 that Prince holds forth belong to the Mosaic Law. We would therefore expect Prince to explain his understanding of the relationship between faith in Christ and the Mosaic Law. In this volume he does not. However, in his systematic presentation in the volume Foundational Truths for Christian Living, he presents his view of the matter. We will first look into his presentation in order to see how it fit with his concept of Generational Curses. Further we will study how the law is presented in the Protestant tradition, to see if Prince has support for his concept there.

The Law According to Prince

When he writes about the law, Prince states that "Salvation is received through faith alone..." But "... what is the relationship between faith in Christ and the requirements of

the law of Moses?” In order to answer this question, Prince summarizes the basic facts of the law in three points:

1. The law was given once for all, as a single, complete system through Moses; thereafter, nothing could ever be added to it or taken from it.
2. The law must always be observed in its entirety as a single, complete system; to break any one point of the law is to break the whole law.
3. As a matter of human history, this system of law was never ordained by God for Gentiles, but only for Israel.

In relation to the first point, Prince adds that the complete system of the law includes its “commandments, statutes, ordinances, and judgments” (emphasis mine). With reference to Rom 6:14, Prince points out that Christian believers are not under law but under grace. These are mutually exclusive, as no person can be under both law and grace at the same time.

However, Prince asserts that when we accept Christ’s redeeming work for us in faith, we also accept without compromise that the law is right and true – and it is fulfilled through Jesus for us. In this sense believers in Christ establish the law (Rom 3:31).

Then Prince asks, “What are the works by which saving faith is expressed” since it is not expressed by observing the law? In his answer Prince emphasizes that it is the righteous requirement of the law (Rom 8:3-4) that is to be fulfilled by the believer. This requirement is summarized in the two great commandments of love (Matt 22:37-38). Therefore, purpose of the law (1Tim 1:5) and the fulfillment of the law (Rom 13:10; Gal 5:14) can therefore be reduced to one word: love.

Finally, Prince affirms what he understands to be the basic requirement of both the Old and the New Covenant: “the supreme test of man’s love for God can be expressed in one word: obedience.”

Commentary

As we saw before Prince holds that the curses in Deut 27-28 is a judgment from God upon disobedience. However, according to Prince’s systematic view of the law, no judgments can strike those that are under the grace of God. If Prince’s theology were consistent, he would – even in his concept of curses – need to mention that a believer has moved into an area where the law is no longer effective in pronouncing judgments, including curses. Thus

there is a lack of coherence between his concept of Generational Curses and his systematic understanding of the law.

In order to make his concept of curses coherent with his own teaching on the law, Prince would need to apply the “curse of the law” upon believers who do not want to repent from their disobedience and thus might have fallen out from the state of grace. Consequently, people in the age of the New Covenant might be subject to curses because of their disobedience. As it is now his teaching on curses implies that God’s judgment on sin might hit people living in an open and honest covenant relationship with God.

The Law in Classical Protestant Theology

We will move on by studying how the law is presented within the Protestant traditions. How does the concept of Generational Curses as presented by Prince correspond with general Protestant theology?

The expression the third use of the law will be part of my research here. In the Protestant traditions this term refers to the relation the law should have to people after coming to faith in Christ, and thus it will shed light upon how the Mosaic Law relates to people of faith in Christ. We will first turn to John Calvin and the Reformed tradition, and then to Martin Luther and the Lutheran tradition. The production of these reformers, and the traditions following them, is so impressive that we can only make a tiny selection of their writings in order to present their views.

John Calvin and Biblical Law

John Calvin is seen as a great teacher on biblical law. He divides the Mosaic Law into three types; the ceremonial, the judicial and the moral law. The moral law is still binding for a believer as a rule for right living. The first use of the moral law describes us as sinners and shows us our need of mercy. In the second use, the civil use, the rulers of society find their responsibilities. In the third use, which Calvin calls the main use, the moral law works in “respect to believers in whose hearts the Spirit of God already flourishes and reigns”.

Calvin applies the moral law on the believer’s life to spur obedience and growth in righteousness. Even though a believer does not keep the law in a perfect manner and needs to rely on the forgiveness of God, the law directs the believer to faithfulness and growth in holiness. Calvin writes, “... the law has the force of exhortation, not to bind their consciences with a curse, but by urging them, from time to time, to shake off sluggishness

and chastise imperfection” (emphasis mine). In this sense Calvin asserts that the law will work out righteous deeds from us, but not because of the threatening curse that binds us in fear of death. Christ has indeed freed us from the curse, “that we might not be, all our lifetime, subject to bondage, having our consciences oppressed with the fear of death.”

Reformed Tradition on the Law

The Reformed tradition has to a great extent followed Calvin in the application of the law, and has always had a strong focus on the Decalogue. One of the Confessional writings in the reformed tradition that is regarded as Calvinistic is the Westminster Confession. This confession lifts forward that true believers are not under the law and can therefore not be condemned or justified by it. Curses no longer serve as a threat for the believers, even though the law informs them of God’s will and their duties.

Martin Luther and the Application of Moses

As Calvin, Luther gives important teaching on the law. He points out that the law in its first use gives instructions for the society. The second and main use reveals sin and forces people to Christ. Regarding the believer and the Mosaic Law, Luther writes that “We will regard Moses as a teacher, but we will not regard him as our lawgiver – unless he agrees with both the New Testament and the natural law.” The law always demands and kills. Luther teaches explicitly, like Prince does, that this Law of God binds only the Jews, and not Gentiles. However, Luther encourages the study of the law, saying, “Those who know the Ten Commandments perfectly know the entire Scriptures and in all affairs and circumstances are able to counsel, help, comfort, judge, and make decisions in both spiritual and temporal matters.” Furthermore, again like Prince, Luther says that Paul compromises the law and its fulfillment in one sentence when pointing out that we should serve one another in love. Luther emphasizes the freedom from the curse: “For Christ set us free from the curse, not from the obedience of the law...God ...wants us to keep the commandments...but not to put our trust in it when we have done so or despair if we have not” (emphasis mine).

The Lutheran Tradition and the Third Use of the Law

The tradition following Luther in the Formula of Concord continues to confess that a genuine believer in God has been liberated and set free from the curse and compulsion of the law through Christ, but on the other hand they are not without the law, as the law has its value as a guide for the believer. However, the curse of the law is no longer a threat for

the believer: "... the law cannot burden those whom Christ has reconciled with God with its curse and cannot torment the reborn with its coercion because they delight in the law of the Lord according to their inward persons (emphasis mine)." It is recognized that a believer still carries the old flesh and might fall into sin (Rom 7:18). However, "their sin is completely covered by the perfect obedience of Christ so that this sin is not reckoned to them as damning" (emphasis mine).

Furthermore, this tradition holds the acts of the believers to be acceptable to God "because they are personally freed from the curse and condemnation of the law through faith in Christ and because their good works, though imperfect and impure, are pleasing to God through Christ" (emphasis mine).

Commentary

In general, we find that Prince's systematic view of the law corresponds with the Protestant tradition. However, the Protestant tradition clearly rejects all curses and bondage of fear through curses. In my opinion Prince contradicts classical Protestant doctrines especially where he implies that obedient believers in Christ can be subject of generational curses.

From the Curse of Law to Blessings in Christ

In the findings above we saw that Prince implies redemption from curses to be conditional; it depends on how the believer is exercising the authority he has received. And consequently Prince places freedom from curses under the lifelong process of sanctification. The final part of the analysis will therefore concentrate on the following questions: Does redemption from curses really belong to the process of sanctification? How does Prince's concept correspond with the blessings in Christ?

Galatians 3:11-14

In Galatians the apostle Paul discusses the aspect of transferring from the curse of the Law to the blessings in Christ. A believer is by faith justified in the sight of God, and he "shall live" (3:11-12), as opposite of being condemned. The justified person is accepted by God and stands in his favor. By references to the Old Testament (Hab 2:4, Lev 18:5) Paul describes two different roads to life; a promise of life to the one who believes, and to the one who does. The first way of salvation (v11) is faith and the second (v12) is work. Those who choose the way of the law, must fulfill the requirements without mistakes; an impossible task. Consequently, if someone turns back to the law after having received faith

in Christ, they are under the curse of God since their own righteousness must be seen as idolatry and blasphemy against God.

In 3:13 Paul continues to point to the work of Christ. By becoming a curse for us, Christ has freed us from the bondage of the law and the curse. We can escape the curse of the law by the work of Christ. He who was innocent got charged with all the sins of humanity. Jesus' death on the cross demonstrated for the Jews that he really was cursed by God. Only if they realized that Jesus became a curse for them, their rejection could turn into faith.

By faith in these facts we are justified in the sight of God. Our sinfulness does not condemn us. Since Christ became a curse for us, (3:14) we can now receive the blessing of Abraham and the promise of the Holy Spirit through faith in Christ, Paul concludes.

Ephesians 1:3-13

Let us now look into how the apostle Paul expands his teaching on blessings in Ephesians. In 1:3 he praises God for His richly blessing in Jesus: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ". "Every spiritual blessing" includes the election of God (1:4), adoptions as his children (1:5), the grace of God (1:6), the redemption (1:7), forgiveness of sin (1:7), and the gift of the Holy Spirit (1:13). Everything that belongs to Christ is granted to his believers (Rom 8:32).

According to Paul, these blessings come to us in Christ. The condition of being in Christ is therefore important. The blessing in Christ includes all the richness and gifts that belong to the person of Jesus and his work; it includes all aspects of salvation. The blessings in Deut 28 reads: "If you diligently obey ... all these blessings shall come upon you" (1-2). All of them are conditional; they begin with the small word if. In the same way the threat of curses says: "If you do not ... all these curses will come upon you" (15). However, in the New Covenant, with reference to 2 Cor 1:20, we can see that all the "promises God has made, they are "yes" in Christ" (NIV). In the Gospel there is no longer any question of conditional or unconditional promises. All the conditions are fulfilled in Christ, through his obedience, dignity, and worthiness. And they already belong to the believer who is in Christ.

Commentary

According to Gal 3:10-14, the aspect of freedom from curses is not achieved in a process of sanctification, but is a result of faith in Christ. It is part of the justification that pronounces

us to be righteous in the sight of God. Therefore, redemption from curses belongs to the believer's legal rights in Christ, and not to the sanctification. An honest believer is freed from the bondage of curses to live in freedom under the blessings of Christ.

Earlier we have seen that Prince asserts that "the conditions for enjoying the blessings are: first, listening to God's voice; second, doing what He says." Prince thereby implies that the blessings of Christ in the New Covenant to some extent are conditional. From Ephesians we saw that there is only one condition to be fulfilled: In Christ.

Prince affirms that the requirement of obedience is valid also in the fellowship with Christ in the New Covenant. That is right. But when we fail, God will require a confession. The required obedience, though, is fulfilled by Christ. As part of "every spiritual blessing" this obedience belongs to the believers. The Gospel can thus be received unconditionally. Prince's position that generational curses might hit obedient believers does not correspond with the blessings in Christ.

Final Conclusions

Derek Prince holds that Generational Curses proceed from God, mainly supported by Ex 20:5. However, Prince builds his concept of curses without a thorough investigation of the passage, and without taking into consideration that the visiting of iniquities only strike "those who hate me". Thereby he wrongly implies that curses, as God's judgment on ancestral sin, strike the children regardless of their own relationship with God.

With relation to Ex 20:5 the individual and corporate responsibility are interwoven, and this passage does teach collective retribution as far as the generations are united in sin. However, a repentant man who leaves the wicked way of his father does not carry the retribution. The iniquity of earlier generations is only visited upon those who are guilty themselves, as Ezekiel later confirms.

Prince also refers to Deut 27-28 and states that the "curse of the law" can be applied on believers of the New Covenant. Again Prince draws conclusions without thorough biblical examinations and systematic considerations, saying that the requirements and conditions of a covenantal relationship with God are the same in both Covenants; the condition for blessings is active obedience while disobedience results in curses.

In his systematic teaching Prince states very clearly that a believer in Christ has moved away from under the law to live in the state of grace. In that area he cannot be touched by

the judgments included in God's law. Systematically, he fits within the general Protestant sphere. However, even though the Protestant traditions did not establish a position on generational curses, my research demonstrates that according to these traditions an honest believer does not any longer have to fear the threat of the "curse of the law". Thus, Prince would not find any support for his concept of generational curses within classical Protestant theology.

Prince is very profound in his teaching of the Divine Exchange. However, this teaching loses its importance when he continues that we must work out the releasing work from curses by ourselves as part of our sanctification. This teaching is not in accordance with Gal 3:10-14. There we found that the curse that proceeds from God as "the curse of the law" has already struck its accursed object, Christ. It does not strike twice. Those who receive Christ in faith are justified in the sight of God; the curse is abolished. The legal rights of the justification include freedom from curses and are nothing we have to process through sanctification.

In my opinion, the teaching of Prince is in danger of creating fear among believers when he implies that obedient believers might be subject to generational curses due to ancestral sin. However, what I have found in my research scatters the fear; there is no support for the concept of Generational Curses as advocated by Prince. A believer living in a covenantal relationship with God has the opportunity to choose otherwise than his sinning ancestors. Everyone that has a faith-relation to God, already live in a new era under the blessings of God where all curses are abolished by Christ. The blessing and mercy reach out to thousands.

There is a condition and requirement of obedience even in the New Covenant. But, through faith in Christ this condition has been fulfilled by every true believer. It is part of the justification through faith and thus it is God's gift. Therefore, freedom from curse is also a gift from God to every true believer.

Personal Reflections

Let me end my article by presenting some personal reflections. The testimony of the Bible makes us understand that the death of Jesus on the cross surely was for the people of the whole world (1 John 2:2). However, it is made effective only to those who are in Christ. Without faith "the wrath of God abides on him" (John 3:36). But when a person receives Christ through faith, his life under the curse is changed into a life in the abundant blessing

of God (Gal 3:11; 14, Eph 1:3). Thus there is no condemnation for those who are in Jesus (Rom 8:1).

Prince said that there is no curse without a cause. I would say: there is no end for curses of the law without a cause. However, there is a cause! Christ was accursed instead of us. The curse of the law that proceeds from God due to disobedience is abolished – in Christ. The Law that demanded complete obedience and all sin to be cursed is fulfilled. The curses are caused to stop. The divine exchange is real: Christ took my curse so that I could get His obedience!

Spirituality is probably a greater part of life in Mongolia than in Western countries. Thus it is of great importance to judge rightly between the spirits. It is not a right judgment of spirits, though, to teach that God lets generational curses strike believers living under His grace! The curse of the law is cut off. We are free. Our task is not to preach and encourage believers to exercise their authority to become free. Instead our task is to encourage the believers to live in the freedom. In order to live so, they need to know about the freedom. They need to realize what God already has given them.

However, it is crucial that we are aware of the power of Satan. Satan is a spiritual authority that easily can undermine our strength if we do not know who we are in Christ or make no use of the armor of God in the Spiritual warfare. Satan has the power to attack us even with curses. Our only protection is in Christ. In my research I have been through several volumes written by Prince. Even if there is material I certainly do not agree with, I appreciate his intention of signaling where the dangers are, as well as encouraging and equipping the believers and thus making them ready for the Spiritual Warfare.

The greatest danger in our lives as believers is our spiritual laziness. Satan knows that. He wants to make war with us, and he succeeds far too often. The reason is not generational curses. It is “the curse of sin”, the old man within ourselves, that creates the main problems for us. This traitor – our flesh and Satan’s allied – is the best “weapon” Satan has. Our evil desires want to live without the Protection in Christ. For example: A person that professes Christian faith is not subject to generational curse just because she becomes pregnant with her boyfriend, not even if her mother and her grandmother also became pregnant before marriage. Or if a believer has a violent temper, just like his father and grandfather, the reason is not a generational curse. It is learned behavior. Or more, it is the work of the flesh. We should fight our flesh in the power of the Holy Spirit. The concept of generational curses might be just another log on our selfish fire: “I can’t do

anything with my problem. It is not my fault, but the result of a curse that damns me!” This is denial of responsibility!

Even though we are being released from curses in Christ, sin has consequences. King David’s life gives us a clear example: David took another man’s wife; later his son slept with his sister. David murdered Uriah; later his son killed his brother. David did not prioritize to teach his children in the law of God; later they lost their relationship with God. David received forgiveness – but his sin brought serious consequences upon his whole family! If someone commits adultery and has a child with another woman, he has to pay support even though he is poor. That is not a generational curse. It is the consequence of sin!

Unforgiveness is another matter. Unforgiveness does not imply that a believer is subject to a curse. However, Satan uses our unforgiveness to create more problems in our personal relations. Moreover, our unforgiveness becomes a spiritual barrier as it closes our channel to God. God cannot forgive those who do not want to forgive others. The solution is to repent and ask for forgiveness. It is to take on the armor of God, and in the power of the Holy Spirit stand against our sinful desire.

Some people have been wounded due to rejection in their childhood. That is not a generational curse. It is the consequence of their parents’ sin, which in turn might have been rejected by their own parents. Through counseling we can get to know the reason to our feelings of rejection, receive help to forgive our sinful parents, and thus be released of the burdens.

Isaiah 53 shows us that the curse of the sin is taken away. However, we will have to carry the consequences of sin in our lives. Every day we will encounter problems caused by sin. Jesus also carried our sicknesses, grieves and sorrows. He was cursed for us because of these things. But still we have to struggle with the consequence of sicknesses.

In Hebrews it is made clear that testing and suffering might be part of a believer’s life (Heb 12). These Bible references in connection with the experience of innocent suffering give a perspective on suffering that does not include generational curses. Even if we go through seven steps for release, God might permit “innocent suffering” in our lives afterwards. Suffering is not symptoms of curses – it is life on a sinful earth.

Christ became a curse for us 2000 years ago – but we need to hear it in order to believe. In the same way we need to preach freedom from curses so that people can believe that the curses are cut off. We should not preach what believers can become in Christ; we

should preach what they are in Christ. We should not tell them to exercise their authority to become free; we should encourage them to rejoice in Christ!