

## **"Generational Sin"**

**"He [Adam] had a son in his own likeness, in his own image; and he named him Seth." (Genesis 5:3)**

Orthodox clergy and church workers are not exempt from the egregious sins that beset clergy from other churches and the rest of society. We are all too familiar with the reports of pedophilia, sexual addictions, alcoholism, and mismanagement of church funds that have brought scandal to the priesthood, undermined how people relate to Christ's Church, ruined the lives of the clergy and their families, and have wounded the hearts and souls of victims and parishioners.

Researchers often trace offensive behaviors by the perpetrator to trauma afflicted upon him or her in childhood. In adulthood, these perpetrators simply act out from internal wounds, they state. This is not just "pop psychology." Scripture confirms that sinfulness is transmitted via family lineage.

In his audio lecture, *Sin—Primordial, Generational, and Personal*, Protopresbyter Thomas Hopko points out that although Adam and Eve were made in the image and likeness of God, something radically changed in the birth of their firstborn son. He quotes Genesis 5:3: "When Adam had lived 130 years, he had a son in his own likeness and image; and he named him Seth." Although Seth still retained God's image and likeness, Adam's image and likeness (the sins of the father) likewise became part of Seth's makeup. And from generation to generation, the sins of our fathers became ours. We have a predisposition to, and are caught and poisoned by generational sin. The sins of our fathers still hold sway over us, and, sadly, we pass those propensities onto our children. Generational sin is a fact of our fallen humanity. Further, the range of generational sin runs the gamut, from the egregious to the subtle and hidden.

These subtle generational and "family of origin" sins might include: unresolved and latent anger; hunger for power and authority; hatred of power and authority; need for attention; abandonment issues; boundary issues; fear of confrontation; disavowal of any personal need; unhealthy dependency on others; or using God as a "drug of choice." These will affect our ministry and the people to whom we minister in ways we cannot imagine. The grace of ordination does not eliminate them. In fact, ministry only exacerbates them and makes them more apparent. If unresolved, these issues will remain not only hindrances to effective ministry but also will bring us great sadness and unnecessary trouble.

In a similar manner, generational and “family of origin” sins affect our marriages and relationships and include: our inability to communicate properly; our fear that honesty about our feelings will cause the other to abandon us; the inability to say “no”; the inability to say “yes”; the heavy weight of self-anger, due to strange thoughts and temptations; our regression into silence when confrontation arises; the lack of proper boundaries; the lack of attentiveness to the other; how we’ve learned or not learned to deal with stress; and people pleasing at the expense of family—all which will play havoc on marital fidelity, harmony, and unity.

There are two ways to deal with this conundrum. The first way seeks avoidance of the issues. The second way seeks help, whether pastoral or professional, or both. We may be able to recognize our own need, or we may require someone else to point it out.

Twelve-Step programs state correctly: “It is OK to be sick; but it is not OK to stay sick.” There is no shame in admitting that something is wrong. It takes strength of character and courage to admit that certain areas of our lives have gone awry.

On the other hand, to fear acknowledging our sins and defects and to refuse to take steps to address them signals weakness. Avoidance is always an option, but it is always deadly. Fr. Thomas is quick to point out in his lecture that God will not judge us because we have been poisoned by these sins, but He will judge us according to how we respond to them.

We believe that Christ is the healer of our souls and bodies. We believe that He yearns for our wholeness and summons us to change. The first step to this healing is recognizing that something is wrong. Orthodox Christianity has much to say about “humility.” But in its simplest form, “humility” is honesty about ourselves.

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