

The Culture of No Consequences

In the beginning, the Lord blessed man with a paradise garden to keep, trim, and enjoy. Only one prohibition was mentioned. Adam and Eve were not to eat of the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil" (Gen. 2:17). If they ate, they would lose their place in the garden and forfeit their right to the "tree of life." They would lose their lives and their special relationship with the Lord. This was the consequence. Sadly, they ate of the prohibited tree and paid the consequences.

Have you noticed the singular lack of consequences in almost every system of American culture? God's plan of behavior management for children (the rod of discipline Pro. 22:15) has been set aside by parents and schools. Athletes, stars and politicians are seen to break laws with impunity. Bad manners and rudeness are tolerated if one is popular or famous. Coaches throw chairs, athletes sling helmets, and parents attack other parents, all clear violations of team rules and rules of appropriate behavior. Yet, rarely are those actions held to account. Proverbs 19:19 tells us the truth: "A hot-tempered man must pay the penalty; if you rescue him, you will have to do it again." Priests and teachers have abused children without penalty. Presidents lie, congressmen take money, etc.

Human beings require structure and discipline. Fortunately for us, our Creator planned for our growth and happiness by holding us accountable. God is honest with us: sin brings death. The Word clarifies His expectations and holds us accountable. God is predictable, consistent, and fair. And aren't we thankful for that! The beauty queen and best player have the same consequence and reward as the rest of us. Moses, God's chosen leader, was held accountable for disobedience (Number 20). Samson, a judge chosen by God, maintained supernatural strength as long as he followed God's directions. However, God allowed Samson to suffer the consequences of foolish behavior: the Philistines cut his hair, blinded and imprisoned him. Ultimately Samson gained victory over himself and over his enemies; God did not abandon Samson but answered his prayer.

Obedience begins with the fear of consequences. God's people cannot thrive if they accept the culture of no consequences. Churches grow numerically but not spiritually. Many are suffering from the lack of discipline among their members. Fornication, bar-hopping, gossip, and bitterness find their way into churches. Behavior that is plainly un-Christian is ignored while the "positive" is accentuated. By overlooking sin, the consequences of sin are not seen or felt. Paul rebuked the Corinthian church for this (1 Cor. 5:1-5). They accepted an adulterer as a faithful brother. Paul told them to deliver him to Satan -- to let him know where he was spiritually. They were not even to eat with him. How cruel! No! This is God's way of shocking the sinner into seeing the consequence of his sin.

Not all consequences are bad. In fact, the disciplining of the Corinthian adulterer caused him to repent and return to Christ. Paul urged the brethren to reaffirm their love to him (2 Cor. 2:3- 9). The renewal of Christian fellowship was crucial in helping this brother remain faithful. It remains the same today. We can not live without consequences. Some believe, because God does not punish sin immediately, He will not punish it at all. "Because the sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil" (Ecc. 8:11). This is a serious mistake. In this life we might evade many bad consequences. However, in judgment all will be made right. Everyone will stand before God to be judged based on the things we have done on earth (2 Cor. 5:10). Don't buy into the idea of a culture with no consequences, for there is no such place in existence.

- by David Hartsell

Rend Your Heart

"So rend your heart, and not your garments; return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and merciful" (Joel 2:13).

Rending one's garments was the action of one experiencing distress. Such actions, however, might be only superficial. According to Joel, that which really needed rending was the heart. One could tear his garments into shreds and still not be right with God.

The basic need is the recognition of the guilt of sin and godly sorrow from a broken heart. Because of sin in his own life, David knew the kind of heart that pleases God. After his sin with

Bathsheba, he wrote, "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart -- these, O God, You will not despise" (Ps. 51:17). In the 34th Psalm, he further showed the vital need of the broken heart: "The Lord is near to those who have a broken heart, and saves such as have a contrite spirit" (Ps. 34:18).

Paul knew that, where there was no sorrow for sin, there could be no forgiving of sin, "For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation" (2 Cor. 7:10).

- by Tim Johnson

Should This Be Told or Not?

There are several different ways that we sometimes learn sensitive information about a brother or sister in Christ. It might be by something we have personally experienced, or we might be exposed to certain facts innocently via something inadvertently heard or seen. In other instances someone might sinfully spread gossip that comes to our ears without invitation.

This information may indicate that the brother or sister has done wrong. If so, we must act upon that information for the sake of our fellow Christian. We must go to him with the help that might save his eternal soul (Galatians 6:1,2, James 5:19,20). If someone else has also sinned in the matter (via gossip, etc.) then we must address them also.

But sometimes the thing that is learned is sensitive – might put a brother or sister in a 'bad light' – but it is not inherently sinful. What should be done in such a case?

In many, if not most, cases such news should be allowed to die – and the sooner the better. Think about the numerous reasons why:

- 1) If we love the one about whom the facts are being reported, then we will want to prevent any further potential harm to him or her. Since this is obviously the way we'd like to be treated, it is therefore the way we should act (Matthew 7:12).
- 2) We should also consider the person with whom we are tempted to share this news. If they are told, they will also have to think about the matter, deal with their own feelings about it, and potentially harbor negative feelings toward a fellow Christian unnecessarily. We could spare them all this if we just let the thing 'rest' – and we should.
- 3) Finally, love for God is reflected in our actions in such episodes. If we gladly report this kind of unfavorable information about a brother or sister, it indicates that we don't love them as we should. AND, that indicates that we don't love God like we should either (1 John 4:20). Think!

- by Greg Gwin