

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. 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

Are You Taking Your Medicine?

An elderly gentleman who hated going to the doctor became ill. Finally agreeing to go, he was given a prescription to be taken daily for a month. Taking his first dose he nearly choked! So, he added a little water to it. His next dose was just as bad, so he added a little honey to it. He continued adding a little this, a little that, until it began to taste pretty good.

When he returned to the doctor for his checkup however, the doctor was puzzled as to why there was no progress made. "Did you take your medicine as I prescribed", the doctor asked. "Sure did", the old man replied. The doctor said, "Well, I don't understand why you haven't improved".

I think we all see what happened. The old man kept adding things to his medicine until it was so deluded it couldn't do the work for which it was intended. Too many people say they are taking the medicine God has prescribed, but by adding their old traditions and man made creeds along with other erroneous practices they have not only deluded God's word but have polluted it beyond any usefulness. Some of these traditions go back hundreds of years and are given equal authority with God's word. By doing this they feel they have made his word more palatable, but in reality have only weakened it and robbed it of any real value.

God's word can be strong medicine sometimes, but the great Physician knows what He is doing. No one can take the watered-down 'medicine' taught by men and correctly expect to be cured of their sins.

- by J.D. Williams

Murphy's Law and Eternity

Have you heard of Murphy's Law? There are many versions, but the basic notion of Murphy's Law is this: "If anything can go wrong, it will go wrong". Any Saturday mechanic, weekend repairman, or home owning handyman will have to admit that this Murphy, whoever he was, had pretty good insight. Skinned knuckles, stripped threads, broken parts, missing pieces, and malfunctioning equipment are a continuing testimony to the apparent accuracy of Murphy's pessimistic view.

However, there's one realm where this 'law' is clearly not true. Paul wrote, "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God" (Romans 8:28). This is a wonderful promise, and a great blessing. But note; it is only for "them that love God", and we know that love for God must be demonstrated by humble obedience. "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments" (1 John 5:3). Those who will not fully surrender to Him need not expect this outcome in their lives.

But wait! Are we to believe that the life of a faithful Christian will be all roses; no troubles? No. Paul writes again, "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Tim. 3:12). Persecution is never a pleasant thing, but those who serve God are told to expect it. So, how can we reconcile these two statements from Paul?

The answer lies in our perspective; whether we view things temporally or eternally. Only when we are able to see the events of this life in relation to death, judgment, and eternity will we be ready to agree that "all things work together for good". Ultimately, anything that makes us more like God wants us to be – anything that prepares us for a home in heaven – is a good thing. Think!

- by Greg Gwin