

CONSEQUENCES

My clunky red Motorola portable and I logged untold hours together 'neath the covers in Memphis, out of my Mom's earshot. This addiction from age 4 is still uncured.

Radio transported me to the Pacific with Terry & The Pirates, to the icy North with Sgt. Preston of the Yukon, to the ole South with "Lum & Abner," to New York City with "Grand Central Station," and out West with The Lone Ranger.

One of my heroes was Ralph Edwards. At 27 he created *Truth or Consequences*, where contestants were asked a question and for a wrong answer had to pay the consequences by doing a dumb stunt.

As a kid I starred in my own "live" show at our house called "The Truth **OF** Consequences," hosted by my Father who vividly demonstrated that my choices can bring pleasure or pain. Well, enough sentimental nostalgia; here's tonight's...

BIG QUESTION: What are two decisions you've made: one that flopped disastrously, and one that was a huge winner?

Farmers live and die by The Principle of Sowing and Reaping, one of those "natural laws" embedded in the fabric of our physical and spiritual worlds. Jesus illustrates this fundamental truth:

"26 Jesus said, "God's kingdom is like seed thrown on a field by a man 27 who then goes to bed and forgets about it. The seed sprouts and grows--he has no idea how it happens. 28 The earth does it all without his help: first a green stem of grass, then a bud, then the ripened grain. 29 When the grain is fully formed, he reaps--harvest time!" (Mark 4)

Paul develops this principle like so:

"7 Don't be misled: No one makes a fool of God. What a person plants, he will harvest. The person who plants selfishness, ignoring the needs of others--ignoring God!- 8 harvests a crop of weeds. All he'll have to show for his life is weeds! But the one who plants in response to God, letting God's Spirit do the growth work in him, harvests a crop of real life, eternal life." (Galatians 6)

Paul contrasts the aftermaths of good and bad decisions:

"19 It is obvious what kind of life develops out of trying to get your own way all the time ... 22 But what happens when we live God's way? He brings gifts into our lives, much the same way that fruit appears in an orchard--things like affection for others, exuberance about life, serenity. We develop a willingness to stick with things, a sense of

compassion in the heart, and a conviction that a basic holiness permeates things and people. We find ourselves involved in loyal commitments, 23 not needing to force our way in life, able to marshal and direct our energies wisely.

“25 Since this is the kind of life we have chosen, the life of the Spirit, let us make sure that we do not just hold it as an idea in our heads or a sentiment in our hearts, but work out its implications in every detail of our lives.” (Galatians 5)

QUESTION: What are the marks of a person who doesn’t buy into The Principle of Consequences?

Tom Shrader, to whom I’m indebted for this topic, says he who ignores “you reap what you sow,” makes decisions based on:

- Selfishness, pride, personal pleasure
- Justifying his actions by claiming his “rights”
- Denying responsibility, shifting blame
- Defying authority, resisting correction
- Refusing to believe that actions have consequences

But he who “gets it” makes choices based on:

- Understanding that God designed this Sowing-Reaping system
- Knowing we can control our behavior but not its consequences
- Concluding that we then, to some extent, control our future

Reversing The Curse

What about bad choices we’ve already made? Well, in *this* life we’ll always reap what we sow. You break it, you buy it.

But the good news is that God’s forgiveness, purchased by Christ’s death for you and me on the cross, paid our *eternal* sin debt *IN FULL!* Even for a former Jesus-hater like Paul who wrote:

“15 ... Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. I’m Public Sinner Number One—16 someone who could never have made it apart from sheer mercy. And now evidence of his endless patience-- he shows me off to those who are right on the edge of trusting him forever.” 1 Timothy 1

How many of us truly believe this radical statement by Paul:

“1 So now there’s no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus. 2 For the power of the life-giving Spirit has freed you through Christ Jesus from the power of sin that leads to death.” (Romans 8)

It can hardly be laced up any tighter than Paul does here:

“14 ... One man (Jesus) died for everyone. That puts everyone in the same boat. 15 He included everyone in his death so that everyone could also be included in his life, a resurrection life, a far better life than people ever lived on their own.

“16 Because of this decision we don't evaluate people by what they have or how they look. We looked at the Messiah that way once and got it all wrong, as you know. We certainly don't look at him that way anymore. 17 Now we look inside, and what we see is that anyone united with the Messiah gets a fresh start, is created new. The old life is gone; a new life burgeons! Look at it!

“18 All this comes from the God who settled the relationship between us and him, and then called us to settle our relationships with each other. 19 God put the world square with himself through the Messiah, giving the world a fresh start by offering forgiveness of sins. God has given us the task of telling everyone what he is doing.

20 We're Christ's representatives. God uses us to persuade men and women to drop their differences and enter into God's work of making things right between them. We're speaking for Christ himself now: Become friends with God; he's already a friend with you.

“21 ... God put the wrong on (Christ) who never did anything wrong, so we could be put right with God.” (2 Corinthians 5)

Okay, how then *do* you make wise, godly choices? For starters:

- Cozy up to one of Proverbs’ 31 chapters each day. Author Solomon counsels: “Let those who are wise listen to these proverbs and become even wiser. ... (Respect for) the Lord is the beginning of knowledge. Only fools despise wisdom and discipline.”

- When your wisdom tank’s on E, get some God-gas. As James, Jesus’ half-brother, writes: “If you need wisdom – if you want to know what God wants you to do – ask Him, and He will gladly tell you. He will not resent your asking.”

- Finally, if you haven’t given the reins of your life to Christ, receiving His free gift of forgiveness, all your other good decisions don’t mean Jack. Isaiah the prophet nukes any doubt about this:

“6 Seek the LORD while you can find him. Call on him now while he’s near. 7 Let the people turn from their wicked deeds (and from) the very thought of doing wrong! Let them turn to the LORD that he may have mercy on them ... for he will abundantly pardon.”

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