

Consequences

News reports several years ago told about a reporter for the Financial Times of London who met his death when a crocodile seized him as he relieved himself beside a lagoon infested with the reptiles. The man, whose name was Paul McClean, 25, was an Oxford University graduate. McClean wandered away from his group of friends to find a toilet when he was attacked. The British victim, from Surrey, about 90 minutes southwest of London, was seen “waving his hands in the air” in desperation before being dragged under the water at a lagoon called Crocodile Rock near Arugam Bay, Sri Lanka.¹

Dangers lurk in many places. Some of them are labeled as plainly as “Crocodile Rock.” Others are less obvious. The lesson is: disregard a danger and suffer the consequences.

Someone has rightly said that there are two sides to every issue. It is also true that there are two sides to a sheet of flypaper. And it makes a big difference to the fly which side he lands on.² Think of the consequences for the fly. His choice is immensely important to his well-being. So it is with the issues of life.

Dangers in the Garden

God has no policeman to go around and grab us by the neck and say you must read your Bible, or you must go to Church, or you must give alms to the poor. When God created man, He made man superior to all other creatures. He gave man the power and privilege of choice. From the Creation to the present time the Lord has respected that privilege. He will not force us. But with that privilege of Choice, goes the terrible responsibility of abiding by the consequences of our choices.³

In the beginning Adam and Eve faced a choice. The original couple had everything they needed to sustain life. They had food to eat in abundance, and there was beauty to behold and appreciate. There was also useful work to do. Yet there also existed a threat.

God Planted a Garden

The Bible says,

Genesis 2:8 The LORD God planted a garden toward the east, in Eden; and there He placed the man whom He had formed. 9 Out of the ground the LORD God caused to grow every tree that is pleasing to the sight and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

And added to this the Bible says,

¹ By Jenny Awford and Maryse Godden, The Sun. September 15, 2017 | 12:17 am

² Michael P. Green, *Illustrations for Biblical Preaching*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, 1990. p. 100.

³ Tan, P. L. (1996). *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: Signs of the Times* (p. 1204). Garland, TX: Bible Communications, Inc.

Consequences

Genesis 2:16 The LORD God commanded the man, saying, “From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; 17 but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die.”

It is difficult to conceive of a way God could have made Adam’s choice clearer. God identified the tree. He stated the prohibited condition, and He clearly stated the consequences.

The Spanish people have a name for a tree which they call the *manzanilla de la muerte*—the little apple of death. Also called the manchineel, the tree may be found in a range stretching from southern tropical North America to northern South America. Its appearance is attractive and the wood is beautiful. It bears a kind of fruit that looks like an apple, and resembles the golden pippin. The fruit is tempting and smells fragrant, but to eat of the fruit brings death. Its sap is so poisonous that if a few drops fall on the skin it raises blisters and causes great pain. Some native tribes dip their arrows in the sap of the tree that they might poison their enemies with a shaft. When ingested, the fruit is reportedly "pleasantly sweet" at first, with a subsequent "strange peppery feeling ... gradually progressing to a burning, tearing sensation and tightness of the throat." Symptoms continue to worsen until the patient can "barely swallow solid food because of the excruciating pain and the feeling of a huge obstructing pharyngeal lump."

Interestingly, although the plant is toxic to many birds and other animals, the black-spined iguana is known to eat the fruit and even live among the limbs of the tree.^{4 5}

Much like it is with the *manzanilla de la muerte* so it was with the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. It may have been pleasantly sweet—at first. But later they experienced the bitter truth. Eat of it and you die. Moreover, as the black-spined iguana lives among the branches of the manchineel tree so did the serpent roam amid the trees of Garden of Eden.

The promise of life

There were two important trees in the Garden of Eden besides the others. One offered life and the other offered death. God had said they might eat of any of the trees of the garden, except one. If they had listened to the admonition they would have lived.

God holds out the offer of life. It is similar to what He said to the Israelites after He had brought them out of Egyptian slavery,

Deuteronomy 30:15 “See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, and death and adversity; 16 in that I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in His ways and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His judgments, that you may live and multiply, and that the LORD your God may bless you in the land where you are entering to possess it. 17 “But if your

⁴ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manchineel>.

⁵ Elon Foster, *6000 Sermon Illustrations*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, 1996. p. 98.

Consequences

heart turns away and you will not obey, but are drawn away and worship other gods and serve them, 18 I declare to you today that you shall surely perish. You will not prolong your days in the land where you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess it. 19 “I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants, 20 by loving the LORD your God, by obeying His voice, and by holding fast to Him; for this is your life and the length of your days, that you may live in the land which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them.”

God said, “See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, and death and adversity,,Choose life in order that you may live.”

There would be unpleasant consequences that follow disobedience.

The threat of temptation – Satan lies to you

Consequences follow our choices no matter what influenced us to make them. The Bible says further,

Genesis 3:1 Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, “Indeed, has God said, ‘You shall not eat from any tree of the garden’?”

Satan is real. His purpose and his actions are carried out in order to undermine the instructions of the Lord, and to bring man into temptation. Satan is subtle. His deceptions are calculated to lead man into unpleasant outcomes. Satan can make the prospective violation appear alluring and satisfying much like the saying, “Can it be wrong if it feels so right?” Yes. It can be. There are consequences to every choice, even if the Devil tempted us into the choice. And the consequences might be catastrophic.

Desire for the forbidden

King David coveted another man’s wife.

In 2 Samuel the Bible tells about the temptation of David,

2 Samuel 11:2 Now when evening came David arose from his bed and walked around on the roof of the king’s house, and from the roof he saw a woman bathing; and the woman was very beautiful in appearance.

It was one of the oldest temptations in the history of man. He saw a woman bathing, and she was very beautiful. Lust of the flesh. Lust of the eye. And worse, Bathsheba was the wife of Uriah the Hittite. But David desired her. He evidently forgot that the Law of Moses said, “Thou shalt not commit adultery.” But he desired her in spite of what the Law said. And to compound his sin he arranged to have Uriah killed so that he could have the man’s wife for himself. But there were consequences to his sin.

Consequences

The prophet Nathan delivered the Lord's word concerning the cost of David's sin.

2 Samuel 12:10 'Now therefore, the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised Me and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.' 11 "Thus says the LORD, 'Behold, I will raise up evil against you from your own household; I will even take your wives before your eyes and give them to your companion, and he will lie with your wives in broad daylight. 12 'Indeed you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel, and under the sun.' "

During the days that followed David suffered anguish for his sin.

Simon wanted to buy God's authority

There is a way of thinking into which a person can fall, a mindset that allows them to believe that anything can be obtained with money. They see money as the means to any pleasure, a way to avoid the ugliness of life and see it in its beauty, an instrument of power that may be wielded to one's own advantage.

Simon was a man who had wealth. The people of Samaria called him, "The Great Power of God" because he could perform magic feats. And they gave him much attention. But that was not enough for Simon because when he saw the Holy Spirit performing miracles through Philip the evangelist, and the Apostles, he wanted the power for himself. Luke wrote,

Acts 8:18 Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was bestowed through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, 19 saying, "Give this authority to me as well, so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit." 20 But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money!

Simon learned swiftly that there are things that money cannot buy.

The Rolling Penny

An article in *The Christian Observer* refers to an interesting painting that portrays man's sinister lust for gold and its consequences. Harry Montgomery says of that unforgettable portrait: "It depicts a narrow highway along which a gold coin is rolling. The road is crowded with men and women who rush madly after the treasure. Their eyes are aflame with greed and their faces drawn with intense desire.

"In their midst rides a man on a horse.

Clinging fearfully to him is his devoted wife. In his eagerness to reach the coveted gold, he is roughly pushing her aside, for she is a hindrance to him in his race for wealth. He tramples on all who block his way, leaving them crushed and bleeding."⁶

⁶ Tan, P. L. (1996). *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: Signs of the Times* (p. 833). Garland, TX: Bible Communications, Inc. —Henry G. Bosch.

Consequences

Wealth can distort the thinking. It can overpower and dominate. It is like Paul wrote to Timothy,

1 Timothy 6:9 But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. 10 For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

Satan offers money to tempt, but the consequences belong to the one who accepts the offer.

Faulty Judgment

It happened once that four young people decided to go for a joy ride in a car and to enhance their pleasure they drank a generous quantity of whiskey. The whiskey led to speed and the speed to a crash. It was a fatal accident. The evidence from the wreck showed that liquor was the culprit. The police found broken whisky bottles among the debris, and with the liquor the mangled bodies of the four youthful victims.

The father of one of the girls in frenzied anguish over the death of his beautiful daughter threatened to kill the one who had provided the four young people with liquor, but upon going to the cupboard where he kept his supply of adult beverages, he found a note in his daughter's handwriting, "Dad, we're taking along some of your good liquor—I know you won't mind."⁷

One bad choice leads to another. Sometimes the 'other' is someone we dearly love. There are consequences to bad choices even when we don't intend that they happen.

Genesis 3:6 When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate.

- Eve admired that TREE.
- She felt she had to share it with Adam.

Attempting to conceal the sin - Achan and the wedge of Gold.

The Valley of Achor lies on the northern boundary of Judah near Jericho. It is the valley where the people of Israel stoned Achan and all his family to death.^{8 9} Achan was the "troubler," the man who violated God's ban on taking any of the spoil of the victory over Jericho. God had said,

⁷ Tan, P. L. (1996). *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: Signs of the Times* (124). Garland, TX: Bible Communications, Inc. —Christian Union Herald.

⁸ Lilley, J. P. U. (1996). Achor. In D. R. W. Wood, I. H. Marshall, A. R. Millard, J. I. Packer, & D. J. Wiseman (Eds.), *New Bible dictionary* (3rd ed., p. 10). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

⁹ William Smith, LLD, *A Dictionary of the Bible*, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, p. 16

Consequences

Joshua 6:17 “The city shall be under the ban, it and all that is in it belongs to the LORD; only Rahab the harlot and all who are with her in the house shall live, because she hid the messengers whom we sent. 18 “But as for you, only keep yourselves from the things under the ban, so that you do not covet them and take some of the things under the ban, and make the camp of Israel accursed and bring trouble on it.

But Achan took some of the things under the ban and hid them in his tent. When Achan’s guilt had been uncovered Joshua told him to admit it before God.

Joshua 7:20 So Achan answered Joshua and said, “Truly, I have sinned against the LORD, the God of Israel, and this is what I did: 21 when I saw among the spoil a beautiful mantle from Shinar and two hundred shekels of silver and a bar of gold fifty shekels in weight, then I coveted them and took them; and behold, they are concealed in the earth inside my tent with the silver underneath it.”

For this reason Achan and all his family perished, and their remains with all their property were burned.¹⁰

After Adam and Eve sinned by eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil they realized they were naked and so they made clothing for themselves and then hid from the Lord.¹¹ Thus does the conscience do for the sinner.

But one cannot either hide the sin or the consequences of the sin. As Moses had stated to the Children of Israel if they disobeyed,

Numbers 32:23 “But if you will not do so, behold, you have sinned against the LORD, and be sure your sin will find you out.

Paul elaborated on the principle,

1 Timothy 5:24 The sins of some men are quite evident, going before them to judgment; for others, their sins follow after. 25 Likewise also, deeds that are good are quite evident, and those which are otherwise cannot be concealed.

A man cannot hide from the consequences of his sin.

Consequences.

In regard to the sin of Adam and Eve,

- Eve ate (i.e., she experienced the fruits of her error.)
- She drew her husband into the experience.
- Their sin aroused their consciences.
- Their sin separated them from God, a type of death.

¹⁰ Joshua 7:19-26.

¹¹ Genesis 3:9.

Consequences

- Their suffering followed.
- Their sin delivered all of mankind into the dominion of Satan.

In her temptation Eve looked at the tree. Not the fruit. The tree was good for food. It was like the tempting job that offers the salary to pay for the necessities of life as well as its pleasures. But once accepted the applicant finds out that there are moral compromises to make. From Eve's perspective the tree was a delightful thing to behold. It was like the façade of luxurious living—always enchanting and beautiful from the distance, but on closer inspection it is unsightly and repulsive. And it would make her wise—worldly wise. So she ate of the fruit and she experienced the results because the fruit of any unholy desire is suffering and death. Worse, she shared her experience with Adam and drew him into the circle of suffering and death. And lest we forget Adam's part in this great temptation, it was Eve who was deceived, not Adam. Adam knew.¹² It is as James wrote,

James 1:14 But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. 15 Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.

Adam and Eve experienced all of these. Regrettably, they left this to their posterity as well.

Ignorance is no excuse

In Genesis the Twelfth Chapter the Bible tells how Abram journeyed from the Negev down to Egypt because there was a severe famine in the land of Canaan. He also took with him his wife Sarai. Then the Bible says,

Genesis 12:11 It came about when he came near to Egypt, that he said to Sarai his wife, "See now, I know that you are a beautiful woman; 12 and when the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'This is his wife'; and they will kill me, but they will let you live. 13 "Please say that you are my sister so that it may go well with me because of you, and that I may live on account of you."

So it happened when Abram arrived in Egypt the Egyptians, and the Egyptian officials saw Sarai and realized that she was an exceptionally beautiful woman. So they praised her to Pharaoh and the Pharaoh took Sarai into his house. In turn, Pharaoh provided Abram with gifts of sheep, cattle and donkeys, including servants.

But because Sarai, while in the house of Pharaoh, remained Abram's wife the Lord struck Pharaoh and his house with plagues.

Genesis 12:18 Then Pharaoh called Abram and said, "What is this you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife? 19 "Why did you say, 'She is my sister,' so that I took her for my wife? Now then, here is your wife, take her and go." 20 Pharaoh commanded his men concerning him; and they escorted him away, with his wife and all that belonged to him.

¹² 1 Timothy 2:14; Romans 5:14; Hosea 6:7; Job 31:32.

Consequences

Pharaoh thought that Sarai was Abram's sister. It did not matter that Pharaoh was deceived. He suffered anyway. To his credit Pharaoh corrected his error when he was informed of it.

"But I did not know!" is the cry of the ignorant. Ignorance does not alter the fact of a sin. Consequences for sin result because of the fact.

Uzzah and the Ark of the Covenant.

Exodus the 25th Chapter tells how the Israelites were to carry the Ark of the Covenant from one place to another.¹³ The Ark had two rings on each side, and poles of acacia wood overlaid with gold were to be inserted into the rings and the Ark then carried by the sons of Kohath. They were not to touch the Ark itself lest they die.¹⁴

A day came when King David ordered that the Ark be brought up from Kiriath-Jearim to Jerusalem. To move it they used a new cart pulled by oxen. The use of an ox-cart was a violation of God's instructions. The Ark should have been borne by the Levites as the Law instructed.¹⁵ The Bible says,

2 Samuel 6:3 They placed the ark of God on a new cart that they might bring it from the house of Abinadab which was on the hill; and Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, were leading the new cart. 4 So they brought it with the ark of God from the house of Abinadab, which was on the hill; and Ahio was walking ahead of the ark.

And then in verses six and seven,

2 Samuel 6:6 But when they came to the threshing floor of Nacon, Uzzah reached out toward the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen nearly upset it. 7 And the anger of the LORD burned against Uzzah, and God struck him down there for his irreverence; and he died there by the ark of God.

The Ark of the Covenant had been in the house of Uzzah's father, Abinadab, for twenty years. Surely Uzzah was familiar with the prohibitions concerning it. It was the Ark of God and it was holy. Many years had passed from the time Moses had given instructions on how to move the ark. Perhaps the words of Moses had been forgotten. Perhaps they were simply being ignored. Whatever the reason for the use of an ox-cart instead of the Levites the injunction of God still stood. If the Israelites used another method than that described in the Law, then there would be consequences.

Uzzah might have had good intentions. He might have wanted to prevent damage to the Ark of the Covenant. But he "took hold of it" in violation of God's command. Despite the fact that he was a Levite, he was not permitted to touch the Ark.

¹³ Exodus 25:12-15.

¹⁴ Numbers 3:30; 4:15.

¹⁵ See also William Smith, LLD, *A Dictionary of the Bible*, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, p. 724.

Consequences

The consequence of his irreverence was: he died. God struck him down. Despite Uzzah's evident intent to prevent damage to the Ark of the Covenant.

Even good intentions can have dire consequences.

The outcome of one's work cannot be foreseen.

Dante Fascell, a former U. S. Congressional Representative from South Florida, was instrumental in convincing Congress to pay part of the \$175-million cost of the bridge renovation in the Florida Keys. In recognition of the congressman's help, Monroe County authorities renamed the Long Key Bridge the Dante Fascell Bridge. Ironically, Representative Fascell's son and another driver were killed and three others were seriously injured in a fiery, head-on collision on Seven Mile Bridge in the Florida Keys.¹⁶

Good intentions may not always work out the way we conceive them. What we build may have an effect we do not intend.

Deliverance

Elon Foster wrote in his book of illustrations that there is a general rule of consequences that "wherever we are sure that duty leads, wherever we are sure God bids us to go; then that way we should go, whatever and however painful the consequences may be. In all other cases a prudent man will carefully weigh the consequences of what he may think of doing, and be guided by the consideration of them; but if God clearly points the way, that way he should take, disregarding consequences."¹⁷

Luke wrote concerning the Apostle Paul,

Acts 21:8 On the next day we left and came to Caesarea, and entering the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, we stayed with him. 9 Now this man had four virgin daughters who were prophetesses. 10 As we were staying there for some days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. 11 And coming to us, he took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands, and said, "This is what the Holy Spirit says: 'In this way the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.' " 12 When we had heard this, we as well as the local residents began begging him not to go up to Jerusalem. 13 Then Paul answered, "What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but even to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." 14 And since he would not be persuaded, we fell silent, remarking, "The will of the Lord be done!"

- The consequences Paul respected were those that benefitted Christ.

¹⁶ Miami Herald, Feb 2, 1984. Fascell's son was under the influence of alcohol when the accident occurred. (He had been drinking the night before, and still retained a high level of alcohol in his blood.)

¹⁷ Elon Foster, *6000 Sermon Illustrations*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, 1996. p. 131.

Consequences

The Bible says that Moses could have received the honors and riches of a prince of Egypt, but he chose rather to suffer the ill-treatment with God's people rather than enjoy the passing pleasures of sin.¹⁸ Moses was looking for an outcome that accompanies service to God.

Difficult as that service might be Moses withstood the threats and contradictions of Pharaoh and then in the strength of the Lord he brought Israel to the brink of the greatest barrier to obedience they had yet faced. The way forward for them lay in the sea. As Pharaoh's army bore down upon them many of them feared and wanted to return to Egyptian slavery because they saw the alternative as death. but God had another outcome in mind. God said to Moses,

Exodus 14:16 "As for you, lift up your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it, and the sons of Israel shall go through the midst of the sea on dry land.

And so they did. Israel passed through the sea on dry land, but Pharaoh and his army were destroyed when the Lord had Moses stretch out his hand over the sea so that it would return over the Egyptians and drown them.

Elon Foster, in telling about the *manzanilla de la muerte* tree, also wrote that Providence has so appointed it that one of two trees always grows near the manchineel tree. These are either a *white wood* or a fig-tree, the juice of either of which, if applied in time, is a remedy for the disease caused by the manchineel. Sin, like the poisonous apple, looks pleasant to the eye, and men desire it, eat of it and die; but there is a remedy at hand; it is the precious blood of the Son of God, which soothes the troubled conscience, and cleanses it from all sin.¹⁹

For Israel the consequences of their obedience to God through Moses was deliverance from Egyptian bondage, and passage through the sea into the promised land.

For Christians the consequences are similar, but greater. Peter wrote,

1 Peter 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, 5 who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. 6 In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, 7 so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ; 8 and though you have not seen Him, you love Him,

¹⁸ Hebrews 11:

¹⁹ Ibid., Elon Foster p. 98.

Consequences

and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, 9 obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls.

There is no better consequence to hope for.