

Notes for the Ekklesia Meeting

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Consequences and Returns

by Dan Trygg

"Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap.⁸ For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.⁹ And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.¹⁰ So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith."
Galatians 6:7-10

"Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality,²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions,²¹ envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.²⁴ And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.²⁵ If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit."
Galatians 5:19-25

Sometimes there is confusion (or denial) regarding forgiveness of our sin and the consequences of our sin. Sometimes we think that because someone *forgives* us that there are no longer any *consequences* for our wrongful behavior. *That is not true.* At times, because our offense involves only a hurtful interaction between me and another person, and that other person has a gracious and full heart, ...one that has *not* been wounded by me repeatedly..., he or she *may* be able to forgive me, and we *seem* to pick up as though nothing happened. That is a testimony to the resilience of the human heart, and the power of grace to allow us to overcome hurt. In reality, however, there *is* a consequence to my behavior, however small it may seem. If I *continue* to hurt that person, even if they forgive me repeatedly, there likely will come a time when they will begin to be guarded or self-protective around me. Loss will come into the relationship as a result of my behavior.

The most common NT word for sin is *hamartia*, which means to "miss the mark". The word picture associated with this word is an archery contest. We try our best to hit the bull's eye, but we miss. As a result, we lose the prize. **There is always loss involved in missing the mark.** To use another definition, *hamartia* simply means to "make a mistake". When you make a mistake, there is *always* some consequence. You have to go back and retrace your steps, or repair what was the result of your error. You have to go back and set it right. There is always a consequence of time, energy and life spent. **You can't just pretend it did not happen. It did, ...and you have to deal with the result.** It doesn't matter how pure your intent was, ...or how completely the person forgives..., you "missed it", so you have to come back to fix it, or somehow cover for what you missed. You have to make amends, or repair the damage. Or you choose to live with the loss. **It is not the same as if you had never sinned.**

If we go back to the story of the first human sin in the garden of Eden, it is quite clear that *things changed as a result of sin.* Adam and Eve were no longer permitted to stay in the garden. They no longer lived in an ideal environment. There were radical consequences, ...just from eating a piece of fruit! *Innocence* was gone. *Trust* was broken. *Betrayal* had occurred for the first time. They felt *guilt* and *shame*, and *avoided God* for the first time. They *hid themselves*, from God and each other. *Blame* made its first appearance in human relationships. *The consequences were huge.* We find that the ripple effect of that choice affected *all creation* (Rom. 8:19-22). **Even though God graciously restored their relationship with Him, and gave them hope and promises for the future, they were never able to return to what they had before they chose to sin.** They sowed to their flesh, and reaped a *horrific* harvest. **In the end, since they could not pay for their sin, God chose to bear the cost, and sent Jesus to die on their behalf. Even God could not just pretend it never happened!!** The error had to be corrected. The loss had to be paid for.

Think of any human relationship. **Sin is like spilling a glass of water on the table.** Some runs onto the floor. **Try as you might, you are not able to get all that water back into that glass.** Furthermore, even if you could, you lost the time and energy it took to try to recover that water. Any way you look at it, **sin always has a consequence.** If it were grape juice in the glass, and it got on your clothes, you'd have to wash them, too, ...or they could forever bear the stain. I think you get the point. **Sin always creates loss of some kind.**

Forgiveness is when I do something that hurts or disappoints another person, and they personally choose to release me from their desire to exact revenge, or make me pay for the loss incurred. I might have to make some kind of amends, but they are willing to bear the cost of the damage I caused to their trust. **Forgiveness always means that the forgiver is willing to bear the cost for their pain,** at least to some degree. They choose to allow me another chance. **Consequences still remain, however.** They now know that I am capable of hurting them. **Innocence and**

idealism have been shattered. Thankfully, we have the capacity to work beyond that, but the consequence is there. Trust is broken. Hurt has been inflicted, and we know it could happen again. The damage caused remains. It may be healed. It may leave scars. It will cost something. It always does. **The question regarding forgiveness is, “How much will this person be willing to cover the cost of my offenses and injuries?” Or, “How far should I go in bearing the cost for another’s sin against me?”** Jesus said that we ought to forgive as often as a person repents and asks to be restored (Matt. 18:21-35), but He also said that **there are times when we have to distance ourselves for our own protection** (Matt. 18:15-17; cf. Rom. 16:17; Tit. 3:10; II Tim. 3:5).

Paul tells us plainly that **we will reap what we sow** (Gal. 6:7). **Sin is like planting seed.** This word picture indicates not only do they remain, but also that **the consequences of sin can sometimes take on a life of their own that can multiply into further consequences in our lives.** Now, just as not every seed will sprout, grow and multiply, in the same way every sinful choice will *not* burgeon into an addictive habit, or initiate a domino effect of other sins and consequences. The *principle* is there, however. Paul is not just talking about outward consequences. He is talking more about how our choices affect our character. **Character growth is the consequence of our choices and investments over time.** We choose to invest towards things of the flesh (self-focused) or things of the Spirit (God-focused). Thankfully, the multiplication principle is also operational on the other side as well. **If we sow to the Spirit, ...if we make choices and investments toward knowing God and obeying Him..., there can also be a multiplied result that develops in our hearts and character. Those consequences are just as real.** Satan would like to convince us that they don’t matter, or don’t count, when we fall into sin. Those seeds are just as real, however, and *some* of them will sprout and produce a multiplied effect in our lives, especially if we nurture them.

On a further positive note, **Paul makes the application of this positive investment principle to the impact we can have on the lives of others.** He tells us not to get tired of doing good for others, because eventually it will have an impact. Again, the analogy of sowing crops is a valuable word picture for understanding how this works. Not every good deed is going to produce *drastic* change, ...just as every seed is not necessarily productive. Furthermore, the wise farmer would sow seed at different times, and under different circumstances, because there is no guarantees when a seed would “take” and grow (Ecc. 11:4-6). In the same way, if we are wise concerning the “sowing” of good deeds into the lives of others, hoping to draw them to Jesus, we need to realize that **repeated investments in a variety of times and situations will more likely produce a more noticeable impact and effect** than occasional good deeds or a “one-per-person” mentality. **Another reality, however, is that not all people will be responsive.** Like the parable of the soils (Matt. 13:3-23), not every heart will be responsive to the grace of God, or the message of His Kingdom, especially in the short-term. Some of those hearts can be softened, but it will take time, prayer and repeated investments in their lives. Even then, some people simply will not respond.

If we sow to the flesh, what will we get as a result? What does the flesh produce? How about investments in the Spirit? What return can we expect from investing toward God? Galatians 6:8 tells us that **those who sow to the flesh reap rotteness, while those who sow to the Spirit reap age-type life,** the quality of life that comes from the Kingdom of God. In Galatians 5:19-23, Paul had described in more detail some of the ways which fleshly living and Kingdom living appear in our lives. **Investing in the flesh will produce consequences in our lives. A fleshly orientation will show itself in a focus on sensuality** (cf. Eph. 4:17-19), leading to sexual immorality and impurity. There is a corruption of spirit, as well, expressed in **idolatry** (honoring and serving anything in place of God) **and sorcery** (In NT times this referred to people who took mood altering drugs and herbs to open their minds to the spirit-world. The Greek word is *pharmakeia*). Sowing to the flesh also results in **emotional and relational imbalance, injury and division.** Finally, escape into drunkenness and running to late night parties (with all that can happen there) are fruits of fleshly living. **These are destructive behaviors.** They create hurt to the individual, as well as their partners. **In the end, they destroy a person’s health and trap them in a world of pain and addiction, where people are degraded, used and abused.** The consequences are very real, and very tragic. While these people are *searching for good feelings*, they are *sowing seeds of pain and destruction* in their lives that ultimately will ruin and consume them.

By contrast, the Spirit produces emotional and character qualities that everyone recognizes as healthy, positive and desirable. While there will sometimes be warfare and opposition from others, the change in quality of life and relationships will become noticeable to all. The mind set on the flesh is death; but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace (Rom. 8:6). **Just as sowing to the flesh produces rotteness, sowing to the Spirit produces a harvest of health, vitality, stability and contentment.** Of course, it is not just going through the motions that will bring these benefits. **We have to want what God begins to work into our lives. When we invest less in fleshly living, and choose to invest more in our relationship with God, there will be a growing shift that will become evident in the outworking of our lives. So, do not lose heart or focus. Continue to choose to invest toward life in the Spirit, and watch for the return that develops as you keep pursuing Him.**