

The Inescapable Consequences of Sin

II Samuel 12:1-6 & Galatians 6:7-8

This month we are studying the Biblical Dynamics of Change. Please open to page 81.

Bible Study Tip

Before we begin let me share a couple of tips that have helped me this third time through these materials.

First, there are 285 passages noted in this chapter, many of them are repeated. I look up each of them. That means I need to look up and consider about 9-10 passages each day of this month.

Second, the first time I come across a passage and do a study on it, I highlight it. Then each time I look at it again, I know I have covered it, flip back through my journal, see what I concluded, if needed I recopy and enlarge my study.

Those two simple habits have made this third time the most challenging, deepening, and nurturing time yet. It has blessed my heart so much that I can't wait to dig into the next days verses.

Lesson 5

Open to lesson 5 and notice these keys truths in the first boxed statement on page 82 at the top¹:

Now, look across the page at p. 83 and notice first the boxed statement²:

This week we will start to look at Principle 10, this concept of the "Downward Spiral".

1. The downward spiral. (Principle10):

Now, we are going to pause in our overview of the textbook and go deep into this downward spiral principle.

¹ Neglecting or refusing God's ways brings multiplied problems. To deal effectively with your problems, you must realize your inadequacy and turn to the power of God for salvation. Then you will be able to make the necessary Biblical that characterize a child of God as you reverently depend on God and His Word.

² Biblical change begins with your spiritual birth and continues throughout your life. Your purpose for living changes from a focus of living for self to one of dying to self as you learn to love God and love others in a Biblical manner.

The Spiritual Law of Sowing & Reaping

Turn with me in your Bibles to Galatians 6:7-9. One of the most vital lessons we as believers need to learn, and that we as Biblical Counselors & Disciples need to share is found in Galatians 6:7-9.

Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. 8 For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. 9 And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart

God never sleeps, never gets distracted, and He notices everything we say, think, and do. The spiritual law that Paul here describes in Galatians 6 is called the consequence engine.

God's consequence engine is regulated by the law of sowing and reaping. He has never revoked, altered, or amended this great truth. The consequence engines connected with sowing and reaping run with 100 percent reliability century after century in every generation:

whatever a man sows, that he will also reap (Galatians 6:7).

Although we often forget about it, both halves of this verse impact all of us. In reality, most people find that they are still reaping the unpleasant long-term consequences of past bad choices. And yet, at the same time, as forgiven sinners we are probably also sowing to the Spirit for a future positive harvest. We must also remember:

*he who **sows to his flesh** will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who **sows to the Spirit** will of the Spirit reap everlasting life* (Galatians 6:8).

Now to see the truths Paul taught, God has already illustrated them in the life of the most written about person in all of God's Word: David.

God Illustrates the Consequence Engine

In II Samuel 12, we find the start of a sketch of David's last 20 years of life. What shapes the problems for the next two decades, more than anything else humanly speaking, were the sins of David's "mid-life crisis" and his ensuing adultery.

From God's perspective David's years of suffering began with his fall into sin with Bathsheba. Everything in this man of God's life: from 2 Samuel 11 (Bathsheba) to 1 Kings 2 (David's death) was touched, affected, and colored by that event.

As Biblical Counselors, we need to always be aware of this, and share these truths as we counsel:

Although God forgives sins and forgets iniquities, He doesn't wipe out the consequences.

As a result of David's sin with Bathsheba, he would now reap many great pains; among them: a son's betrayal, the verbal abuse by Shimei, and then the physical abuse and death threats of Absalom.

But the best news of all is that, by the grace of God, David faced every one of these consequences, and endured them with the promises of God.

His responses as we'll see recorded in the Psalms, record some of the most hope-filled pages of Scriptures.

There are lessons to be learned from David that are very difficult but so necessary.

INESCAPABLE AND PAINFUL CONSEQUENCES

One thing is certain—sin *always* pays back both believers and unbelievers with boredom, guilt, shame, loneliness, confusion, emptiness, loss of purpose, and loss of rewards.

The negative consequence engine for the Christian should never be thought of as punishment because Jesus has already been fully punished for the believer's sins.

Neither is it to be confused with God's corrective discipline of his wayward sons and daughters (Hebrews 12:6-17).

David was forgiven: ... *"The LORD also has put away your sin ..."* (2 Samuel 12:13). But forgiveness never takes away the consequences of the sin.

David grieved over the awfulness of his sin: *"Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight ..."* (Psalm 51:4).

David also had to endure the coming years of painful consequences, yet he did so with peace and settled faith in the goodness and wisdom of God.

The High Cost of Sin

Here in 2 Samuel 12:1-6 we find the amazing explanation of just how much David's sin

would cost him. Nathan the prophet told David he would have to make restitution four-fold. We already saw the confrontation (Thou art the man) but now focus with me on the amazing sketch Nathan gives of David's future and sins consequences intertwined with the years ahead.

2 Samuel 12:1-6 (NKJV) Then the LORD sent Nathan to David. And he came to him, and said to him: "There were two men in one city, one rich and the other poor. 2 The rich man had exceedingly many flocks and herds. 3 But the poor man had nothing, except one little ewe lamb which he had bought and nourished; and it grew up together with him and with his children. It ate of his own food and drank from his own cup and lay in his bosom; and it was like a daughter to him. 4 And a traveler came to the rich man, who refused to take from his own flock and from his own herd to prepare one for the wayfaring man who had come to him; but he took the poor man's lamb and prepared it for the man who had come to him." 5 So David's anger was greatly aroused against the man, and he said to Nathan, "As the LORD lives, the man who has done this shall surely die! 6 And he shall restore fourfold for the lamb, because he did this thing and because he had no pity."

In the context of Nathan's parable about the rich man: (David), the poor man: (Uriah), and the ewe lamb: (Bathsheba), we know from Exodus 22:1 that God's law demanded four-fold restitution. The penalty for stealing and slaughtering an ox or a sheep was not death, but restitution.

However, in Nathan's parable, the wrongful taking and using of the "lamb" (Bathsheba) pointed to David's adultery and subsequent murder of Uriah. Under the Mosaic Law, both sins, adultery (Leviticus 20:10) and murder (Leviticus 24:17), were punishable by death. So when David pronounced his judgment on the rich man of Nathan's parable, David was condemning himself to death.

It is very possible that the four-fold restitution God required may be related to the tragic events of David's final years. For instance, ***it could be an allusion to the death of four of David's sons:***

1. Bathsheba's first son (2 Samuel 12:18);
2. Amnon (2 Samuel 13:28-9);
3. Absalom (2 Samuel 16:14-15); and
4. Adonijah (1 Kings 2:25).

There is also a ***possible allusion to the four disasters marking the final days of David's reign:***

1. Amnon's rape of his sister Tamar (2 Samuel 13:1-22) and his death at the hand of

his brother Absalom (2 Samuel 13:23-33).

2. Absalom's treasonous rebellion (2 Samuel 15:1-18:8) and death at the hand of Joab (2 Samuel 18:9-19:8).
3. Sheba the Bichrites rebellion (2 Samuel 20:1-22) and the plague following David's numbering of the people (2 Samuel 24:1-25).
4. The plot of Adonijah to grasp the throne, endangering Solomon and Bathsheba's lives (1 Kings 1:1-53).

Whichever it was of those God was explaining, or if it were all of them, the fact that God had determined them is an insight for us into:

The Goodness and Justice of God

What a lesson David becomes to us, of the goodness and justice of the Lord! God's grace is free, but the cost of sin is high—as John MacArthur writes:

Every sin I as a Christian commit is forgiven in Jesus Christ. But no sin is ever right or good, and no sin ever produces anything right or good. The price for doing some things is terribly high, terribly unprofitable. Sin never brings profit; it always brings loss.

David was a man after God's own heart and was greatly used of the Lord in leading Israel and even in writing Scripture. But David was not exempted from the consequences of his sin.

Through His prophet Nathan, God told David that because of his sin, "the sword shall never depart from your house. ... I will raise up evil against you from your own household," and "the child also that is born to you shall surely die" (12:10-11, 14).

David paid for those sins almost every day of his life. Several of his sons were rebellious, jealous, and vengeful, and his family life was for the most part a tragic shambles.³

In spite of David's family life being a "tragic shambles," he still faced the consequences of his sins in a godly way. For part of genuine repentance is the grace to go forward—no matter what life may bring. That godly response, even to the consequences of his sin, is what sets David apart as such an example for us today.

³ John F. MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary I Corinthians 6:12* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1983), in loc.

Let me explain it as we turn back again to Galatians 6:7-9 to examine more from the central truth text for this study. Here we find a statement from the Eternal God our Savior, who speaks His Word and declares to us an unchangeable truth we all need to heed.

Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. 8 For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. 9 And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart

When we see God reflected in the world around us, consider the implications of what His Word teaches us. Everything we know in the world around us is built on “Laws” of gravity, relativity, thermodynamics, and so on. We call these the:

Laws of the Physical Universe

We can count on the law of gravity to make things fall, the laws of thermodynamics to make them wear out, and the laws of motion to help us calculate wavelength, frequency and so many other laws of the sciences.

We need to see God reflected in the world around us and then consider the implications of what His Word teaches us. Ray Stedman (1917-1992), a giant of Bible expositors of a generation ago writes:

"All of us have had some sample, some contact, some encounter with the power of nature -- we are awed by the mighty thundering of a storm that breaks upon our heads suddenly, or by the power of breakers dashing upon the shore...God is a God of power, and that power indicates to us a force behind nature. Nature is alive with power. We are told that everything is in motion -- the atoms that constitute this pulpit are constantly in motion. And behind the motion is the pulsating force of energy. Nature is one great mass of energy.

"But, more than that, all of us have experienced some knowledge of the sovereignty of God in nature. We don't play around with the laws of nature. Have you noticed that? When we discover a natural law, we are careful to observe it because, oftentimes, our very lives are at stake.

"You don't go fooling around with the law of gravity. You don't get on top of a 15-story building and shove your hands in your pockets and nonchalantly stroll over the ledge to show people how superior you are to the law of gravity. You won't break the law of gravity -- you'll just illustrate it. They'll just scoop you off the pavement!

"We don't play around with the laws of electricity. When a wire is charged with 10,000 volts, we know that it will operate according to a strict and precise law, and we are careful to observe that law because one little mistake is enough to cause us to forfeit our life⁴.

Remember that not only are there great "natural" (built-in) laws at work in the physical realm, so there are also even more important laws at work in the spiritual realm. Those laws tell us that God is Just, as well as Loving and Merciful.

The Spiritual Laws God Built into the Universe

Our travel, communication, and industry are built upon these inflexible and unchanging laws of the physical world. We respect those laws. If we slam into a stationary object when traveling at a high velocity, we expect there to be corresponding damage. If we jump off a high place, we expect to fall. It is simply a law of gravity that indiscriminately takes over.

But sometimes we fail to remember that not only are there great "natural" (built-in) laws at work in the physical realm, so there are also even more important laws at work in the spiritual realm. Those laws tell us that God is Just, as well as Loving and Merciful.

God always rewards good and eventually punishes all evil. No detail, no matter how minute--escapes His attention.

Most lost people and many immature believers speculate that God, because He is good, grants some type of general amnesty to people, adding up good deeds, subtracting the bad, and throwing in some extra mercy here and there, so that just about everybody can make it to heaven somehow.

Nothing could be further from Christ's Word in the Bible. Every human choice and every action has consequences, whether good or ill. We are all affected by the choices others make as well! This reality of consequences and God's Laws that govern the physical and spiritual universe I'd like to call—"The Consequence Engine".

That's why our study of David's life, verse-by-verse through the Psalms is so vital.

As we walk through each of the pages of God's Word we can see God's Laws at work in and around David's choices. And, as we see this inspired record of God's dealings with him, we can better choose our course—knowing that God and His laws are unchanging.

Consequences In Daily Life

⁴ Ray C. Stedman, <http://raystedman.org/romans1/0006.html>

Consequences abound in our lives. Driving over the speed limit can get us a speeding ticket. Driving under the influence can have more severe consequences. Not paying the rent usually causes a renter to lose his residence. Not showing up for work on time can get one fired. The slightest disobedience to the Drill Sergeant in military basic training can prove painfully costly.

"Sensible" people who are law-abiding and "moral" cause less trouble for themselves in this life, and are better off as long as they live--compared to the person who is irresponsible, or promiscuous, who abuses booze and drugs and can't hold a job.

Neither type of individual may end up in heaven, but this present life is better off for people who see the intrinsic order in the world and who follow it as best they can, even if their motives are self-serving, and even if they do not know God.

Always remember that God takes note of everything going on--nothing escapes his notice, especially a person's motives.

1 Corinthians 4:5 Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God. (NIV)

The consequences of life, inexorable and unavoidable though they may be--do not usually bring immediate consequences in response to our actions. An old Proverb says, "The mills of God's justice grind exceedingly slow--but they grind exceedingly fine."

Because we often do not see the negative consequences of our bad choices right away, we are often persuaded to make bigger and more foolish mistakes. Because God's judgments are usually long delayed in time, many think the Lord never judges anyone at all.

For the pagan "the wages of sin"--which is death--are inevitable, inexorable, and unavoidable. Sin also pays lost people back with boredom, guilt, shame, loneliness, confusion, emptiness, loss of purpose, but, in the end, not only with physical death itself—they must also face final separation from God—because they never laid hold of the saving life of Christ.

Paul, Peter, John, and Jesus all clearly state that some forms of life-style behavior exclude a person from entry into the kingdom of God altogether, thus revealing that many who say they are Christians never were in the first place (Matthew 7:21-29)! A list of these moral absolutes in the universe is found in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 and yet another in Ephesians 5:1-6.

The record books of life are being kept up daily by recording angels who miss no details. Judgment is totally fair and just—even for the lost. Punishment is appropriately proportional, following the great principle outlined in Romans 2--God weighs the motives of the heart as well as behavior, and He takes into account the individual's actual knowledge of God.

Nonbelievers do not cease to exist when they die, nor do they pass into limbo or purgatory. After death they end up intact and conscious at the "last" judgment described in Revelation 20:12-13.

Revelation 20:12-13 And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. 13 The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works.

Negative Consequences For Believers

Negative consequences in time and eternity occur when a follower of Jesus Christ does things in his or her own flesh, our natural energy and strength. A number of New Testament passages highlight this:

*Galatians 5:19-21 Now **the works of the flesh** are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, 20 idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, 21 envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.*

“Adultery, fornication” is the most frequently listed sin in the New Testament. Why? Because our flesh wants to gratify itself, and if it can get loose, it will do so!

“Uncleanness” refers to thinking about it, and wanting it, but “lewdness” is acting it out.

“Idolatry” involves elevating anything above God; “sorcery” is the same word for drug use.

Except for “murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like,” the others —“jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions”—are some works of the flesh that even many Christians tolerate or practice.

When believers fail to see the negative consequences of bad choices right away, they are often persuaded to make bigger and more foolish mistakes. And if God's judgments are

long delayed, many of them think the Lord never judges at all.

One of the features of the negative consequence engine at work is that we do not get to choose the consequences of our sins—God does. For instance, I grew up watching my parents help newly saved men from our local rescue mission get a fresh start. I'll always remember what my dad said: "God saved their soul but He doesn't give them a new stomach or liver!" Many of those radiant new converts went on to have years of terrible health problems—negative consequences of poor choices earlier in their lives.

Negative Consequences Believers Can Face

But what possible negative consequences can there be for those who are in Christ? Here are just a few:

- We have *lost opportunities for service* if we aren't alert to God's leadings.
- We have a *greater propensity to make the same bad choice the next time* we're tempted after having yielded to a particular sin. For example, every time a believer rationalizes to find an excuse for not attending church, it becomes easier and easier to forsake the gathering together of God's people. An increased vulnerability to temptation applies to anything in life.
- We run *the risk of an early death*. God's Word says if you partake with unconfessed, unrepentant sins, God will judge you and bring weakness and sickness into your life—and may ultimately take you home to heaven in an untimely death.

Positive Consequences

Like negative consequences, the effects of the positive consequence engine at work in our lives do not usually show up immediately; they are long term. (This can be frustrating for those who crave instant gratification and expect daily rewards.) The big payoff for followers of Christ is in the next life rather than the here and now, as Jesus reminds us in His sermon on the mount:

"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:19-21).

Much of a positive consequence is also internal. Positive consequences of knowing God include wonderful inner qualities of wholeness, fulfillment, and contentment.

As we yield in obedience to the Lord, over time we become all we ever dreamed of being as whole men and women. For God will produce in and through us the fruit of the Spirit which: *is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law* (Galatians 5:22-23).

Life Comes Down to Two Choices

We only have two choices in life—pleasing God or pleasing self.

We only have two choices in life—pleasing God by what we do or pleasing our self. Paul explained in Romans, that we are all servants (slaves), and there are only two choices of which master we choose to serve:

Romans 6:16-23 Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness? 17 But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. 18 And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. 19 I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness. 20 For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. 21 What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. 22 But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life. 23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

We only have two building materials in life—what will last and what will not. That is another New Testament description of the consequence engine at work in the life of the Christian. What we do (build) in life will either endure or we will suffer loss:

*1 Corinthians 3:10-15 According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. 11 For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. 12 Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, 13 each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. 14 **If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward.** 15 If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.*

2 Corinthians 5:10-11 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that

each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. 11 Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are well known to God, and I also trust are well known in your consciences.

Spirit Led Living

The positive consequences in life are empowered by God's Spirit. What really counts in life—actions that lead to positive consequences—are the works Jesus does in and through us when we make ourselves available to God. The basic rule of Christian life is this: Nothing coming from me, but everything coming from Him!

In God's sight, there is nothing at all in us, in our flesh, that is able to please Him. We must die to self and be replaced by Christ living in and through us:

*... Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, **let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.** For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works (Matthew 16:24-27).*

*... I through the law died to the law that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and **the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God,** who loved me and gave Himself for me. I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain (Galatians 2:19-21).*

Mortifying My Flesh is a Life Long Struggle

Identifying the "flesh" in our lives is a life-long task--the flesh will do anything to avoid being put to death. We do not readily recognize the flesh in ourselves apart from our daily obedience to Jesus--and our ongoing feeding on the Word of God. Hebrews offers key insights into our day to day walk in the Spirit.

*Hebrews 4:10-13 For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His. 11 Let us therefore **be diligent to enter that rest,** lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience. 12 For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, **and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.** 13 And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.*

That is why Paul described the Christian life as *agonizomai*. What word in English sounds like that? Agony.

In other words, he was saying that the Christian life is a long, hard spiritual battle. In fact, if you're not struggling, you are probably not making a lot of good choices. The more good choices you make, the more your life will become spiritually embattled because it's an agonizing thing to bring the flesh under the domination of the Spirit of God.

I know of no clearer pathway to killing selfishness and encouraging consecration than adopting the same life purpose that Thomas Chisholm embraced in his poem "Living for Jesus." This poem expresses the marching orders of one who read these Scriptures and said, "Lord, how do I harness my life?" Chisholm did it when he declared: "*O Jesus, Lord and Savior, I give myself to Thee.*"

Each of us can affirm his flesh-crucifying, life-consecrating words. Say them to the Lord because there is a positive consequence to what you express to Him. Decide today that you want to sow to the Spirit by denying and crucifying your flesh—and then make every day a day of living for Jesus:

Living for Jesus a life that is true, striving to please Him in all that I do, yielding allegiance, glad-hearted and free—this is the pathway of blessing for me.

Living for Jesus who died in my place, bearing on Calv'ry my sin and disgrace—such love constrains me to answer His call, follow His leading and give Him my all.

Living for Jesus thru earth's little while, my dearest treasure the light of His smile, seeking the lost ones He died to redeem, bringing the weary to find rest in Him.

Chorus: *O Jesus, Lord and Savior, I give myself to Thee, for Thou in Thine atonement didst give Thyself for me. I own no other Master—my heart shall be Thy throne: My life I give, henceforth to live, O Christ, for Thee alone.*

—Thomas O. Chisholm (1866-1960)