

It Is Written

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The Culture Of No Consequences

By David Hartsell

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” (Genesis 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 God. 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, Proverbs 22:15) has been set aside by parents and schools. Athletes, stars, and politicians 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, and Samson, a judge chosen by God, were both held accountable for their disobedience.

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, barhopping, gossip, and bitterness find their way into churches. Behavior that is plainly unChristian is ignored while the “positive” is accentuated. By overlooking sin, the consequences are not seen or felt. Paul rebuked the Corinthian church for this (1 Corinthians 5:1-5). They accepted an adulterer as faithful. 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 Corinthians 2:3-9). The renewal of Christian fellowship was crucial in helping this brother remain faithful. It remains the same today. In this life we might evade bad consequences, but at the judgment all will be made right. Everyone will stand before God to be judged based on the things we have done while here (2 Corinthians 5:10).

Who Is A Christian?

By Dan Gatlin

This is a basic question that many are confused about. If you ask the religious world (so-called “Christianity”), you are likely to get a variety of different answers. But, when you look at the Bible, you will get clarity rather than confusion.

First, are all “believers” in Jesus Christ Christians? The Bible says No! “*You believe that there is one*

God. You do well. Even the demons believe — and tremble!" (James 2:19). I don't think anyone would affirm that demons are Christians, yet they believe. Demons are one thing, but what about people? Jesus said, *"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'"* (Matthew 7:21-23). These are sincere believers who claim Jesus as "Lord" and claimed to work "in His name." Yet, Jesus told them to "depart from Me!" Why would He reject a believer who works on His behalf and calls Him "Lord?" The answer is found in the last phrase, *"you who practice lawlessness."* Since sin is lawlessness (1 John 3:4), sin will separate us from Christ. These were believers who did what they wanted to "in the name of Christ" and not what Christ actually said to do. Consider also, *"Nevertheless even among the rulers many believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God."* (John 12:42-43). Who would argue that these "believers" are saved?

So, who are Christians? The word "Christian" is only used three times in the Scriptures (see Acts 11:26; 26:28; 1 Peter 4:16). Consider what Acts 11:26 says, *"And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch."* The Scriptures equate "disciples" with "Christians." So, the question is, how does one become a disciple? Jesus answers, *"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.' Amen."* (Matthew 28:19-20). A disciple (and therefore a Christian) is someone who is baptized "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" and who observe all that Jesus commands.

To clarify, this does not mean that disciples (Christians) don't need to believe. Belief is absolutely essential to salvation (See Mark 16:16; John 3:15-16, 36; 8:24, etc.). But belief is only the first step. If someone takes the first step and becomes a "believer" but goes no further, is he really a disciple (Christian) as defined by Jesus? Regardless of what the religious world proclaims, God may have a different view.

AM I GOING TO HEAVEN?

By Kyle Campbell

Many like to ask the question, "Are members of the church of Christ the only ones going to Heaven?" However, this is not a very good question. The better question to ask is, "Am I among the number of those who are going to Heaven?" Jesus said in Luke 13:24, "Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able." In Acts 2, when Peter preached the first gospel sermon and 3,000 obeyed (Acts 2:41), were they members of a denomination? No, they were members of the Lord's church (Matthew 16:18; Acts 20:28).

So how does one know they are going to Heaven? The Bible says that the steps to salvation include faith (John 1:12; Mark 16:16; Hebrews 11:6), repentance (Luke 13:3; Acts 17:30), confession of Jesus (Matthew 10:32; Romans 10:10), and baptism for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38; 22:16; 1 Peter 3:21). After someone has become a steward of the grace of God (1 Peter 4:10), they must be faithful (1 Corinthians 4:2; Revelation 2:10). If they fall back into sin and do not repent, they are lost (2 Peter 2:20-22).

One must always remember that a kingdom is reproduced by its seed. Genesis 1:12 says, "And the earth brought forth grass, and herb yielding seed after his kind, and the tree yielding fruit, whose seed was in itself, after his kind: and God saw that it was good." In Luke 8:11, we are told that the "seed is the word of God." Therefore, just as physical seed produces only the plants which it is supposed to, so the word of God produces only the kind of Christians God desires. When one "obeys from the heart that form of doctrine" (Romans 6:17), and are faithful, they will go to Heaven.