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The Consequence Engine



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This morning all of us operate under some very powerful but often unseen laws around us. These are the laws of the physical universe. The laws of gravity, chemistry, and physics are inflexible, unstoppable and very unforgiving—and we all **must bow before them**.

But what we seldom consider are the other laws, the ones that govern the spiritual world that surrounds us. In the pits of despair David learned about those laws. It is a **law that says that there are unavoidable consequences for our choices**. And David wanted positive consequences—he didn't like the negative ones he experienced in the pits he had gone through.

David disobeyed God and something happened—called a consequence. He was saddened, troubled, fretful, anxious, depressed and finally despairing. When he sat back and analyzed all that had happened he realized that the Lord allowed all that **as a consequence for all of his actions**.

Look with me at [Psalm 57:7](#). Here David declares that his heart is fixed. He declared that he would not slip back into the pits of despair again by going his own way in his own strength. He learns how to minister in a place where troubles surround him **without being dragged down by those around him**.

David goes on to the most fruitful years of his life with an unbroken string of spiritual and material triumphs. He rises to the highest levels of leadership, worship, and heritage. What an incredible time of his life. And all that seems to start right here in Psalm 57. So this is a crucial Psalm for our spiritual nurture and development.

In Psalm 57 David had learned a law of the spiritual universe—there is a consequence for every act that is unavoidable. As sure as the laws of nature are the laws of the spiritual world; and that law can be called the consequence engine.

But before we get into these precious treasure laden verses—go back with me to this concept of the consequence engine. Let me explain it as we turn to [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

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!

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"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 life[1].

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.

The Consequence Engine Operates for Everyone in Daily Life

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 Consequence Engine Operates for Pagans

Most people are not interested in knowing the real God. They are actually enemies of God. This general animosity towards the real God is the main cause of the invention of earth's many religions. God gives everyone enough knowledge of His existence and of His attributes so that all men everywhere are without excuse, (*Romans 1: 18-21*). When people hear, but reject, the gospel of Jesus Christ, God ordinarily leaves such people alone and they live out the rest of their lives—often in relative peace and even prosperity.

There seem to be no immediate obvious negative consequences to their unbelief. But because the silent, invisible wrath of God rests upon all men who reject Him—there is gradually increasing emptiness in the lives of those who refuse God's grace and mercy (*John 3: 36*). In *Ecclesiastes*, Solomon states clearly that enjoyment in life is a gift from God *given only to those who please Him—and not obtainable any other way!*

Ecclesiastes 2:24 Nothing is better for a man than that he should eat and drink, and that his soul should enjoy good in his labor. This also, I saw, was from the hand of God.

The consequence engines 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.

The Negative Consequence Engine Also Operates 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.*

*[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.*

One of the features of the negative consequence engine at work is that we do not get to choose the consequences of our sins.

All sin is forgivable but—all sin **also** has consequences.

Christians are not judged for their sins—which have been paid in full by Jesus—but certainly we are thoroughly evaluated for all our choices in life—like everyone else. *All of our choices in life have negative or positive consequences.*

As a child, I grew up watching my parents minister to men from our local rescue mission. My dad always said, "God saved their soul but He doesn't give them a new stomach or liver!" Many of those radiant faced new converts went on to have years of terrible health problems—negative consequences of poor choices earlier in their lives.

So, just what possible consequences can there be for us who are in Christ? Negative consequences can involve lost opportunities for service, increased vulnerability to the same bad choices the next time we are tempted, and in some cases even an early death.

The consequence engine is regulated by the law of sowing and reaping in life. This great truth has never been revoked, altered, or amended. The consequence engines connected with sowing and reaping run with 100% reliability century after century in every generation.

*[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.*

Although we often forget about it, both halves of this verse impact all of us. In reality, most Christians find we may still be reaping the unpleasant long-term consequences of past bad choices and at the same time, as forgiven sinners, we are probably also sowing to the Spirit for a future positive harvest.

Sin **always** pays us back with boredom, guilt, shame, loneliness, confusion, emptiness, loss of purpose, not to speak of—**loss of rewards**.

This was happening to David as we followed him through Psalm 13, 34, 40, and 70. His bad choices led to guilt and shame, produced numbing loneliness, profound confusion, emptiness, and a complete loss of purpose. When we suffer through similar times we need to look back and see if there are consequences of choices we have made also at work.

The negative consequence engine for the Christian should never be thought of as punishment for sins—because Jesus has already been fully punished for the believers sins—all of them. Consequences of our bad choices is not the same thing as punishment for sin. Neither is it to be confused with God's corrective discipline of his wayward sons and daughters ([Hebrews 12:6-17](#)).

The Positive Consequence Engine

Like negative consequences in life, the effects of the positive consequence engine at work in our lives do not usually show up immediately—they are long term. This is frustrating for folks who want instant gratification and who expect a daily rewards balance sheet.

The big pay off for followers of Jesus is in the next life—not here and now, as Jesus reminds us in His sermon on the mount.

*Matthew 6: 19-21 "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; 20 but **lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven**, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*

Much of consequence that is positive 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 dream of being as whole men and women. God produces in and through us "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law." (*Galatians 5: 22-23*)

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.

The Positive Consequences in Life Are Empowered by God's Spirit

What 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. God does not want our best efforts on his behalf! The basic rule of Christian life is "nothing coming from me, everything coming from Him." We are not to give God our very best efforts. Self-improvement programs are of no avail. "Trying harder" doesn't cut it.

However, it is by trusting and acting on what God has promised that we unleash the power of God working in us so that the consequence engine runs in our favor. That is again the reason for David's declaration in the middle of Psalm 57—his heart was fixed on God. His will was yielded, his life was offered as a sacrificial offering. As Paul said over and over—he was God's servant or slave.

Jesus is more than willing to live through us whenever we give Him permission. Someone has said, "There is no limit to what God will do through any individual, if that person doesn't are who gets the credit."

Usually when we come to know the Lord we abandon those bad habits which everyone agrees are socially undesirable—such as getting drunk, living in a life style that is sexually immoral, being dishonest in business, lying, stealing, cheating—and so on.

What is harder to recognize and deal with regarding the flesh is its "good" side. A tragic example of not dealing with the "good side" of the flesh is contained in the account of King Saul's loss of his throne in 1 Samuel 15.

In God's sight, there is nothing at all in us—in our natural lives—that is able to please Him. We must die and be replaced by Christ living in and through us day by day, year after year.

*Matthew 16: 24-27 Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, **let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.** 25 For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. 26 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? 27 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.

Galatians 2:19-21 For I through the law died to the law that I might live to God. 20 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. 21 I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain."

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.

We need to thoughtfully and deliberately respond to the truth of God's Word that we have heard today. I know of no more clearer pathway to killing our selfishness and encouraging consecration than the life purpose adopted by Thomas Chisholm in his poem *Living for Jesus*.

Why not stand and join me in affirming again these flesh crucifying, life consecrating words. Decide today that you want to sow to the Spirit, denying and crucifying your flesh, and 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.

[1] Ray C. Stedman, <http://raystedman.org/romans1/0006.html>

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