

The Lakeview Lamp

"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." -Psalm 119:105
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Truth or Consequences

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In an effort to impress on others the need for doing what is right, an argument is often made from consequence. Unfortunately, this coin is often turned over by others who want to justify something on the basis of consequence. We desperately need to closely examine the positions we take and their rationale to see if they are based on truth or simply consequence.

Reasoning From Truth

"Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer"(**Acts 17:2-3**). This means taking the Scriptures, correctly explaining what they mean, and then making proper application to life.

This ability to reason from Scripture is one all of us must develop. It is what Peter referred to when he wrote that we must *"always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you"* (**1 Pet. 1:15**).

Reasoning From Consequence

I understand why reasoning from consequence is so appealing. The problem is that it is not a suitable replacement for reasoning from Scripture. *"For the word of God is living and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and it a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart"* (**Heb. 4:12**). Arguing from consequence doesn't pack this kind of punch.

“It’s Wrong Because of Negative Consequences”

The argument goes something like this: “Don’t smoke because you will get cancer,” “Don’t engage in fornication because you may get a disease or become pregnant,” and “Don’t lie because you’ll get caught.” Usually this is an effort to graphically illustrate the folly of certain behavior.

Most arguments from physical consequence list what are only possible consequences. People who want to sin tend to feel confident that negative physical consequences won’t happen to them (high odds seem to apply only to others). Great pains are taken to point out that negatives only “can” happen which doesn’t mean they certainly “will.” It then becomes an argument over the statistics, odds, and the foolishness of risk.

Although none of the physical consequences of sin are a pleasant prospect to face, none of them is as serious or deadly as the fact that they are sin. Physical consequences are possible (even probable at times), but spiritual consequences are always certain! While someone may argue that they won’t contract a disease or lose something of physical value, they cannot argue that their sin doesn’t violate Scripture, the very will of God for them.

I am not wholly against demonstrating the potential physical disasters of sin, but true repentance will not come until one realizes that God’s word defines sin, and every sin alienates us from our Creator. There will be no arguing with the spiritual consequence of sin: *“The wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23)*.

“It’s Not Wrong Because of No Negative Consequences”

Some argue: “Homosexuality isn’t hurting anyone,” “It hasn’t been proven that marijuana smoking causes cancer,” and “Lust is okay as long as it is not acted on.” This is the world’s justification for “safe sex” – fornication without physical negative consequences (disease or pregnancy). These arguments ignore the fact that there is always a negative spiritual consequence to sin. The problem is that, since the world walks by sight and not by faith, the lack of an immediate negative physical consequence for sin lulls sinners into thinking there is no consequence of evil. Christians, who in contrast to the world walk by faith, not by sight (**2 Cor.**

5:7), are not dependent on there always being a known negative physical consequence for sin. We know God has said it is wrong and that is enough. Sin violates God's revealed truth (**1 Jn. 3:4**) and we therefore confidently trust it is bad for us whether we see it or not.

“It’s Not Wrong Because of Positive Consequences”

We hear people argue things like: “This new method of church cooperation will accomplish so much for Christ,” “A new approach to worship will bring us closer to God,” and “My lie will protect me or others and the truth will cause unnecessary pain.” The world is quick to see that doing what is right in God's sight does not always bring instant gratification. In fact, righteousness can bring suffering while enduring everything from controlling personal passions to persecution. Sin is often seen as a way of alleviating the pressures of the flesh and carnal world. So, how can something be wrong when it feels so right? How can something be condemned when it helps so many people?

For something to be good it must first be right. Saying, “Let us do evil, that good may come,” is still doing evil and is flatly rejected in Scripture (**Rom. 3:8**). Something must first be good in the sight of God, not just in keeping with our own standards and sensibilities, or that of our society. This means we must define what is good by the word of God, for without this revelation we cannot know what God thinks is good or evil (**1 Cor. 2:9-12**). Surely we must admit that our personal feelings and standards may be tainted by things like pride, lust, and ignorance. This is why arguing from our perception of positive consequence falls so far short of establishing something to be good from God's revealed truth.

“I’m Willing to Accept the Consequences”

Those who make this statement tend to think only of physical consequences (and even then think they will probably never receive them). But the spiritual consequences of sin are unbearable: “*a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries*” (**Heb. 10:27**). Who, but Christ, can bear this?

“I will go in the strength of the Lord GOD.”— Psalm 71:16

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"This is the day the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it"
(Psalm 118:24).