

What Does the Bible Teach About the Law of Unintended Consequences?

Lesson Eleven, Thursday Indepth Bible
Class of the Trilacoochee church of Christ

“But I Didn’t Mean To...”

- We have no control over all of the consequences of our choices
 - Rom. 6:23 - “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”
 - “Sin will take you further than you intended to go, cost you more than you intended to pay, and keep you longer than you intended to stay.”

“But I Didn’t Mean To...”

- We are all connected and do not have the power to control or limit the effects of our sins on others
 - 2Sam. 11:1-18
 - David’s sin ruined the lives of: Bathsheba, her unborn child, Uriah the Hittite, Joab the captain, the future children of David, the entire nation would have to endure shame of their king’s sins as well as a civil war
- No man is an island unto himself.

“But I Didn’t Mean To...”

- What is the Law of Unintended Consequences?
- “Unintended consequences are outcomes that are not the ones foreseen and intended by a purposeful action. (*Robert K. Merton*)
 - Sun screens and the rise in skin cancer
 - CAFÉ Regulation
 - Treaty of Versailles of 1919
 - Email
 - Aspirin

“But I Didn’t Mean To...”

- The same Law of Unintended Consequences applies to sin.
 - Paul said, “The wages of sin is death.” But people do not sin because they want to die.
 - People sin to fulfill the desires of their flesh, or for pleasure, or for personal advantage; stealing, adultery, dishonesty

“But I Didn’t Mean To...”

- The Law of Unintended Consequences does not apply only to sin. It also applies to good works.
 - Some have inadvertently won others to God by their moral manner of life.
 - Saul's father sent him to Samuel to find donkeys.
 - Jesse sent David to the battle to check on his brothers.
- Good or bad choices, we do not have the power to control all outcomes.

Lot Didn't Mean For That To Happen

- Lot was only looking for a way to support his family and to ensure their future financial security.
 - Gen. 13:10-13 - “And Lot lifted his eyes and saw all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere (before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah) like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt as you go toward Zoar. 11 Then Lot chose for himself all the plain of Jordan, and Lot journeyed east. And they separated from each other. 12 Abram dwelt in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwelt in the cities of the plain and pitched his tent even as far as Sodom. 13 But the men of Sodom were exceedingly wicked and sinful against the LORD.”

Lot Didn't Mean For That To Happen

- At some point, Lot became aware that he made a choice that was creating trouble for him and his family
 - 2Peter 2:7-8 - “And delivered righteous Lot, who was oppressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked 8 for that righteous man, dwelling among them, tormented his righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing their lawless deeds”
- He decided to remain anyway, perhaps believing it would work out.

Lot Didn't Mean For That To Happen

- He was a moral man who chose to live among the most immoral people in the world
 - Gen. 19:4-9 - “Now before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, both old and young, all the people from every quarter, surrounded the house. 5 And they called to Lot and said to him, ‘Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us that we may know them carnally.’ 6 So Lot went out to them through the doorway, shut the door behind him, 7 and said, ‘Please, my brethren, do not do so wickedly! 8 See now, I have two daughters who have not known a man; please, let me bring them out to you, and you may do to them as you wish; only do nothing to these men, since this is the reason they have come under the shadow of my roof.’ 9 And they said, ‘Stand back!’ Then they said, ‘This one came in to stay here, and he keeps acting as a judge; now we will deal worse with you than with them.’ So they pressed hard against the man Lot, and came near to break down the door.”

Lot Didn't Mean For That To Happen

- He was only trying to provide for and protect his family in a fortified city. He did not intend for his choice to destroy his family.
- Provide for his family and financial security and provide a protective home for his family in the safety of a city -- these are good things for a man to do for his family.
- However, he didn't have to go to Sodom to do that.
- He could have trusted God Who would have provided those things far better than Lot could in Sodom.

Lot Didn't Mean For That To Happen

- We may be tempted to make choices in the name of popularity, convenience, or financial security, but at what catastrophic, unforeseen cost?
- Choices we make now can eternally affect our families for generations to come.

Why We Cannot Control All Outcomes

- Ignorance, the inability to know every detail and potentiality
- Errors in understanding the crisis or question
- Following plans and patterns that worked in the past, but do not apply to the current dilemma
- Immediate interests overriding long-term interests
- Self-defeating prophecy or the fear of some imagined consequence

Why Our Way Often Goes Wrong

- Confusion
- Conflict
- Cost
- Loss
- Regret
- Pain
- Discipline

Why Our Way Often Goes Wrong

- “Without reflection, we go blindly on our way, creating more unintended consequences, and failing to achieve anything useful.” (*Margaret J. Wheatley*)
- “Good intentions can often lead to unintended consequences.” (*Tim Walberg*)

What Do The Scriptures Say?

- We are accountable for our choices and all of the outcomes produced by our choices
 - Gal. 6:7-8 - “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.”
- We often deceive ourselves about our choices
 - Jer. 17:9-10 - “Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, burn incense to Baal, and walk after other gods whom you do not know, 10 and then come and stand before Me in this house which is called by My name, and say, We are delivered to do all these abominations?”

What Do The Scriptures Say?

- God has always held His people responsible for unintended consequences of their choices
 - Ex. 22:5-6 - “If a man causes a field or vineyard to be grazed, and lets loose his animal, and it feeds in another man's field, he shall make restitution from the best of his own field and the best of his own vineyard. 6 If fire breaks out and catches in thorns, so that stacked grain, standing grain, or the field is consumed, he who kindled the fire shall surely make restitution.”
- Bad choices made in compromise with evil by good people destroy their influence
 - Prov. 25:26 - “A righteous man who falters before the wicked Is like a murky spring and a polluted well.”

What Do The Scriptures Say?

- We overlook the pain caused by our unintended consequences, but are enraged by the unintended consequences of others
 - 2Sam. 12:1-14
- Often, we must live with the pain of unintended consequences
 - Matt. 27:3-5 - “Then Judas, His betrayer, seeing that He had been condemned, was remorseful and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, 4 saying, I have sinned by betraying innocent blood. And they said, What is that to us? You see to it! 5 Then he threw down the pieces of silver in the temple and departed, and went and hanged himself.”

What Do The Scriptures Say?

- Our unintended consequences can hurt multitudes in generations to come
 - 1Kings 11:9-11 - So the LORD became angry with Solomon, because his heart had turned from the LORD God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice, 10 and had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods; but he did not keep what the LORD had commanded. 11 Therefore the LORD said to Solomon, Because you have done this, and have not kept My covenant and My statutes, which I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom away from you and give it to your servant.
- Often, others are forced to pay for our unintended consequences
 - Jonah 1:1-17

What Do The Scriptures Say?

- It is possible that the unintended consequences of our choices can impact the world
 - Rom. 5:12 - “Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned”
 - Gen. 3:14-17 - “So the LORD God said to the serpent: Because you have done this, You are cursed more than all cattle, And more than every beast of the field; On your belly you shall go, And you shall eat dust All the days of your life. 15 And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel. 16 To the woman He said: I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception; In pain you shall bring forth children; Your desire shall be for your husband, And he shall rule over you. 17 Then to Adam He said, Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying, You shall not eat of it: Cursed is the ground for your sake; In toil you shall eat of it All the days of your life.”

What Do The Scriptures Say?

- Our unintended consequences can affect God's influence through us in this world
 - 1John 1:10 - "If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us."
- It is better to live with a little loss in this world than to deal with long term unintended consequences
 - Mark 9:43 - "If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed, rather than having two hands, to go to hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched."

**We are free to choose as we
will, but we will never be
free from the consequences
of our choices.**