



# The Tri-Cities Edifier

Volume 9

June 26, 2022

No. 26

## Trials and Character

Jeff Himmel

**“...we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character...” (Romans 5:3-4).**

For disciples of Christ, it's heartening to know that persevering in tribulation yields proven character — “a quality of life and character that has been tempered and purified and demonstrated to be pleasing to God” (Jack Cottrell). Marvin Vincent called it “tried integrity.” As James wrote, “Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing” (1:2-4).

However...“A man must be careful. His trials and tribulations may be the result of his own foolishness; if this is the case, his tribulations may not result in proven character at all!” (Gareth Reese).

Many hardships have multiple, complex causes that are largely beyond our control; but some troubles we may bring directly on ourselves through foolishness and sin. True, we can learn and grow even from these. But not everyone does. Many choose instead to blame it all on someone or something else. They keep on making the same bad choices, reaping the same bad consequences, and offering the same bad excuses. They manage to grow in nothing but their bitterness and their capacity for blame-shifting. Worse, some act as if there is something inherently noble about all their self-inflicted suffering, even as they refuse to acknowledge, much less change, the thinking and behavior that keep the whole sad cycle stuck on repeat.

Not all suffering is necessarily sanctified. George Mark Elliott warned, “Sometimes when a man thinks he is wearing a martyr's crown, he really is wearing a fool's cap!” And God warns, “Make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler; but if anyone suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name” (1 Peter 4:15-16; cf. 2:20). 10/03/21 - *The Plant City Planter*

## 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” (Gen. 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 the Lord. 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 Pro. 22:15) has been set aside by parents and schools. Athletes, stars and politicians are seen to 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, was held accountable for disobedience (Number 20). Samson, a judge chosen by God, maintained supernatural strength as long as he followed God's directions. However, God allowed Samson to suffer the consequences of foolish behavior: the Philistines cut his hair, blinded and imprisoned him. Ultimately Samson gained victory over himself and over his enemies; God did not abandon Samson but answered his prayer.

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, bar-hopping, gossip, and bitterness find their way into churches. Behavior that is plainly un-Christian is ignored while the "positive" is accentuated. By overlooking sin, the consequences of sin are not seen or felt. Paul rebuked the Corinthian church for this (1 Cor. 5:1-5). They accepted an adulterer as a faithful brother. 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 Cor. 2:3-9). The renewal of Christian fellowship was crucial in helping this brother remain faithful. It remains the same today. We can not live without consequences. Some believe, because God does not punish sin immediately, He will not punish it at all. This is a serious mistake. In this life we might evade many bad consequences. However, in judgment all will be made right. Everyone will stand before God to be judged based on the things we have done on earth (2 Cor. 5:10). Don't buy into the idea of a culture with no consequences, for there is no such place in existence.