

EQUIPPING THE SAINTS

“...FOR THE EQUIPPING OF THE SAINTS FOR THE WORK OF SERVICE...” ~ EPHESIANS 4:12

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UNDERSTANDING THE CONSEQUENCES

(EXODUS 34:11–17)

By Andrew Dow

Consequences accompany everything we do. While we may think of consequences as inherently negative, they are not; they can be positive or negative. Unfortunately, foreseeing the consequences of any given action can be difficult. As a result, many people act on impulse without considering what the final outcome will be.

This shortsightedness was a problem for Israelites. Shortly after God made a covenant with the children of Israel, they constructed a golden calf and worshipped it as if it were God (Exo 32:1–6). This was after God had clearly commanded, “**You shall not make for yourself an idol...**” (Exo 20:4). In an effort to dissuade the Israelites from committing this sin again, God said, “**Be sure to observe what I am commanding you this day.... You shall make for yourself no molten gods**” (Exo 34:11–17). Israel clearly saw nothing wrong with molten gods. So, God clearly lays out the consequences of disobeying Him.

The Commands of God

When the Lord renewed His covenant with Israel, He was primarily concerned with obedience: “**Be sure to observe what I am commanding you this day**” (Exo 34:11). The Lord went on to foretell how He would be responsible for driving out the pagan nations from before

them. These nations would only be a distant memory after the Lord destroyed them, but they posed a threat to the Israelites. Therefore, God gave two commands.

First, God instructed, **“watch yourself that you make no covenant with the inhabitants of the land into which you are going...”** (Exo 34:12). Under no circumstances were the Israelites to make a covenant with these nations. This is a simple command, but is perhaps contrary to human reason. Despite what may seem logical, God demands that no covenants be made.

Second, God said, **“you are to tear down their altars and smash their sacred pillars and cut down their Asherim”** (Exo 34:13). Another simple command. Do not, under any circumstance, adopt the inhabitants’ religious practices. There was to be nothing left of their idols and rituals in the promised land.

Before we go further, God gives the Israelites a very clear reason why they should obey both of these commands: **“For you shall not worship any other god, for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God”** (Exo 34:14). They should have obeyed because the God of Heaven told them to obey! This should be enough. However, the people had already ignored the command of the Lord once by constructing the golden calf.

Can’t you just imagine the Israelites looking at these two commands from God and saying, *“We know you commanded these things, but why can’t we make covenants with the people? Why must we completely destroy their idols?”* After all, allies could be valuable. It could be in their best interests to keep some of the inhabitants happy with them, rather than destroying their

way of worship. Anticipating these kinds of questions, God spells out very clearly what the consequences would be if Israel disregarded these instructions.

The Consequences of Disobedience

God explains that, if Israel makes a covenant with the inhabitants, **“they would play the harlot with their gods and sacrifice to their gods, and someone might invite you to eat of his sacrifice, and you might take some of his daughters for your sons, and his daughters might play the harlot with their gods and cause your sons to also to play the harlot with their gods”** (Exo 34:15–16).

Notice the sequence of events God lays out. If Israel made a covenant with the Canaanites, they would be bound to honor it and the idol worship would continue in the land. God suggests that **“someone might invite you to eat of his sacrifice”** (Exo 34:15b). What’s the danger in accepting this kind gesture? God continues, **“You might take some of his daughters for your sons”** (Exo 34:16a). Could intermarrying be so bad? **“His daughters,”** God concludes, **“might ... cause your sons to play the harlot with their gods”** (Exo 34:16b).

The choice to disobey God is much more than a poor decision. It’s the beginning of a perpetual cycle into idolatry. Even though they were not immediately apparent to the Israelites, the consequences were serious. Therefore, **“you shall make for yourself no molten gods”** (Exo 34:17).

Application and Conclusion

We, as God’s New Covenant people, must realize that God demands holiness of us (2 Tim 2:4; 1 Pet 1:16; 2:9). We

may convince ourselves of reasons to hold onto friends, jobs, or relationships that tie us to the world. But think of the consequences. Do they bring us closer to or lead us away from God? Realize that God gives this (and other) commands for our benefit—to avoid the consequences!

After Israel entered the promised land, the Gibeonites tricked them into making a covenant (Josh 9:3–6). Despite God’s explicit warning in Exodus 34, **“The men of Israel ... did not ask for the counsel of the Lord. Joshua made peace with them and made a covenant with them, to let them live”** (Josh 9:14–15). Just as God predicted, the idolatry of Gibeon plagued Israel and ultimately led them to captivity. Brethren, beware of the consequences of sin!

NOTES: _____

AM LESSON:
What Does
“Church” Mean?

PM LESSON:
Divisions in the Church
(1 Corinthians 5)

“GO THEREFORE AND MAKE DISCIPLES...”
(MATTHEW 28:19-20)