

The new pastor said the benediction. He went to the back door to shake hands after the service. This church had three aisles with doors at end of each. Only a handful of people came down the center aisle and shook his hand. Everyone else went out one of the side back doors. He asked an elder what was going on. The elder said, “You haven’t heard about the butter then.” “The butter?” the pastor replied.

Then the elder shared. Many years ago there was a church meal and Mary had brought some of her famous hand-churned butter. She left it at the church. Alice was cleaning up and found the butter. She couldn’t get a hold of Mary and didn’t want it to go rancid so took it home and put it in her fridge. When Mary and Alice talked, Mary said she would like her butter back. When Alice brought the butter back, Mary accused her of trying to take her butter saying that she was jealous. Alice felt wrongly accused. That is where it began. Families took sides, literally in the church and would exit from separate doors. The disagreement died with Mary and Alice, but the people were so used to leaving from different doors, it continued. New members simply joined in the ongoing practice. More than thirty years later one disagreement had a lasting negative impact.

The distress of sin continues beyond the original sin, even years after. We have seen David’s sin. We have seen how he was made aware of it. We have seen his confession. Consequences were prophesied for his sin, though forgiveness was given. The judgment for his sin was violence, dissension, and humiliation. The result of forgiveness was life.

David lived, but his sin and how it was handled set patterns that continued. There are consequences of individual sin and wrong actions by a church. They may be felt on various levels for years.

We see David’s oldest son Amnon shaped by David’s sin. He emulated David’s sin of lust. He raped his sister. We see David’s son Absalom shaped by David’s sin. He emulated David’s fixing a problem by killing someone. When David did nothing, Absalom had others kill his brother Amnon. Absalom also emulated David’s style of arrogant taking. Later he took the throne from his father. David was forced to fight him.

When we become aware of our sin, it may be easy to ask for forgiveness. We think that doing so will forestall consequences and make everything right. But what do we do when the consequences intensify or keep coming? Do we turn towards God for redemption or away in anger? Or are we paralyzed by guilt and indecision?

Forgiveness does not wipe away the consequence of sin but reconnects us to God who is the only one who can deal with sin. David confessed sin, but did not turn to God in the midst of sin's consequences. The church did not turn to God to deal with their disconnection. The distress of sin multiplied.

In the case of Amnon, David overlooked sin just as he did his own. I think he was paralyzed by his own guilt. He couldn't deal with punishing Amnon for a sin he himself had committed. Then when Absalom killed Amnon, David turns away in anger and ignored Absalom who fled. Probably thinking if he is not around I don't have to deal with punishing him for a sin I have committed that happened because I didn't deal with Amnon's sin. David let sin continue to have power.

John had been doing drugs. He couldn't tell his parents on his own. So the pastor and I told his parents he was doing drugs. They didn't want to hear it. They focused their anger on the church, ignoring their son's needs. They stepped back from their involvement in the church, made personal accusations. Things did not end well. John overdosed, there was some brain damage.

It seems easiest to ignore the consequences of sin. We don't want to face potential pain or rejection in the short term. This is because we are focused on ourselves. Yet the power of sin does not fade away when we don't deal with it. It grows.

David could have asked God how to handle Amnon's sin. He could have forgiven Amnon and dealt with the painful tension in his own family. He could have condemned Amnon and dealt with the consequences. Instead, David reluctantly brought Absalom back but continued to ignore him. David's self-focus exacerbated by his parental disarray caused him to be paralyzed with indecision. Things did not end well. Eventually Absalom rebelled against David and David was forced to flee.

The consequences of sin continued. David fought for his throne. Twenty thousand of his people died in the ensuing battle. However David did not want his son the leader of the rebellion killed. David could not control what happened. Absalom got caught in a tree. David's general and his armor-bearers killed Absalom, against the king's orders.

David heard what happened and dissolved in grief. He went to a private, yet public place, above the gate to the city, and cried out in anguish. "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!"

Sin and its consequences may effect who we become. But it doesn't have to be a hopeless, despairing end that we come to. We see David

paralyzed by guilt and grief, the consequences of his sin. David cannot bear Absalom's death. David cannot bear his own guilt. David cannot figure out how to handle the situation except by wishing he could have borne the price for Absalom's rebellion, that he would have died instead of Absalom.

God does not save us out of the consequences of sin. God does not save us from the consequences of sin. God saves us in the midst of the consequences of sin. Only God can bear all the cost of sin. We all need the forgiveness and redemption for our sins accomplished in Jesus' life death and resurrection. God in Jesus Christ takes our sin and offers hope to us in the midst of the consequences of sin.

My brother faced the consequences of 'D' in 9th grade. He didn't get into his first choice college, the only one he originally applied to. Faced with a minor crisis. He didn't let that sin have power. He applied to another college. He did not stay paralyzed in feeling sorry for himself. He listened for God not his bitterness. In the college he entered, his faith and academics were strengthened and now he is a professor.

We don't have to let sin and its consequences continue to have power. Even after turning to God for forgiveness, we can continue to seek God for healing, for guidance in how to handle what is going on in life.

Yes we have sinned. We need to deal with sin. Instead of letting sin have power and control over us, embrace the forgiveness God offers. We can be forgiven and still second-guess our actions and face consequences we don't know how to handle. Turn and listen for the Lord each day for how to live. God brings life and newness in the midst of the consequences of sin. Our hope is in the Lord for redemption. Will we turn and be healed? Will we listen? Let us listen now for what God is asking us to do to deal with a sin he has revealed to us or what he is asking us to do in the midst of the consequences for a long past sin.