

Every Action Has A Reaction

Positive and Negative Reactions

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There is very much in this world that almost seems as though it is designed to make a person think that what he is, and what he does, and what he thinks, is of no account. We get to the place where we begin to think as though, "Well, it really doesn't matter whether I live or die." We very frequently feel as though we are lost in the shuffle. We are just a nameless, faceless blob in the teeming billions of people on this earth.

It is so difficult to keep track of people these days that numbers seem to simplify matters. There are so many people involved in so many things, and so many names that are similar, that we individually have been relegated (here in the United States anyway) to nothing more than a number. For example, when I was eighteen years old, I applied for a Social Security number. Ever since that time, almost every document (every paper, it seems) that I sign which has some kind of legal twist to it, I have to put my personal Social Security number on there. So, I am not John W. Ritenbaugh any more. I am that number!

About the same time, just as I turned eighteen years old (because at that time we had to register for the draft), I became another number—my draft number. This one was significant because, for those who could read the "code," it showed that I lived in the state of Pennsylvania and that I fell under a particular draft board there. It also showed that I was born in 1932, and the individual number that I was personally (in that specific draft board).

Then, when I was a little bit over nineteen years old, I went to work for United States Steel as a laborer. When I got my job there, I became another number. I kept that number for about six months; and then I applied for another job—working for U.S. Steel as an apprentice welder—and my number changed.

When I was hired full time by the Work in 1968, I became another number. And I received a Plain Truth index number way back in 1959, when my wife and I first began to hear the [World Tomorrow] program and also to get literature. And now, here in the Church of the Great God, I have a new and totally different number. So my life has involved a series of numbers.

We are dealing with numbers all the time. You have credit card numbers, license plates numbers, driver's license numbers, telephone numbers; and each one of them identifies **you!** But, hey, I am more than a number! I am a person. I have personality. I have character. I do things with my life. I am not just something that is part 'n parcel of something that has no face or character. Am I having any impact at all? Does what I do count? Does it make any difference? Seemingly, with the numbers, it does not.

We are stunned, I think, by the numbers that we hear—until we become almost inured to the impact that maybe they ought to have. Almost every day now, you hear something about the size of the debt of the United States. We know that it exceeds four trillion dollars, and it seems as though four trillion dollars has almost no significance.

We also understand, do we not, that personal indebtedness is also in excess of four trillion dollars. Do you realize that the debt in the United States is so great that the interest payments alone this year on the Federal Debt are larger than the entire Federal Budget was in 1960, whenever we had our last budget surplus here in the United States?

As we move out of this area and into another area, right now the league championship series are taking place in baseball, prior to the World Series. I happened to think of this and I thought that I would pass it on to you.

It is generally conceded in the world of sports that the highest individual achievement in all of sports is for a man to have a batting average in excess of .400 over the entirety of the season. In almost 125 years of professional baseball, fewer than 10 men have ever done this. One man did it twice. And it has not occurred since 1941. (I believe that Ted Williams was the last one

to do it.) Do you know why it is so difficult for someone to do this? It is because there are so many tiny little variables when it comes to hitting a baseball.

Now, consider this: The pitcher is standing 60 feet 6 inches away from the batter. He is elevated 15 inches above home plate. So the pitcher is pitching the ball at somewhere between 60 and 100 miles per hour (good round figures there), downhill, at a batter who is standing there and trying to aim at a 3-inch ball and hit it with a round 3-inch bat. It is no wonder so many of them strike out.

In addition to that, we have to consider that there is not only the variation in speed (between 60-100 mph) but the ball is not coming in at a straight angle. Very frequently the ball is curving—sometimes in a gentle arch, and at other times it seems to dart one way or another just about the time that it gets to the batter. It will go off to one side, or the other, or down. And if you saw the ineptitude last night of the Milwaukee Braves, trying to hit that knuckle ball, you can understand their frustration because that ball will even go *up* on its way in. It seems to be uncontrolled.

And so here we have a man, practically defenseless there, with the ball coming in at different speeds and different angles. In addition to that, the ball never arrives at the same place—because sometimes it is higher, sometimes it is lower, sometimes it is right in the middle. Sometimes it is in close to the batter, other times it is out away from the batter. Over the entirety of the season, it is getting to be even rare for a batter to hit .300. And this year the highest season average, I believe, was in the American League. The man hit about .340. In the National League, I think the high was .331 over the entirety of the season.

One more thing I need to add here, and that is that positioned strategically out on the field are 9 men. So that even if you do make contact with the ball, it is very likely that one of those men is going to be in position to either catch it, or pick it up off the ground and throw it to the first baseman; and you are out anyway, even though you made contact.

The difference between a home run and an ordinary fly ball is a fraction of an inch. This 3-inch-circumference ball has to come in contact with a 3-inch-

circumference bat that tapers down until it is about 1 inch in diameter at the handle. And it has to meet it perfectly, or you get nothing more than a little pop fly that a fielder handles easily. And the difference between the home run and an ordinary out is probably sometimes around 1,000th of an inch.

You ought to be able to begin to see a little bit about where I am headed. That is, that *little things make a great difference*. When we look at the creation of God, the figures are equally staggering. And even when we look at earth's nearest neighbor, the moon—it is 240,000 miles away from the earth. That is 10 times the difference around the circumference of the earth. But walking at 3 mph, do you know how long it would take you to get there? It would take you 80,000 hours to walk to the moon at 3 mph. Let us make that a little more manageable. It would take you 3,333 and 1/3 days—or, another way of putting it would be 9 years and 1 month—to get there, walking 24 hours a day. If you left today, you would arrive there mid-November, 2001.

If you only put in 8-hour days (like we are want to do here in the United States), it would take you 27 years and 3 months to get there. And if you left today, you would not arrive until mid-January, 2020. If you walked with a 24-inch stride, it would take you 633,600,000 steps. **But** if at any point in the journey you decided that you were not going to take the next 24-inch step, then you would **never** get there. One 24-inch step! Do little things make a difference?

Some of you came here by airplane. Some of you drove. Those of you who were driving, if at any point you made one little wrong turn and did not correct it, you would have never gotten here. All it takes is one wrong turn, and you do not get here. If the pilot had been off just 1 or 2 degrees when he left Los Angeles, and instead of coming out at Dallas or wherever it was you changed, he would have never gotten to Dallas because he would have passed it either to the right or the left. One way or another, one little degree—by the time you travel 1,500 miles, that one little degree would stretch out into miles and miles and miles away. And you would have missed Dallas.

Even insignificant 'nothing' human beings (who are nothing more than a number, and who think that we do not count), yet we are *part of processes*

that are begun; and we are part of events that bring to completion the things that we are involved with. And we have a very large part in determining *the direction* and *the quality* of an event, or a thing. It is the infinite amount of care by many people taking care of the thousands of details that makes a Rolls Royce a Rolls Royce. Otherwise, it would be something else.

Any choir director knows that the overall quality of what is produced is determined by the quality of the individual singers and their desire to blend for the overall good of the whole. We know this especially well in terms of mechanical things. Most of us have watches on, and most of those watches are quartz crystal watches. But all you have to do is take out one tiny little microscopic part, and the thing does not work! If you took off one of those skinny little hands, you would either know what minute it is but not what hour, or you would know what hour it is but not what minute. So, where would you be? One tiny little thing!

Now, these things are clearly illustrated in the world of mechanical things, but we do not always understand...and sometimes, even if we do understand, we tend to disregard this in relation to living organisms. We know that God has built safeguards and a certain amount of adaptability in living things. But there are limits! And what we do in reference to these living things is exceedingly important regardless of us only being one person.

Mankind is learning, by leaps and bounds, that he is an integral part of the web of life; and what he does to the earth and its resources does make a difference in the quality of life for ourselves and our posterity. And there are people now wondering whether there is going to be much left for our children and grandchildren to live on, because of what mankind has done through the years.

There are two principles that are at work on this earth among living things that are important to this sermon. The one is that, in the reproductive process, there is a powerful tendency towards increase. We will deal with this a little more fully later, but simple observation will show you the truth of this premise. Those of you who garden, all you have to do is know that you plow things, you sow your seeds, and the first thing you know there are weeds all over the place. They just seem to spring up magically.

All the people on earth came from two people. Do you see what I mean? In the reproductive processes, there is a powerful tendency towards increase! There are those who feel that it is entirely possible that as Adam and Eve were the couple created from which all people sprang, then it is entirely possible that God, in the beginning, only created Genesis kinds. Those Genesis kinds were in the Garden of Eden. And all vegetation and all animal life sprang from what was originally only there. Then, through reproduction, they spread out over the earth.

There is some justification to this, because is that not what happened when the Flood occurred? God brought these animals to the ark, and there were only the pairs from which all animal life spread after that. That is the one principle. That is, the powerful tendency towards increase in the reproductive processes of life on this earth.

The second one is clearly established by Galatians 6:7-8; and that is that whatever a man sows, that shall he also reap. It is an illustration of the "kind after kind" principle. One cannot get cabbage from Brussels sprout seeds, even though they look somewhat like each other. (I do not mean the seeds look alike, but the fruit.) Cabbage is a lot bigger. Brussels sprouts are just about an inch in diameter. But, when you look at them, they look very similar. But if you plant Brussels sprout seeds, you are not going to get cabbages. And when you plant radishes, you are not going to get carrots. Even though seeds may look similar to one another, they are not going to produce one another. Whatever a person sows, that he is also going to reap.

If you planted corn and you got pumpkins, you would be surprised, would you not? By the same token, if you *gossip* about something that is going on in the congregation to those who are your brethren and your friends, you should not be surprised at all if you found out, after a while, that there was nobody who trusted you; and that there was a dearth of friends in your relationships—because these two principles are at work among living things. So, what we have here is that *every action has its result*; and every result will tend to be *like that which was sown*.

Matthew 7:16-18 You shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thorn-bushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit.

Now you put these principles together: (1) *the tendency towards increase* together with (2) *whatever is sown will also be reaped*. It then means that no matter what a person sows—unless somebody or something intervenes and interrupts the cycle—more will be produced than was sown.

Living according to Christian standards, or morals and ethics, can be **faked** for a while. Consider these verses. "Every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit." Christian standards, and morals, and ethics can be faked for a while. But no matter how guarded a person is, the fruits produced will betray him. That principle that Jesus gave was also given in the Old Testament by Moses, in Numbers 32:23, where Moses said you can "be sure your sin will find you out."

Bitterness, divisiveness, envy, jealousy, lethargy will eventually show. How much [of the fruit] will be produced I do not know, because there are too many variables involved to accurately show. But I do know these principles that I have already given you. Because of the principle of increase over what was originally sown—whether good or evil—there is every likelihood that *more is going to be produced than was sown*.

Matthew 13:3-9 Then He spoke many things to them in parables, saying: "Behold, a sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell by the wayside; and the birds came and devoured them. Some fell on stony places, where they did not have much earth; and they immediately sprang up because they had no depth of earth. But when the sun was up they were scorched, and because they had no root they withered away. And some fell among thorns, and the

thorns sprang up and choked them. But others fell on good ground and yielded a crop: some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!"

Shown in the parable is that, in each case, there was a sowing. Seed was put out on the ground, but **variables** came into play that tended to *increase* or *decrease* what was sown. Variables in terms of the literal seed (as here) would be weather. When seed hits the ground, the weather immediately is going to impact on it. If rain comes, it is likely that the shell or husk of that seed is going to soften; and it is going to begin to germinate and take root in the soil. If it does not rain, then the sun is going to be a factor; and if the sun is too hot, it is very likely that the seed is just going to bake there on the ground. Even if it does germinate, it is going to be very quickly scorched.

In addition to that, a seed can germinate and begin to take root and, if there is rain at just the right time and conditions are right, that variable is being met that will give a great deal of increase; and everything will be okay. But, on the other hand, maybe the rain comes at the right time; but it comes in the wrong amount. And instead of just getting enough to keep the soil moist, it comes in "a toad-strangler" and there is a flood; and maybe the seed is even washed away. Or, if it does begin to germinate and take root, it actually drowns—because you have too much water.

Do you begin to see the point here, in regards to this? There are all kinds of variables that will impact upon how much is going to be produced. In addition to the weather, there are things like insects. The thing takes root and seems to be a very healthy plant. Then a bug comes along (a grasshopper, or locust, or something like that) and it bites it off; and that is the end of it. Or the rabbits come out and get it, or the deer come into the field and get it. They just love those tender, juicy morsels that are right there.

And so there are variables at play. There might be viruses, or moles, or parasites in the soil. The soil condition may not be good, even though there is good seed. Or the soil condition may be good, and you have bad seed. In addition to that, you have birds that are flying around. And you throw good seed on good soil; and the birds come, and they snatch it all up. So even though everything seemed to be perfect, the birds got it.

Now what happens whenever you plant, let us say, an apple seed? The United States had "Johnny Appleseed" going around and throwing apples on the ground. Those things would rot, and the apple seeds would germinate and begin to take root. In time, mature trees appeared—which, in turn, produced one apple? No. A mature tree produces *many* apples. There is that principle of increase. Not only does it produce many apples in any growing season, the tree may live and produce after that another 25 or 30 years of its productive life. And bushels upon bushels upon bushels of apples are produced by that one tree.

The apple tree is rooted there, but its fruit is not rooted there. And so, what happens? Birds come along. They see the apple rotting on the ground, and they start pecking away. They take an apple seed into their beak. It goes down into their gullet, and they fly off. Then what happens? They fly off somewhere else. They defecate the seed out. It hits the ground. And now we have another apple tree beginning to take root—miles and miles and miles away from the point of origin.

Are you beginning to see what is happening here? This is the way the earth became crowded with people. And it is possibly the way that the earth became forested all over it and with grass all over it. God depended upon this natural process that He built right into His laws, so that the earth would become a fit inhabitable place for us to live. He took advantage, then, of the principle of increase. So the cycle keeps repeating itself over and over again—unless another variable intervenes and stops the process (or, the cycle).

Let us apply this to a moral and spiritual situation. Suppose somebody comes along and they tell you, "Oh, man, have I got a wonderful, juicy piece of information for you about so-and-so." *Ding!* The antenna goes up; and it is almost impossible to resist what is going to come into your mind, and feed our vanity or whatever it is there. So this person then plants a choice morsel of gossip right in your ear. If your ear (your mind, your life) is "fertile ground" and you can hardly keep this thing contained within you, it is almost impossible to describe how much damage can be done.

Just suppose that you pass this on to ten people. Then, in turn, each one of these people (also being "fertile ground") passes it on to ten more; and each

of those pass it on to ten more. Do you realize that in three cycles—like I have just described here—1,000 people are involved in a sin! It is the leavening effect, the principle of increase. Whatever is sown. . . Tremendous devastation! What a fertilizer of *disharmony* and *disunity* such a thing can be!

One reason why this happens is because the person, or the persons, who passed this on are either ignorant of these principles or they do not see that they are important cogs in the machinery of an organism—a living Body, a church. They have been taught all their life, "I'm just a number." "I'm just a faceless blob." "Get out of here, kid." "Who are you?"

Let us go back a little bit further, this time to II Timothy 2. Paul, in his last letter to Timothy, says:

II Timothy 2:16-17 But shun profane and idle [vain] babblings, for they will increase to more ungodliness. And their message will spread like cancer. Hymenaeus and Philetus are of this sort.

It is interesting that the *New English Bible* translates that one phrase "the infection of their teaching will spread like gangrene." Now, why is that true? It is true because in human nature there is no natural impediment to sin. Romans 8:6 shows this very clearly, because this same apostle said:

Romans 8:6 To be carnally minded is death. . .

That is what carnality produces. And it produces it because there is no repentance possible; there is no impediment to sin in carnality, in human nature. All that human nature can produce is **death!** But all along the way, before it finally produces the death, it *infects* others with the death syndrome.

II Timothy 3:13 But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived.

Brethren, I submit to you that men are not getting any better. You know what it says at the beginning of this chapter. When the time of the end comes, it is going to be *perilous* —because men are lovers of their own selves. It is not getting better and better out there, despite what the evolutionists and all of

the social scientists say. They are confusing advancements in technology with advancements in human behavior. Actually, it is abundantly clear from our newspapers and newscasts everyday on radio and television that just the opposite is taking place. As man advances technologically, he is going downhill spiritually, morally, and ethically. It is written all over the place and obvious to see, despite the PhDs that these men have behind their names.

What God is doing here is witnessing to a tendency towards **progressive degeneration**. We are adding this to the principle of increase. We began with the principle of increase in living organisms—such as trees, the flora and the fauna. There is that principle working all the time in the natural reproductive cycle. Now we have shifted a little bit; and we are into the area of moral, and ethical, and spiritual considerations—behavior, ideas, beliefs, and attitudes. And what God is saying is that, because of human nature, there is the tendency to increase; but the tendency to increase is degenerative—not generative! And so the increase tends to be bad, rather than good.

That is the kind of world we live in. That is the way we are whenever God calls us and begins to convert us. What we have to do is begin to fight against these two natural laws that are working against us, seemingly all the time. We must be aware that this process is there, and take advantage of the knowledge (the truth) that God has given to us, and fight against it tooth and toenail. If we do not, we are going to go backwards.

Does not Peter say that if a person gives up on the truth of God and turns back, the latter end is worse than the former (what he began with)? It is like a pig returning to its wallow, or a dog to its own vomit. We get the idea, do we not? The tendency is to **degenerate** morally, ethically—not to get better. And we have to be aware that this principle is at work.

There are two related reasons why this occurs. The one is that God warns us in His Word that sin has a drug-like addictive quality in that the sense of relief or satisfaction or pleasure that comes from sinning is not lasting. The satisfying feeling that one gets as a result of sin only lasts a little while. Paul talked about "the pleasures of sin." So God admits that there is a pleasure there. There is something that fills a void that is there, within us. But it does not last. And sin has an addictive quality. So one has to *go deeper and*

deeper into perversion in order to get the same sense of satisfaction that formerly we had because of just a little bit of sin.

The other principle is closely related. That is that sometimes people will not go deeper and deeper into perversion. Rather, what they will do is that they will simply *sin more and more frequently*. That is, the same sin—over and over and over again. So here is that principle of increase. Instead of it being cut off, we do it more frequently because of this drug-like addictive quality. And so God says, does He not, about the "wine of the wrath of her fornications." He is telling you that her sin of fornication is just like drinking wine. There is a sense of stimulation and satisfaction, but it is very quickly followed by *the need to have more* .

Because of this tendency to increase, what happens in society? Gradually, over one's life, the barriers to sin in each individual begin to come down. It does not happen overnight. Those of you who are my age—let us say up in your 40s, 50s, and 60s, especially those who lived in the time of the '30s and '40s and even up into the mid-'50s—the mid-'50s was almost like a turning point. It was almost like a signal. When Buddy Holly came on with "Rock," it was like somebody turned on the switch and said, "This is the beginning of the great moral degeneration of the United States of America."

Now we had words and actions to go with the tremendous influence of a beat that grabbed the person's attention. And, as you know, **the beat** kept getting more and more intense as time went on. I do not mean to give anybody the impression that Americans were [previously] pure or anything like that. But there is such a difference, young people. You can hardly believe the difference in behavior and social standards between the '30s and '40s and the '90s. The difference is almost incredible, almost unbelievable.

This did not happen overnight. It happened gradually. Things have been going down hill. And so what happens during that? The "acceptable behavior" in society becomes more and more acceptable to the individual. And this sets you and me up for a very deceitful and disturbing possibility. As a way of illustrating this, suppose that 20 years ago you were 50% more "righteous" than your neighbors. Now, here it is 20 years later, you are still 50% more "righteous" than society. Because the standards have gone down,

do you realize that you have actually degenerated in your conduct? Things that you formerly would NOT have permitted yourself to do, you now do—not even thinking. It has become "*acceptable behavior*." Twenty years ago, you never would have touched it. It is that sneaky!

People, who do not know what sin is, can call evil "good" and good "evil" to the place where what God describes in Genesis 6:5 is reached. That is, where every imagination of the heart was only evil continually; and yet it is "acceptable behavior" in society. "*Everybody's doing it! What's wrong with it?*" And mankind would never know, until the iniquity becomes so full and God says, "The land vomits them out." In other words, what happens **literally** is that the land will no longer support life. And so people have to leave if they are going to continue to live. And that is the direction the United States is going in.

You can see other areas of the world where that principle is very well advanced. How much life does the Sahara Desert support? Men did that to the Sahara Desert! That thing used to be covered with huge, primeval forests. The Romans are primarily responsible, because the Romans cut the trees down to build Rome. Now it seems that North Africa has virtually vomited out its inhabitants. It will not support life anymore. And that desert is growing at the rate of 15 or 20 miles per year—moving into Central Africa.

What man *does* has an effect. And what man *does* has a tendency to increase. Things grow worse. And we can see, as the Bible says, that the fruit is there; and things get only more evil continually.

Let us go back to Ezekiel 8, and we will see a vision that Ezekiel was given while he was a captive in apparently what was like a concentration camp situation. We will see this principle that we have had subtly impressed upon us—that what we *do* does not matter at all. You see yourself as a non-entity, and just a nameless, faceless number. This frequently plays on us in terms of sin, in that we feel that, "What I do, in terms of sin, isn't going to matter all that much. I can do it in my own little corner here. I can do it in my house. Nobody sees it, because I have the walls shielding me. Or maybe I can do it under the dark and cover of night, and nobody sees what is going on."

Does it even matter whether anybody sees? This is the frightening thing about these principles that I am telling you about. God's laws work in such a way that it does not matter even whether He sees it. I am sure that He does; but, you see, the **natural laws are at work**—moving in a certain direction. And when we operate those laws, they are going to—by nature—take our action in that direction. And in most cases the action will tend to increase, and it will produce the same thing that began the action.

Here in Ezekiel 8, we find Ezekiel is in Babylon; and he is holding a meeting with the elders (as it says in verse 1). Then (in verse 2), suddenly a hand appeared and took him by a lock of hair on his head, and picked him up and transported him—in vision—all the way to Jerusalem. So he began to see things. In verses 8 and 9, he was told to dig into a wall. He had done it. Then he was told to go in and see the wicked abominations "which they are doing there." So he did go in, and he says "every sort of creeping thing, abominable beasts, and all the idols of the house of Israel, portrayed all around on the walls."

Ezekiel 8:12 Then He [God] said to me [Ezekiel], "son of man, have you seen what the elders of the house of Israel do in the dark, every man in the room of his idols? For they say, 'The LORD does not see us, the LORD has forsaken the land.'"

This is a spiritual mind at an exceedingly low level. It does not believe that God is aware of what is going on in His creation. "Because I'm just such a small entity here, He surely couldn't be concerned about what is going on in my life. And what I do doesn't even matter! So I can sin."

Ezekiel 8:13 And He said to me, "Turn again, and you will see greater abominations that they are doing."

Then we find in verse 14 that, to Ezekiel's dismay, there were women "weeping for Tammuz." Then, in verse 16, he was taken to the inner court of the Lord's house; and he saw 25 men praying with their backs to the altar. They turned their backs on God! Get the picture, brethren. They were doing all of this *in secret* (they thought). There is a lesson here for you and me.

Ezekiel 8:17 And He said to me, "Have you seen this, O son of man? Is it a trivial thing to the house of Judah to commit the abominations which they commit here? For they have filled the land with violence; then they have returned to provoke Me to anger. Indeed they put the branch to [My] nose."

The branch was "*the Asherah*." The branch was a male sex figure. God said that it was the same thing as sticking that thing (and what they were doing) right in His nose—right in His face. What I want us to see is that they were doing it *in private*. In their minds, they thought it did not make any difference. If nobody could see them doing it, "Hey, I'm getting away with the perfect crime. I can have my cake and eat it too. I can go outside the temple and look like I'm really somebody in the community. But, you see, here in the dark nobody sees me bowing down and worshipping these idols."

Does that make any difference? I think you can see here that it made a difference to God. He was offended by what was going on. When you understand the context, these people were **in captivity because** of what they were doing—cause and effect. What they sowed earned captivity.

When I was pastoring the Columbia and Walterboro, South Carolina churches between 1975 and 1977, I had a Bible Study in Savannah, Georgia. It was held on a Wednesday evening, from 7:30-9:00, in a little upstairs room that Sears & Roebuck Company gave us for free. It was tucked over behind the carpet department. We had to be out of there at exactly 9:00. When I left there, I had a 155-mile drive from Savannah to Columbia—to my home. What I normally did on the way home was listen to the radio. Since it was a Wednesday night, I almost invariably ended up listening to the CBS Mystery Radio Theatre.

One time I heard this drama that really stuck with me; and when I put this sermon together, it became an integral part of it. It was about a man in his mid-to-late '40s, or maybe his early '50s. He was a prosperous man. He was a respected college professor. Married, he had two children who were just about ready to go into college. The man lived in a fine, wooded neighborhood in the suburbs. To others, he was a respectable person, and he seemed to have plenty.

But inside of him, there burned a feeling of bitterness. He felt cheated. He felt conspired against. He felt as though he was being held back by his superiors. And the focal point of this is that he felt that he was not making anywhere near enough money. He was not getting paid what he felt that he should. This was burning away at him to such an extent that one day he felt the best thing for him to do was to leave his teaching responsibilities at the college and go home. So he knocked off early, and went to think things out.

His wife was not home at the time that he got there. So he just put his car in the garage and went up into the house. While he was there, he decided that being in the house was not exactly what he wanted. Therefore he would go out and take a walk. He decided to go to a wooded area, because he felt that he would be able to think a little bit better about what he was going to do about his future. He started out the door, and he heard the garbage truck in the neighborhood. So he went back and collected the garbage, and took it out, put it in his garbage can, and moved it out to the front of the house.

He had been walking around for quite a while in the nearby woods. Unknown to him, though, there was a bank robbery taking place at exactly the same time that he was walking through the woods. The robbers made good their escape, but the police were fairly close to them. They were not exactly 'hot on their tail;' but they were close enough that the robbers became concerned, and they did not want to be caught with the money that they had stolen from the bank in their possession.

So what happened is that they pulled into our hero's nice, lovely, suburban neighborhood and went zipping down the street. This attracted his attention, because he was at a place where he could see what was going on. He was not completely out of the woods, and so it was very unlikely that these people even saw him there. And what they did is that they drove up to his neighbor's house, and they deposited this paper sack in his neighbor's garbage can. Then they went out of the neighborhood.

That really got our hero's curiosity. So he went and looked in his neighbor's garbage can; and here was this paper sack. He took it out of there, and went into his house, and he opened up the sack. After he got done counting, he found that there was \$80,000 in cash—all negotiable, Federal Reserve notes.

"Ah," he said to himself, "this is the answer to all my problems! This money has fallen into my hands. Nobody knows that I have it. And the bank isn't going to lose anything. This is the perfect crime, because the bank's money is insured—is it not? My neighbors don't know that I have this. The robbers don't know that I have this. The police don't know that I have this money. And even if the police come wheeling through the neighborhood and they happen to call on me—"Did I see such and such?"—I can always say, 'No, I didn't see it. Oh, I do remember on that day the garbage truck was in the area. Maybe they threw that stuff in the garbage can, and by this time it's in the city dump.'" The perfect crime! Eighty thousand bucks! The answer to all of his problems!

The author of this story must have understood this principle that was at work, because things began to happen in this man's life. Before I begin to tell you what occurred, let us go back to Luke 12.

Luke 12:1-3 In the meantime, when an innumerable multitude of people had gathered together, so that they trampled one another, He began to say to His disciples first of all, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. For there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, nor hidden that will not be known. Therefore whatever you have spoken in the dark will be heard in the light, and what you have spoken in the ear in inner rooms will be proclaimed on the housetops."

Scary! Jesus' conformation of Numbers 32:23. "Your sin will find you out."

Now, I said that the author of this program understood this principle because before that program was completed, the man's wife had been murdered, his best friend was seriously wounded, the hero's mind snapped from the strain, so he ended up in a mental institution. And his children had to live with their stained reputations. The leaven of that sin began to reach out.

We have to understand that it is God's purpose, because He is love, that He is going to do everything in His power to *cover* sin. He does not want people to be exposed. He will do everything He can to keep you from being

embarrassed. But if we will not repent, then He will follow through with this principle. Because He loves you so much, He will embarrass you to tears to get you to **repent**.

He will hold you up to shame and scorn, like He did to His loved one David. You know David would not repent after the adultery that he committed with Bathsheba. So, eventually, God had to send a prophet to bring him to repentance. Then He warned David that, "What you did was done in secret, but what is going to happen is going to be done right out in public."

Oh, what we *do* means a lot—because there is a God who loves us! He does not want to see us as victims of our own sins. And He does not want to see people who are innocent victimized by things that we even do privately, in secret. There is no such thing as "the perfect crime." It does not exist. The effect of what we *do* is going to show—unless a variable takes place, and we repent, and God is willing to cover it.

But you see, all the while, that sin is like an active living organism "out there"—impacting upon other organisms (usually, other human beings). So we need to ask ourselves this question: "Why are we so **insensitive** and so **indifferent** to the things that we do?" It is that self-centeredness, is it not?

Let us go back to the book of Joshua. In chapter 6, the occasion here is with Jericho—which is at the foundation of this illustration. This is instruction that is coming to those who are going to be marching around the city of Jericho.

Joshua 6:18 And you, by all means abstain from the accursed things [That word is better translated "devoted." We will see why in a second.], lest you become accursed when you take of the accursed [devoted] things, and make the camp of Israel a curse, and trouble it."

Hey! He is talking to individuals here. Start thinking about that. Did you see that last phrase? He said, "Keep away from the devoted things *lest you make the camp accursed*." One person make the whole camp of Israel cursed? Surely one person's little ol' sin is not going to make all that much difference.

Joshua 6:19-20 "But all the silver and gold, and vessels of bronze and iron, are consecrated [devoted] to the LORD; they shall come into the treasure of the LORD." So the people shouted when the priests blew the trumpets. And it happened when the people heard the sound of the trumpet, and the people shouted with a great shout, that the wall fell down flat. Then the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city.

Joshua 7:1 But the children of Israel committed a trespass regarding the accursed [devoted] things, for Achan the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took of the accursed [devoted] things. So the anger of the LORD burned against the children of Israel.

What we are going to see here, brethren, is that one man's sin in private. . . . He did it inside of a tent. Nobody else saw him do what he did. He took some of the gold. And he took a piece of cloth that had been used as a mantle or something. It really attracted his eye. He took them home and hid them in his own tent. Nobody else saw what Achan did.

So Israel is moving into the Land. The whole camp of Israel is moving into the Land. They have taken Jericho. The next place that they are going to take is Ai. It is only a little city. And so Joshua puts together an army of only 3,000 men. He did not need a great army to take care of that little place—just a little fortified place on the side of a hill. And so he sends out an army of 3,000 men—expecting that they will be able to take it easily.

But what happened was that those 3,000 men were put into a rout, and 36 men died. Joshua was thunderstruck! Here they had defeated the great city of Jericho; and this little, tiny fortress town up on the side of a hill—they could not do beans against it. So Joshua turned to God.

Joshua 7:7-9 And Joshua said, "Alas, Lord GOD, why have You brought this people over the Jordan at all—to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us? Oh, that we had been content, and dwelt on the other side of the Jordan! O Lord, what shall I say when Israel turns its back before its enemies? For the Canaanites

and all the inhabitants of the land will hear it, and surround us, and cut off our name from the earth. Then what will You do for Your great name?"

I do not think that God said this next thing in a very kindly manner:

Joshua 7:10-11 So the LORD said to Joshua, "Get up! Why do you lie thus on your face? Israel has sinned, and they have also transgressed My covenant which I commanded them. For they have taken some of the accursed things, and have both stolen and deceived: And they have also put it among their own stuff."

Here comes **the effect**—of *one* sin, done in private, by *one* individual.

Joshua 7:12 "Therefore the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies, but turned their backs before their enemies, because they have become doomed to destruction. Neither will I be with you anymore, unless you destroy the accursed from among you."

One man's sin! There were no accomplices. Nobody saw him do it. And yet Israel's army became paralyzed with fear. Joshua faltered and became confused. The whole nation was affected. Thirty-six men died. Thirty-six women became widows. And how many children no longer had a father?

You might say the sin was somewhat atoned for. When they found out what Achan had done, Achan and his family (who were innocent of the deed) were put to death. When God saw it, He analyzed the sin according to different standards. He was dealing with His people, and He wanted to make sure that a witness was made—so that there would be information for you and me in the end time, when we are concerned with His church. God takes a **personal interest** in His people. Things that are happening out in the world can be done, and nothing seems to be done by Him. But when things begin to happen within His church, He is concerned for the well-being of His people; and He is going to act.

What we see here is a very clear beginning of "the body" analogy that later becomes so important in the New Testament to the church. He shows us very clearly that sin has a natural *leavening effect*. It increases, and it will not just lie there and die. The correction has to be made.

So let us go back into the New Testament and we will pick up a few things there. Do you think it is any accident that Ananias and Sapphira died in the way they did? Do you think that there is a possibility that, as the New Testament church was beginning, God acted in exactly the same way as He did when the Old Testament church came out of the land and into their inheritance? And something similar happened in the case of both of them—the one with Achan, the other with Ananias and Sapphira. In both cases, God immediately *put to death* the sinning person, or persons. It was no accident. God was drawing your attention and mine with these two illustrations.

I Corinthians 5:1-2 It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles—that a man has his father's wife! And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you.

I Corinthians 5:6 Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?

We have to understand that this sin was not just a one-time affair. Rather, it was a sin that was continuously occurring, and these people were allowing it to go on. Do you think for a moment that the fornicator thought that he was *affecting the whole church* by what he was doing, and this "little lie" that he was living there somewhere around Corinth? I do not think so. But, again, you see that this is in here for us to understand.

Understand what? Understand that every single one of us has a **responsibility** not only to God, but also to the Body. What you *do* and what you *say*—God very clearly shows—is going to affect the efficiency, and effectiveness, and the purity of the whole! You understand what was occurring here [in I Corinthians 5]. What this man was doing was confusing

Every Action Has a Reaction by John W. Ritenbaugh (<https://www.cgg.org>)

and dividing the congregation. He was jeopardizing the spiritual health of the entire congregation.

Let us go back to the Old Testament again, to Deuteronomy 20, where there is a listing of instructions given to leaders who are going to lead men into war.

Deuteronomy 20:1 "When you go out to battle against your enemies, and see horses and chariots and people more numerous than you, do not be afraid of them; for the LORD your God is with you, who brought you up from the land of Egypt."

Then the instructions begin to come. The priest is to go stand before the people and remind them that God is going to be with the army. Then, in verse 5, the officers of the army are to speak to the people and begin to separate out various categories of soldiers. If a soldier has just married, he is not to go to war. If a soldier has just built a new house, he is not to go to war. If there is a soldier who is betrothed to be married, he is not to go to war.

Deuteronomy 20:8 The officers shall speak further to the people, and say, "What man is there who is fearful and fainthearted? Let him go and return to his house, [Why?] lest the heart of his brethren faint like his heart."

What is He saying here? He is saying that in battle there is a type similar to a "mob psychology." If one man breaks and runs because he is fearful, that one man is likely to set off a tremendous charge of retreat—because everybody else will be frightened by the one man who was fearful. So the army becomes routed and defeated, because *the action of one affects the attitudes of all* .

The opposite works too—the bravery of one can inspire all, as well. So there are both sides of it. I am trying to back you into a corner here so that you will see that, in every situation, *you have a responsibility to the whole*. You do not stand alone! There is individual responsibility (1) to be obedient to God and (2) to be faithful and loyal to the whole. If you go off and do something on your own, then you are going to bear the burden of your sin; but it is not

going to end there, because it is going to affect everybody else (unless corrective action occurs).

Now, I am going to show you that God wrote this right in the Ten Commandments. So nobody has any excuse at all! Understand how important this is!

Exodus 20:5 "You shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity. . ."

Here it begins. It is going to spread out. God is going to tell you that the actions that you take right now may very well have impact, not just on those who are around you at the moment, but even generations yet unborn. That is a frightening, staggering, principle!

Exodus 20:5 ". . . visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me."

We know very well that this is true in physical areas. A mother can be carrying an embryo (and then a fetus), but she does drugs. She passes her sin right on to her children. Or she smokes, and she passes it right on to her children. Or she drinks too much alcohol, and she passes the effect right on to her children. Maybe she takes X-rays, and it affects that fetus or embryo that is in her.

I will tell you, this is just a personal thing but I would never allow my wife to get a sonogram. I do not know what that is going to do. I do not care whether the doctors say that there is no problem there at all; but brethren, there are sound waves going in there! Those things are vibrating at a tremendous rate of speed. Do you think that little fetus is not vibrating too? That is just something to think about, but you have to relate those things to something like this.

God shows these principles, and men mess around. They tell us that it is okay; and then, years later, they admit, "Well, we were wrong." The way to have babies is to eat right, sleep right, and do things right in your life; and

then you are going to be healthy, and you are going to give birth to healthy children. The chances are exceedingly great that will occur. That is the way you show love to your babies.

Exodus 20:6 "But showing mercy to thousands [of generations], to those who love Me and keep My commandments."

I will tell you—what a difference! If we sin, God says (He is promising us there.) that the effect of that will be passed on to the third or fourth generation; but He will end it there. On the other hand, if we love Him and we keep His commandments and we do those things that are pleasing in His sight, He will bless our progeny for a thousand generations. That gives you some ideas of the measure of **His mercy** in comparison to His desire to cut off sin.

This principle is all over the Bible. Almost everywhere we look, it is there. Let me show you another staggering one, in Romans 11.

Romans 11:26-29 And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; for this is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins." Concerning the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but concerning the election they are beloved for the sake of the fathers. [Now, look at this.] For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.

Another way of saying that would be that the *privileges* and *invitation* of God can never be withdrawn. God has a commitment to Israel because of the obedience of **one man**—Abraham! One man's obedience 4,000 years ago is having impact on your life right at this very moment. We live in Israel, and God gave this land to us *because of Abraham's obedience*. We are reaping the blessings of that physically. We are reaping the blessings spiritually—because it is in Israel that God's gospel has been preached by far and away the most effectively.

Remember Paul said in Hebrews 11 (just a simple little four or five word statement), "Abel's blood yet speaks." Abel lived almost 6,000 years ago; but

what he did was so important in making that sacrifice, in believing God. We can look at his example and say, "I want to do what he did, and live my life by faith as well." What Abel did 6,000 years ago is **impacting** right now on your views. Do you get the point?

Why does God speak so much about the kings? There are a couple of reasons. Whenever there was a David, or a Hezekiah, or a Josiah—things went pretty well. Whenever you had an Ahab, or a Manasseh, or a Zedekiah—things really fell apart. Do you realize that God is showing one of two things, or maybe both at the same time? He is able to give us a microcosm with a king, by giving us little biographical sketches of his life; and we are able to learn what was going on (in microcosm) in the entire nation. So God did not have to write a tremendous history of the nation of Israel. He just had to tell us what the king was doing. And we know, by extension, that everybody else in the land was basically doing the same thing that the king was.

On the other hand, it could have been this way. That is, that by telling us what the king was doing, we understand what everybody else was doing; and the king was simply reflecting what everybody else was doing. It was one way, or the other.

But there is a principle that is at work here. I learned this from Ralph Waldo Emerson. He said that every institution is but the lengthened shadow of one man. In other words, the institution reflects what the man is. Okay, parents, start thinking. Your little family unit is going to be a reflection of you. Now we are getting close to home here. So you see, this principle is at work.

Parents, do you care how your children turn out to be? Are you going to be one of those who, by the time your child gets to the teen years, what you have there is someone who is virtually uncontrollable? Are you going to blame it on society? Are you going to blame it on the kid's peers? Are you going to look for justification for the way that child is?

Are you going to be willing to recognize, for whatever the reasons, that child started off in its most formative time and you were not "there"? That is, with the right kind of equipment, the right kind of behavior, the right kind of character, the right kind of understanding (or, whatever it might have been).

So your child grew up. He was not really trained. He just grew up. But that child is the fruit of what you were 15 or 20 years ago.

I will tell you, a number is really being done on the American family. I mean it. All of these kids, growing up in day care centers—not with a loving mother taking care of them; but with somebody who is a stranger. And I would have to admit that, in some cases, maybe the stranger is better than the mother is. I will concede that.

Let us begin to conclude this, by turning first to Matthew 10.

Matthew 10:29 Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's will.

Do you want to look at a Parent who really knows what His kids are doing? He does not "farm" His kids out to day care centers. He provides, in some way.

Matthew 10:30 But the very hairs of your head are all numbered.

That is *individual attention!* God does *everything* in wisdom and love. You are not a non-entity—swallowed in the vastness of humanity. God's sovereignty is not limited to the big issues. It is focused on you! You are the apple of His eye, the focus of His attention. You have His undivided attention twenty-four hours a day. I do not know how He does it. I only know that He does it. And what you *do* is important to Him.

You are so important to Him that He gave up His most valuable possession for you—the only Being with whom He could share life. There is no need to fear that He is going to dump you, or overlook you. **You** are an important cog in His purpose! Do you understand that? He does not make mistakes at all. And if He revealed His truth to you, He did it on purpose. It was not just somehow, accidentally, that the seed fell in the wrong place. "Oh, now he (or, she) has it; and I've got to do something with it." God does not do things like that! You are important to Him.

I Corinthians 3:6-9 [Paul says:] I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase. Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor. For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building.

What we begin to see out of the book of I Corinthians is that there is *an individuality* in our relationship to God, but also there is *individual responsibility* of every person to the Body. Our faithfulness, and loyalty, and obedience to God go first of all up to Him; but we cannot leave out the duty—the responsibility—that that faithfulness and loyalty goes out to everybody else as well. It goes to your mate, the rest of the family, church of God.

This is why we will not attack the Worldwide Church of God. They are our brothers. We love them. We have had good times with them. We learned the things that we know "over there." Our concern is **for** them, not against them. God is also able to work on their minds. And if He feels that He can use us to help them towards the Kingdom of God, then fine. I want Him to make the choice.

Let us go to I Corinthians 12, so that we see this in its context.

I Corinthians 12:4-7 There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all.

I went through some of these scriptures when I was giving the series on Government. I was trying to impress upon you that, though the hierarchical form of government is the proper form of government (that is clearly shown in the Bible), it is not a military form of government. I showed you, I think very clearly, that no individual is of greater or more importance than any

other individual. I, as the pastor, am no greater or more important than anybody else is. I can only get up here and speak because **He has given** me a gift to be able to do it, and I have to recognize that. I cannot "toot my own horn," because He has given me an ability to do these things.

I did not choose to be in this responsibility. Most of you understand that. I was going to go out into the business world and just work. But, suddenly, this began to form around me. So I had to make a decision. But I want you to understand that I am no more important than anybody else is. And neither are all of the elders, any of the deacons or deaconesses—they are no more important than anybody else is. They are cogs in a piece of machinery.

If we look at the machinery angle, then look at this: We take a little old widow who does not do anything else but pray, let us say; and we take her out of the machinery. Then maybe the machine does not work. An "insignificant, unimportant," 75-year-old gray-haired widow—and she is not performing her function. So Ritenbaugh cannot speak, you see, because others are not pulling their weight (for whatever the reason). That is the issue here in I Corinthians 12.

I Corinthians 12:12 For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ.

I Corinthians 12:14 For in fact the body is not one member but many.

And then he goes on to show that every part of the body is *dependent upon* every other part of the body.

I Corinthians 12:26-27 And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.

So God has organized the Body as He saw fit, and every part of it has a function to perform. Because we are living organisms of free moral agency,

it therefore bears upon us (as every individual part) to contribute to the wholeness, to the purity, to the efficiency, to the effectiveness of the whole—or leave.

If you cannot agree to that, then it is very likely that you are going to be **an irritant**; and you are not going to grow here with us. It would be better for you to go elsewhere, for your own good. That is, for your own spiritual good. I do not say that meanly at all. It is just a reality.

So what happens to one part, or what one part does, affects the whole. Thus what you *do*, brethren, does make a difference. What you *do* tends towards **increase** of good or evil, efficiency or inefficiency, effectiveness or ineffectiveness. So we have this dual responsibility of (1) loyalty and faithfulness to God and (2) and loyalty and faithfulness out to all of our brethren. You can confirm this in Ephesians 4:16, where Paul talks about how every part of the Body is fitly joined together—and every part has **part** in the increasing of the whole.

Ephesians 4:16 From whom [Christ] the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.