

Have you ever heard **The Parable of the Stove**? It goes like this: a little girl is in the kitchen with her mother. Her mother warns her: “do not touch the stove. If you touch it, you will be punished and you will get badly burned.” So, for a couple of days the little girl walks through the kitchen eyeing the stovetop. The third day, she makes sure her mother isn’t looking and just touches the edge of a burner with the tip of her finger. And... nothing. She doesn’t get caught or punished. And she doesn’t get burned. The world did not come to an end! So, the next day she touches it with two fingers. And the next day she rubs her hand across the stovetop without giving it a second thought. That is, until the following Saturday morning, when she nonchalantly reaches up and lays both hands on the burner. She doesn’t know her mom is cooking eggs and has just walked to the pantry for a moment. And... she gets burned. She screams loudly and falls to the floor in pain. She is taken to the hospital and treated for her burns. And her mother punishes her as well. Her little world, as she knew it, comes to an end.

So, what is the moral of the story? Well, obviously, mom is always right!

But have you every heard or seen a story like it? I suspect most of us have done similar things in our youth.

Whether you have done so or not, it should sound familiar. It is a retelling of the oldest story in all of history:

Genesis 2:15-17 – God had been abundantly clear as to the consequences of eating the fruit.

Genesis 3:1-6 – But Eve slowly great comfortable around it and was even willing to discuss eating it. Perhaps over time it just didn’t seem like that big a deal. She picked the fruit and nothing happened. She took a bite and nothing happened. Then she took it home and they ate... and their world as they knew it came to an end!

One important point both stories have in common is **The Power of the First Concession**.

The little girl burned her hands, not on the day the burner was on, but several days earlier, when she gave in that first time and started a string of concessions that led to a devastating result.

Likewise Eve did not lose her home and the blessings of their lives at the moment she and Adam ate and God’s voice sounded, but long before when, in the opening scene, she is willing to stand by the tree, talk about the produce, and pick the fruit.

We have all seen the power of the first concession in our lives or perhaps the lives of those around us:

EX) A teenager is steeped in the consequences of immorality: destroyed self-worth, unplanned pregnancy, perhaps disease, pain for her family, or a derailed future. When did all of this happen to her? No when she was in an immoral place doing an immoral thing, but days or weeks before when she first decided to date the wrong guy or begin going to the wrong places.

EX) A man caught up in substance abuse: addiction, hurt to his body, destroyed family or church or faith, and living with a sense of hopeless guilt. This did not happen to him when he found the bottom of his 100th liquor bottle or as a result of buying drugs off the street, but months or years earlier when he first decided to drink with friends or take more than the recommend dosage of a prescription.

Giving in once, on something seemingly small, often leads to places we never thought we’d go.

I am not saying we can reverse all the damage poor decisions have caused. But I am saying this: if we understand the Power of the First Concession, we can repent of our sins, leave here whole and pure, and avoid devastating situations by the power of EARLY and SIMPLE choices...Like not touching the stove with even the tip of your finger.

Taking control of life and choices, and stopping trouble before it ever starts, is possible in the life of a Christian if we can understand just a few simple principles:

I. Small Things Lead To Big Things

- a. How many Bible examples would you like to study to illustrate this point?
 - i. **Cain** started with anger toward Abel and it grew to murder and suffering.
 - ii. **David** looked too long at Bathsheba and it led to adultery, murder, and suffering.
 - iii. **Judas** felt greed and pilfered the money box and eventually “little things.”
- b. And so, if we will start seemingly small, like controlling what we THINK and VIEW, we can fortify our position in righteousness and stop trouble before it starts. (Problems start on the Inside!)
 - i. **Matthew 6:27-30** – If we don’t want to act immorally, then we mustn’t make that first concession to THINK on such things.
 1. Pornography isn’t about late night sites, but yahoo.com pages early in the day.

- ii. **Matthew 6:19-23** – If we don't want to be drawn in by materialism and put the love of things before God, that begins with what we LOOK upon daily.
 - 1. Materialism begins with subtle things like checking FB during worship!
- c. **James 1:12-15** – Sin is a process. It starts with seemingly insignificant steps like FEELINGS or THOUGHTS or LOOKS, and then grows to action and consequence.
 - i. This is Good News! It means if we stop it EARLY, we stop it completely!
 - ii. Small is the first big step. No one can stop an avalanche, but each and every one of us can melt a snowflake. Let's mind the "little things."

II. There Are No Small Things To God

- a. Have you ever come across the occasional Bible story where it almost feels like God is overreacting? It seems the sin "isn't that bad" and yet, God reacts decisively and angrily.
 - i. **Moses** strikes the rock. It wasn't as if he was cursing God, but he lost his life.
 - ii. **Nadab & Abihu** offer strange fire. Not paganism, but God ended their lives as well.
 - iii. **Ananias & Saphira** keep back of the price. It's not as if they gave nothing, but they died.
- b. What is the point of those stories? THERE ARE NO SMALL THINGS TO GOD!
 - i. There is right and there is wrong. Even if it seems small or private, it is sin to God.
 - ii. **Eve** sinned just as much with the first bite as when she and her husband ate freely.
 - iii. **The Little Girl** did wrong with that first finger touch. It wasn't insignificant at all.
- c. **Matthew 5** – Look at this list Jesus gives. He is preaching the need to stop things EARLY, even if they are internal or private. Not because of where they lead, but because they are sin of themselves.
 - i. **V21-24** – "What's the big deal? It won't lead to murder?" Anger is sin of itself.
 - ii. **V27-28** – "It's not like I am actually committing adultery." Lust is just as much a sin.
 - iii. **V43-45** – "As long as I don't hate my neighbor or hurt my enemy." Wrong is wrong.
- d. So, while we can argue that small concessions lead to big ones. And we can decide to make better daily decisions on our daily walk to avoid dead ends. Let's understand that God is just as displeased with the first concession as with where it leads. Once again, mind the "little things"

III. Don't Reason Merely From Consequences

- a. It is easy to become consequence oriented. "Okay, if I do this, will I get caught?" "Will this choice put me at risk of getting punished?" "Will this next decision take me too far and I will lose my soul?" Good questions, but if they are the only ones we are asking, it can lead to wrongful conclusions:
 - i. Okay, I can do this because I won't get caught.
 - ii. This little thing is okay because I won't get punished.
 - iii. If I just commit this one sin this one time and repent, I won't lose my soul.
- b. And the devil will bait us with "consequence-free sin." At least, that's how he makes it look.
- c. Certainly we can answer this by restating our first two points. First, these small choices can eventually lead to larger ones that can definitely hurt you and those you love. Second, even the sins that don't seem like they will hurt us certainly can, since all sin is sin to God.
- d. *But let's also understand that being a Christian is NOT just about avoiding punishment!*
 - i. If it was just about that, we could test some waters, touch some stovetops and just make sure we didn't let it get out of hand. Or just make sure to repent later.
 - ii. But HERE is what Christianity IS ABOUT: (**Colossians 3**)
 - 1. **V1-5** – I am to honor my King will all my choices: mind, mouth and body!
 - 2. **V9-11** – I am a New Creature in Him, and that means all of me belongs to Him.
 - 3. **V17-24** – And I must reflect such in all my relationships, everyday in every way.
- e. **The Little Girl** in our story forgot that Mom's will is right and obeying her is right and it didn't matter if she got burned or not, nor if she was caught or not. The first touch disrespected and disobeyed her mother and that is why she should have never made the First Concession.

Conclusion: Mind the First Concession. Don't even begin a journey if you don't want to end up where it goes. The first look, thought, touch, choice, these are the things that we can easily control. And we should protect ourselves early, before it goes to far and gets beyond our control. If we do this, 3 things will happen:

- 1) We prevent further trouble or devastating consequences down the line.
- 2) We tell God that every thought and every action, not matter of size, are captive for His cause.
- 3) We make our life about being Good for Christ, not just avoiding the Punishment from God

While one small step away from God can cost us, one small step toward God can create a great future. Come now.