

Doctrine versus Consequences

Warning: Thinking required ahead. Consider that **“Doctrine may determine consequences, but consequences shouldn’t determine doctrine.”**

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus laid out the “doctrine” of the kingdom from the outset with the Beatitudes, cf. Matt.5:3-9. They are the kingdom’s “doctrine” in that they contain the requirements of attitudes, actions, and dispositions required of citizenship. He then immediately sets forth the “consequences” associated with adopting/implementing that “doctrine” as: 1) *persecution*, vv.10-12; or, 2) *positive influence* on others as the *preserving influence* of “salt,” and “light” as an *illuminating influence*, vv.13-16. Thus, there are “consequences” that stem from adopting the “doctrine” of kingdom citizenship. Such can be *negative* from persecution, and *positive* from influence on others. In fact, both of these “consequences” usually occur as one continues to live by the “doctrine” of the kingdom. This is simple “Cause” and “Effect” wherein “doctrine” is the *cause*, and “consequences” are the *effect*. However...

Far too many, if not most, people today have this paradigm reversed. Instead of doctrines/beliefs determining consequences, they allow consequences to determine their beliefs. If a “doctrine” can have what they consider to be a *negative* effect (especially *personally*), then it must and will be disbelieved and rejected. However, if a “doctrine” may have what is regarded as a *positive* effect (again, especially *personally*), it will be believed and adopted. Such is nothing more than Situational Ethics, and results in a complete lack of character wherein the guiding principle of living is selfishness. And here we are 2024.

But this backwards reasoning isn’t new. Even Jesus’ disciples were infected, as I suspect people have always been to greater or lesser degrees. Note when Jesus presented the “doctrine” of *marriage, divorce, and remarriage* in Matt.19:4-9, His disciples reasoned from “consequences” and concluded, *“If the relationship of the man with his wife is like this, it is better not to marry,”* v.10. Granted, they did not reject the “doctrine” in this case, but did conclude that the “consequences” of being *married* according the “doctrine” Jesus presented was just not worth the (personal) cost.

Perhaps a clearer example can be seen in John 11:47-48. The Pharisees admitted the veracity of the *evidence* before them when they said that Jesus was *“performing many signs,”* v.47. But note how they reasoned from “consequences” in v.48, *“If we let Him go on like this, all men will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.”* The “doctrine” evidenced by *facts* (that Jesus was the Christ by the “signs” He performed) was ultimately rejected because of its (yep, still *personal*) “consequences,” and *“So from that day on they planned together to kill Him,”* v.53.

True character does discern “doctrine” based on “consequences” whether *positive* or *negative*. Instead, it allows *truth* to determine “doctrine,” and then accepts whatever “consequences” result whether *positive* or *negative*. I’ve long said that we “believe” something in one of two ways: 1) Either facts/truth/sound logic force us to a conclusion regardless of how we feel about it; or, 2) Our feelings cloud and/or distort facts/truth/logic to allow us to reach the conclusion we desire. The same is true for “doctrine” and “consequences”: 1) Either “doctrines” (truth) dictate our beliefs/actions

regardless of resultant “consequences;” or, 2) “Consequences” determine which “doctrine” (and so-called “truth”) we will accept.

In conclusion, let’s return to our NT examples for some applications. Will you, like the Pharisees, *reject* the “doctrine” and truth of Jesus Christ because how such will necessarily affect you? Will you *reject* the truthful evidence about Him because of the *personal* “consequences” believing in Him will subsequently require? Or, will you *reject* the true “doctrine” Jesus taught about marriage, divorce, and remarriage because of the *personal* “consequences” of such? True character and integrity allows “doctrine” to determine “consequences,” but does not allow “consequences” to determine “doctrine.” In these regards as well as others, “*No one can serve two masters...*” **Matt.6:24**. You must determine whether “doctrine” and “truth” or “consequences” will govern what you believe and practice. Choose well my friend, choose well. (Philip C. Strong; Viking Drive Church of Christ; 3791 Viking Drive, Bossier City, LA; online at vikingdrivechurchofchrist.com; email to mrpcstrong@hotmail.com)