

A Better Christian – The ABC Chain

Prayer

Jesus loves every one of us. He came and died for our sins, he is our propitiatory sacrifice. He justified us, he redeemed us, and he put us back into right standing with the Father.

As we have previously talked about The Holy Spirit draws us to salvation. Once we believe on Jesus Christ we are saved by our lord Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit then works in us in a restorative manner to bring about the likeness of Christ in each one of us. This process of restoring us and bringing out the nature of Christ within us is called sanctification.

Now we are righteous now and we should work out our salvation with fear and trembling, but from a position of righteousness. We are born again. We are righteous because of Christ's righteousness wrapping us up in his righteousness. This puts us in good relationship with the Father.

We are not sinners, yet we should not be afraid of that word... The truth is we all sin.
1 John 1:5-8

"This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us."

Romans 3:23 ESV For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

So today I ask this question... Do you have any times in your life when you really don't like the consequences of your actions? Are there times when you argue with your spouse or significant other and it has resulted in frustration or anger? Do you ever get in trouble with your spouse or maybe your mom or dad for things you do?

Here is what I am getting at. Prepare for the divine revelation here.

When we behave or do things a certain way, there are always consequences. Sometimes a consequence is positive. Like when a husband brings flowers home for his wife and she smiles at him and maybe gives him a kiss, other times they are

negative like when he brings home a new guitar and it makes it impossible to pay the rent.

Every action we do we make a choice. We choose to act in either fear or faith and the results of every action we do has a consequence either negative or positive.

Now for most people this is not rocket science - so stay with me because I am building a foundation here for where we are going.

Most people know that when you behave well you usually get a positive result and when you behave poorly you usually get a negative result. Yet this is not always the case.

For example: "Ray do I look good in this outfit?" I know that if I say "No", the consequences will be that I will not be a happy man. If I say: "Yes", the consequences will be that I can't be trusted and we need honesty in our relationship.

With a nod to Star Trek - I call this the Kobiashi Maru or no-win scenario. No matter whether I say yes or no, the consequences are negative. So I change my yes/no male behavior and I say something else true like: "It doesn't matter what you wear honey, you always look beautiful to me." I change the conditions of the question.

By this point I think you can all agree with me that behaviors have consequences.

Galatians 6:7 ESV Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap.

Even not taking an action is in itself an action with consequences

Proverbs 29:15 ESV: The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother.

We use the bible because in 2 Timothy 3:16 it tells us:

"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness"

So behaviors have consequences. No one is falling out of their seats astonished with this revelation yet, at least I hope not...

So here comes some meat...

2 Corinthians 10:4-7 New International Version (NIV)

“The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. And we will be ready to punish every act of disobedience, once your obedience is complete.

You are judging by appearances. If anyone is confident that they belong to Christ, they should consider again that we belong to Christ just as much as they do.”

We are to demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

The ABC chain

We know what behaviors are and we know that they result in consequences. But there is an “A” to this whole thing... Antecedent. This is what came before the behavior that resulted in the behavior in the first place.

For illustration, let’s look at the sin of pornography.

This is a behavior that results in sin. Lust is developed, unhealthy sexual appetites occur and actual changes in the mind occur, this is a documented medical fact. It is why pornography is a sexual addiction.

This behavior can result in unhealthy sexual ideation. Perhaps the person will begin to believe that it is okay to grab a waitress posterior. Perhaps they will fantasize and come on to the babysitter. Many cases of incest or sexual abuse have had their roots in pornography. Seeking ever greater stimulation some seek child pornography, which is child abuse.

Now the behavior of watching pornography and the eventual inappropriate actions can lead to consequences. This is the “C” in our ABC model. The consequences can vary - but may be jail time, the loss of a spouse, cheating on a spouse and the loss of sexual intimacy in the bedroom, and so on...

So... here is the part that so many miss, human beings have feelings, we react, we have emotions and needs. This is the “A” in our model, the antecedent. Does the man or woman use pornography because they feel all alone? Do they try to escape in to a fantasy world where they feel loved without the risk of hurt? Do they feel the need for a physical release, has their spouse rejected them or been neglectful in the intimacy department? Were they exposed to this as a child and the habit has just persisted?

Now this applies to every behavior... this is not a lesson on porn...

Let’s look at excessive drinking or drugs...

Behavior - Person gets stoned.

Consequence - Relationships may fall apart. Money is not stewarded properly and is drunk down or flittered away. The body starts to show signs of the abuse and the organs break down. May get a DUI charge or maybe even death.

Let's look at the possible reasons and antecedents:

The reason many people don't break their additions is because they want to escape from something. There is the occasional teen, who is simply rebelling against authority and becomes addicted - but hear me out. Many addiction and rehab programs are band-aids. They treat the chemical addiction right enough but they very seldom have success.... Why?

It is because, in many cases, these programs treat the symptoms, not the cause. Most often, people have had hurts, bad relationship, abusive parents or spouses and so on. The addiction will never go away as long as it is a mechanism for the person to escape from hurt or gain desired attention.

If a person is drinking because their wife cheats on them or their husband beats them or a person has been abused by a parent or a family friend, they may feel guilt, shame or just simply pain. They try to escape. The problem will not go away until the root cause of the addiction is dealt with.

To deal effectively with this we looked at the consequence to be avoided, we looked at the behavior that results in the consequence, but when we look at the antecedent the behavior is not longer just their actions in most cases, but they get stoned because... comes into play.

As a person talks out the hurt with a pastor or counselor they start to deal with the hurt inside, pain bubbles to the surface and the negative behavior eventually falls away. The pastor or counselor does not do this. The person must choose to let it go. To get better the wounded individual needs to understand the antecedents or what came before and come to grips with it. Once they understand themselves they are empowered to deal with it.

Another fact is that the longer the hurt is left unhealed and festering, the more neurosis and psychosis result. Or put another way, the longer it is left unhealed the more it will infect areas of the life, which are farther and farther away from the initial trauma.

When we understand why we do what we do, we can change it. But if we are hurt or have strongholds in our lives, we must examine ourselves and create an awareness of ourselves. How can you have self-worth if you don't know who you are?

We need to start paying attention to the antecedents or triggering events in our lives that result in behaviors that cause consequences that are negative.

We really need to pay attention to what caused us to behave the way we did in the first place.

Steps

The first step is awareness of what causes us to behave in a fashion that results in a negative consequence. Once we have listed all of the things that cause us to want to do the unwanted behavior. We can start to place an awareness within ourselves when these things happen. These are Indicators of the pending behavior, if you will.

Once we have an awareness... We can bring those thoughts into captivity to Christ. The indicators fire and we make the choice to act against our current nature and behavior and choose faith or we succumb to the temptation to the bad behavior.

To sum up this point...

We want to get rid of a consequence. We know that it happens because of a behavior and the behavior is lead by a triggering event. We make ourselves aware of what events trigger the behavior and we pray and ask God for strength to overcome our nature and to choose to walk in faith.

So far this is all about avoidance right? Kind of negative... Let's turn this puppy upside down and sideways.

What consequences do you want to have happen in your life?

As an easy example let's say your kids are not listening to you.

Antecedent – Kids not doing what they are supposed to do

Behavior – I get upset, I yell, I send them to their room

Consequence – The behavior doesn't change and I get upset.

This consequence sucks, so I want to change it so they are obedient and I am happy... sound impossible? Hang on.

It is a chain...

I don't want this consequence, so I need to change my behavioral reaction to their not listening. This takes me all the way back to the antecedent doesn't it? Okay so

Why are they not doing what they are supposed to do? I have heard because they are brats because they are little monsters, they are strong willed etc.

I almost never hear, I think it is my approach or motivators that might need changing...

We can never change another person's behavior but we can lead them to changing it themselves.

Let's look at the kid's side of the chain.

Thinking - I don't see why I should listen. I don't want to do it, what's the reward? And so on...

Behavior - I don't do what I am told

Consequence - I get into trouble and I am unhappy.

What we have here is a lack of motivation and a suffering of consequences on both parts. Do your kids want to be happy? Do you want to be happy? Are you willing to change your approach for this to occur? Many parents aren't and that's why they suffer...

It requires a change in perspective. With kids it is generally not a test of wills but a deficit of motivations.

Example:

Kids aren't listening – parent and kids unhappy – mom and dad letting the kids run roughshod over them because they are at a loss for what to do and they are good people and making their children fear them has never been an option.

Dad – “I am going to change the way things are done here. I have asked you to clean your room and you don't do it. I have asked you to put away the dishes and you don't do it. I am sorry that I have not made you want to help, that's going to change.

You want that New Nintendo game right? You want me to be motivated to buy it for you cause its \$40 bucks and you don't have that much in your piggy bank right?

If you look over there on top of the fridge you will see that I bought it...

Now every time you make you bed or do the dishes and mom or I is happy with it, either mom or I will put our initial on that sheet over there on the fridge. Do you see it? When all of those 100 boxes are filled, you can have the game.

PS. Motivation is not bribery... Nor is this type of thing manipulation as manipulation is for your benefit alone and this is showing reward for growth... let's face it you were going to give it to them anyway, get them to value it by earning it.

So here is the sideways I was talking about...

This can be used to bring about good things as well.

I want X to happen so I will do Y. How often have we seen someone say: "if you want to be successful work harder" or smarter or some such thing. This is a desired consequence so we apply certain behaviors.

Have you ever looked at the triggering events or reasons why you want the consequence?

So many times we do things, because that's the way they have always been done, we have comfortable habits. What are the motivators that we look at when we desire to change?

What are your motivators this morning?

I don't want to go to hell so I will attend Church and receive eternal life (Fear)

Jesus has made a difference in my life and I want to give back to him so I come (Gratitude)

I just love Jesus! there is no one other than him for me. I am radically sold out to him, because he first loved me (love)

I am a good person so I go to church because its expected of me (obligation)

I am bought and paid for with a price and I am a servant for Jesus (Servant-hood)

God has messed with me royally so I am here to see how many others I can mess with (Revenge)

I don't want the church to actually experience a flow of the Spirit of God, because my God is about logical thought and not emotion or experience (science)

I don't want my wife or family ticked at me so I go (duty)

Sometimes negative events can spur us on to positive actions. These negative triggering events are a positive if they result in a change in behavior that brings about a positive consequence.

When we have a positive antecedent environment we can achieve positive consequences through our actions and our words with less hurt. When we surround ourselves with the people of God and we start bringing our thoughts into captivity the whole quality of the experience of our lives improves. Jesus said that he came to give us life and life more abundantly.

If there are behaviors that you want to change, take control of your thoughts, bring the consequences back along the chain past your behavior to the antecedent that causes you to behave the way you do and change it. Even better - plan a consequence.

Think in a positive way:

I am going to surround myself with the people of God. I am going to live in a culture of honoring one another, I am going to stop living in the past, I am going to put aside negative thoughts and emotions.

I am going to behave in a way that results in my life being full and rewarding. I am going to work to do things that will bring about joy and happiness in my life and in the lives of those around me. I will look for those things in my life that trigger positive consequence and I will work to build on those.

I know I can't do this on my own but I will let Jesus be my strength as I take back myself, so I can give myself to him as a whole, healed, happy and joyful person.

I will take a hard look at myself and look at what motivates me to do the things I do and if they result in negative consequences, I will give them to the Lord.

I will plan to put myself into circumstances where positive fellowship breeds a culture of honor.

I can overcome my fleshly nature by praying and asking God for an awareness of why I do what I do and by asking him for strength to overcome my failings.

prayer