

Unintended Consequences

Anyone who does their own “yard work” knows about *unintended consequences*. You might not care that your yard is full of “weeds,” but if your neighbors care about theirs, then they’re probably not too pleased with the seeds that blow from your place to theirs.

And if you’ve ever tried to spray herbicide (kills grass and weeds without discrimination) on a windy day, you’ve likely experienced *unintended consequences* first-hand. You *intended* to kill the vegetation growing in the cracks of your sidewalk or driveway. But bugs or fungus probably didn’t cause those brown spots in the grass alongside them! Ditto with sowing seed or broadcasting fertilizer. I invariably seem to get almost as much in the street, on the sidewalk, and across the fence as I do on my lawn.

But there are other and more positive and beneficial aspects of *unintended consequences* also.

I can’t tell you how many times someone completely unexpected came up to me after a “pointed” sermon and told me how much the lesson “got on their toes” or that they “really needed to hear” it. Although I may have had some specific people in mind who, at least in my judgment, “needed the lesson” (usually mostly me!), the *unintended consequences* always surprise me. It’s almost always someone I would have never expected “needed the lesson” who says that they did! Paul and Silas *intended to pray and praise God* with the hymns they sang at midnight in that Philippian jail, but “*the other, PCS prisoners were listening to them,*” Acts 16:25.

Likewise and very much related, I am always amazed (as I’m sure my preaching colleagues and diligent brethren are also) when someone relays how much something I said to or did for them- which I don’t even remember, meant to and helped them. Christians who “*let their light shine*” in the proper way and for the right reasons, often never know just how much *illumination* they’ve provided to someone *in the dark*, cf. Matt.5:16 and Acts 26:18. Keep *shining* brethren, you never know which tempest-tossed sailor “in the darkness may be lost” without even what we might consider to be our “feeble lamp” to guide them (from the hymn by Philip P. Bliss, “Let the Lower Lights Be Burning,” 1871).

I’ve long thought that many miss the primary point of the *Parable of the Sower* (and calling it the “Parable of the Soils” not only contradicts what Jesus called it, cf. Matt.13:18, but also highlights the misconception of it). By concentrating on the *various soil types* and *why they were unproductive*, we fail to comprehend the main point that “*the sower went out to sow*” and *did so on ALL of these various soils*, Matt.13:3-8. He did not “target” or limit where the seed fell; He just *sowed the seed*. Did He *intend* for seed to be sown “*on the good ground*”? Sure, but not to the point of discriminating against the (perhaps) *unintended consequence* of seed also falling on the *roadside*, *rocky*, or *thorny* ground. If we become “soil-testers” instead of “seed sowers,” the unintended consequence is that some *roadside*, *rocky*, and *thorny soils* are denied the opportunity to become “*good*”! But if our *intention* is go out and just “*sow seed*,” we may be indeed astonished at the *unintended consequences* that sprout, grow, and bear fruit!

We may think that our attitudes and behavior stemming from them “affects no one but me.” But such is rarely, if ever, true. While it may indeed not be our *intention*, negatively or positively, others ARE influenced and affected as *unintended consequences*. What blessing it is to influence others *toward* and *for* heaven, but what a curse it becomes to do so *away* and *from* the kingdom of God- even if such was not our “intention,” cf. Matt.18:1-7.

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