

CAUSE AND EFFECT AND THE MYTH OF UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

Daniel Botkin

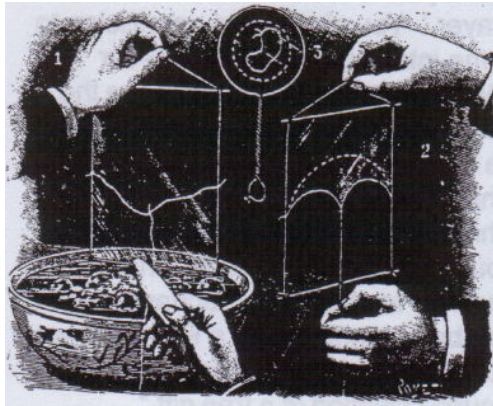
When God created the heavens and the earth, He built into this universe a system of cause and effect. The world operates by laws of cause and effect. For every effect there is a cause. Nothing happens or comes into existence without some known or unknown cause behind it.

God made it clear to Adam that his choices would be the cause of either positive or negative consequences. Choosing to eat from the tree of life would produce the effect of life; choosing to eat from the tree of knowledge would produce the effect of death. If Adam died, there would be a cause behind his death. Some 5,000 years after Adam's death, we still realize that death does not happen without some cause behind it. When we hear that someone has died, we usually ask, "How did it happen?"

This phenomenon of cause and effect is very obvious when the effect is something as serious and irreversible as death. But when the effect is something less serious than death, it is easy to forget (or even to deny) that there is a cause behind the effect. Because we live in a world of cause and effect, we should assume that whenever something happens, whether good or bad, there is some cause behind it. (This does not mean that every bad thing that happens to us is always the result of our own personal sins. Sometimes it is, but sometimes it is a test of our faith, as was the case with Job.)

The Bible is filled with statements of cause and effect. Many of the warnings to obey God's commandments are worded in the language of cause and effect. "If you do this, then I will do that"; "Do this... so that..."; "Don't do that... lest..."; "Thou shalt not... or else!" The first few chapters of Deuteronomy contain several cause-and-effect warnings like these.

"If... then..." statements are conditional. When God says, "If you will obey



not obligated to bless you unless you first obey Him. Your obedience becomes the cause of God's blessings. Conversely, your disobedience becomes the cause of God's curses.

Some people do not like to hear about consequences and conditions when discussing the blessings of God. Some folks believe that God's love is unconditional, that He loves everybody, even the wicked, unconditionally. There is so much talk in the church world about God's "unconditional love" that many people mistakenly assume that this idea is from the Bible.

In a general, universal sense, God's love for the human race as a whole could perhaps be called "unconditional." (See John 3:16.) But God does not have unconditional love for every individual of the human race. There are some individuals whom God hates. This is not just Daniel Botkin's personal opinion; it is what the Bible plainly states. Psalm 5:5 says that God hates all workers of iniquity. Psalm 11:5 says He hates the wicked and lovers of violence. Proverbs 6:19 says He hates a false witness who speaks lies, and he who sows discord among brethren.

It may disappoint some readers to hear this, but God does not unconditionally love every individual of the human race. He does not unconditionally love workers of iniquity, nor the wicked, nor lovers of violence, nor

false witnesses who speak lies, nor those who sow discord among brethren. God hates these individuals, the Bible says.

To speak of "unconditional love" implies that there is no "If... then..." that there is no cause and effect. But we live in a world of cause and effect. *If* a person is a worker of iniquity, or wicked, or a lover of violence, or a false witness that speaks lies, or one who sows discord among brethren, *then* God hates that person.

If we are not one of these recipients of God's hatred, why is it important for us to know this? It is important to know this because we do not want to misinform people about the nature of God's love. If I say, "Smile, God loves you" to workers of iniquity, or to the wicked, or to lovers of violence, or to false witnesses who speak lies, or to those who sow discord among brethren - people whom God in fact hates - then I myself become a false witness speaking a lie.

One rarely hears sermons about God's hatred for certain classes of individuals. That is to be expected, because the overall message of the gospel is the love of God as expressed through His Son. It is true that Jesus came into the world to call sinners to repentance and to save them. But Jesus' love for sinners will not stop Him from killing them and casting them into the lake of fire if they refuse to repent. When the Bible describes the Lord's return, it says that "the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power" (2Thes. 1:7-9). The first time the Messiah came, He demonstrated the love of God and called sinners to repentance. The second time He comes, He will execute the wrath

vengeance of God upon unrepentant sinners by melting the flesh off their bones.

How should we relate to sinners? Like Yeshua did at His first coming, we should demonstrate the love of God and call them to repentance. At the same time, we should not give them the false impression that God loves them unconditionally even if they remain in their sins. If a sinner continually hardens his heart and becomes a worker of iniquity, or wicked, or a lover of violence, or a false witness, or one who sows discord among brethren, then God will hate him. At that point, we need to be careful about how we relate to such sinners. We even need to be cautious and prayerful about how much help to give to a sinner who has earned God's hatred. King Jehoshaphat, a righteous king, agreed to help wicked King Ahab in a war. After the battle, a prophet rebuked King Jehoshaphat with these words: "Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate Yahweh? Therefore is wrath upon thee from before Yahweh" (2 Chron. 19:2). This verse makes me be careful about how much help to give to someone if I know that he is ungodly and hates the Lord. We are commanded to love our own enemies, but I'm not so sure how much love we are supposed to have for God's enemies. King David said, "Do not I hate them, O Lord, that hate Thee? And am I not grieved with those that rise up against Thee? I hate them with perfect

hatred" (Ps.139:21f)-

Lost sinners need to know that we live in a world of cause and effect. They need to realize that the choices they make have both temporal and eternal consequences. What they choose to do or not do about their sinful condition will be the cause of either forgiveness and eternal life with the saints of God, or everlasting fire with the devil and his angels. Telling an unrepentant sinner that God loves him unconditionally is not the Biblical model for calling hardened sinners to repentance.

Believers, too, need to realize that their choices have both temporal and

eternal consequences. In some Christian circles, the people's view of Christianity could be summed up something like this: To become a Christian, you go up to the church altar and repeat the words of the 'sinner's prayer.' You give Jesus permission to come into your heart and be your personal Savior. Then you have the option of deciding whether you want to be a carnal Christian or a spiritual Christian. You can be a carnal Christian and still go to heaven. But if you want to be a spiritual Christian, you'll go to church on Sundays, so you can be reminded once a week that you don't need to do anything for the Lord, 'cause salvation is a free gift."

It's true that salvation is a gift from God, but it is not exactly "free." It cost the Son of God His life. Because He paid the price of redemption. He can freely offer forgiveness of sins and eternal life. Even salvation operates by cause and effect. His death is the cause which produces the effect of your forgiveness. But your forgiveness, once received, should become a cause. Your receiving of God's gift of eternal life should cause you to want to do something for the Lord - not out of a need to earn your salvation, but out of gratitude for His amazing grace. If you are not motivated and inspired to do something for the Lord, then I suggest that you "examine yourselves [to see] whether ye be in the faith" (2 Cor. 13:5).

Not only lost sinners, but also saved believers need to remember that we live in a world of cause and effect. For every effect there is a cause. Furthermore, it is important to understand that we cannot always know the exact cause behind each and every effect. Many of the cause-and-effect warnings in the Scriptures are not real specific. They are just general statements which tell us that obedience to God's commandments will bring the effect of blessings, and disobedience of God's commandments will bring the effect of curses. Some passages get specific, but in most of the warnings, the specific forms of the blessings and curses are not described in great detail. This

means that if you disobey God's commandments, your disobedience will result in some sort of negative consequences, but you may never know which act of disobedience caused which negative consequence. So it's best to not disobey at all.

Things go on behind the scenes in the unseen realm of the spirit. The choices we make become the causes of positive or negative results. We do not need to understand the "Why?" or the "How?" of cause and effect. Joshua did not understand why God told him to march around Jericho, nor how this would make the walls fall down flat. Naaman the leper did not understand why the Prophet Elisha said to dip in the Jordan, nor how that would heal his leprosy. Yet both of these men got the desired effect because they obeyed. They obeyed because they had faith that their obedience would be the cause of the desired blessing.

Each time we obey the Lord, our obedience becomes the cause of some positive effect; each time we disobey the Lord, our disobedience becomes the cause of some negative effect. We may never know which specific acts of obedience or disobedience produced which results, but we can be certain that obedience brings blessings and disobedience brings curses. "I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live" (Deut.30:19).

PETAH TIKVAH



A quarterly magazine
for Torah-observant
Messianic believers.
\$2 for sample issue

PetahTikvahi
165 Doncaster Road
Rochester, NY 14623