*“Right is right, even if everyone*

*is against it; and wrong is wrong,*

*even if everyone is for it."*

*- William Penn, 1644-1718*

*founder of Pennsylvania*

Recently, I read about a church in Virginia that was newsworthy because it wanted to do something its insurance company directed it not to do. It wanted to tell the truth; but the insurance company disagreed, worried that if the church did so, their legal liability and financial risk would rise.

The consequences of telling the truth were too great; the insurance company deciding the value of truth was less than the value of money. It believed it was the responsibility of those harmed by a church employee to prove the church was responsible for the employee’s actions. And if they could not, the church was obviously not responsible.

Perhaps the insurance company should have looked to the words of early 20th century English writer G. K. Chesterton who said, “To have a right to do a thing is not at all the same as to be right in doing it.”

Was the insurance company’s approach how our parents taught us to make decisions? I don’t remember my father telling me that right and wrong took a backseat to anything. Rather, my brothers and I were expected to do what was right regardless of the consequences.

Our elected officials are the experts at allowing consequences to drive their decisions. They look first at the consequences of their vote and then vote to maintain their political power, to get reelected, and to secure their personal financial future; the right and wrong of their vote rarely considered.

Nevertheless, consequences can be useful, deterring us from doing something wrong because of the consequences of doing so. My father was expert at such feedback. If my brothers or I failed to do the right thing, we received immediate, clear, and memorable consequences that altered our future decision-making.

Unfortunately, our society no longer sees consequences of poor decision-making as desirable. When time-honored values interfere with what we want to do, we remove the consequences by redefining right and wrong. An excellent example happened about 30 years ago when we “modernized” the Hippocratic Oath to better reflect our more evolved and enlightened values, deciding an Oath that had endured for over 2400 years was outdated.

So, we removed prohibitions against abortion, euthanasia, and sex with patients. We removed the consequences of our actions because they interfered with what we wanted to do. We redefined right and wrong. Problem solved. Really?

Is this the path we want for our nation? According to Sir John Glubb in The Fate of Empires, America is in the final age in the life of an empire, The Age of Decadence. Isn’t decadence just seeking self-interest and self-gratification while avoiding the consequences of those actions? Is that really what we want?

Back to the church in Virginia and what it decided? Did it allow the consequences of its decision to alter its decision? No. It told the truth. It decided that doing what was right was more important than the consequences of doing so. It saw less ambiguity in its Law than the insurance company saw in its law.

It publically apologized to victims of sexual abuse by its youth ministries director.It then set up programs to help the people who were abused. It accepted its responsibility and worked to help repair the damage.

How should we make decisions? Should we make decisions based on personal self-interest? Should we redefine right and wrong so our decisions have no consequences? Or, should we follow the example of the church in Virginia, doing what is right, refusing to allow the consequences to impact the decision. Which of these would allow us to feel best about ourselves?

What is important? How do we make decisions? Scottish poet and essayist Robert Louis Stevenson said, “Everybody, sooner or later, sits down to a banquet of consequences.” It’s worth some thought.