

*The Articles of*  
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# Learning From the Mistakes of Others

*“As a dog returns to his own vomit, so a fool repeats his folly”*(Prov 26:11)

Picture that! God sees us as dogs disgustingly going back to lap up our vomit when we repeat the mistakes we have committed. We have wasted a golden opportunity to learn from our sin and be a better person for our experience.

Picture this! We stand at a fork in the road. It diverges in several directions, and we don't know where each one leads. However, we have in our hands a journal written by people who have traveled each road describing their experiences on that road. Would we not be fools to throw the book away unread and walk wherever we feel is best?

If God expects us to learn from our own mistakes, He assuredly expects us to learn from others' mistakes. All around us, others are making a mess of their lives and leaving us precious opportunities to see the foolishness of the path they have chosen. Will we learn?

Observe the mistakes of others! The wreckage sin leaves is not simply sad; we must notice it to learn from it. Ezekiel describes a man who defiles himself in sin and deserves death (Ezek 18:10-13), but then says, *“If, however, he begets a son who sees all the sins which his father has done, and considers but does not do likewise...he shall surely live!”*(Ezek 18:14, 17). Notice that the son *“sees all the sins which his father has done”*—he is observing! He watches the father's actions and their outcome, and decides he wants to be a different person. Solomon warns us to heed his words, *“to deliver you from the immoral woman...None who go to her return, nor do they regain the paths of life”*(Prov 2:16, 19). Solomon had seen this type of woman and the way she destroyed men's lives—and he had made this mistake himself. Rather than stumbling ourselves, Solomon wants us to learn from his missteps. Something simple must be said: We don't have enough time—or money, or strength—to make all the mistakes in the world! We shouldn't have to probe every path to know it's dangerous! If we hope to survive, we must have the wisdom to observe others' flaws and avoid them!

Isn't observing the mistakes of others one of the main reasons we read the Bible? Paul says of the Jews, *“Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come”*(1 Cor 10:11). If we are tempted by sex outside of marriage, can't we see where that path leads by reading the stories of David (2 Sam 11-12), Samson (Judges 16), and Amnon (2 Sam 13)? Doesn't Solomon remind us of the emptiness of riches and partying (Eccl 2:1-11, 1 Pet 4:1-4)? God didn't write these stories to give us a history book, but so we could observe their mistakes. Add to their testimony what we see around us—jails teeming with convicts who started by just “running with the wrong crowd,” homes wrecked by adultery, pornography, and divorce, and millions dying of lung cancer, cirrhosis, and

drunk driving. Do we have to end up this way to learn something? Can we afford not to observe others' mistakes?

Don't think you're immune! Somehow we think we'll never end up here—not me! We are not the first to think so. When Jesus told Peter he would deny Him, Peter protested, "*Even if all are made to stumble because of You, I will never be made to stumble*"(Matt 26:33). Not me, Lord, I would never do that! God addresses this directly: "*Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall*"(1 Cor 10:12). It will happen to you! The physical and spiritual consequences of sin come on all those who commit them. We must observe others' mistakes, but not with hopes of looking down on them in sin, but to apply the lessons directly to ourselves. Remember: no one started out in life hoping to be divorced and lonely, or contract a sexually transmitted disease, or go to prison. Yet if we don't apply their mistakes to ourselves, we are doomed to repeat them!

Choose better! Yes, we can do better! Remember that evil man—"If, however, he begets a son who sees all the sins which his father has done, and considers but does not do likewise"(Ezek 18:14). We can choose a better path than our parents, if their path has led to sin. We can choose a better path than our classmates and co-workers. Knowing where the road leads, we can turn our back on it. Speaking of young people conspiring to do evil, Solomon warns, "*My son, do not walk in the way with them, keep your foot from their path*"(Prov 1:15). Choose better!

In some matters of morality there are gray areas as to what God wants. How short is too short? How far is too far? How much is too much? Remember this principle: "*Abstain from every form of evil*"(1 Thess 5:22). Remember the mistakes of others, and that many started down the road to sin by telling themselves it was a gray area. Choose better!

We stand at a fork in the road of our lives. Each day we choose our path, and Satan does all he can to confuse our decision and cloud our judgment. Look at others around you and in the Bible. Remember you are not immune. Choose better!

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