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Pardon or Punishment

Shakespeare’s Elizabethan tragic play, *Romeo and Juliet*, follows two star-crossed lovers who commit suicide because of a family feud that keeps them apart. Friar Laurence, the holy man who lied and formed scheming plans in order to marry two adolescent teens, should be banished from Verona because his sins that had good intentions still led to irreversible negative consequences.

When two young lovers go to Friar Laurence for aid in how to be together, he gave them advice to marry in secret. Although this was intended to turn “household’s rancor to pure love” (II.iii.92), the alliance of Romeo and Juliet was risky and controversial because “violent delights have violent ends” (II.vi.9). Both Montagues and Capulets were unaware of this new birth of peace, and could not comprehend Romeo’s passiveness towards a Capulet. This led to confusion, fighting amongst the enemies, the murder of Tybalt by Romeo, and Romeo’s banishment. If Friar Laurence had been honest and informed the families about the marriage and its humble intentions, the bloodshed and misfortunes that resulted from misinformed enemies could have been avoided.

As the situation grew bleaker, Friar Laurence had to use more schemes to cover up his own tracks by giving Juliet a vile to fake her own death. Romeo never discovered the secret intentions of the scheme even though it had been the Friar’s responsibility to inform him. Another plan that was “miscarried by [Friar Laurence’s] fault” (V.iii.267) resulted in Romeo’s suicide. Friar Laurence realizes that he is to be held accountable for the tragedies and offers his “old life [to] be sacrificed… unto the rigor of severest law” (V.iii 268-269). The masking of secrets with more false acts to avoid shame from previous sins still resulted with the negative consequence of death.

Friar Laurence caused death just like Romeo did, so they should both get the same punishment of banishment. The priest was a holy man who should know that lying, even with good intentions, leads to negative consequences. Being a mature adult, he should have been able to handle the situation with integrity and honesty. Sins that result in the death of others can’t go unpunished.