

Sowing and Reaping

Galatians 6:7-10

With Study Questions

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Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. ⁸ For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. ⁹ And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. ¹⁰ Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith (Galatians 6:6-10).

My friend, who has since died, wrestled with the notion of faith in Christ. And though there are no legitimate objections to the faith once for all delivered to the saints, we should not think that all things are simple; some things can be quite vexing. My friend's struggle concerned his Christian friend. His friend was apparently a good, hard working, virtuous man whose life was full of strife and difficulty. It led my friend to ask, "When does his ship come in?" Where's the payoff for virtue?

The Apostle Paul writes in such a way as to lead his readers to believe there will be a payoff. There will be a crop. That crop may be a blessing or a curse. Either way, there will be a crop – a produce.

Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap (Galatians 6:7).

God is Not Mocked

So what is this deception to which church members are vulnerable? It would do us well to know, for it is a deception which leads to the mocking of God. To mock God literally means to turn up one's nose at God – to sneer at Him or treat Him with contempt. When the verse says that God is not mocked, it does not mean that men will not mock Him; it means God will not be mocked with impunity.

It seems odd that church members would desire to mock God. This, for the most part, is a character trait reserved for the ungodly (Psalm 1:1). But since this letter is written to churches, it must mean that this mockery is not merely happening among the pagans. How is God mocked by the church?

Reaping and Sowing

We're not immediately told what the exact offense is. Paul uses a basic agricultural axiom – you reap what you sow. If you plant corn, don't expect peaches. The question now is what is being sown and what is being reaped? What are people planting? In what are they investing? What misguided notions

have so subdued church members that the mature crop, rather than being a nutritious meal or a profitable harvest, will rather be a rude awakening?

For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life (Galatians 6:8).

Corruption Versus Life

Here is Paul's answer. If you sow to the flesh, you will reap corruption. We can see by the parallel phrase that corruption must be the opposite of everlasting life, i.e. everlasting death. God is mocked when one sows to his flesh and the result of this mockery is death.

And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame *and* everlasting contempt (Daniel 12:2).

Jesus describes this death as:

"hell fire – where *'Their worm does not die And the fire is not quenched'*" (Mark 9:47, 48). ...outer darkness. (Where there) will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 8:12).

On the other hand when one sows to the Spirit he will, of the Spirit, reap everlasting life. Of this glorious life we are told:

Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever (Daniel 12:3).

And as we have borne the image of the *man* of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly *Man* (1 Corinthians 15:49).

For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,²¹ who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself (Philippians 3:20, 21).

Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.³ And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure (1 John 3:2, 3).

Sowing to the Flesh/Spirit

Assuming we wish to avoid mocking God – assuming we wish to avoid corruption and reap life over death – how are we to understand sowing to the flesh versus sowing to the Spirit?

The immediate context of the verses (1-6) under our consideration (supporting your teachers and bearing one another's burdens) may provide some application to the apostle's point, but it doesn't give us a very full portrait of what this sowing is. One can hardly suppose that a person's willingness to support their church or ability to gently empathize and restore an erring brother is the good work that delivers a soul to heaven rather than hell.

We must realize that Paul's parting comments here are a series of somewhat self-contained encouragements and admonitions. The wider context is necessary to grasp the nature of reaping and sowing to life or death.

This brings us back to the Apostle's main point in this epistle. If you're sowing, investing, trusting, hoping in your own flesh (understanding the flesh to be any aspect of human achievement or effort) then you have no hope. Furthermore, if one seeks to synthesize or commingle their own efforts with the cross of Christ, Christ profits them nothing (Galatians 5:2).

But if one operates in the venue of the Spirit (understanding the Spirit to be all that the Spirit reveals regarding the person and work of Christ and His power to save), then life is yours. The spiritual man recognizes that, strictly speaking, he does not approach God through any power of his own as much as he is drawn to God by the power of God. The mature Christian sees that his journey to the cross was a result of the power of the cross. As we studied earlier, this it is the difference between walking in the Spirit (Galatians 5:16) and the works of the flesh (Galatians 5:19).

And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart (Galatians 6:9).

Doing Good

Lest someone say, "Since salvation is by the power of God alone, let us sin all the more" Paul readily advances the concept of the necessary fruit produced by those who have been quickened by the Spirit of God. It would be quite antithetical to the theme of the entire epistle to suggest here that the doing of good merits the approval of God unto salvation. On the other hand, the doing of good is so tightly linked to the free gift of justification that Paul can include good behavior in his challenge to persevere.

The perseverance that necessarily follows justification is not to be thought of as a skate in the park. Christians grow weary (literally begin to lack courage or lose heart). It shouldn't be considered odd that the Christian faith, though

given freely by Christ, is quite a challenge to live out. One doesn't earn the post of a prince – he's born into it. This doesn't mean that it is easy to be a child of royalty.

Two things Christians should never grow weary of doing: 1) Trusting in Christ as Savior. There is plenty of glitter which would seek to sway us from trusting in Christ alone. Vain philosophies and empty deceit are at an all-time high. The brass ring is more like a gas ring. When you reach for it you'll find yourself grasping at the air and landing in the mud. 2) Trusting in Christ as Lord. Following the counsel of the Master Teacher is not as easy as following the counsel of a friend who is always willing to tell you what you want to hear. We are to persevere in the power and wisdom of Christ.

The acknowledgment of Christ as Savior and Lord, though a free gift, again, can be tough work; saints historically have suffered and died for their profession of faith. But even the most heroic saint realizes that both his salvation and good works are granted by the grace of God.

And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient,²⁵ in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth (2 Timothy 2:24, 25).

Calvin observes,

The undeserved kindness of God appears in the very act of honoring the works which his grace has enabled us to perform, by promising to them a reward to which they are not entitled!

I must both cajole and provide the financial resources for my children to buy a birthday or Christmas present for their mother. Apart from me they would neither have the resources nor disposition to do this. Yet once they are brought in as a participant, they find it most joyous. It would be contrary to rational thought, however, for them to glory in this action as if it originated from their own natures.

Reaping in Due Season

The harvest to those who sow to the Spirit will be rich indeed if we do not lose heart. Losing heart can be compared to the loosing of a bow-string. When relaxed it becomes useless or feeble. Losing heart also carries the idea of becoming weary in the strife against sin.

In some respects, sowing can be tedious work – the tilling of the ground, the planting of the seeds, the removing of the weeds, and the waiting. I remember

¹ Calvin, J. 1998. *Calvin's Commentaries: Galatians* (electronic ed.). Logos Library System; Calvin's Commentaries (Ga 6:8). Ages Software: Albany, OR

as a child planting seeds and growing so impatient. Where's the payoff? As my friend asked, "When does the ship come in?" As Christians we shouldn't think that all of God's blessings are on the other side of glory. Certainly we are blessed daily in untold ways by God. But the truly pious man realizes his harvest is in heaven where the sowing will appear a pittance compare to the reaping. As Paul informs us,

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us (Romans 8:18).

What investor, if he knew his penny would yield thousands, would not give all pennies? The Academy Award winning *Schindler's List* has a touching scene where Schindler, who had given so much to save Jews from the holocaust, begins his cost benefit analysis. Each rescued person had cost him a certain amount of business or money. When the war was over he looked at his watch, his ring, his car and lamented. How many lives would this ring have saved? How many would this car have saved? The spiritual man views his entire life as one of sowing for his entire eternity will be one of reaping.

Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith (Galatians 6:10).

With that eternal season, and reaping, in mind, let us continually sow in the season designated for sowing. The immediate context of this sowing may be the support of your church or your compassion and support of a Christian brother. But of course, this sowing extends into all acts of charity and kindness. And this should be reflected in our behavior toward all, but especially other Christians.

This type of favoritism may seem odd at first glance. But we all know that our family members take priority.

But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever (1 Timothy 5:8).

Our most intense and devoted efforts should always be toward those to whom we are most closely tied. Christ was not miserly toward us; neither should we be miserly but rather liberal—whether it be finances, time, hospitality, or other forms of consideration. Ponder the challenge in Ecclesiastes 11:

Cast your bread upon the waters, for you will find it after many days (vs. 1). There will be reaping after the sowing.

Give a serving to seven, and also to eight, for you do not know what evil will be on the earth (vs. 2). Give generously. You might not have the ability to give tomorrow.

If the clouds are full of rain, they empty *themselves* upon the earth; and if a tree falls to the south or the north, in the place where the tree falls, there it shall lie. ⁴ He who observes the wind will not sow, and he who regards the clouds will not reap. ⁵As you do not know what *is* the way of the wind, or how the bones *grow* in the womb of her who is with child, so you do not know the works of God who makes everything (vs. 3-5). We'll always find reasons why it might not be the best season to help. This can paralyze us – paralysis by analysis.

In the morning sow your seed, and in the evening do not withhold your hand; for you do not know which will prosper, either this or that, or whether both alike *will be good* (vs. 6). In the end, all are at the mercy of God's providence. May our sowing be in the rich promises of God.

Questions for Study

1. What does it mean to mock God (page 1)?
2. What does it mean to sow and reap (page 2)?
3. Where does sowing to the flesh lead? Where does sowing to the Spirit lead (pages 2, 3)?
4. What does it mean to sow to the flesh/Spirit (page 3)?
5. What are two things of which Christians should not grow weary (page 4)?
6. We are told that we will reap for doing good. Does this mean we are saved by human works or effort? Explain (page 4).
7. When does the Christian's "ship" come in (page 5)?
8. Why should Christians make every effort to do good (sow) as they have opportunity (page 6)?
9. Why are we to give priority to other Christians in good works (page 6)?
10. Discuss the counsel regarding giving found in Ecclesiastes 11:1-6 (page 6).