

SOWING AND REAPING

"Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting."
Galatians 6:7-8.

That the hearers of the Word were obligated to support the ministry of the Word was insisted upon again and again by Paul, even though he seldom asserted his own claims. Here he is intimating that selfish, unsympathetic, and unjust dealings with ministers of the gospel cannot but result in a harvest of spiritual meagerness and leanness. On the other hand, generous dealings with religious leaders will result in the spiritual growth and enrichment of the Christian community. As to this he admonished the Galatian Christians not to deceive themselves. We should remember that there are three ways by which people are deceived. Some deceive themselves; some are deceived by others; and still others are deceived by Satan. Hence, the timely exhortation, "Be not deceived."

These Christians in Galatia seemed to believe that the law of cause and effect in the world of morals does not work always. But, this law had been stated in the Old Testament. Job had declared: "According as I have seen, they that plow iniquity, and sow wickedness, reap the same." Job 4:8. The same truth was set forth in Proverbs: "He that soweth iniquity shall reap vanity." 22:8. Hosea preached the same doctrine: "For they have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind." 8:7. The Galatians were not ignorant of these teachings of the Old Testament, nor were they ignorant of the facts of experience and observation. No matter how much they might try, they could not defy successfully such a divinely established law.

Between the natural world and the spiritual world there is the closest analogy--an analogy which the sacred writers have turned to excellent account in emphasizing the operation of natural law in the spiritual realm. This is what Paul is doing in our text. He is seizing upon a principle known and recognized in the realm of the temporal and the seen, and is projecting it with all of its inevitable certainty into the realm of the eternal and the unseen as the postulate of moral responsibility. Among all analogies that may be traced between the human mind and the course of external nature none is, perhaps, more striking or more easily understood than that of sowing and reaping.

Our text opens with a caution: "Stop deceiving yourselves; God is not mocked." This construction is the present imperative in a prohibition which forbids the continuance of an action presently going on. The word "mocked" comes from the Greek "mukterizo", meaning "to dilate the nostrils," "to turn up the nose," "to ridicule," "to ignore," or "to sneer." The thought which Paul is trying to press home is that it is foolish to think that one can thwart the divine law, and out-wit God by reaping a harvest different from that which a person has sown. "Stop leading yourselves astray. God is not being out-witted and evaded, for whatever a man is in the habit of sowing, this also will he reap."

This text applies to an individual, a family, a church, a state, or a nation. Therefore, let none be deceived. Let an individual, a community, or a nation hate righteousness and love iniquity, and

"Tho' the mills of the gods grind slowly,
They grind exceedingly small;
Tho' with patience He stands waiting,
With exactness grinds He all."

But friends, listen: "Whatsoever a man soweth, that," just that, exactly that, and nothing else, "shall he also reap." Many things we know are true because they are in the Bible, but if we did not have the Bible we would know that this verse is true. It is being fulfilled daily before our very eyes. Nothing is any clearer than this—that we cannot reap without a previous sowing; that we cannot reap what nor where we have not sown. "God is not mocked;" nor will He be. Men may deceive themselves, and others, with excuses and false appearances, but they cannot deceive God, who knows their hearts as well as their worldly substance.

Some things about sowing are self-evident. When a man sows:—

I. He Expects To Reap.

If a farmer went on sowing and never reaped, you would say that he was a fit subject for the lunatic asylum. In both the natural and the spiritual world, he who sows does so with the confident expectation of two things—first, that there shall be a harvest, and second, that he shall reap it. The law of cause and effect is axiomatic.

It is amazing that rational people should deceive themselves in matters that concern their everlasting interest. It is infinitely more astonishing that in this so-called scientific, philosophical, and psychological age men should delude themselves so far as to fancy they can impose upon God Himself, or mock Him and escape with impunity.

This law of the harvest is familiar. It is a law about which no one should ever have the slightest doubt. A man should not deceive himself, much less can he with impunity deceive God by managing to escape the consequences of his acts. When a man attempts to avoid the results of his own actions, he is really showing such contempt for God. It is utterly impossible for a man to escape the harvest which springs from the seeds which his own deeds have sown. Moffatt introduces a note of freshness in his translation of this passage, "Make no mistake. A man reaps just what he sows."

Man is always looking forward to the time when he will reap. A young man serves an apprenticeship to some trade or profession for years, looking forward to the time when his reputation and fortune will be made. A young man studies law for years, anticipating the time when his clients will be numerous. A medical student works hard for years, looking forward to the day when he will receive his diploma and start his earnings.

We are constantly and ceaselessly sowing. We are sowing physically in the care or the abuse of our bodies. We are sowing mentally in the training or the neglect of our minds, in the filling of them with the things that are worthwhile or with fancies, fantasies or figures that will rise up to haunt us. We are sowing morally in the thoughts that we think, in the literature that we read, in the places to which we go, and in the amusements that we follow. We are most of all sowing spiritually, sowing in prayer or lack of it, sowing in the study of the Bible or the lack of it, sowing in attendance upon the service of the house of the Lord or in our neglect of them, sowing in our obedience or disobedience to the guiding impulses of the Holy Spirit. We sow by thinking, or by failing to think. We sow by being, or by failing to be. We sow by doing, or by failing to do.

II. He Expects To Reap The Same Kind Of Seed That He Sows.

A farmer decides what his harvest will be by the seed which he sows in the spring-time. He who sows barley does not expect oats. He who sows oats does not expect to reap wheat. He who sows turnips does not expect to reap potatoes. Every intelligent farmer expects to reap what he sows. He knows that the quantity of the harvest will depend on some things that are beyond his control; for example, the amount of rain and sunshine will have something to do with that. But whether the harvest be great or small, the quality of it he decides when he determines what shall be sown. This analogy holds good in the spiritual world. Man may sometimes wish he had sown differently; he may wish the seeds could be changed in the ground; he may wish the harvest could come up of quite another sort. But all the wishing in the world won't alter things as they are. It is impossible to trick or to cheat God.

It does not matter whether God writes His laws in nature or in the scriptures, they cannot be violated with impunity. To seek first the kingdom of God is to have all things added to you. To jump into the Niagara River is to be carried over the falls. To take fire into your bosom is to be burned. You cannot touch pitch without being soiled. This is a truth to think about. "Whatsoever a man soweth, that"—just that and nothing else—"shall he also reap."

Anne of Austria said to Cardinal Richelieu, "My lord Cardinal, one thing you seem to have forgotten. God is a sure paymaster. He may not pay at the end of every week or month or year, but I charge you to remember that He pays in the end." There is nothing arbitrary here. You are privileged to sow as you please; God simply sees to it that nothing interferes with the harvest.

You might as well try to deceive God by painting a few pebbles from the beach and planting them for peach seeds, expecting first the sprout and then the tree and then the luscious fruit, as to live a painted life and expect God to mistake sin for holiness and to reward you with the blessing of the righteous. Emerson once said, "Punishment is a fruit that, unsuspected, ripens within the flower that conceals it." That is only a bit more polite and rhetorical way of saying what the old colored woman said when asked, "Where do they get the sulphur for the fires of hell?" She replied, "Never you mind, sonny, you carry your own sulphur with you."

We all reap just what we sow. Sow wheat, and you will reap wheat. Sow tares, and you will reap tares, and troubles, and tears besides. We reap what we sow in our own lives. We reap what we sow in our education. Many a person has wished he now had the opportunity he once had at getting an education, finding himself limited for life by the neglect of earlier years. We reap what we sow in our businesses. We reap what we sow in our children. We reap what we sow in our friends. No thought, no word, and no deed of man ever dies. The sower shall be a reaper. Whatever a man sows in deeds that shall he also reap. Sow sympathy and you will reap love. Sow tenderness to the man wounded by the way-side, and you will reap tenderness when angels stoop down to bind up your own broken heart. One cannot do another an injury without paying for it. A prominent school man gave an unfair decision when judging a debate. Without a single comment one of the debaters removed him from important position. It does not pay anyone to do wrong. On two adjoining farms were owners who did not get along well. One night a young man from the other farm took a sack of Johnson grass seed and scattered it over his neighbor's farm. But, later he fell in love

with the daughter of the man on whose farm he had scattered the grass seed, and married her. The old gentlemen, on whose farm the grass was sown, soon died after he had willed the farm to his daughter, whose husband had sown the grass. He fought Johnson grass as long as he lived. This is true both in a good and in a bad sense. Sing a good song, speak a good word, or do a good deed, and it will increase and break on the shores of eternity with an increase of a thousand-fold.

Here are two ways of living. To sow unto the flesh is to be absorbed in self-pleasing and sordid pursuits. They sow to the flesh who live under the influence of their natural inclinations and desires, pleasing only themselves and neglecting the will of God. He who lives and sows unto the Spirit devotes himself to the weal of others and to the glory of God. Sow to the Spirit so that you may reap a blessed spiritual harvest here and hereafter. Sow to the Spirit so that those about you, who will share in your harvest, may rise up and call you blessed because of the fruitage of your life. Some are like the boy who, when his teacher told about rich man and Lazarus and asked him which he would rather be, said, "The rich man while I live and Lazarus when I die." That could not be. There isn't any bridge between.

III. He Expects To Reap More Than He Sows.

The harvest is manifold. Sow a grain, and reap a spear of wheat; sow a handful, and gather a sheaf; sow a bushel, and gather enough for a year's supply. The same rule of multiplication holds in spiritual things. Eliot said, "Sow a thought and you reap an act; sow an act and you reap a habit; sow a habit and you reap a character; sow a character and you reap a destiny." But the kind of a harvest depends upon the kind of seed sown. Great harvests are gathered by those who have lived well; "thirty, sixty, an hundredfold." Someone wrote this statement, "The evil a man does lives after him, the good is oft interred with his bones." But the good we do is also immortal. It will live and multiply when the places that knew us know us no more forever.

I am presenting this text to you as a promise, an inspiration, a heartening and a radiant hope from the ever-blessed God. "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." You reap just what you sow, except more of it. Let me close this message with the following lines from Madeline S. Bridges:—

"There are loyal hearts, there are spirits brave,
There are souls that are pure and true;
Then give to the world the best you have,
And the best shall come back to you.

Give love, and love to your heart will flow,
A strength in your utmost need;
Have faith, and a score of hearts will show
Their faith in your word and deed.

For life is the mirror of king and slave,
'Tis just what you are and do;
Then give to the world the best you have,
And the best will come back to you."