

“Sowing and Reaping”

GALATIANS 6:7-10

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This morning I would like for us to take a few moments to think about a topic that was suggested by one of our own just a week or two ago, the idea of “living by a worldly standard but expecting a Godly result.” As we think about that statement, “living by a worldly standard but expecting a Godly result,” there is one law that comes to mind, one of God’s laws that goes all the way back to the Garden of Eden, God’s law of sowing and reaping. I did not really think about it until this week, but this is actually one of the first of God’s laws to ever be established – it was a law issued, in fact, several days before there were even human beings on the earth! According to Genesis 1:11, ***“Then God said, ‘Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees on the earth bearing fruit after their kind with seed in them’; and it was so.”*** This basic principle, then, is as old as life itself – we reap what we sow.

Of course, as human beings, we often think that we can bypass God’s law; we often think that we can be the exception to the rule. And so we look at the world around us, and we find many who want to throw off the shackles of God’s law – they would love to remove all mentions of God from public life, they clamor to redefine marriage, they defend the murder of millions of innocent children every year, and yet these same people long to live in a society that is characterized by safety, and peace and love. And so there is a disconnect – living by a worldly standard, but expecting a Godly result. When we try to bypass one of the oldest laws in the universe, however, we usually just end up frustrated and disappointed. The law of sowing and reaping cannot be overturned by judicial review, and it certainly cannot be made void by ignoring it and hoping that it simply goes away.

The solution, then, is not to bypass God’s law but to understand it, and live by it, and work with it – using God’s law for our benefit, as it was intended. This morning I would suggest that the same basic rule that applies in the garden also applies to spiritual matters, and so that we can get God’s input on this, I would invite you to turn with me to one of the clearest passages on this subject – it is found in Galatians 6:7-10.

As you might know, the book of Galatians is actually one of the first New Testament books to be written. In other words, if you were to arrange all of the New Testament books in the order they were written, the New Testament would most likely start with the book of Galatians. The letter was written by the apostle Paul to a number of congregations scattered throughout the Roman province of Galatia, what is now basically the nation of Turkey. Conservative Bible scholars tell us that the book was written sometime around 49-50 AD,

only about 20 years after the Lord's death and resurrection. The book deals with the struggle at that time between the Law of Moses and the relationship that we now have with God through his Son. Paul deals with that issue, and then in the last two chapters, he basically encourages godly living – encouraging Christians to get along with each other, encouraging them to avoid sin, encouraging them to do good, encouraging them to encourage each other, and that is where we come to Galatians 6:7-10,

⁷ Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. ⁸ For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. ⁹ Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary. ¹⁰ So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith.

As we look at these four verses, I would like for us to look at the common deception, and then I would like for us to close with a brief review of God's law.

I. **But first of all, let us please notice the danger that Paul warns about here – THE DANGER OF DECEPTION – THE DANGER OF BELIEVING THAT WE CAN SIN WITHOUT ANY CONSEQUENCES.**

“Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption.” When Paul says that we are not to be ***“deceived,”*** he uses a word referring to being led astray, the idea that we can be misguided or led off of the right path. The word he uses is the basis of our English word “planet.” As you might know, the word planet means “wanderer,” and it goes back to the idea that when ancient people looked up at the sky, the stars had a definite track, but then there were the planets – they did not fit the path of the stars, they were different – they appeared to wander, and so they called them “planets.” That is the root of the word here at the beginning of verse 7 – we are not to be tricked into wandering, ***“Do not be deceived.”***

Paul then goes on to say that, ***“God is not mocked.”*** That word ***“mocked”*** is used only one time in the New Testament, right here – and it goes back to the Greek word for “nostril,” and Paul uses it here as a figure of speech. Back in that day, if you really wanted to insult someone, if their chariot cut off your chariot in downtown Rome during rush hour, you would thumb your nose at them. Paul is basically saying, “Do not wander off. Do not thumb your nose at God” [paraphrase]. Do not treat God with contempt. To bring this over into modern times, today we might say, “Do not give God the finger.” And the way we throw this insult at God is to sin as if there will be no consequences. And so if we sin while ignoring what that sin will eventually lead to, we are throwing God a very unpleasant gesture. And the truth is, we cannot get away with mocking God in that way. If we ignore the warnings and sow seeds of the flesh, we will at some point in the future ***“reap corruption.”*** I think of maybe ignoring a warning light on the car. A lot of times, if that check engine light comes on and if we ignore it long enough something bad might happen. I always get a kick out of the NAPA store on Stoughton Road down near Farm & Fleet. Sometimes their sign out front says, “We fix check engine lights.” And I laugh at that, because it's usually not the light that's broken! If the light is on, it is doing its job! Two weeks ago, I was driving downtown and had two of those warning lights come on. Suddenly, the van felt like it was about to die at the stoplight. The light turned green, and the van seemed to just kind of limp along. I made it back to our mechanic on the southwest side of Madison, and they determined that three of the coils had failed. There is a coil right over each spark plug in our van, so I made it home on three cylinders. And so I guess that for nearly \$500 they fixed our check-engine light! Of course, I could have just taken out a piece of black electrical tape and taped over the light so I couldn't see it – that might have been one way of fixing the light, but that is not the way it works. In a slightly similar way, if we ignore God's warnings, thinking that we

can get away with something, we are thumbing our noses at God, we are wandering, and there will be consequences – even if we think we can get away with it.

I'm thinking of the Lord's words in Luke 12:2-3, where he warned against the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and said, ***"But there is nothing covered up that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known. Accordingly, whatever you have said in the dark will be heard in the light, and what you have whispered in the inner rooms will be proclaimed upon the housetops."*** The apostle Paul said something similar in 1 Timothy 5:24-25 when he said that, ***"The sins of some men are quite evident, going before them to judgment; for others, their sins follow after. Likewise also, deeds that are good are quite evident, and those which are otherwise cannot be concealed."*** Satan would love for us to think that we can sin without consequences, that we can do evil and live a wicked life and still be blessed God in the long run. And yes, we might get away with some things on a short-term basis. Maybe we can fool our parents. Maybe we can fool our church family. Maybe we can fool our friends. We might be able to avoid jail or embarrassment here in this life, we may think we're beating the system, we may think we're getting away with something, but there is a time coming when we will reap what we have sown. And again, this goes back to a law established by God before there were people. It is a natural law written on the world itself, and if we think we can bypass this law, we will end up frustrated and defeated. To think we are the exception is to mock God, but God will not be mocked.

Consider several examples. Consider King David. King David thought that he could get away with taking another man's wife while that man was fighting for the nation of Israel. But God was not mocked, and David reaped the harvest that he had planted. Consider King Ahab of the Ten Northern Tribes of Israel. Ahab thought that he and his wife could persecute Elijah, the prophet of God, and get away with it, but God could not be mocked. You might remember that Ahab was killed in battle and the dogs licked up his blood as it was washed out of the chariot (1 Kings 22:38). You might remember what happened to Ahab's wife Jezebel. She was tossed over the city wall, her blood splattered all over the wall, her body was trampled by horses, and when they went out to bury her, the Bible says that the dogs got to her first, and ***"...they found nothing more of her than the skull and the feet and the palms of her hands"*** (2 Kings 9:35). And then in the New Testament, consider what happened to the Prodigal Son. Here was a young man who demanded his inheritance (basically wishing that his father was dead). He took that inheritance and wasted it on a bunch of wild parties, but when the money ran out, he was so hungry that he ended up eating the scraps of food that were being put out for the pigs. There was a young man also who sowed to the flesh and from the flesh harvested corruption.

And before we leave the rather negative first half of this lesson, I would point out a little context on this passage in Galatians. Notice: He talks about ***"the one who sows to his own flesh."*** I would encourage all of us to look back at verses 19-21 of the previous chapter. In Galatians 5:19-21, Paul removes all doubt and tells us what the deeds of the flesh are, ***"Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God."*** That first word refers to all kinds of sexual sin – cheating on your husband, cheating on your wife, any sex outside of marriage. Committing sexual sin is sowing to our own flesh. Something else I noticed in these verses: Notice how many of these sins involve how we interact with each other within the congregation – enmities, strife, disputes, dissensions, factions – causing division among God's people is a sin right up there with sexual immorality. I would also point out the sin of ***"drunkenness."*** The Bible teaches that it is a sin to get drunk, and those who get drunk and think they can get away with it will not go to heaven, ***"...those who practice such things will not***

inherit the kingdom of God.” So first of all, then, in this passage Paul is warning about the danger of deception – we are not to be deceived into thinking that we can sin with no consequences.

II. **Thankfully, there is also a far more positive part of this passage, and it comes with several additional reminders about God’s law of sowing and reaping: Specifically, A GOOD HARVEST REQUIRES HARD WORK OVER A LONG PERIOD OF TIME.**

First of all, we need to make sure we know what Paul is talking about here when he refers to *“sow[ing] to the Spirit.”* As with what we just learned about the works of the flesh, we also have a commentary on the works of the Spirit from the previous chapter. Notice the familiar passage back in Galatians 5:22-23, *“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.”* Sowing to the Spirit, then, involves performing acts of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. But, as we know, doing all of these good things does not necessarily pay off immediately. And that’s where we get back to the picture of sowing and reaping.

By now, I think you have figured out that the image up here is the plan for our garden out in the back yard. I have one of these plans for every year that we’ve lived in Madison. I keep each one to remember the hard work and also to make sure we keep rotating the crops as we should. As most of us know, you can’t plant a seed this afternoon and decide to harvest squash for dinner later on this evening. But instead, this process (at our house, at least) usually starts in January each year. When we have two feet of snow on the ground, Jung’s sends out their seed catalog, and we go through and start working on the plan. We tweak it here and there, and sometime in the spring I go out there and till up the soil. This last year I did a soil test through the UW for the first time here in Madison, they told me what the soil needed, and then I went out to Farm & Fleet and got it – 7 pounds of dried blood. Let me tell you: After that, the little bunnies were terrified of our house for about two months. But we got the soil ready, and raked it out, and got the seeds, and made rows, and did the planting, and kept it all watered. And then the hard part comes in the heat of summer – keeping the garden weeded. And sometimes it seems like it might not be worth it, but we keep up with it through the summer, and finally we step out in August and September, and we are able to bring in that harvest. Sometimes we will have a dinner where everything comes from the garden, and it is awesome! It is awesome, but it takes a lot of hard work over a long period of time.

The same is true of the fruit trees that I have mentioned through the years. I’ve done a lot of research, and it turns out that the best time to prune trees is in the coldest part of winter. So, for the past few years, I’ve gone out there in the middle of January. In the middle of January, most people don’t do much thinking about where apples come from, but I do! I bundle up in a coat, and hat, and boots, and warm gloves, and I go out there through the crunchy snow at 10 degrees, and I will spend several hours pruning trees. I get some strange looks from our neighbors, but the harvest of fruit is a long, drawn-out process, and the process takes years.

We could say something similar about sowing to the Spirit. Notice what Paul says at the end of verse 8, *“...but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.”* In other words, when we do something good, when we *“sow to the Spirit,”* the payoff might not even come until the next life. According to verse 9, then, the harvest is coming – we will be able to reap – but it might be a while. And so the lesson, Paul says, is that we must not *“lose heart.”* We think about Moses leading 2-3 million people through the wilderness for 40 years. What a hassle that must have been – 40 years of whining! But because of his own sin, Moses was not able to enjoy the harvest in his lifetime. We think about the Bible class teachers here at this congregation. Some of you who are teaching right now will never live to see the good that you have done. You will see it in

the next life, but for now, Paul would say, “Let us not lose heart.” Do not give up! You might not see results immediately, but keep up the good work!

And with that, Paul closes it out with verse 10, **“So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith.”** And so instead of getting sidetracked with distractions, instead of getting down because we can’t see any immediate results, Paul basically says, “Just do it! Put your faith to work! When you have the opportunity, do good!” [paraphrased] Does somebody need help or encouragement? Does somebody need a listening ear? Does somebody need a ride, or a meal, or a smile, or a prayer? Does somebody need a friend? If you have the opportunity, do it! Do it, and do not lose heart, because a good harvest takes hard work over a long period of time.

Conclusion:

This morning we have been looking at a request: Living by a worldly standard, but expecting a Godly result. And as we have learned from the apostle Paul, to do this is to mock God. It is impossible to live by a worldly standard and end up with a Godly result.

And so as we close, the question is: What kinds of seed are we sowing in our lives right now? And I would ask: What did we do yesterday? Not: What I will do tomorrow, or what we might do under ideal circumstances, but what did we do yesterday? How did we spend our time? Did we spend any time thinking about the seeds that we’re planting? Did we plant any seeds of obedience and service? Everything we say and do has a way of echoing through the lives of the people we meet. What about our children? What kind of seed are we sowing there? What kind of example are we setting? What are we teaching our children? Are we preparing them to walk with Christ? What are we sowing in our relationship with our spouse? Are we sowing seeds of criticism and neglect, or are we sowing seeds of encouragement? What about our relationships with others in the congregation? Are we sowing seeds of peace, or are we sowing seeds of division? What about our own spiritual lives? Are we praying? Are we reading God’s word? What kind of harvest are we expecting? Are we expecting a harvest of fruit or a harvest of weeds?

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The key to all of this is: We do not have a choice concerning whether the Law of Sowing and Reaping applies to us. We do not have a choice concerning whether the seeds we plant will bear fruit – that’s not up to us. And we do not have the option of reaping an awesome harvest without planting any seeds – that ‘s impossible. The only choice we really have is what kinds of seeds we are going to plant. The choices we make today, the actions we take – with our families, with ourselves, with our fellow students, with our church family, with our coworkers, with outsiders – these actions will bear fruit. The only question is: Will these choices bear good fruit, bringing us great joy in the end, or will these choices bear the kind of fruit that brings us heartache and pain? And so we have to decide: Which will it be?

If you are not yet a Christian, we would invite you to make a choice this morning, the choice to plant a seed, the choice to accept God’s word and to do whatever He tells you to do. In James 1:21, the Lord’s own earthly brother tells us that we are to **“...put[ting] aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness,”** and that

we are to, ***“in all humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls.”*** The word of God is like a seed, and this morning we would invite you to allow that seed to bear fruit in your life. If you know the right thing to do, then let’s do it! The Bible teaches that we need to turn away from sin and be immersed in water for the forgiveness of our sins. If you have any questions, let us know. If you have something we need to pray about as a congregation, we would invite you to write it down and bring it to the front. We would be honored to go to God on your behalf. If you are ready to obey the gospel right now, though, you can let us know as we stand and sing. Let’s stand and sing together...

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com