

January 20, 2008

“Sowing and Reaping” Galatians 6:6-10

FCF: Possibility of being deceived re. “sowing and reaping”

PROPOSITION: (anchor) Because of the fixed ways of God’s working in this world,
(magnet) we must take care as to our sowing and reaping.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

Anyone can make great claims. The trouble comes in living out those claims, putting theory into practice, not counting ourselves to be exceptions to our own rule. Good quote from a famous comedian from a few years ago (**READ Farley quote**):

I used to think you could get to a level of success where the laws of the universe didn’t apply. But they do. It’s still life on life’s terms, not on movie-star terms. I still have to work at relationships. I still have to work on my weight and some of my other demons. Once I thought that if I just had enough in the bank, if I had enough fame, that it would be all right. But I’m a human being like everyone else. I’m not exempt.

Those are the words of Chris Farley. A few weeks later, his body was found in his Chicago apartment, having died of an opiate and cocaine overdose. Farley said one thing and then lived another. What of us? Do we believe ourselves to be the exception?

SCRIPTURE READING: Galatians 6:6-10

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON INTRODUCTION:

Imagine this scenario. I come to you and say I want to start a garden. Better yet, an apple orchard. With my pumpkin seeds. And I want a quality crop. But my seeds are cracked and spoiled. I want a quantity crop. But all I have is a small handful of seeds. What would you tell me? Well, one thing should be this. “*You reap what you sow.*”

The theme of Paul’s letter to the church of Galatia is the gospel of grace. Our right standing before God is secured by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. There’s nothing we can do or fail to do to make Him love us any more or any less. The mirror of God’s law, once it has exposed the bankruptcy of our hearts, is now a map to guide us along the path. That’s been the emphasis. Now living this out has a definite shape to it. There is, after all, still a map. We’ve been set free to live according to it. Our conduct, as Paul says in chapter 2, is to be “*in step with the gospel,*” dependent upon the Holy Spirit, living for the sake of others, a life of love. Remembering all the while that, just as anywhere else, we reap what we sow. That’s the unwavering way of God’s working. Following Jesus doesn’t change that. It changes our approach but it doesn’t change that. And knowing that, we ought to then take care as to how we sow.

You may remember that the emphasis in the paragraph before, vv.1-5, is the need to bear one another’s burdens. We talked about this last week. Transitioning from there, Paul then shifts in what kinds of burdens we are to bear. He speaks, first, specifically of congregational life in v.6. That then leads him to this general principal of field and seed, of sowing and reaping in v.7. From there, he moves from speaking of a few to each of us in v.8. And then, in vv.9-10, he moves from personal piety to more public expressions.

The point being that, as with starting a garden, this should all be undertaken recognizing the need to sow the right seed, only good seed, and then much seed as well. Which is to say much care should be given in all we do. For we reap what we sow.

I. CONGREGATIONAL LIFE

Now the first arena Paul mentions is that of congregational life. (**READ Galatians 6:6**). Again, this flows from the burden bearing mentioned earlier, a mutual sharing.

A) *The One Who Teaches*

A mutual sharing that begins with the one who teaches.

1. What is to be shared

He is to share the Word. Not his clever ideas, not trendy sophistry, but the Word of God.

2. How it is to be shared

And he is to do so willingly, joyfully, and diligently ([READ 1 Timothy 5:17-18](#)). There is labor involved, much as with an ox or laborer in the fields, labor that must be done.

B) The One Who Is Taught

So one shares the Word. And those who are taught are to share “*all good things.*”

1. What is to be shared

That is, what is necessary to free the teacher to his task, including financial support.

2. How it is to be shared

And here too, it is to be done willingly, joyfully, without any desire to control or manipulate what is then taught ([READ 1 Timothy 5:18; 1 Corinthians 9:8-11, 14](#)).

And the rationale behind this? Well, Martin Luther put it this way ([READ Luther quote](#)):

It is impossible for one man both to labor day and night to get a living, and at the same time to give himself to the study of sacred learning as the preaching office requireth.

Application:

Now, let me be clear. This is good for us to talk about. Not because it props me up but because it guides us all so well. The word Paul uses here is related to *koinonia*, the word often translated as “*fellowship.*” This is a mutual sharing, not a package insisted upon and maintained, but each giving what they have to the other, all under the Lordship of Jesus. And this congregation has been so generous, so kind in living out this mutual sharing. That’s fleshing out well the principles we see here of sowing and reaping.

II. SPIRITUAL GROWTH

But Paul goes on, moving from the particulars and pastors to the general and all of us ([READ Galatians 6:7-8](#)). Here we move from congregational life to spiritual growth.

A) Sowing to the Spirit

And recognizing we reap what we sow, Paul then urges us to sow to the Spirit.

1. What it means

That is, as in chapter 5, to walk, to be led by, to keep in step with the Spirit. To cultivate the fruit of the Spirit ([READ Galatians 5:22-23](#)) by laying hold of the means given to bring about such spiritual growth – the Word, prayer, sacraments, fellowship, service.

2. What it yields – eternal life

And what does such sowing yield? Eternal life. Now recognize this term has to do with quality and not just quantity. It’s not just life everlasting but life ever deepening as well.

B) Sowing to the Flesh

And, again, with that in mind, Paul urges us then to sow to the Spirit. Especially considering what it means to sow to the flesh. That said, what does it mean?

1. What it means

It means to give ourselves, to cultivate a whole other kind of fruit ([READ Galatians 5:19-21a](#)). What’s the commonality? Living for, relying upon, ultimately worshiping oneself.

2. What it yields – corruption

And what does such sowing yield? Corruption. Note this is not just referring to eternal punishment. It is that but it’s more. It’s an ongoing daily decay, a progressive perishing.

Illustration:

Sin is selfish. It’s also self-destructive – not just in the next life but in this one as well. Phil Ryken lists a few examples in his commentary ([READ Ryken pp.258-259](#)):

A young couple in love gets caught up in the passions of the moment. They engage in sexual activity outside of marriage. They experience some pleasure, of course, but they are also sowing the seeds of destruction. After they break up, they discover that they have damaged their capacity for true intimacy.

A man fantasizes about taking control of his organization. He comes to think of his colleagues as rivals, and he schemes his way past them. But his selfish ambition is sowing the seeds of his destruction, not only for others, but also within his own soul.

A woman secretly despises another woman in her church. From time to time they have their petty disagreements, but it is really a matter of personality as much as anything else. With every contemptuous thought, she is sowing seeds destructive to her own spiritual health and the fellowship of the church.

A husband and wife allow resentment to build in their marriage without ever resolving their differences. They, too, are sowing the seeds of destruction. Year by year, as they drift further and further apart, they reap loneliness, bitterness, and unbelief.

Do you see? Sin is selfish. But it's also self-destructive. It brings corruption.

Application:

We reap what we sow. John Stott puts it this way ([READ Stott, p.170](#)):

Every time we allow our mind to harbor a grudge, nurse a grievance, entertain an impure fantasy, or wallow in self-pity, we are sowing to the flesh. Every time we linger in bad company whose insidious influence we know we cannot resist, every time we lie in bed when we ought to be up and praying, every time we read pornographic literature, every time we take a risk which strains our self-control, we are sowing, sowing, sowing to the flesh. Some Christians sow to the flesh every day and wonder why they do not reap holiness. Holiness is a harvest; whether we reap it or not depends almost entirely on what and where we sow.

We reap what we sow. Seeds sprout. What we need then is to see sin as it really is.

Illustration:

It's a rebellion against God, transgression of His commands. It's also corruption, self-destructive, hideous to behold. True story. A middle school in Oregon had a problem. After some of the girls put on their lipstick in the bathroom, they would press their lips to the mirrors, leaving dozens of lip prints. The principal decided something had to be done. She called the girls to the bathroom and met them there with the custodian. She explained this caused a problem for the custodian, who had to clean the mirrors each day. To show how difficult it was, she asked the custodian to clean one of the mirrors. So, he took out a long-handled brush, dipped it into the toilet, and scrubbed the mirror. Oddly enough, there haven't been any more lip prints from those girls.

We need to see sin for how disgusting it is and know we reap what we sow.

III. WELL-DOING

Well, Paul then moves on from personal holiness and ourselves to philanthropic activity and others ([READ Galatians 6:9-10](#)). A clear focus on well-doing.

A) Scope of the Command

Including the scope of the command. How far, after all, to whom does this go?

1. Good to all

Simply put, we are to do all kinds of good to all kinds of people.

2. Especially to one another

That said, charity does begin at home. Imagine a series of concentric circles, each reverberating out from a deep core. We begin with family. By God's grace, we've been adopted into His family, made sons and daughters. We now love as brothers and sisters.

B) Incentive to Carry On

So Paul gives the scope of the command. But he also gives incentive to carry on.

1. The need to persevere

And we need this incentive. Paul knew this all too well from experience. Ministry in any form – loving, caring, and serving in any arena – can be tiring. Temptation comes and opposition arises. Results seem scant and the needs so great. And it can wear us down. So there is then this great need to persevere, to press on, to not give up, to not give in.

2. The need for the incentive

A need to persevere and, with that, a need for incentive, for encouragement in our persevering. Which Paul then speaks to, telling us (**READ Galatians 6:9**).

There's an assurance given here – not of when or how this harvest will come. Just that, in the Lord's good timing and according to His good purposes, it will come.

Illustration:

Consider a story from the colony of Virginia and the conversion of a man named Luke Short at the ripe old age of 103. Short was sitting under a hedge when he happened to remember a sermon he had heard preached by the famous Puritan John Flavel. As he recalled the sermon, he asked God right then and there to forgive his sins through Jesus Christ. Short lived for three more years, and when he died, this inscription was put on his tombstone (**READ quote**): “*Here lies a babe in grace, aged three years, who died according to nature, aged 106.*” But here's the remarkable part of the story. That sermon Short remembered had been preached by Flavel back in England 85 years before!

Application:

We just don't know what the Lord will do with the seeds we sow. Or when. But consider the comfort, the relief, the assistance that could be rendered. The possibility of someone being led to Christ. Moral deterioration in society checked. A growing respect and longing cultivated for what is beautiful and true. And that's to say nothing of the rewards for us – graciously given by Jesus to His own in this life and even in the next.

CONCLUSION:

We reap what we sow. Again, we know all this to be true in theory. But what about in practice? Seeds sown do have a way of sprouting. Little things have a way of accumulating into larger things. Case in point, what we often deem sudden disasters. About 10 years ago, a 763-foot grain freighter, the *Bright Field*, was heading down the Mississippi near New Orleans when it lost control, veered toward the shore, and crashed into a riverside shopping mall, demolishing parts of the wharf and injuring 116 people.

After investigating the accident, the Coast Guard reported that the freighter lost control because the engine had shut down. The engine had shut down because of low oil pressure. The oil pressure was low because of a clogged oil filter. And the oil filter was clogged because the crew had failed to maintain the engine properly. Here's the thing. What initially seems like a sudden disaster often has a long history trailing behind it.

Little things have a way of accumulating. Seeds sprout whether in the arenas of congregational life, spiritual growth, or well-doing. And Paul is saying those seeds come by our thoughts, words, and deeds – the things we do and the things we don't. Those are the seeds we sow for good or for ill. How you got to where you are today has a lot to do with what was going on last week, last month, and last year. And maybe even a generation before that. Things rarely just happen. Which means at each level, at each interval, at each checkpoint, we should be exercising great care. We're all sowing seed all the time. The question is whether it is the right seed, good seed, and enough seed.

Jesus graciously calls us to live this out, to engage in this sowing and reaping in a new way. That is, reveling in the fact we've been set free to love God and one another, satisfied in the fact our status and security before Him is grounded not in what we've done but in what He has done. And then moving forward just as we began, depending upon Him, living “*in step with the gospel.*” We do reap what we sow. Make no mistake about it. But Jesus has saved us, set us free, to now sow together in a whole new way.

PROPOSITION: (anchor) Because of the fixed ways of God's working in this world,
(magnet) we must take care as to our sowing and reaping.