

"Where Are You Sowing Seeds?"

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Galatians 6:7–10

7. Do not be deceived. God is not One to be mocked. For whatever a person sows, he will also reap.

8. For the one who sows to his own flesh will reap corruption from the flesh, but the one who sows to the Spirit will reap eternal life from the Spirit.

9. Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.

10. So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.

Good morning. Today, I would like to look together at Galatians chapter 6, the final chapter of the letter, with all of you.

* Introduction *

The Letter to the Galatians is a letter that the apostle Paul wrote to several churches in the region of Galatia. Most of the people who gathered in these churches were not originally Jewish — they were Gentiles. They heard the gospel and received it with genuine joy.

But after some time, certain Jewish teachers came. And they began to teach this: "Believing in Jesus alone is not enough. You must also receive circumcision and keep the Law." In other words, a teaching crept in that said human works and merits must be added to salvation by faith.

So why did people accept it? Perhaps it was because it sounded more plausible to them. It is difficult for people to truly accept the fact that one is saved by faith alone. Thoughts such as "Shouldn't I also be doing something?" and "Isn't my own effort also necessary?" — these naturally well up within us. Perhaps it is a sign of our own sinfulness as human beings that we want to add even a little of our own merit to "salvation." We may be creatures who find more comfort and conviction in pouring in our own strength than in acknowledging the work of God.

Yet the gospel is a remarkable thing — the moment human merit is added, it is no longer the gospel. There is a Chinese expression, "drawing legs on a snake." People were competing to be the first to draw a snake on the ground. One man finished first, but wanting to show off, he added legs to the snake. In the end, he was told, "A snake has no legs by nature, so what you drew is not a snake," and his victory was annulled, even though he had finished first. The gospel is the same. When even a little human merit is added to what God has done, it does not become a more complete gospel — it becomes something else entirely.

So throughout this entire letter, Paul vigorously defends the gospel of justification by faith alone. At the same time, he issues another warning: that the freedom gained from the Law must not be turned into licentiousness. The Letter to the Galatians rejects legalism, and it also rejects licentiousness. It speaks only of the walk of living in the Spirit.

At this point, a question may arise. If we are saved not by works but by faith, does it no longer matter how we live afterward? Paul's answer is a clear "No." Salvation is not by works. Yet there are definite consequences that follow from where the one who has been saved is directing his or her life. I believe the passage we will look at together today is the concluding section that answers precisely this question.

*** A God Who Is Not Mocked ***

From chapter 5:16 through 25, Paul has been portraying the flesh and the Spirit as two forces warring against each other. As it says, "For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh" (5:17). The Christian life is like a battlefield.

But when we come to chapter 6, the metaphor changes. What had been a battlefield is now likened to a field. The flesh and the Spirit become two fields in which we sow seeds.

What we will reap — that depends on where we are sowing right now.

But before entering this metaphor, Paul speaks with great solemnity in verse 7:

"Do not be deceived. God is not One to be mocked. For whatever a person sows, he will also reap."

I would like to pause here for a moment and reflect — I want you to notice the order. Paul did not simply say "you reap what you sow" right away. First: "Do not be deceived." Then: "God is not One to be mocked." Only after saying that does he say, "For whatever a person sows, he will also reap."

Why? Likely because this is the very point at which we human beings most easily deceive ourselves. For example: "This much should be fine." "I can repent later." "Living somewhat worldly for a bit shouldn't matter." "God will understand." — We are able to justify ourselves in any number of ways. A person can deceive others, and can even deceive himself. But there is one thing a person can never do: deceive God. For God sees not merely our words and actions, but the very thoughts of our hearts. Not what words we have spoken, but where the true intentions of the heart really lie — that is what He sees.

That is precisely why Paul says, "God is not One to be mocked." This word "mock" — in the original Greek — carries the meaning of "to turn up one's nose and sneer." But I do not think mocking God refers only to belittling God with one's lips.

It means taking lightly the order that God has established — the rules God set in place at the creation of heaven and earth. Knowing the spiritual principles God has established, yet thinking "they do not apply to me" — that is mocking God.

For instance, we do not doubt the principle of "you reap what you sow" itself. As a natural order, we accept it as something entirely self-evident. No one would sow barley in the ground hoping to harvest strawberries. No one would sow bean seeds and expect a sweet potato harvest. No one doubts this. For reaping what you sow is the order of creation that God has placed within nature.

Yet when this same principle is applied to the spiritual realm, things begin to feel a little different to us. What we accepted as a matter of course in the natural world, we begin to look for exceptions in the spiritual realm.

We cannot go on sowing to the flesh and expect the fruit of the Spirit. We cannot go on loving the world and hope to draw nearer to God. We cannot, can we, go on living according to our own desires rather than the Word and expect a holy life?

And yet we often live that way. We keep sowing to the flesh while expecting a spiritual harvest. We pray not and yet wish for faith to grow. We do not draw near to the Word and yet wish to know God more. We do not forgive our neighbor and yet wish for the fruit of love to appear. But God says: "For whatever a person sows, he will also reap." We may be able to deceive ourselves, but we cannot deceive God.

Therefore, rather than first applying this Word to others, I would like us to receive it as a word for each one of us to quietly examine ourselves before God. Where am I sowing seeds right now?

*** Sowing to the Flesh ***

Paul continues in verse 8:

"For the one who sows to his own flesh will reap corruption from the flesh, but the one who sows to the Spirit will reap eternal life from the Spirit."

First, let us be clear about what "the flesh" is. The "flesh" that the Letter to the Galatians speaks of is not simply our physical body. Nor does it refer only to certain sinful behaviors. It is a word that points to the human being itself — the human existence that tries to live without God.

Therefore, the flesh can appear in two very different forms. One is legalism, and the other is licentiousness.

On the surface, these two appear to be exact opposites. The legalist tries rigorously to keep the rules. The licentious person ignores the rules altogether. But throughout this letter, Paul calls both of them "the flesh." Why?

Because in both cases, the self is at the center. Legalism clings to "how well I have performed" and "I have been able to keep these regulations." Licentiousness clings to "I have been set free by believing in Christ, so I will live as I please." The direction may differ, but in both cases, it is the self that is seated on the throne.

So Paul writes in Galatians 5:19–21a:

"Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger,

disputes, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these."

And then he says clearly: **"just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God"** (Galatians 5:21b).

And in verse 24, he declares: **"Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires."**

"Sowing to the flesh" can be understood as not crucifying this "flesh," but rather continuing to feed it and nurture it.

For example: continuing to harbor hatred in one's heart. Deciding absolutely not to forgive. Continuing to let greed grow. Continually choosing to give more weight to the voice of the world than to the Word. Each time we do these things, we are going on sowing seeds to the flesh. At first, they may look like small seeds. But seeds inevitably grow. They inevitably bear fruit. That is precisely why Paul says that one "will reap corruption from the flesh."

*** Sowing to the Spirit ***

Conversely, then, what does it mean to sow to the Spirit?

Here Paul uses an interesting expression. In chapter 5, he said, "Walk by the Spirit" (5:16). But here he says, "sow to the Spirit." In other words, is he not asking about the direction one's life is facing?

Sowing to the Spirit means directing the orientation of our lives toward God. There is one thing I want us not to forget here. We do not become children of God by sowing to the Spirit. It is precisely because we have already been made a new creation in Christ and have become His children that we are able to turn toward God — and we are given the freedom and the power to sow to the Spirit.

Therefore, a life that sows to the Spirit is never abstract — it takes very concrete forms. Restoring a fallen brother with a spirit of gentleness (6:1). Bearing one another's burdens (6:2). Sharing all good things (6:6). And doing good to all people whenever there is opportunity (6:10). The Spirit always turns a person away from himself and toward God and neighbor. And it takes time for this fruit to appear within us and through us.

*** Without Giving Up ***

Paul continues in verse 9 with this exhortation:

"9. Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up."

Why did Paul speak of "not becoming weary" immediately after talking about sowing? Think of a farmer. No farmer sows seeds and harvests the next day. After sowing, he waits, endures the rain, bears the scorching sun, and spends a long period of time. (In autumn, Megumi Church has a baked sweet potato event. I look forward to it every

year, but those potatoes are only brought to harvest through the care and labor of many people.) It is because he is convinced that, even though the harvest is not yet visible, it will come in time. In this natural order, we go on sowing in the confidence of a harvest.

We accept this natural order as something God has established, as entirely self-evident. And this same order operates in exactly the same way in the spiritual world.

A life that sows to the Spirit is the same. Just because you have prayed does not mean a person will change overnight. Just because you have read the Word does not mean your character will immediately change. And just because you have done good does not mean you will immediately be rewarded. In fact, living according to the flesh is far easier and more immediately satisfying in most cases. That is precisely why people so easily become weary. "Even though I pray, nothing changes." "Even though I read the Word, nothing changes." "Even though I do good, no one recognizes it."

But Paul says: "for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up." The "proper time" spoken of here does not mean merely the passing of time. It means the time appointed by God. We do not wait because we can see the result; we wait because we believe in God's promise. For God Himself has promised that He will cause us to reap what we have sown. Therefore, the one who sows to the Spirit is never sowing in vain.

*** While We Have Opportunity ***

Finally, Paul draws his conclusion in 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 faith."

First, it says "to all people." Nationality, age, gender, social standing — none of these can limit the reason we should do good.

And Paul also says, "especially to those who are of the household of faith." We sometimes see Christians being more harsh toward fellow Christians. "Why would a Christian do something like that?" "That person is legalistic." "That person doesn't really understand the Bible." Rather than judging one another in this way, Paul encourages us to do good especially to the household of faith.

A life that sows to the Spirit is never an abstract life. It appears as a life that loves the brother standing before us, bears burdens together, and does good.

So then, what does it concretely mean to "do good"? Some of you may have already noticed. In the end, this is no different from the word "love." It means: love with all your strength.

It does not mean that one is only accepted after loving perfectly. Because of the weakness of the flesh, we sometimes sow seeds in the wrong place. We may start out trying to love, and grow weary halfway through, so that only the outward form remains. But rather than becoming weary each time that happens, we can simply pray once more, set our hearts in order, and seek to sow to the Spirit again. We can choose to go on loving. Not because we are perfect. But to sow again each time we stumble. To turn

ourselves back toward God and neighbor each time — is that not precisely what we have been called to?

*** Application ***

Through today's passage, Paul is putting a single question to each one of us:

"Where are you sowing seeds right now?"

This is not a question to condemn us. It is a question for each of us to quietly examine ourselves before God.

Every day, we spend time on something, seek after something, and live while loving something. And every single one of those things, without our even noticing, constitutes the sowing of seeds. Sowing seeds, then, does not refer only to certain special events. It is the accumulation of small daily choices.

But I believe that what Paul means by "sowing seeds" is not merely the accumulation of actions. Where do those actions come from? Where is the center of that person's heart? That, too, is included. At the end of the Letter to the Galatians, Paul speaks of those who were urging circumcision: "They desire to make a good showing in the flesh" (6:13). The problem was not the act of circumcision itself. It was that what lay at the center of that action was not God but the self.

Is it not the same for us? We want to grow more in faith. We want to draw nearer to God. We want to become better able to love. We wish for these things. But are we actually sowing seeds for that? And is that walk truly directed toward God?

Are we trying to love the household of faith? Are we even praying for that person who is difficult to love? Or are we thinking, "That person has issues too," or "I can't help it right now," and leaving our heart as it is, ending things there? The love that the Bible commends does not change according to who the other person is. When we turn our hearts toward God, the Spirit leads us into a walk of loving our neighbor.

So today, I would like us to ask ourselves: "Where am I sowing seeds right now?" And one more thing: "Is my heart truly directed toward God?" For God sees not only our actions, but the very center of our hearts.

*** Conclusion ***

Paul said: "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up."

The harvest is given not in the time we think, but in the time appointed by God. Yet even if you feel the time slow in coming, God's promise does not change. For God is not One to be mocked — He is always faithful to the order He has established, and to His promise.

Therefore, believing in God's promise and standing in reverence before that order, we would like to go on sowing to the Spirit today as well.

Turning our hearts toward God, being sustained by His grace, one step at a time, led by

the Spirit — that is the walk.

"Where are you sowing seeds right now?"

Holding these words of the Lord in our hearts — I pray that we would be those who go on sowing seeds to the Spirit, without giving up.