

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

SOWING AND REAPING.

A Sermon

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“Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.”—Galatians vi. 7.

I FIND, on reference to Luther's Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians, and to Calvin's Commentary on this passage, that both those learned expositors consider that this refers to the treatment of ministers by their people in the matter of their pecuniary support. They very properly point out the connection between the 6th verse and the 7th: “Let him that is taught in the Word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things. Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.” I suppose that there was a need for such an injunction in Paul's day, and there is a need for it now. There were some hearers of the gospel, then, who contributed generously towards the maintenance of the preacher, and the apostle says that what they gave would be like sowing good seed, in return for which God would give to them an abundant harvest; but there were others who gave sparingly, and who would therefore have a proportionately small return.

But I feel sure that the apostle had a wider range than that, and that these words express a general principle: “Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.” So I begin my discourse by reminding you that our present lives are of the utmost possible importance, for on these winged hours hang eternal issues. Our present actions are not trifles, for they will decide our everlasting destiny. Everything we do is, to some extent, a sowing of which eternity will be the reaping.

I. So I pray you to notice, first, that our text tells us that God

IS NOT TO BE TRIFLED WITH: "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."

Some trifle with God by holding, practically, if not theoretically, that *there will not be rewards for virtue, nor punishments for sin*; that one end will come alike to all; that, whatever the dignity or the degradation of character may be, we shall all go to the same place, and there sleep in oblivion; or that, if there is any future life, it will be common to us all; and that, in fact, the whole question concerning the hereafter is a matter so utterly unimportant that we can afford to regard it with complete indifference.

But, dear friends, it is not so. There is an omnipotent, omniscient, and omni-present God, and he is the moral Governor of the universe. He will not see his laws broken with impunity, his name defied, his gospel despised, his Son rejected. He is intensely sensitive to the actions of mankind; he is not a god of granite or of steel. He takes note of the acts, and words, and even of the thoughts of those whom he has created; and if they are finally impenitent, sooner or later he will say, as he did in Isaiah's day, "I will ease me of mine adversaries, and avenge me of mine enemies."

Others seem to suppose that, even if there be a future, an eternity of rewards and punishments,—the reaping of which this life is the sowing,—*a bare profession will suffice to save them*. They appear to imagine that, if they only compliment their Maker with an occasional "Thank God!" and utter a few words of mere formal prayer, and are not grossly licentious, but live tolerably decent lives, that will satisfy God's requirements. Nothing can be more mistaken than such an idea as that. God in the highest heavens is himself perfectly pure, his perfect law is like himself, and it is not for him to accommodate his righteous law to the wills of fallen man. Do not fancy that he will accept the mere external homage of your being. He must have your heart, and soul, and mind, and strength, or he will not be content. It is vain for anyone to attempt to mock God by supposing that anything will do for him in place of that heart-surrender and heart-service that he demands.

There are others who seem to suppose that, *if they make a profession of religion*, that will suffice. They think that, if they attend the parish church or the dissenting chapel, and subscribe regularly to religious and philanthropic societies, that is all that is required of them. That is how they mock God, that God who came to the top of Sinai, and there, amidst thunders and lightnings, gave the Ten Commandments; but he is not to be satisfied by a bare profession of religion. To confess what we do not really feel, is but to increase our sin, and a hypocritical profession is a further aggravation of our sin. Doth God accept your heartless sacrifices, your meaningless words and empty phrases? No; he is not to be mocked by mere outward religious forms and ceremonies.

Others imagine that God can be imposed upon *by a formal compliment when they are near death*. A man is dying, and immediately the cry is, "Send for a minister!" They often send for a dissenting minister, though they have never attended his ministry;

and they appear to imagine that, by some sort of magic, we can work wonders even for the poor creature who is probably unconscious before we get to him; and if he has not trusted in Christ before that time, no one can enable him to do it then. Yet his friends call us up in the middle of the night, thinking that we can do something for him. I am not now speaking of you who regularly hear the gospel, and who are, therefore, likely to know better, yet this opinion is very generally held; but I loathe the idea of having anything of priestly power imputed to me. I have not an atom more power than any of you, my brethren and sisters in Christ, have. I am only a preacher of the gospel, and I would gladly hear the gospel message from any one of you. It is blasphemous to pretend that sacred unction can be imparted by a mortal man. You must yourselves repent, and turn to God; I cannot do this for you. It is your own sowing, in this respect, that must bring you a blessed reaping;—not anything that you can get a so-called “priest” or even a minister of the gospel to sow for you.*

II. Now, secondly, I want to remind you that GOD'S MORAL LAWS, AS WELL AS GOD HIMSELF, ARE NOT TO BE TRIFLED WITH: “Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.”

First, *it is so in nature.* If it were possible for God not to observe what man does, yet what man does is, of itself, full of a power which will be to him what the harvest is to the soil; and just what he sows he will be sure to reap one of these days, or in eternity if not in time. If a man were to sow his field with garlick, and expect to reap barley, he would be bitterly disappointed. If he were to sow tares, he might pray as long as he pleased for a crop of wheat, but he would not get it. God never so changes his laws as to make tares come up wheat, and he never will. The sowing always is, and always will be, the father of the reaping.

It is so, also, in providence. A man is idle, and neglects his business; he sleeps in the morning when he ought to be at work; he is dilatory and careless about his affairs; so, as the inevitable consequence, he goes from bad to worse, and soon is a bankrupt. As he sows, so he reaps. Another indulges in the sins of the flesh; so, when you see him with a broken constitution, and his whole being the very incarnation of misery, you are not surprised. Another gambles, and wastes all his substance; and, sooner or later, he comes to beggary. As he sows, so he reaps. If a man is a drunkard, the poison he swallows will take effect sooner or later, however strong a constitution he may have.

As it is in nature, and in providence, *so it is in the general moral government of God.* Does not a man's own conscience tell him to expect that what he does will come home to him? And though a man strives to lull his conscience to sleep, yet now and then it wakes up, and shakes him with its thunders, and causes him to be ill at ease. How is it that graceless men cannot bear to be alone? It is because conscience shakes them, and makes them

* See *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, No. 1,250, “The Priest Dispensed With.”

think of the future, and dread still greater misery than they at present endure. Just suppose, for a moment, that this law could be reversed, and that I could now say to you, "You may sin as you like, and no evil consequences will follow." Could you imagine any proclamation which would spread such alarm and terror? Why, the very fabric of society would be shattered in such a state of things. Suppose that I had to say, "There is nothing better in being generous and noble than there is in meanness and vice." Why, it would be enough to put out the least spark of virtue that might be in existence anywhere. But we have not to talk in that immoral fashion. There is a God who judgeth actions, words, and even thoughts; and "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." God's Word, which is our ultimate Court of Appeal, tells us that, in the great reaping time that is coming, Christ will "gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." The Book of Revelation, foretelling the future, says that "the books were opened; . . . and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works." O ye gay, and light-hearted, and frivolous ones, it is not we who say this, but it is the declaration of the Spirit of God that, after death, comes the judgment; and that, at that judgment-seat, you shall all appear, and for the acts committed in your lives you shall all be tried, and as your lives have been so shall your eternal destiny be fixed.

III. This leads me to my third remark, which is, that EVIL SOWING WILL BRING EVIL REAPING. "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."

This is seen in the present result of certain sins. "He that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption." By "the flesh" is meant our corrupt human nature, in such sins as are mentioned in the 19th verse of the 5th chapter of this Epistle, where we read, "Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God." These are "the works of the flesh."

I am not going to expound this passage* fully, but I want briefly to show you that there are four classes of sins mentioned here. First, Paul mentions sins of lust;—adultery, which violates the most sacred ties;—fornication, which defiles the body; uncleanness, which is secret, not known to others, but which is fully known to God; fleshly thoughts, and fleshly words, and fleshly acts;—lasciviousness, the outward uncleanness which "society" condemns, yet often practises. He who is doing any of these things is sowing to his flesh, and he will, most surely, "of the flesh reap

* Mr. Spurgeon's expositions of the whole passage, Galatians v. 13—26, will be found in the *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, Nos. 2,632 and 2,831.

corruption." You who are true Christians, of course hate all these things; as Jude says, "hating even the garment spotted by the flesh;" and mind that you also hate all books in which these things are worked up into attractive narratives, for you cannot even casually glance at such books, much less read them, without polluting your whole being. But as for those who practise these sins, which the apostle here enumerates, let them not dream that they can be saved while they continue to love that which God hates with a perfect hatred.

The next sins in the apostle's black catalogue are idolatry and witchcraft;—idolatry, which is forbidden by the second commandment: "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord, thy God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me: and shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments." To bow in worship before an "altar" so-called, or a cross, or an image or picture of a saint, or before a real or supposed "holy" relic, or anything of the kind, is nothing but sheer idolatry; yet multitudes are committing this great sin under the notion that they are doing God service. There is a form of idolatry which is not so gross as this; yet it is also sinful,—the idolatry of loving ourselves, or our wife, or husband, or child, or father, or mother, or sister, or brother, more than we love the Lord.

Then the apostle mentions witchcraft, by which is intended all real or pretended communion with evil spirits or with the dead. Necromancy, spiritualism, and everything of the kind are absolutely forbidden to all who desire to "inherit the kingdom of God."

Then follows a third set of evils, which may be classed under the head of sins of temper: "hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders;"—all kinds of acts and forms of feeling which are not in harmony with Christian love. If you really *want* to sow to the flesh, you have only to make these things your own;—if you give way to a contentious spirit, foster disagreements, are filled with hatred and envy, so that you cannot bear to know that others prosper more than you, and desire to drag them down to your level;—if you give way to bursts of passion, or indulge in backbiting, for that is strife; you are sowing to the flesh. I grieve to say that these evil things abound all around us; but, O men and women of God, keep clear of all these things!

Then, lastly, Paul mentions sins of appetite: "drunkenness, revellings, and such like;" for we must include gluttony with drunkenness. All who commit any of the sins in this long black catalogue are sowing to the flesh, and not to the Spirit; and when a man sows to the flesh, what will the harvest be? "He shall of the flesh reap corruption,"—putridity, rottenness, death! The sin that the sinner thought was sweet as honey turns bitter as gall to him. There are many men and women, in this world, who have lived in

sin till it has become its own punishment; and if it is not so in this world, it will be so in the world to come.

What a dreadful thing sin is when it comes to the full! If there were no fire that shall never be quenched, and no worm that shall never die, you need not want any worse hell than that of wicked men by themselves, with nobody to control them, no public opinion to hold them in check; you need not even turn the devil in with them, just leave them to themselves, with no restraint upon their wickedness, and I can hardly imagine that hell itself can be worse than those sinners would soon become.

Ah, my friend, if you go on living in sin, you will wake up, one day, surrounded by the fruition of your own guilt in all its awful enormity. On every hand, the harvest of your sowing to the flesh will stare you in the face, and God will place in your hand a sharp sickle, and will say to you, "Reap here! Reap there!" You will say, "I cannot do it;" but you sowed it, so you must reap it. What terrible misery there will be for you there; yet it will only be your own sin in its ripeness, your own transgression fully developed; and that awful harvesting will be infinitely more than you will be able to bear. "Whatsoever a man soweth, *that* shall he also reap." The man who gripped the widow's throat, the other day, and took away her few sticks of furniture, will look upon her tearful face to all eternity! The man who led a fellow-creature to sin will see her pale sorrow-stricken face before him for ever and ever; he may try to escape from it; but he will not be able to do so. Does that description fit anyone here, and does he complain that I am very personal in my remarks? That is what I am and what I mean to be, in the hope that he may repent of his great transgressions, and looking to Jesus upon the cross, may receive forgiveness of his sins ere it is too late.

IV. But now, lastly, I have something better to say, and that is, that GOOD SOWING WILL BRING GOOD REAPING.

I hear someone object, "But is not that salvation by works? Do you not preach that salvation is all of grace through faith in Jesus?" Yes, of course I do; but it is still true that good sowing will bring good reaping. But what sort of sowing do I mean? Why, the sowing that is mentioned in the verse following our text: "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." When a man sows to the flesh, he deceives himself, for the flesh is his old fallen nature, and such sowing is nothing but evil; but to sow well is to sow under the influence of another Power, and to sow in another manner; in fact it is, as the apostle says, to "sow to the Spirit."

First, *we must sow under the influence of another Power.* Sowing to the Spirit lifts our sowing altogether above the idea of human merit. He who sows to the Spirit is led and guided by the Spirit of God,—led to repent of sin, led to believe in Jesus, led to a new life, led to holiness, led to sanctification; and, therefore, he does not take any credit to himself for anything in him that is good, for he knows that it was all implanted there by the Holy

Spirit. Ah, my dear hearers, if we would have a good harvest, we must give up sowing to ourselves, and must sow to the Spirit; and the Spirit is freely given to all who seek his aid at the foot of Christ's cross. Jesus said to his disciples, "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" May the Spirit of God come upon you, and prompt you so to pray that you may truly sow to the Spirit as to be regenerated in heart, and renewed in life, for then you shall most assuredly "reap life everlasting."

We are also to sow in another manner. When the Jews, at Capernaum, asked Jesus, "What shall we do, that we might work the works of God?" he answered, "This is the work of God, that ye believe in him whom he hath sent." That is the first thing for you to do if you wish to sow to the Spirit. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." When you have rested upon the great atoning work which Christ for ever finished on the cross of Calvary, you will begin to walk in newness of life, and you will seek in all things to be conformed to God's will. So you "shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting."

In verses 22 and 23 of the 5th chapter of this Epistle, the apostle tells what "the fruit of the Spirit" is. Firstly, "love." You are not really saved if you have not a loving spirit. Secondly, "joy." Christians ought to exhibit a joyful cheerfulness, so that all around might see how happy they are. Thirdly, "peace"—the opposite of variance. Fourthly, "longsuffering"—patience under provocation. Fifthly, "gentleness"—consideration for others, readiness to help them in any way that we can. Sixthly, "goodness"—not any holiness of which you boast, but such "goodness" as other people can see and admire. Seventhly, "faith"—reliability, keeping good faith with others, so that they know that your word is as good as your bond. Eighthly, "meekness"—that does not push itself to the front, and does not easily get provoked. Ninthly, "temperance"—which keeps every passion under control, not only with respect to meats and drinks, but with regard to everything else.

Now, if you thus sow to the Spirit, you will "reap life everlasting." The apostle does not say that you will reap everlasting existence, but *everlasting life*, which is quite another thing. "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life." That is the perfection of love and joy; you shall have that, and you shall ascend to successive stages of holiness and virtue through the cleansing power of the blood of Jesus, and the sanctification of the Spirit; and, one of these days, you shall throw off the last trace of the slough of sin, and then your disembodied spirit shall pass before the flaming eyes of him who is purer than the sun; and, by-and-by, "tho' Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout," and your redeemed body shall arise, purified like the body of your own dear Lord and Saviour, which could not see corruption because it contained no trace of sin; and then your perfected body and soul and spirit shall triumph and reign with Jesus here below in his millennial glory, and after that you shall have the fulness of "life

everlasting" in the glory yet to be revealed. All this honour will be given to you, not because you have deserved it, but of the free, sovereign grace of God. It is only given to those in whom there is the Spirit of God, and who, therefore, in their lives manifest that holiness of character, "without which no man shall see the Lord."

May the Lord graciously give to all of us his Holy Spirit, and may we all meet in heaven, to part no more for ever, for our Lord Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

Expositions by C. H. Spurgeon.

PSALM LXXX; AND MATTHEW IX. 36—38; AND X.

Psalm lxxx. Verses 1—3. *Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, thou that leadest Joseph like a flock; thou that dwellest between the cherubims, shine forth. Before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh stir up thy strength, and come and save us. Turn us again, O God, and cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved.*

To whom could Israel go, in times of distress, but unto her God? It was well that her psalmists should teach her thus to pray. Notice the form of this prayer: "Come and save us. Turn us again, O God." We cannot be saved except by being turned from the ways of sin into the path of holiness. But who shall turn us? What power can reverse the current of the human soul? As well might Niagara begin to ascend of its own accord as for man to turn to God except as God turns him.

4—7. *O LORD God of hosts, how long wilt thou be angry against the prayer of thy people? Thou feedest them with the bread of tears; and givest them tears to drink in great measure. Thou makest us a strife unto our neighbours; and our enemies laugh among themselves. Turn us again, O God of hosts, and cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved.*

Israel was evidently in very deep distress, yet still God's own. It is no evidence of our having ceased to be God's people that we are made to drink deep draughts of tears. We are not to imagine that God has cast us off because he chastens us; nay, rather are we to argue the other way, "for whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth."

8—15. *Thou hast brought a vine out of Egypt: thou hast cast out the heathen, and planted it. Thou preparedst room before it, and didst cause it to take deep root, and it filled the land. The hills were covered with the shadow of it, and the boughs thereof were like the goodly cedars. She sent out her boughs unto the sea, and her branches unto the river. Why hast thou then broken down her hedges, so that all they which pass by the way do pluck her? The boar out of the wood doth waste it, and the wild beast of the field doth devour it. Return, we beseech thee, O God of hosts: look down from heaven, and behold, and visit this vine; and the vineyard which thy right hand hath planted, and the branch that thou madest strong for thyself.*

Notice how a soul, in deep distress, usually gets to God. Under some aspect or other, by some way or another, the heart gropes its way till it finds him out. If poor Israel be as a vineyard given up to the wild boar of the wood, there is still hope through that "righteous Branch" of whom the Lord said to Jeremiah, "In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely."

16, 17. *It is burned with fire, it is cut down: they perish at the rebuke of thy countenance. Let thy hand be upon the man of thy right hand, upon the son of man whom thou madest strong for thyself.*

"If thou wilt not hear us, yet hear him. If thou wilt put no honour upon us, we will ask thee to put the highest honours upon him. Save us