

e. What is comforting about any suffering we may undergo?  
(verse 9)

f. What has God called us to? (verse 10)

g. What four things does God promise to do out of our suffering?  
(verse 10)

---

#### DID YOU KNOW?

---

The knowledge of willful sin in the believer's life can weigh on them in an almost physical fashion. John Bunyan knew this and used it as his impetus to write the beloved story, *Pilgrim's Progress*. Christian's journey away from home and towards the Celestial City starts when he is weighed down by a great burden. What caused this burden? Reading the Bible and realizing the knowledge of his sin. Bunyan's image of Christian carrying the burden of sin on his back is as powerful, truthful, and relevant today as it was when he first wrote it three hundred years ago.

# SOWING AND REAPING

*Galatians 6:6-10*

*In this lesson Paul teaches a principle that applies to all aspects of life.*

---

#### OUTLINE

---

In our culture we tend to describe the virtuoso athlete or musician as someone who is "naturally gifted." And while that is most likely true, it also discredits and overlooks the thousands of hours of hard work, practice, and sacrifice that created such a polished product. We are so nearsighted regarding achievement that we too often forget the basic principle behind all bountiful things: you reap what you sow.

- I. The Practice of Sowing and Reaping
- II. The Proverb of Sowing and Reaping
  - A. The Principle of Investment
  - B. The Principle of Identity
  - C. The Principle of Increase
  - D. The Principle of Interval
- III. The Promise of Sowing and Reaping
- IV. The Priority of Sowing and Reaping

## OVERVIEW

**A**t the very center of this portion of Galatians lies a universal proverb. If you study the Bible for any length of time, you will discover this principle throughout the Old and New Testaments. And even if it were not found in the Bible, it would still be just as true as it is here in the Book of Galatians. It is a proverb that works in every area of life. Paul puts it simply in verse 7: "for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap."

This proverb is stated here in epigrammatic form so that we would never forget it. It is given to us as a formula with "absolute" written all over it. And while we are to apply this principle in the area of our spiritual lives in this specific context, it also rings true in so many other areas of life.

For instance, this governs the world of agriculture. Recall that after Noah came out of the ark, God promised that so long as the earth remained, seedtime and harvest—that is, sowing and reaping—would not cease (Genesis 8:22). God has certainly kept this promise, for if a farmer wants a harvest, he must sow seed in his field. Otherwise there is no harvest. It's that simple.

This principle is also true in the realm of technology. When computers were first introduced, there was a little thing everybody talked about called G.I.G.O. — Garbage In, Garbage Out — a reminder that whatever you put in the computer determines what you get out of it.

And the harvest principle is obviously true in the area of finance. If you don't make an investment, you can hardly expect a return! But if you wisely invest over many years and decades, you will reap a harvest in your latter years that is based on your prudence in your early years.

Sowing and reaping also proves true in human relationships. If we want to be loved, we need to love others. And if a man wants friends, he needs to show himself friendly. Relationships that are deep and close-knit are the product of years of mutual investment. Love is something that is nurtured not unlike a flower.

And finally, this principle is reflected in the area of athletics. No athlete is going to be able to perform at a high level unless he invests. Olympic athletes invest four years of grueling work and sacrifice for just one moment to shine before the world. Professional golfers and baseball players have honed their skills for close to

twenty years before they become professionals. The fruit of high athletic skill and performance is the result of sowing diligent seeds of hard work on the practice field.

As you can see, the proverb of sowing and reaping is a law of the universe. Every day we live out this law whether we are aware of it or not. The psalmist wrote that,

Those who sow in tears  
Shall reap in joy.  
He who continually goes forth weeping,  
Bearing seed for sowing,  
Shall doubtless come again with rejoicing,  
Bringing his sheaves with him. (Psalm 126:5–6)

This is a tremendous promise from the Psalms. And now here in the Book of Galatians, we discover that the proverb of sowing and reaping operates from four distinct foundations.

## THE PRACTICE OF SOWING AND REAPING (GALATIANS 6:6)

Verse 6 reads, "Let him who is taught the word share in all good things with him who teaches." At first glance, this verse does not seem to belong in this paragraph.

But this is actually a fitting introduction to the law of sowing and reaping. It simply teaches that a minister may expect to be supported by his congregation. He who sows the good seed of God's Word should reap a livelihood from the people who receive his instruction. This is a precept that Paul wrote about in 1 Corinthians 9:11: "If we have sown spiritual things for you, is it a great thing if we reap your material things?"

This is the way that the church should function. The minister should not have to work in the secular world and at the same time also be expected to devote himself to the study and ministry of the Word of God. The great reformer Martin Luther understood this:

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 requires.<sup>1</sup>

Paul went even further in his instruction concerning the ministry when he wrote this to young Timothy:

Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine. For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox while

it treads out the grain," and "The laborer is worthy of his wages." (1 Timothy 5:17-18)

Scripture makes it very clear that the law of sowing and reaping is also to be applied to the church. This is God's plan and we should faithfully hear it and heed it.

## THE PROVERB OF SOWING AND REAPING (GALATIANS 6:7)

Paul writes in verse 7, "Do not be deceived. God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap." Locked into this simple statement are four things that we need to remember.

### ***The Principle of Investment (Galatians 6:7b)***

Consider the statement "whatever a man sows." The implication here is that we reap only *if* we sow! Jesus put it this way in John 12:24: "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain."

Jesus said that if you have a grain of wheat and you hold that grain of wheat in your hand, it will always and forever be one simple, little grain of wheat. But when that grain of wheat is invested in the ground and entrusted to the soil, it will grow and multiply itself.

There is no such thing as reaping without an investment. And this is true both in the good and the bad sense. So the first underlying principle of the proverb of sowing and reaping is the principle of investment. This is the very foundation from which this law unfolds.

### ***The Principle of Identity (Galatians 6:8)***

Verse 8 then says, "For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life." We not only reap *if* we sow, we reap *what* we sow!

The kind of harvest we receive is determined in advance by the kind of seed that we sow. In the world of agriculture there is an absolute law that declares that if you sow barley, you will harvest a barley crop. And if you sow wheat, you will reap a wheat crop. Likewise, if you sow good seed, you will receive a good crop. And if you sow bad seed, you will reap a bad crop.

The nature of the seed determines the nature of the harvest. This is true in both the physical and spiritual realms. With that in mind, Paul harkens back to the Galatians 5 theme of the flesh and the Spirit and applies it to this principle.

### 1. Sowing to the Flesh (Galatians 6:8a)

If we have been paying attention to Paul's letter to the Galatians, we know that the "flesh" is our old nature. It is the residence of sin that still remains in a believer's life after he has been saved. Perhaps you will remember that the word "flesh" spelled backwards – minus the "h," – is the word "self."

According to Paul, when we sow our lives and our money to the flesh, we reap corruption. The word "corruption" in the original translation comes from a word that means "degeneration." It refers to something that has gone from better to worse and is the word for "decay." This simply means that when we sow our resources into the field of the flesh, we can expect the investment ultimately to go bad and end in ruin.

### 2. Sowing to the Spirit (Galatians 6:8b)

In contrast, "but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life." When we sow to the Spirit, we set our affections on things above and not on things that are on earth. We seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and determine to feed our new nature and starve our old nature.

We need to consider if the books we read, the company we keep, the television programs and movies that we watch, and the music we listen to sow to the Spirit. If not, we need to make changes so that we are sowing good things into our lives. And be sure to know that when we pray and witness and bear one another's burdens, we are sowing to the Spirit.

The harvest for sowing to the flesh is "corruption" and deterioration. But the harvest of sowing to the Spirit is "eternal life," and that process begins at the moment of our conversion and continues to grow and develop until it is fully realized in heaven. If we sow to the flesh, we will go from bad to worse until we finally perish. But if we sow to the Spirit we will begin a process of moral and spiritual growth that will develop until it becomes perfect in eternity.

How can you sow to the Spirit and grow in your walk with the Lord? Well, there are many spiritual disciplines: reading the Word of God, praying, fellowshiping with other Christians, and ministering to a world that so desperately

needs to hear of Christ. When we get involved in serving the Lord and investing in the Spirit, the Bible says that investment is going to reap a reward of eternal life.

But if we already have eternal life, what does that mean? It simply means that we are going to see our investment in eternal life begin to blossom even now. We're going to become more and more today what we will ultimately be in heaven for all of eternity.

And the investment in eternal life is so totally different than the investment in the flesh. The flesh deteriorates, but when we invest in spiritual things, it only gets better and better all the way to heaven. C.S. Lewis put it this way:

Every time you make a choice, you are turning the central part of you, the part of you that chooses, into something a little different from what it was before. And taking your life as a whole, with all your innumerable choices, all your life long you are slowly turning this central thing either into a heavenly creature or into a hellish creature: either into a creature that is in harmony with God, and with other creatures, and with itself, or else into one that is in a state of war and hatred with God, and with its fellow-creatures, and with itself.<sup>2</sup>

That is the general principle of sowing and reaping. But we must not miss the very specific application that Paul is making here: he is really talking about what we do with our money. The Christian really has but two fields into which he can sow seed—he can either sow it to his flesh or he can sow it to the Spirit.

### ***The Principle of Increase***

We reap *if* we sow and we reap *what* we sow. But thirdly, we reap *more than* we sow! If this principle were not true, then sowing would be a foolish thing to do. If you took one seed and put it in the ground and received only that same seed in return, you would have been better off to have kept your original seed.

But the principle of increase is especially true in relationships, isn't it? Sow a little bit of hate and you will get a whole lot of it back. Sow a little bit of discord and you find yourself the object of discord and discouragement.

Conversely, this principle is why it is more blessed to give than it is to receive; for when we give and sow, we reap back blessings and

benefits that can be absolutely overwhelming. Second Corinthians 9:6 puts it this way: "He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully."

### ***The Principle of Interval***

We reap *if* we sow, we reap *what* we sow, and we reap *more than* we sow. And finally, we reap *later* than we sow! This last principle is the hardest one for us to accept because we are impatient people.

But no farmer plants seed in the morning and harvests the crop in the afternoon. That just doesn't happen. There must always be a period of time between sowing and reaping.

In conclusion, the universal proverb that you reap what you sow has four underlying principles:

You reap if you sow—that's the principle of investment.

You reap what you sow—that's the principle of identity.

You reap more than you sow—that's the principle of increase.

You reap later than you sow—that's the principle of interval.

## **THE PROMISE OF SOWING AND REAPING (GALATIANS 6:9)**

Paul gives us a promise in verse 9, "And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart." Since there is an interval between sowing and reaping, we have the tendency to get discouraged. So that is why Paul adds a promise to his instruction. He reminds us that "doing good" can sometimes be disheartening. He pointedly states that there is a danger that we might lose heart in the process.

There are times in our service for God when we wonder if what we are doing is making any difference. We are sowing, but it does not appear that a harvest is coming. It is in those very seasons that we need to embrace this promise.

In difficult times, we must continue to concentrate on sowing the seed, even if there seems to be no harvest. We must continue to sow because we have a promise from Almighty God that in "due season we shall reap." Just stop for a moment and consider those words. There is no "if" or "maybe" or "possibly" in that promise. No, it is an ironclad guarantee that our sowing will result in reaping!

As it says in 1 Corinthians 15:58, "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord." If we allow the



lack of a visible harvest to so discourage us that we stop sowing, we will short-circuit God's plan for our lives. Just like the farmer, we have to plant the seed, cultivate and water it, and wait for God to bring it to maturity. And Luke 18:1 offers a practical word to those prone to discouragement as they wait: "men ought always to pray and not lose heart."

## THE PRIORITY OF SOWING AND REAPING (GALATIANS 6:10)

Verse 10 concludes with this priority: "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith." Paul's principle is clear—you should sow where you reap. If we truly understood this, it would help to clarify for many of us what to do with the stewardship that God has entrusted to us.

This doesn't mean that you should give all of your money to the local church; but it does mean that if that is where you are ministered to and where you reap, then that is a place where you should sow. This is Paul's principle and we should teach this unashamedly.

Now as we look back over this passage from Galatians six, we must not miss the big red warning sign that stands at the beginning of the paragraph in verse 7: "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked." We all know that Satan is the one who deceives. Recall that the Galatians had already been warned about his power to "bewitch" them with false doctrine.

But here in this paragraph, we are told that it is possible to "deceive ourselves." Indeed, Jeremiah 17:9 warns us that "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked; who can know it?"

There are some Christians who deceive themselves into believing that just because they are Christians, God will not deal with them for their sin or unfaithfulness. But according to Paul, when we play that game, we are mocking God. And the word "mock" is from a Greek word that means to "turn up your nose and sneer." So when we knowingly sin and act as if there is no penalty to be paid, we mock God—we turn up our nose at God and scorn Him.

We have the choice to sow anywhere we want. We can sow the seeds of our investment and our energy any place that we choose. But once we sow that seed, we are no longer left with any choices. The harvest will come where we have sown it, and we will have nothing to say about it.

If we have invested in the world and in the flesh, that is what we will harvest, and it will ultimately be a bad investment. But we have no right to turn our noses up at God when we don't do what He tells us to do. That is what this passage means. Don't try to deceive yourself.

Some of you may be in the midst of one of those choices right now. If you make the right choice, you're going to have a harvest that will bless you in the future. But if you make the wrong choice, you may have some immediate joy, but that joy will deteriorate and you will look back and say, "That was a bad choice."

So stop and ask yourself this question: "What kind of harvest do I want?" Once you have that answer, simply sow the seed in that field. You will always reap what you sow. That is what the Word of God says.

And that should be a great encouragement to you! It serves as a reminder that you have some determination over your destiny, your future, and how your life is going to be. You must simply sow the type of seeds that you want to harvest.

A man came up to a preacher one day who was renowned for his understanding of Scripture. And he said to the preacher, "What can I do to get the knowledge of the Bible that you have?" The preacher looked at him and said, "You're fifty years too late."

The man was confused by that answer. The preacher explained, "I started studying the Bible diligently fifty years ago. That's how I know what I know today. You can't have the knowledge of the Bible that I have because you're fifty years too late. You should have sown that seed back then if you wanted this harvest."

Now that can be a discouraging story, but don't let it be because God will take us from the point where we are! He will start us wherever we are as long as we start sowing that good seed. Don't look back with regret. Deal with the past quickly and get on with God. Start sowing the right seed, and when you do, you'll start having the right harvest. That is God's plan, and that is His promise to us. So take Him up on it!

### Notes

1. Martin Luther, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians by Martin Luther* (London: James Clarke & Co. Ltd., 1955), 552.
2. C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishers, 1980), 92.

---

**APPLICATION**

---

1. Read 2 Corinthians 9:6-15.

- a. In what two ways are we not to give? (verse 7)
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- b. Why do you think the attitude toward giving is highlighted in verse 7? How does the theme of verse 6 play into this?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- c. What does God love? (verse 7) Why do you think this is so?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- d. For what purpose does God pour His grace on us? (verse 8)

- e. What physical things does God provide on a daily basis?  
(verse 10)
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- f. What does God want to do with our spiritual provisions?  
(verse 10)
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- g. Why are we enriched by God? (verse 11)
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- h. When we supply the needs of the saints, what else happens?  
(verse 12)

i. What causes God to be glorified? (verse 13)

j. What will people always be drawn to and thankful for in us?  
(verse 14)

2. Read 2 Thessalonians 3:6–15.

a. What kind of people are we to avoid fellowship with? (verse 6)

b. Why were the Thessalonians able to discern what was proper behavior? (verse 7) What can we learn from this?

c. What is the valued testimony of hard work? (verses 8–9)

d. How does verse 10 relate to the principle of reaping and sowing?

e. Being a busybody is associated with what type of conduct?  
(verse 11)

f. What specific instructions are given to those who do not work?  
(verse 12)

g. What is Paul's word for those who follow the Lord's commands? (verse 13)

h. How are those disobedient to such instruction to be treated? Why? (verse 14)

i. Why is verse 15 such a crucial and critical conclusion to this passage?

3. Read Hebrews 6:9-12.

a. What does Paul say accompanies salvation? (verse 9)

b. What kinds of acts does God promise to remember and note? (verse 10)

c. What is Paul's prayer for all followers of Christ? (verse 11)

d. Who are we to model our lives after? (verse 12) How is this also in accordance with the principle of reaping and sowing?