

INTRODUCTION

After this message, I have only three more messages from Paul's letter to the church at Galatia. We started this series last September, and over the past year we've learned that Paul wrote this letter to a group of churches in what would be southern Turkey today. He established these churches on his missionary journeys so he felt as if these Christians were his spiritual children. He was upset that false teachers had infiltrated the churches and corrupted the pure message of the Gospel of the grace of God. They misled the Gentile Christians into thinking they must become good Jews before they could be saved. Their legalistic message was that Jesus *plus* obeying the Jewish Law equaled salvation. Paul wrote them this strong letter to warn them not to stray from the Grace-Way. Grace means Jesus plus nothing equals salvation.

In this passage, Paul states one of the most powerful principles in the Bible. It's called "the law of the harvest." It's usually expressed this way: You reap what you sow. A prison chaplain told me he was walking by the cell of a prison trustee, an inmate with a few more privileges. This trustee was a believer. The chaplain found him using a needle and thread to repair a hole in his pants. The chaplain asked him, "Are you sewing? The inmate, who knew his Bible thought for a moment and said, "No, I'm reaping."

Down here in Texas we don't use the terms sowing and reaping very much so I want us to think about this law in these terms: You pick what you plant.

Galatians 6:6-8. "Anyone who receives instruction in the word must share all good things with his instructor. Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life."

As many of you know I grew up in L.A., lower Alabama. I actually grew up in UCLA, the upper corner of Lower Alabama. I attended a little high school with about 250 students. In my sophomore football season, we experienced a lot of rain and our football field was a muddy mess. So in the early spring our head coach, Coach Treadwell, plowed the field between the hash marks. We were too poor to lay sod, so Coach planted grass seed. Coach Treadwell was obsessive about his precious grass and he carefully watered and tended it. It was his pride and joy.

One Friday night I was staying with my buddy, Paul Spears, who lived a few blocks from the stadium. In our sophomoric wisdom we came up with the brilliant idea of sneaking into the stadium and planting corn seed in Coach Treadwell's grass crop. So after midnight we climbed over the stadium fence and planted two bags of kernel corn in his field. In a few weeks these tall corn sprouts started appearing in the middle of the football field and Coach Treadwell was as mad as a hornet. He complained that he had been sold bad grass seed. He pulled some of them up and the next day there would be other sprouts.

Of course, all the students were laughing about it, so Paul and I couldn't keep our mouths shut. We started to brag to our friends that we were responsible for the corn. Of course we asked our friends not to tell anyone our secret. A couple of days later an extremely irate Coach Treadwell

called us into the office and told us he knew what we had done. As punishment, every afternoon after school for two weeks we had to run up and down the stadium steps until we were drenched with sweat, and then we had to walk up and down the football field bending over pulling up the corn stalks with Coach Treadwell following and yelling. He made it clear it would not go well if we dared to tread on one blade of his precious grass. Believe me; I learned the hard way you reap what you sow—you pick what you plant!

The law of the harvest is both a natural law and a spiritual law. It's true in agriculture that you pick what you plant. But it's also a great spiritual truth that you reap what you sow. I want to take this irrefutable law of the harvest and look at it from two different angles.

I. WHAT YOU ARE TODAY IS A RESULT OF THE CHOICES YOU MADE IN YOUR PAST

Your life right now is basically the harvest of your habits. That's too profound to miss so let me say it again. Your life is the harvest of your habits.

The law of the harvest can be summarized this way: every choice has consequences. Good choices have good consequences and poor choices have unpleasant consequences. There's a town in New Mexico named Truth or Consequences. I've never been there, but that phrase isn't entirely accurate. It means if you lie, there will be consequences. But the truth is, if you tell the truth, there are also consequences—just different consequences.

Parents, one of the most important values you will ever teach your children is that they need to make wise choices, because choices have consequences. But what is true for children is also true for adults.

Who you are and where you are right now in life is the result of a combination of factors. Your parents and family have influenced you. Our society and circumstances have influenced you as well. But your choices have been the main factors in your attitude, your position, and your character. Your circumstances have had an impact as well. But a large part of your present situation is the direct result of a series of choices you have made in your past.

There are three realities about the law of the harvest:

A. You always pick WHAT you plant

If you plant grass seed you don't expect to grow corn. A farmer who plants soybeans knows he will grow a crop of soybeans. Every kind of seed grows exactly what it is. Tomato seeds grow tomatoes. Squash seeds grow squash. The only exception to this rule I know is once when I planted birdseed but I wasn't able to grow birds. (Just wanted to see if you're listening).

Jacob is a good example of this spiritual principle. He wasn't the oldest son, so he and his mother hatched a plot to steal the birthright and blessing that rightly belonged to his older brother. When Isaac was a blind old man, Jacob came into his room wearing Esau's hunting clothes. He even wrapped his arms in goat hair so that his dad would think he was Esau, whose name means

“hairy.” Jacob planted the seeds of deception in his family, and years later he was the victim of deceit as well. His father-in-law tricked him into marrying un-lovely Leah instead of ravishing Rebecca. And years later Jacob’s sons deceived him again by telling him that his favorite son, Joseph, had been killed by a wild animal.

If you have a bitter, angry disposition toward others, don’t be surprised that you receive hostility from others. But if you are planting seeds of kindness and love, you will find that other people are kind and loving. Jesus said, “Each tree is recognized by its own fruit. People do not pick figs from thornbushes, or grapes from briars.” (Luke 6:44) You pick the same thing you plant.

B. You always pick MORE than you plant

Seeds don’t reproduce one for one; they multiply exponentially. When you plant a butterbean, a butterbean plant grows, and on that bush are pods of butterbeans containing dozens of butterbeans. A tiny acorn becomes a mighty oak tree, which produces thousands of acorns over its life.

A tiny word, deed, or choice may seem small, but it can result in a massive harvest. Four thousand years ago God promised Abraham and Sarah they would have a son. But years passed and there was no son. So Sarah decided to help God out and suggested Abraham take her maid, Hagar, into his bed. Abraham agreed. What a tragic choice! Hagar gave birth to a son named Ishmael. Later, Sarah gave birth to Isaac. These two brothers didn’t get along. They hated each other. But that choice wasn’t just about two brothers—it’s about two races of people today. Ishmael was the forefather of all the Arab people and Isaac was the forefather of the Israelites. The reason millions of Jews and Arabs hate each other today is because of a bad choice made 4,000 years ago. You reap MORE than you sow!

Seeds are small, but they turn into large plants. You may think a tiny word or deed is insignificant, but it always multiplies and grows into large consequences. There is a harvest cycle that is true in life as well as agriculture: “Sow a thought; reap an act; Sow an act, reap a habit; sow a habit, reap a character; Sow a character; reap a destiny.” You will always pick more than you plant.

C. You always pick AFTER you plant

In the story of Jack and the Beanstalk, the magic beans he purchased grew into a huge beanstalk overnight—but that’s a fairy tale. When you plant a seed, it doesn’t pop out the ground immediately. It takes time for a seed to grow into a plant. It takes patience to be a good farmer because you have to wait for the harvest.

When we lived in Alabama we had a vacant lot next to our house, so one summer I planted some watermelon seeds. Soon a watermelon vine started growing. Then a small round watermelon could be seen among the leaves. I told our girls one day the watermelon might be large enough to eat. Every day they would go out and check on the growth of the tiny watermelon. They were so impatient. They would say, “Come on, watermelon! Grow!!” One afternoon I stopped on the way home and bought a big watermelon at a roadside stand. Instead of bringing it into the house,

I took it and placed it among the leaves of the watermelon vine and wrapped part of the vine around the stem. I went inside and asked the girls if they had checked on the watermelon that day. They ran outside and you should have heard them screaming when they thought their watermelon had grown so quickly. I showed them it wasn't attached to vine, and I used it as a chance to teach them that it takes patience to grow things.

Spiritually speaking, the choices you make may not have immediate consequences. But there will eventually be consequences because you always pick after you plant.

By the way, the law of the harvest not only applies to individuals, it applies to nations as well. In the Old Testament, Israel had turned from God and started worshipping the idols of their neighbors. The result was national calamity. God spoke through the prophet Hosea these words, "Israel has rejected what is good...with their silver and gold they make idols for themselves to their own destruction." Then God gave the Old Testament version of the law of the harvest. He said, "They sow the wind and reap the whirlwind." (Hosea 8:3-4, 7)

I believe America is facing a national crisis because we have made the same mistake Israel made. We have forgotten the God who has given us our liberty.

Edward Gibbon was a British historian and Member of Parliament. He devoted much of his life studying the Roman Empire. His most famous work is his six-volume, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, written between 1776 and 1788. The Roman Empire was a great civilization. When it fell to the Visigoths in the 5th century, it had already been weakened from inner moral decay. Gibbon points out four of the main reasons Rome crumbled from within. See if these reasons don't sound exactly like America today. (1) Rapid increase of divorce; the undermining of the family as the basis of society. (FACT: America leads the world in the number of divorces, and there are forces trying to radically change the definition of marriage and the family). (2) Higher and higher taxes and the spending of public money for free bread and circuses for the population. (3) A mad craze for sports, blood sport becoming increasingly brutal. (4) The decay of religion, faith fading into mere formalism, moral decadence.

In 1962, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that students could no longer do what they had been doing since before the founding of our nation: Pray in school. They ruled a non-denominational prayer that simply acknowledged dependence on God was unconstitutional—it wasn't a Christian prayer. It simply stated: "Almighty God, we acknowledge our dependence upon Thee, and we beg Thy blessings upon us, our parents, our teachers and our country. Amen." Twelve years after this prayer was outlawed the court ruled that it is legal to kill babies in the womb. Look around you and you can see the signs of a bad harvest. Today, if you are under 30, married, and you have a baby, you are in the minority. 53% of all children born to women under 30 are born to single moms. Fifty years ago America sowed the wind, and now we're reaping the whirlwind.

Now at this point, you may be feeling discouraged about the condition of our country. Or you may be feeling despondent about the bad choices you've made in the past.

But here's the good news. There's hope for you and there's hope for America. And HOPE is

Having Only Positive Expectations. There's a great promise in the law of the harvest as well. You can't do anything about your past, but you can certainly do something about your future. Let's look at the law of the harvest from a different angle.

II. WHAT YOU WILL BE TOMORROW WILL BE THE RESULT OF THE CHOICES YOU MAKE TODAY

It's true for you personally, and it's true for our nation.

The Bible says we can be engaged in only two kinds of planting—planting in the sinful nature, or planting in the Spirit. So, there are to admonitions we can glean from this truth.

A. Be careful! Selfish living is self-destructive

The Bible says, "The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction." (Galatians 6:8) Someone said many people spend all week sowing wild oats, and then they come to church on Sunday and pray for a crop failure.

John Stott, the New Testament scholar wrote: "To 'sow to the flesh' is to pander to it, to cuddle and stroke it, instead of crucifying it. The seeds we sow are largely thoughts and deeds. 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 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." (*Message of Galatians*, p. 170)

The Bible doesn't say if you plant poor choices you MIGHT pick a crop of bad consequences. It is an irrefutable law. That's why Paul started this verse with this warning: "Don't be deceived. God is not mocked." That's a word that means to "turn up your nose" at God. You can't live in sin and just thumb your nose at God and think you're going to get away with it. It's just not harvest time yet.

R.G. Lee was a great preacher who was known for one famous sermon. It was called, "Payday someday." You can listen to it online. It was the story about how King Ahab wanted to buy the vineyard of Naboth, but Naboth wouldn't sell it to him. Ahab got into bed and had a pity party. His wicked wife Jezebel took care of the situation. She had Naboth murdered and went in and told her pouting husband the vineyard was his. But there was a prophet of God in the land named Elijah. He basically said, "You can't get away with this! You're going to reap what you sow. Just as you spilled Naboth's blood in his vineyard, one day your blood will be spilled and the dogs will lick it up!" Yuck. But the queen laughed at Elijah and thumbed her nose at God. She said, "I'm the queen, you can't touch me!" But in the end that's exactly what happened to the wicked queen. It took a long time. I'm sure she thought she had gotten away with murder. It didn't happen overnight, but eventually she received her "Payday someday."

In that message Dr. Lee talked about when he was pastor of First Baptist Church, New Orleans. There was a man who hated God and mocked the Bible. He sent Dr. Lee obscene, scathing letters criticizing his ministry. He would sign his name, "The King of the Kangaroo Court." Late one

evening Dr. Lee received a phone call from a hospital and a nurse said a man was dying and had asked Dr. Lee to come. The nurse said the man said to tell him he was the King of the Kangaroo Court. Dr. Lee went and saw a man eaten up with disease and bitterness. Dr. Lee asked if there was anything he could do. The man spit out a reply, "No, there's nothing you can do for me except maybe throw my body to the buzzards when I'm dead, if the buzzards will have me." Then the man got serious and said, "I know you talk to a lot of young people. Tell them I said that the devil pays—but he pays with counterfeit money." Dr. Lee tried to share Christ with the man, but he refused to listen and he was dead within two hours.

B. Be patient! You may not enjoy your harvest until eternity

When most people talk about Galatians 6:7 they talk about the negative aspect of planting a crop of bad choices. But I think we should really focus on the positive side. The Bible says, "The one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life." (vs. 8)

I received an email with this quote from an unknown author: "There are two days in every week about which we should not worry. One of these days is Yesterday with its mistakes and cares, its faults and blunders. Yesterday has passed forever beyond our control. The other day we should not worry about is Tomorrow with its possible cares and burdens. Tomorrow's sun will rise either in splendor or behind a mask of clouds, but it will rise.

That leaves only one day: Today. Any person, by the grace of God, can fight the battles of just one day. When we only focus on the bitterness over past mistakes or the dread of what might happen tomorrow, we lose the gift of Today. Let us, therefore journey but one day at a time." That's what Jesus meant when He said, "Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own." (Matthew 6:34) Jesus didn't mean that we need to worry about today; He said when you make good choices tomorrow will take care of itself. In the verse before He said, "Seek FIRST his kingdom and his righteousness, and ALL these things will be given to you was well." (Matthew 6:33)

You can't do anything about last year's harvest, but you still have time to do something about next year's harvest. Let's take a brief look at the text we'll be studying next week, because it is a continuation of the law of the harvest. The Bible says, "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up." (Galatians 6:9)

CONCLUSION

If you're only into planting so you can pick personally, then you've missed the point. We plant good choices so others who come after us will have a good harvest. That's why I'm burdened for our nation. What kind of country are we going to leave for our children and grandchildren? The national debt of \$14 trillion dollars isn't a political issue; it's a moral issue. We're stealing from future generations by running up this enormous debt.

What we will be tomorrow is based upon the choices we make today. And what our nation will be in twenty years is based upon the decisions we make today as a nation. If we continue to kick God out of our public life, our children and grandchildren will reap a bitter harvest.

So, keep on planting good seeds; good choices lead to good habits, which leads to a good harvest. Don't be discouraged if you don't see the harvest of your efforts in this life. If you plant good seeds, there WILL be harvest of blessing. You may not see it until heaven, but there will others who will benefit from your good choices. What kind of legacy are you going to leave behind for others? When you're in heaven will those who are left behind be blessed by your life? We are experiencing the benefit of the service and sacrifice of generations who have come before us. Green Acres is here because of people who had a vision and sacrificed to make this vision a reality.

You might have heard about Wycliffe Bible translators; let me tell you the story about their namesake. In the 14th century, a Catholic priest named John Wycliffe was highly educated professor at Oxford. He read the Bible in the original languages of Hebrew and Greek. As he read the Bible, and compared it to the church of his day and noticed the two didn't line up. There was no Biblical basis for a Pope and for the iron fist the Catholic Church used to control the members. So John Wycliffe did something so revolutionary it was illegal. He had the audacity to translate the Bible into English. The Catholic Church ordered him not to do the translation, but he persevered. He was arrested and charged with heresy. He was removed from his teaching position at Oxford and stripped of all his rights. Heartbroken, he died of a stroke a few years later while he was preaching to a small group of like-minded Christians.

Forty-four years after he died, he was still so hated by the church that Pope ordered his body exhumed. His body was then burned along with his books and Bibles and his ashes were sprinkled on the Thames River in London.

The enemies of John Wycliffe celebrated, "Wycliffe is dead and forgotten." But if you're holding an English Bible in your hand, hold it up today. This is the harvest that John Wycliffe has left for us. He never saw it in his lifetime, but he was faithful to plant seeds of obedience. What will you leave behind? Today, we are enjoying the harvest of the sacrifice and service of faithful people who have come before us. So be faithful and be patient. You may not see your reward of a good harvest until you get in heaven.

I love the song by Steve Green that says: "Oh, may all who come behind us find us faithful; May the fire of our devotion light their way; May the footprints that we leave; lead them to believe. And the lives we live inspire them to obey."

OUTLINE

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- A. What you plant
- B. More than you plant
- C. After you plant

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes