

Sowing and Reaping

***“Be not deceived; ... 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.”
—Galatians 6:7,8***

The thought of sowing is that of planting, with a view to development and resulting good fruitage. The harvest of such sowing will come in due time. All of our thoughts, all of our actions, have an effect on future character. Little by little the character is made up. The sowing of

today will bring the reaping of tomorrow. If our thoughts and our attention are given to earthly things, the result will be an increase of development along earthly lines. By contrast, if our thoughts and attention are given to heavenly things, the development will be along spiritual lines.

Sowing to the flesh means gratification of the desires of the flesh, catering to the things that are craved by our fallen nature. If yielded to, these cravings will grow stronger and stronger. Beyond what is reasonably necessary to satisfy legitimate temporal responsibilities, it is a mistake to suppose

that other types of fleshly gratification are proper. Those who continue to yield to such propensities will, as our opening text states, “reap corruption [Greek: decay].” Those who mind spiritual things; who set their affections on things above, not on things of earth; those who seek to develop themselves along spiritual lines, will progress in spiritual attainment. (Col. 3:2) In due time, they will reap a character likeness to the Lord and become copies of God’s dear Son, sanctified more and more through the Truth. (John 17:17) To such is promised in our text the gift of “life everlasting.”

The words of Apostle Paul in our opening text are addressed to the church and relate, therefore, to those who have “made a covenant with [God] by sacrifice.” (Ps. 50:5) If these live after the flesh, they shall die, as the apostle says; for they have already surrendered their human life-rights. (Rom. 8:13) If, however, by earnest endeavors they seek to lay down their lives; to develop the new life by mortifying the flesh, by putting it to death; and strive to overcome the weaknesses which they inherit, they shall shortly be rid of their fleshly impediments and be clothed upon with a new heavenly body when they are resurrected. (II Cor. 5:1-4) Then they shall be like the Lord.—I John 3:2

The Extent of Personal Responsibility

Comparatively few realize to what extent we form our own characters. Our minds, our affections, are gardens in which we may plant either seeds of thorns and thistles of sin, or those seeds which produce the fragrant and beautiful flowers and fruits which more particularly represent the

heavenly and spiritual graces. (Gal. 5:22,23; II Pet. 1:5-8) "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap," whether he sow to the flesh or to the Spirit. (Gal. 6:7) Whoever, therefore, seeks for the heavenly things, and for joint heirship in the kingdom, must plant or set out in their mind and affections, those qualities and graces which the Lord marks out as essential to the development of characters such as will be acceptable for "the inheritance of the saints in light."—Col. 1:12

The Father places upon all those who accept the high, heavenly calling, and who make a covenant thereunder, the responsibility of sowing to the Spirit in order that they might attain the prize. (Heb. 3:1; Phil. 3:14) Through his Word God tells them of their own natural weaknesses and imperfections, and shows them how he has provided a full offset for these imperfections in the merit and sacrifice of the Redeemer. (Rom. 3:24,25) He shows them also what are the fruits and graces of the Spirit which they must possess, to the extent of their ability, if they would be joint-heirs with Christ. He points out to them, in the Redeemer's sacrificial life as well as in his teachings, the copy which all must follow who would reach the same glorious station and be his joint-heirs.—Matt. 16:24; Rom. 8:16,17

We might look at this matter merely from the standpoint of the responsibility which it puts upon us, and might well feel overwhelmed. Rather, however, we should view it from the standpoint of divine grace, and consider what a blessed privilege has been granted us of being "transformed by the renewing" of our minds, that we may come more and more to know and to strive for the "good, and

acceptable, and perfect, will of God.” (Eph. 2:4-8; Rom. 12:2) In addition to all this, God has set before us the grandest reward imaginable for the doing of that which is merely our “reasonable service”—that of being “partakers of the divine nature.”—Rom. 12:1; II Pet. 1:3,4

Plant Good Seeds and Weed Out the Evil

There is for all mankind a natural attraction toward earthly things. However, during this reign of evil, the earthly things are blemished and in many respects distasteful to those who have learned to love righteousness. There still, nevertheless, can be a strong attraction toward the marred and blemished things of earth. Like weeds, earthly affections and desires spring spontaneously from seeds which often germinate from sources we know not. Christians, therefore, who would keep their hearts in the love of God, must not only keep planting good seeds, keep setting their affections on heavenly things, but they must keep rooting out the weeds of earthly desire and attraction.—Jude 1:21; Gal. 5:24

Our new life is not manifest to all, nor upon all occasions to any. This the apostle intimates when he says, “Your life is hid with Christ in God.” (Col. 3:3) It is a life of new desires, new aims, new aspirations, which the world can neither see nor truly appreciate, though it sees some outward manifestations of the new life in our daily conduct. Even our fellow brethren in Christ may not be able to appreciate the extent of progress of the new life in us. We ourselves may at times be perplexed respecting the progress of our spiritual growth; we may need to look back over weeks, months, or perhaps years,

in order to determine unquestionably that our life “in Christ” is growing. (II Cor. 5:17) Our new life, represented by our endeavors to follow the will of God, is hidden thus in Christ and in the Father.

In harmony with this thought the apostle declares that neither the world nor even the brethren were capable of judging him—that only the Lord, who could read the heart and know all the conditions, testings and weaknesses to be striven against, could properly judge him. He even declares, “I judge not mine own self.” (I Cor. 4:3,4) It is an excellent plan neither to harshly judge others who claim to be walking conscientiously as children of the Lord, nor even to judge ourselves in such a manner, if we are sincerely striving to do the Lord’s will. We should simply press along, day by day, doing the best we can to “grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ,” leaving all the results with the Lord. (II Pet. 3:18) He cares for us. So long as our hopes and aims and objects of life are centered in the heavenly things, and our lives are thus “hid with Christ in God,” we need fear no evil, present or future. The Lord will be with us, bless us spiritually, and keep us from falling. Ultimately, he will present us to the Heavenly Father both blameless and faultless.—Col. 1:21-23; Jude 1:24,25

Putting Off and Putting On

In detailing the changes which should take place in those who have consecrated themselves wholly to the Lord, the apostle enumerates certain alterations of disposition which should be striven for and, as far as possible, accomplished. This includes the putting away of the following: anger, wrath,

malice, evil-speaking, impurity of language, and falsehood in its every form. (Col. 3:8,9) The necessity for such correction of life might, at first thought, seem to be unnecessary to mention, such evil traits being too coarse and entirely opposed to every true Christian principle. Yet, as we scrutinize the matter more closely, we find that the apostle has taken into his list nearly all the weaknesses of the flesh which, to some degree, beset those who have become New Creatures "in Christ."—II Cor. 5:17

How common is it, we ask, to become angry? How easy it is for those who have named the name of Christ to have malicious or, at least, unkind thoughts respecting others. How easy it is, too, when harboring these, to permit them at times to influence one's conduct. Evil speaking, which is slander, is another trap that the Christian can easily fall into, and often results in deception, not only to the hearer, but also to the speaker of such things.

If all evil and impure language were avoided, what a wonderful world this would be! Christians should see to it that, henceforth, every word which proceeds from their mouths shall be such as will "minister grace to the hearers," and which are "good to the use of edifying." (Eph. 4:29) How much need there is also, not only of having good intentions in the heart, but also of expressing those good intentions truthfully one to another, "without partiality, and without hypocrisy." (James 3:17) Such righteous behavior requires that a heart be very pure and full of love if it would be fully truthful; otherwise it would lead to trouble continually. If unloving, ungenerous, unkind hearts, full of evil surmising, malice, hatred, and strife, were to express themselves

frankly it would add immensely to the trouble of the world. The Scriptures therefore urge, first the purifying of the heart, and then the general outward conduct.—Matt. 5:8; I Tim. 1:5

With the thought before our minds of the oneness and equal standing of those who have been accepted into the body of Christ, the apostle then urges upon our attention the necessity not only of putting off the evil dispositions of our fallen flesh, but also of putting on, cultivating, the various graces of the Spirit exemplified in our Head, Christ Jesus.—Col. 3:12-14

He specifies these: 1) compassionate sentiments; a disposition of largeness and generosity of heart toward everybody and everything—toward the saints, toward our neighbors, friends, and relatives, even toward our enemies. Amplifying, he continues, showing that it would imply; 2) kindness toward all; 3) humbleness of mind, the reverse of boastfulness, headiness, arrogance; 4) meekness, or gentleness of disposition; 5) longsuffering, or patient endurance with the faults and weaknesses of others. This implies that we should bear with one another's peculiarities of temperament and disposition, freely forgiving one another, if there be found cause of offense in each other. Meanwhile, we are to learn to correct ourselves, as we see our own blemishes mirrored in others. The standard for all this course of conduct is found in the Lord's course toward us, for he surely has been generous, kind, forbearing, and forgiving.—Rom. 2:4; Eph. 1:7

Especially for the Church

The apostle brings to the attention of the "holy and beloved," the elect, the fact that he is not

attempting at this time a reformation of the world along these lines, but merely a transformation of those who have entered into a special covenant with the Lord. (Col. 3:12; Rom. 12:2) All who have thus covenanted with the Lord and who hope to make their “calling and election sure” to membership in the glorified church, will not only seek to cultivate these fruits of the Spirit in their own lives, but also to encourage the cultivation of the same fruits, as they may have opportunity, in their brethren in Christ. Additionally, they will seek to exercise so good an influence upon their own families that, as their children receive from them, as parents, the natural life and the necessary instructions to start therein, these may be equipped for a good start in life, with the necessary guidelines for a noble character.

The apostle, as the mouthpiece of God, is a thorough instructor. He does not just tell us what fleshly propensities to put off and what graces to put on. Further, viewing us as arrayed in these qualities of heart-compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patient endurance, forbearance, and forgiveness, he adds, “And above all these put on charity [love], which is the bond of perfectness,” or completeness. (Col. 3:14) Love is thus pictured as that which binds and holds in place the folds of Christ’s “robe of righteousness” with its various jeweled adornments of character. (Isa. 61:10) In other words, the apostle would have us see that forbearance, meekness, patience, and other qualities we are to “put on,” must not be matters merely of courtesy or policy. The wearers of Christ’s robe will not be perfected in heart, nor be fit for the

kingdom, until they have reached the place where these various graces of their wills and intentions are bound to them by the cords of love—love for the Lord, love for righteousness, love for the brethren, and sympathetic love for the whole groaning creation. Love is, indeed, “the bond of perfectness,” the very Spirit of the Lord.

Let Us Not Be Deceived

In our text the apostle says, “Be not deceived.” The question naturally suggests: Is there danger that we may not know whether we are sowing to the Spirit or sowing to the flesh? We answer that there is indeed a danger of being deceived along this line. The Scriptures represent that the flesh is very crafty; that the natural mind is “deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.” (Jer. 17:9) The new mind needs to guard continually lest it fall into a trap of the old nature. If we are living according to the flesh, we may expect to reap accordingly, even deceiving ourselves. Others, too, may be deceived. God, however, cannot be mocked by our outward service of him and his truth while we inwardly live according to the flesh. (Gal. 6:7) If we plant corn, we harvest corn; if we sow wheat, we reap wheat. In all the affairs of our lives we are either building up the old nature that we agreed should be destroyed, or faithfully seeing to it that the deeds of the flesh are mortified and killed, that we may prosper spiritually.

We sow to the flesh every time we allow the fleshly, selfish, unjust, unrighteous desires of the flesh to have sway in our hearts and lives. On the contrary, each sowing to the Spirit, each resistance

of the desires of the flesh toward its fallen tendencies, and each exercise of the new mind, of the new will, toward the things that are pure, the things that are noble, the things that are good, the things that are true, the things that are spiritual, is a sowing to the Spirit. (Phil. 4:8) If persevered in, such a course will ultimately bring the attainment of the Lord's gracious promises and arrangements—everlasting life and a share in the heavenly kingdom.—Rom. 6:22; Rev. 2:10 ■