

“Whatever One Sows, That Will He Also Reap”

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—Galatians 6:7,
English Standard
Version*

PAUL’S LETTER WRITTEN

to the churches in the region of Galatia also applies to each follower of Christ throughout the present Gospel Age. His admonitions are for those who have made a covenant with

God, presenting themselves a “living sacrifice” and striving to be “not conformed to this world, but ... transformed by the renewing” of their minds. (Rom. 12:1,2) As we enter upon a new year, it is appropriate that we each examine ourselves along the lines of this work of transformation which should be taking place in our thoughts, words, and actions.

In our opening verse Paul begins with the warning, “Do not be deceived: God is not mocked.” We might temporarily deceive ourselves by being only hearers of God’s Word and not a “doer” of his instructions. (James 1:22) However, we cannot

deceive God because he “knows the thoughts of man” and is “discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” Consequently, it is to “the eyes of him to whom we must give account.”—Ps. 94:11; Heb. 4:12,13, *ESV*

Paul then identifies a most important principle applicable to each follower of Christ—whatever we sow, that we will also reap. From a natural standpoint, a person unfamiliar with the nature of certain seeds might sow, unknowingly, seeds of thistles or weeds, instead of wheat seeds, for example. After a short period of time, they might visit their field and say, “This seed seems to be pretty good. I will have a great harvest of wheat.” Later, however, at harvest time, the mistake in the type of seed which was sown would be obvious. This principle of cause and effect also applies to the development of our character and heart.

THOUGHTS—THE SOURCE OF CHARACTER

What is meant by the word “sow” in our opening scripture? We believe it especially refers to the thoughts, or seeds, which we dwell upon and ponder, those which we “plant.” Our future words and actions are mainly influenced by the previous thoughts which we have been dwelling upon. To extend the matter further, the thoughts which we meditate upon today are the source of what we will become tomorrow. As Solomon wrote, “Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.” “For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he.”—Prov. 4:23; 23:7

It is one thing to have a seed, and it is quite another thing to plant that seed. To plant a seed

you must bury it, then cover it up, and water it. Likewise, a thought which may enter our mind is one thing, but to dwell upon that thought, to ponder upon it over and over, is essentially “planting” that thought in our mind and heart. Thus we see there is a big difference between having a thought and sowing that same thought. Just as a seed has to be planted in order to obtain a harvest, so also thoughts which we dwell upon will eventually result in the type of character we will develop and the type of person we will be.

A little seed which is planted corresponds to the little thought which we plant. A seed is a very little thing, yet it often produces a large plant. Likewise, a thought which we dwell upon may seem a little thing, and yet a lot can result from it.

Concerning the matter of sowing thoughts, we could perhaps ask ourselves: Why do we live in a certain way? Why do we spend our money like we do? Why do we go to certain places? It is because the thoughts which we have been dwelling upon have led us to act in a particular way along these lines. Everything starts with a thought, but sowing refers to dwelling upon certain thoughts. Consequently, the work of the Christian is to encourage good thoughts to grow and to rid ourselves of bad thoughts so they will not have the opportunity to grow.

In the natural world, a good seed is of no value unless it is planted. Likewise, a good thought is of little value unless we dwell upon it—that is, unless we welcome it, meditate upon it, and eventually act upon it. Similarly, a bad seed, or thought, will not harm us unless we dwell upon it—welcome, meditate, and act upon it.

By way of example, we recall that after Jesus was baptized by John at Jordan he immediately went out into the wilderness. There, he was without food for forty days and was hungry, and Satan came to tempt him. Satan did not come visibly, but rather suggested a thought to Jesus' mind. Paraphrasing, he suggested to Jesus: "Command these stones to turn into bread; after all, you have the power, and you are hungry. Why not use your power and make bread out of these stones?" Jesus refused to dwell upon that thought. He would not meditate or act upon it.—Luke 4:1-4

Here is a lesson for us. We are not to be blamed or to blame ourselves for thoughts which come before our mind, but we are responsible for those thoughts which we dwell upon. If a good thought comes to our mind we are not to be especially commended either. Perhaps God permits us, in some way, to have a good thought enter our mind by reading his Word or by allowing someone we are talking to suggest that thought. However, unless we dwell and meditate upon it, that thought will soon leave us, not having accomplished anything of value.

It is similar with bad thoughts. We are not always to be blamed for these. If someone puts a thought into our mind by a statement which they make, we are not responsible. It is the remark of the other person that puts it there, but we are responsible if we dwell upon that bad thought. Therefore, we are not to be discouraged if a bad thought enters our mind, and at the same time we are not to feel over-confident when we have a good thought. The important question is: "What thoughts are we dwelling upon?"

SOWING TO THE FLESH

In the verse following our opening text, Paul states, “The one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption.” (Gal. 6:8, *ESV*) In the previous chapter the apostle states, “Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. ... Those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.”—Gal. 5:19-21, *ESV*

Sowing to our flesh includes minding the things of the flesh, gratification of the desires of the flesh, and dwelling upon that which is craved by our fallen nature. If yielded to, these cravings will grow stronger and stronger, resulting in evil words or conduct. Those who continue to yield to these propensities, Paul says, will “reap corruption” [Greek: decay, ruin].

Each day we are constantly surrounded by these earthly, fleshly stimuli. How can we prevent ourselves from being affected by such corrupting influences? The Apostle Peter gives us the answer on how to escape the “corruption that is in the world,” writing, “Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these” we might, if found faithful unto death, “be partakers of the divine nature.” (II Pet. 1:4) Indeed, God has given us many exceeding great and precious promises, which will strengthen us in proportion as we perceive their significance and dwell upon them.

SOWING TO THE SPIRIT

In Galatians 6:8 (*ESV*), Paul goes on to state, “But the one who sows to the Spirit will from the

Spirit reap eternal life.” If our thoughts and attention are focused upon heavenly things, our character development will be along spiritual lines. There is just one source from which these good seeds or thoughts are supplied—the Word of God. Millions have Bibles, but many leave God’s Word unopened and therefore “unsown.” Let us not, so to speak, “leave the seed in the packet.”

We must sow that which we hope to reap. If we want a crop of turnips, we sow turnip seeds. No other seed will do. Likewise, if we desire to develop in our character the “fruit of the Spirit,” which is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, we must sow these seeds, or no crop will result.—Gal. 5:22,23, *ESV*

Those who mind spiritual things—that is, sow to the spirit—set their “affection on things above, not on things on the earth.” (Col. 3:1,2) If we seek to develop ourselves along spiritual lines, we will progress in the attainment of spiritual fruitage. In due time, we will reap a character likeness to the Lord, and become more and more copies of God’s dear Son. Such are promised to “reap eternal life.” Elsewhere, Paul admonishes, “He which soweth [to the spirit] sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully.”—II Cor. 9:6

PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

Very few realize to what extent we form our own characters, to what extent our minds are gardens in which we may plant either the thorns or thistles of sin, or the seeds which will develop the fruits of the Holy Spirit. Those who seek the heavenly

things, joint heirship with Christ Jesus, must plant, or set out in their mind and in their affections, those qualities which the Lord marks as essential to the development of a Christian character.

Thus, our Heavenly Father places upon all those who have accepted the heavenly calling and who have made a covenant with him, the responsibility for their success or failure in attaining the prize. However, we are not left without help in this work. Through his Word, the Heavenly Father points out our natural weaknesses and imperfections. He then indicates how he has provided a full offset or counterbalance for these fleshly blemishes, found in the merit and sacrifice of his only begotten Son Jesus, our Redeemer. (I John 1:7-10) God also informs us of the fruits of the Holy Spirit which we are to develop in our character, if we would be joint-heirs with Christ. These are illustrated by Jesus' life and teachings, the example which we are to follow.—Luke 9:23; John 12:26; I Pet. 2:21

As we consider the responsibility placed upon us, we might at first feel overwhelmed. However, we should view this matter from the standpoint of God's grace. First, we should consider what a blessed privilege has been given to us in having the opportunity to be "transformed by the renewing" of our minds, that we may more and more come to know God and his divine purpose, and strive to follow after the "good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God." In addition, God has set before us the grandest reward imaginable, the divine nature, for doing that which is merely our "reasonable service" and which will bring us an abundant measure of "joy and peace in believing."—Rom. 12:1,2; II Pet. 1:3,4; Rom. 15:13

Because of the imperfections of our flesh inherited through Father Adam, we can never, in this life, attain the perfection that we wish. There will be blemishes and weaknesses of mind, of thought, of word, and of action. Nevertheless, we should strive to live as nearly up to God's standards as we can. The Lord will compensate for our unintentional weaknesses. His grace will be sufficient for us and will enable us to overcome. On the other hand, if we sow to the flesh, we will reap evil in our flesh. If we remain loyal to the Lord, however, and repent of our sins and shortcomings, striving to overcome them, he will overrule these experiences for our good.

PLANT GOOD SEEDS AND WEED OUT THE EVIL

In our fallen human state, there is a natural attraction toward earthly things, especially since we are presently living during the time of the permission of evil. Although these earthly things are stained with sin and, in many respects, distasteful to us because we have learned to love righteousness and hate iniquity; nevertheless, there is still at times a strong attraction toward even these blemished earthly things. Like weeds, earthly affections and desires seem to spring spontaneously from seeds. Christians, therefore, who would keep their heart in the love of God must not only keep planting good seeds, keep setting their affections on heavenly things, but they must also constantly root out the weeds of earthly desires and attractions.—I John 5:2-4; Jude 1:21

The Apostle Paul repeatedly emphasizes the lasting effects of the thoughts which we dwell upon, stating the importance of “bringing into captivity

every thought to the obedience of Christ.” (II Cor. 10:5) Elsewhere, he also admonishes, “Brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; ... think on these things.” —Phil. 4:8

“PUTTING OFF” AND “PUTTING ON”

Paul exhorted the Colossian brethren, writing: “Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.” Then he provides a list of the changes which must take place in those who have consecrated themselves wholly to the Lord, stating, “Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. ... In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. But now you must put them all away.” The apostle then lists additional changes which must take place, admonishing us to also put away “anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth,” and “do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices.” —Col. 3:2,5-9, *ESV*

What is more common amongst people in general today than to become angry? Even those who have named the name of Christ may, at some time or other, have had malicious or unkind thoughts respecting someone else. How many are there who indulge in slander? This is often done in such a manner as to deceive and stumble not only the hearer, but also the speaker as respects their heart’s intention in speaking about others in an unkind way.

If all evil and impure language were avoided, what a wonderful world this would be! All followers of Christ should see to it that, henceforth, every word which proceeds from their lips should be such as would be “good for building up, ... that it may give grace to those who hear.” True Christians should “speak evil of no one,” Paul adds. (Eph. 4:29; Titus 3:2, *ESV*) Slander and evil speaking are assassinations of the character of another. A slander is equally a slander whether the statement is true or false, and it is so regarded not only in the law of God, but also in the laws of civilized men. Additionally, those who willingly listen to slanderers are partakers of their evil deeds. “Wrongdoers eagerly listen to gossip; liars pay close attention to slander.” —Prov. 17:4, *New Living Translation*

Paul urges us to not only put off the evil dispositions of our fallen flesh, but to “put on” [Greek: being clothed; cultivating] the various fruits of the Holy Spirit exemplified in our Head, Christ Jesus.

In Colossians 3:12,13 (*ESV*), the apostle admonishes us to put on: (1) “Compassionate hearts;” a disposition of largeness and generosity of heart toward everyone; toward fellow believers, neighbors, friends, relatives, and even toward our enemies. (2) “kindness” toward all; (3) “humility” of mind, being the opposite of pride, boastfulness, arrogance; (4) “meekness,” gentleness of disposition; (5) “patience,” with the faults and weaknesses of others; (6) “bearing with one another and ... forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.” This implies that we should bear with one another’s peculiarities of temperament and disposition. We should freely forgive one another, if there be found

any cause of offense in each other, learning meanwhile 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 with us. We must, therefore, do the same towards our fellow brethren in Christ.

ADMONITIONS TO GOD'S CHOSEN ONES

The apostle's admonition is written to "God's chosen ones, holy, and beloved." (Col. 3:12, *ESV*) Thus, he is drawing our attention to the fact that, at the present time, God is not attempting a reformation of all mankind along these lines, but merely a transformation of those who have entered into a special covenant with him. Those who hope to make their "calling and election sure" to membership in the glorified church will earnestly strive to cultivate each of these fruits of the Holy Spirit in their lives.

Paul not only tells us what to "put off" and what to "put on," but he then adds, "And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony." (vs. 14, *ESV*) Love is thus pictured as the uniting principle for all these various graces.

The apostle desires us to realize that the qualities of meekness, patience, and all the others he mentions, cannot be mere courtesy or politeness, but must be developed with love in our hearts. If not, we will not be fit for a share in the heavenly kingdom. Each of us must develop all these various graces in our will, our intentions, and bind them by the cords of love—love for the Lord, love for righteousness, love for

our brethren, and sympathetic love for the whole groaning creation.

“DO NOT BE DECEIVED”

In our theme text Paul writes, “Do not be deceived.” Here he points out the danger that we might deceive ourselves, not realizing whether we are sowing to the spirit or sowing to the flesh. Elsewhere the Scriptures point out that our heart or natural mind is “deceitful above all things, and desperately sick.” (Jer. 17:9, *ESV*) Therefore, our new mind needs to keep guard continually, examining ourselves with honesty, otherwise we may fall into the deceptive trap of our old nature.—II Cor. 13:5; Gal. 6:4, *International Standard Version*

We should realize that it is not sufficient to merely agree to sow to the Spirit. The reaping of spiritual blessings and of heart development will depend upon our faithfulness and persistency in actively engaging in this sowing work. Those who sow to the Spirit and earnestly strive daily to live a spiritual life, seeking to serve the will of God in their words, deeds and thoughts, will reap the largest crop of spiritual fruitage in the various qualities of the character-likeness of our Lord Jesus. As the psalmist wrote of his earnest love of God’s law, “It is my meditation all the day.”—Ps. 119:97

If, however, we sow to the flesh, seeking to live after or gratify ourselves, or desiring to please our earthly-oriented friends or relatives, we can expect that the fleshly desires thus cultivated will grow stronger in our lives. Such a manner of conduct will cause us to decline proportionately along the lines of the Spirit. When we give heed to the fleshly

inclinations of our fallen nature, we are hindering our own spiritual progress, and the tendency is toward corruption.

FAITHFUL CONTINUANCE

Let us to the greatest extent possible “mortify” the inclinations of our flesh and seek to live in harmony with the Spirit of the Lord. In that same proportion we will grow stronger spiritually, preparing for everlasting life on the spirit plane which God has promised to those who shall demonstrate their love for him and loyalty to his principles.—Rom. 8:12-14

This does not mean that only those who attain complete mastery of their flesh will receive a blessing from the Lord. The important point to consider is that unless we manifest to the Lord an appreciation of spiritual things, we will not make progress in them. We will not be fit for the reward of “glory and honor and immortality.” (Rom. 2:7) Whereas, if our conduct manifests to the Lord our love for righteousness and our desire to please him, however weak our flesh, he will account such worthy of everlasting life, knowing that when they shall have the perfect bodies of the resurrection, they will be glad to live in absolute harmony with the divine arrangements. The Apostle Paul on another occasion wrote, “The righteousness of the law [is] fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.”—Rom. 8:4

Little by little, our character will be developed. The sowing which we do today will bring the reaping of ripe fruitage tomorrow. The apostle draws his argument to a conclusion, admonishing us to stay faithful and “not grow weary of doing good, for in

due season we will reap, if we do not give up. So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.”—Gal. 6:9,10, *ESV* ■