

Galatians 5:25-6:10

²⁵If we live by the spirit, let us also walk in step with it. ²⁶Let us not become conceited, provoking one another and envying one another. ^{6:1}Brothers, if a person is caught in some trespass, you who are spiritual should restore such a person in a spirit of humility, carefully watching yourself so that you are not also tempted. ²Bear one another's burdens, and in this way fulfill the law of Christ. ³For if someone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. ⁴Let each person test his own work, and then he will take pride in regard to himself and not his neighbor. ⁵For each man will bear his own burden. ⁶Let the one who is taught the word share all good things with his teacher. ⁷Do not be deceived. God is not mocked. To be sure, whatever a man sows, he will also reap. ⁸Indeed, the one who sows for his own sinful flesh will reap destruction from the sinful flesh. But the one who sows for the spirit will reap eternal life from the spirit. ⁹Let us not become weary of doing good, because at the appointed time we will reap, if we do not give up. ¹⁰So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who belong to the household of faith.

Sermon for Harvest Festival (Pentecost 16) 9-20-20 St. Paul's Green Garden, MI

Text: Galatians 5:25-6:10

Theme: Our Lord Wants a Spiritual Harvest

In the name of Jesus, my dear fellow redeemed,

Our Savior Jesus often used examples from the everyday life of the people to teach the spiritual lessons he wanted them to learn. Since farming was an important occupation of the Jews at his time, we often hear him referring to the events and things that took place on the farm to illustrate his teachings. He compared the work of preaching the gospel to planting seed, and he showed the different ways God's Word is accepted by people by pointing out that not even all the seed which a farmer planted in his field produced a crop. Some of it was trampled on the path that ran past the field and was then eaten by birds. Other seed sprouted and grew well at first but then dried up due to a lack of moisture. And some of it was choked out by weeds.

To show that even in the church there will always be people who are not really Christians, Jesus compared the church to a field of grain in which an enemy had planted weeds that looked very much like the good wheat. So even when the unbelievers say that there are hypocrites in the church, they are not telling us anything new. The Savior taught the same thing 2000 years ago, but the Savior also said that it is not our business to ferret out and decide who the hypocrites are.

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Instead, in his parable he shows us the owner of the field ordered his servants to let the good grain and the weeds grow together until the harvest. Each one of us as Christians should much rather judge himself and examine his or her own life so that he will not be disappointed at harvest time, at the end of the world.

Today in Galatians the apostle Paul tells us the same thing, and he also does it by giving us an example from the farm. He says, “**whatever a man sows, he will also reap.**” And during this time of year when farmers and gardeners are harvesting their crops, it is especially fitting that we should apply the truths about harvest to our spiritual life. The apostle Paul shows us that our God expects a spiritual harvest. 1. Sowing to our sinful flesh brings a harvest of corruption but 2. Sowing to the spirit brings a harvest for eternal life.

When Paul says, “**whatever a man sows, he will also reap**” he is stating a truth that is so obvious that no one would dispute it. If a farmer plants corn he does not expect to harvest cabbage. Yet, it is surprising that, when men enter the spiritual field,

they expect something entirely different to happen. They think that they can plant all kinds of spiritual weeds and still harvest a good crop when God’s harvest time comes. When we speak of the way people live, we sometimes use the same expression Paul does here. We are told for instance, that every one has to show his wild oats. But if someone wants to sow wild oats, then he should not be surprised if his harvest is wild oats, as well. It is just as sensible to say that a person has to sow a few wild oats in his life as it would be to say that a farmer has to plant a few cockleburs or some other invasive weed, every time he plants a field of corn.

You harvest exactly what you plant. That is a law in spiritual and moral things just as well as it is in farming or gardening. Good seed is essential for a good crop. St. Paul says in Galatians, “**the one who sows for his own sinful flesh will reap destruction from the sinful flesh.**” The prophet Hosea said of the people of his times, “**Because they sow the wind, they will reap the whirlwind.**” (Hosea 8:7).

To sow to our sinful flesh means to live as our wicked sinful hearts want us to live. That fact that those who openly violate the laws of God and man are sowing to the flesh is no secret. It should not be necessary to tell the members of a Christian congregation that gross and open sins are not becoming to a Christian. But in God’s Word today, St. Paul mentions certain things which are often not recognized as sowing to the sinful nature. Since we are not guilty of such open sins as murder, robbery or adultery we might easily be tempted to think, “Well, I’m not so bad after all.” Since we are better, outwardly, than some other people in the world, and lead more decent lives, we can easily become proud and, like the Pharisee in the temple in Jesus’ parable, thank God that we are better than other people because we do not

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live a morally corrupt life. But Paul warns us here, **“if someone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. ⁴Let each person test his own work, and then he will take pride in regard to himself and not his neighbor.”**

It is the habit of some people—in fact, the tendency is in the heart of each one of us—to compare ourselves with other people. When we find something in which we are, in human judgment, better than they are, we rejoice in our own imagined goodness. Often, when we speak to people about attending church and about their soul, they say, “I am just as good as many church members,” or “If so and so, who is a member of your church, will get to heaven, then I will get to heaven too.”

God never said we have to be as good as Mrs. Smith or Mr. Jones. If we think that, we are using the wrong measuring tape. God accepts only one standard of measurement when it comes to our thoughts, words and actions. It is the standard of his holy law for he says, **“Be perfect as your father in heaven is perfect.”** (Matthew 5:48) On Judgment Day we will be judged, not by what anyone else has done, but by what we have done. Paul says here, **“each man will bear his own burden.”** The word of God calls our comparing ourselves to others and not to God, sowing to our sinful nature.

And since we want to be better than other people, perhaps we rejoice deep down in our hearts when we see a brother committing a great sin. We like to talk about it, because, when we do that, we are giving ourselves a pat on the back. We imagine that when people see how bad your neighbor is, they will also see how good I am.

But Paul tells us what our attitude should be when we see one of our fellow Christians committing some great sin. He says, **“Brothers, if a person is caught in some trespass, you who are spiritual should restore such a person in a spirit of humility, carefully watching yourself so that you are not also tempted.”** When a fellow Christian falls into some great sin he needs our help. We should call his sin to his attention and not to the attention of everyone else. We should help him in every way possible to see his error and to repent of it. And when he does that, we should forgive him. We may think that we are strong, but Paul says that we need to watch ourselves, for we could very easily fall into the same sin. And if we always remember that, then we will be very humble when it comes to bringing a fellow believer’s sin to his attention.

The same thing is true when we see that one of our fellow Christians leads just a little bit better life than we do. As people rejoice when they see others fall into sin, so they may become jealous when they see that someone is just a little more serious in his Christian faith. Paul says that we should not envy one another. So

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often it happens that those who are a little weak in their faith will say that those who are stronger than they, are just showing off. Now these are things that most people don't consider so bad. But Paul calls it sowing to the flesh or our sinful nature, and he says, "**the one who sows for his own sinful flesh will reap destruction from the sinful flesh.**"

On the other hand, Paul says, "**But the one who sows for the spirit will reap eternal life from the spirit.**" Sowing to the Spirit means to live in a way that our new nature wants us to live, to live in the way that pleases God, to act as the Holy Spirit gives us power to act.

When he writes about this Paul first of all says, "**Let the one who is taught the word share all good things with his teacher.**" Those who are taught in the Word of God should share with the one who teaches them the great teachings of the Scriptures. Now sharing implies a twofold relationship. This passage is not only talking about the pastor receiving a share of the material things with those whom he serves. It also means God's people should share with others the good things the pastor has taught them in the Word. God's people should take the Word of God seriously and take all the blessings offered them there, the forgiveness of sins through the precious blood of Jesus, the hope and the comfort and the joy which the Word of God has to offer us all, the promise of heaven and everlasting life which Jesus gives us.

This is the first thing that is necessary, if we are going to sow to the Spirit, that by a living faith we take for ourselves all the precious promises of God which we have in Jesus, who was crucified for our sins on Calvary, and who carried in his own body the whole harvest of our sins. We must all admit that we have often sown to the flesh, but we know that in Jesus all our sins have been punished. He reaped our harvest of corruption and damnation for us.

But if a person does not accept this salvation Jesus offers, then there is no hope for him. Paul writes, "**Do not be deceived; God is not mocked.**" The word 'mocked' literally means to turn up one's nose at someone. Those who hear the word of God but do not believe it and take it to heart are actually turning up their noses at God. God sometimes punishes such people swiftly. Many years ago the evangelist Billy Graham went to actress Marilyn Monroe and wanted to share the gospel of Jesus with her. Her reaction to his kind offer was a curt retort, "I don't need your Jesus". About a week later Marilyn Monroe died of a drug overdose. You may also recall former Beetle John Lennon, after sales of Beatles records reached a certain milestone, "Now we're more popular than Jesus Christ." About a week to 10 days later John Lennon was shot to death on the street. Just having these examples as reminders it is no wonder St. Paul says that the person who does

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not take the blessings of the Word of God is mocking God. Hearing the Word of God ought to be for us the most serious thing in the world.

And when we do take the Word of God seriously, we should not only accept its promises, but we should also carry out the obligations it places us under. It is impossible to separate a person's faith from his life. The person who knows how much God has done for him will also want to do good for his fellow human beings. Paul encourages us, "**Let us not become weary of doing good, because at the appointed time we will reap, if we do not give up. So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who belong to the household of faith.**"

Once again the law of the harvest is a good example here. Often we feel that doing good to our fellow human beings is a thankless job. You try to bring someone the comfort of the gospel by inviting him to church, and he pays no attention to you. You try to help someone who has done wrong, and often that person tells you to mind your own business. You help people who are in trouble, and they do not seem to appreciate it. But always remember, there is one who does appreciate everything you do. Jesus himself said, "whoever gives you a cup of water to drink in my name, because you belong to Christ, Amen I tell you, he will certainly not lose his reward." For every good thing you do because you love Jesus, you will reap a rich and bountiful harvest. There is no need for us to be weary in doing good, because in God's own time we will reap, if we do not give up.

And now, knowing that through Jesus we have been cleansed from all the sowing unto our sinful nature that we have done in our lives, may we also with the help of the Holy Spirit, continue to seek to sow more and more to the Spirit and less to our sinful nature. May God himself be our strength and our help as strive to do this. Amen.