

GALATIANS 6:7-10

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Smith

A Time to be Born and a Time to Die

⁷ Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. ⁸ Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. ⁹ Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. ¹⁰ Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

Imagine our entire state of Minnesota built over with a gigantic one-story apartment building-- just ground-level with no stairs. There would be enough room for everyone in the world-- which this month is about 7.9 billion people-- enough room for every person to have a private apartment the size of a typical child's bedroom. If that space were separated into tiny islands, as if the world were a gigantic archipelago or island chain spread all around the globe, then each of us on our little private islands would live too far away from one another even to see the next island unless there was a fire burning there at night, and it would be too far for most of us to swim even to one other island.

Now, the Lord our God has seen fit, in his wisdom, to allow us to spread out around the world, to occupy many spaces but for the most part to permit us to live close enough to each other so that we have the contact with other people that we must have to survive, to have food, to have structure for our communities, the ability to manufacture things and repair things that permits most of us never to have to build anything from scratch, not even a fire or a single garment. Most of us never even learn to knit a scarf or a pair of mittens or to create the simplest objects, a towel, a knife, a hot pad, a hammer, a fishhook, or even string.

Consider the blessing of living as we do, of being able to choose whether I will live the life of a hermit, or live among many people, doing such things that rarely if ever find me alone. Martin Luther urged his university students, his congregation members, his family, and anyone who would listen to beware of too much solitude: "The solitary life should be avoided as much as possible," he said. "A person doesn't have control of himself when he is downcast and alone, even if he is well-equipped with a knowledge of the Scriptures. It is not for nothing that God gathers his church around the Word and Sacraments, and that God is unwilling to let these be hidden in a corner. Away with monks and hermits!"⁸ And again, he said, "Christ did not choose

⁸ Table Talk #3754, LW 54:268.

solitude. His life was turbulent, for people were always around him. He was never alone, except when he prayed.”^a

When Paul says we should “**not become weary in doing good,**” he follows it with “**let us do good to all people.**” When we obey God and the second part of the Ten Commandments, we are commanded to do good to our neighbor, to our fellow man. God doesn’t want us to mind our own business if that makes us think we should never talk with anybody, befriend anybody, express our opinions, our faith, our fears, or our dreams with anybody. He wants us, commands us, to get in there and to be with people.

Paul describes this life, the life of faith, in terms of planting, sowing seed. “**You reap what you plant.**” If you plant weeds, you’re not going to harvest corn. If you breed worms, you’re not going to raise cows or hogs or sheep. If you do nothing but complain and nitpick to everybody around you, you will never be surrounded by friends. It will be a miracle if you have even one, and he will probably be hard of hearing.

Paul warns us against sowing or planting for physical rewards. What does that mean? He is talking about the way Christians live. Do we live to please our sinful nature and sinful desires? If we do, the result will be ‘destruction,’ which is eternity in hell. Do we live according to God’s will, “**to please the Spirit**”? The result is eternal life.

Eternal life is the gift of God, since Paul says we “reap eternal life” from the Spirit. The one who reaps eternal destruction, does so from his or her own sinful nature. So on the one hand, heaven is the gift of God, and on the other hand, hell is the fault of the one who rejects God. So is it the things we do, the things we ‘sow’ or ‘plant’ which achieve heaven?

No. No, not at all. Jesus’ death on the cross for our sins is what paid for our sins and achieved heaven for us. We have that gift through faith. But the new life we live in Christ is an outward display of our faith; it is evidence of our faith. Paul’s warning here is on blatant sin which mocks God, which is evidence of unbelief.

We cannot defend sin by calling it love. The man who claims he loves a woman and then behaves with her contrary to the Sixth Commandment defiles her. He sows to please his flesh. And he makes an adulteress of her in the eyes of God. That’s not love, but lust. The woman who seduces a man into moving in with her and sleeping with her is turning her man’s face away from the face of God to vice and immorality. No matter how much she insists that it is love, God decrees otherwise.

^a Ibid, #1329. LW 54:141.

The abortion defender, unless the life of the mother is clearly in danger, defends murder. Now, in cases where whether the mother will live or die are terrible burdens to that couple. "Such a gruesome ethical dilemma and choice is painful in the extreme, and when Christians have to make such a choice, they will bow low beneath what appears to be the heavy hand of God and cry to him for mercy."^a The same charge of murder is true of the one who supports assisted suicide or the use of active means for ending the life of the weak or the terminally ill. It is all too common to hear people, even those who consider themselves Christians, defending sins in the name of love. But Paul says in the first chapter of Romans: **"The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness."** (Rom. 1:18).

What, then, is the answer to every "what if" question about a Christian's past sins? This woman committed adultery; can she be forgiven? With a heart that repents and a life that turns away from sin, of course! Like the Patriarch Judah, the ancestor of Jesus, who committed adultery and then turned away from it and repented of it-- She is forgiven in Christ!

A couple that once turned to abortion for sinful reasons, because they had their lives and not the soul of that baby in mind? Can they be forgiven? With a heart that repents and a life that turns away from that sin, of course! Like David and Moses and Paul who committed murder and then repented and turned away from their sinful, ungodly view of the world, they are forgiven in Christ.

The Christian 'sows,' not to please the flesh, but **'to please the Spirit'** in thanks, because we know we have eternal life, through Jesus.

"Let's not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we'll reap a harvest if we don't give up." We have said this over and over, but it needs to be repeated one more time: We don't achieve eternal life in heaven because of the things we do. Rather, we do things which please God because Jesus has achieved our eternal life in heaven. What we do is a thank you to Jesus. So "Don't give up," Paul cries. He's talking to us as a cheerleader, and as a coach.

The phrase "at the proper time" is really "a special, ideal, chosen moment," referring to the very special time God has chosen for the End, for Judgment Day. This is a special moment that Christians do not need to fear, since, as Paul says, we will reap a harvest at that time: the harvest of heaven. Only then will our earthly service to God end. There is a time to be born, and a time to die. Until then, we have this to do: Believe in Jesus Christ, and love one another. Amen.

^a Deuschlander, *Grace Abounds* (NPH: 2015), p. 228