

Introduction

I begin with a story taken from an attorney's website. It seems a man bought a case of rare cigars valued at \$15,000, and insured it against fire. A month later, having smoked all 25 cigars, he filed a claim with the insurance company. When it refused to pay his claim, he sued it and won a \$15,000 judgment. Instead of appealing the ruling, the insurance company paid the judgment. But immediately after the man cashed the check it wrote him, it had him arrested for 25 counts of arson. In the subsequent criminal trial, based on his claim and his testimony in the civil trial, a jury convicted him of the arson. The judge then sentenced him to a one prison term.

It's a lesson well learned. What goes around comes around. Or as Paul says it in our text, we reap what we sow.

The Law of Sowing and Reaping

6:7-10, in my view, relates not to the verses preceding it, 6:1-6, but to 5:16-26. Those verses address the deeds of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit. 6:7-10 then reveals the foundational law upon which experiencing those deeds or that fruit is based. We reap what we sow.

Sowing and reaping of course are agricultural metaphors. How many times in history has a farmer planted corn and harvested soy beans? The obvious answer is "**0 times.**" No farmer has ever reaped a different crop than he sowed. Each has always reaped the same crop that he sowed. What is true agriculturally is also true spiritually, psychological, relationally, financially, recreationally, and bodily to name a few. In every aspect and arena of our lives, we reap what we sow.

To sow means to choose a condition or behavior. We either decide to be or do something or allow ourselves to be or do it. So, a friend of mine decided to buy eight pounds of Giannis candy on sale and eat the better part of it over the course of a week. She sowed.

To reap means to experience the consequences of a condition or

behavior. Everything that exists has a nature or order that characterizes it. That nature or order in turn makes every behavior or condition a cause that has inevitable effects. To reap means to experience those effects. The nature of candy is that it's highly caloric. And my friend who ate the Giannis candy experienced the inevitable effect of that. She gained seven pounds. She reaped, in other words, and according to her own testimony, the pleasure she got was worth every pound of it.

That analysis helps us pin down and define the law of sowing and reaping. Stated simply, it's this. We cannot choose a condition or behavior but reject its consequences. By choose I mean decide or allow it. Whenever we choose to be or do something, we also necessarily choose that "**something's**" inevitable effects. There's no getting around it. We always reap what we sow.

What we say is a vivid example of this. Words possess the power of penetration. Sticks and stones "**do**" to people, but words "**do**" in them. That's their nature, and whenever we speak to a person, a consequence occurs that's consistent with it. Proverbs 18:21 reveals what that consequence is. Our words work life or death to that person's feelings, self-esteem, attitudes, morale, or moods.

Words illustrate the law of sowing and reaping. We reap what we sow. Whenever we choose a condition or behavior, we necessarily choose its natural (inevitable) consequences as well.

Sow to the Flesh

Now, Paul teaches us in verse 8 that we can sow in two ways.

First, we can sow to "**the flesh.**" The Greek word translated "**flesh**" has several meanings in the New Testament. Here, it refers to the basic nature of fallen man. That nature is what Oswald Chambers called "**the disposition to self-realization.**" This disposition inclines us to be selfish – to act in practice as if our desires, interests, and concerns are more important than everyone else's including God's. To sow to the flesh means to act just that way.

In 5:19-21, Paul gives a sampling of **“the deeds of the flesh.”** People sow to the flesh in these ways, he writes there: **“immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these.”** People commonly sow to the flesh in those and many other ways.

Take our culturally promoted practice of dressing sexy, for instance – wearing clothing that suggestively exposes or outlines the body. People do that to draw attention to themselves – to get the tacit approval and praise of others. It’s narcissism, in other words, which the disposition to self-realization in them prompts. When people dress sexy, therefore, they’re sowing to the flesh.

But notice what verse 8 implies. The nature of what we sow determines the nature of what we reap. Because it does, whenever we sow to the flesh, we reap **“corruption,”** a word that means **“decay.”** That word suggests that sowing to the flesh harms others and us spiritually, psychologically, relationally, and/ or materially.

Let’s go back to dressing sexy. I talked about the nature or order of things. The nature of men is that they’re sight-oriented. Because they are, whenever a woman dresses sexy, she’s tempting them to lust. That is one of the inevitable and detrimental consequences of that particular behavior. It harms others by tempting them to sin.

There’s no doubt about it. Whenever we sow to the flesh, we reap decay. And sometimes the severity of what is reaped exceeds the severity of what is sown. That’s what Hosea meant in 8:7 of his book, **“For they sow the wind and they reap the whirlwind.”** Sometimes, a fleshly condition or behavior let loose consequences that are more serious in nature of numerous in number than we’d expect or predict.

Dressing sexy illustrates what I mean. I’ve already identified one consequence. It’s tempts people to sin. But there are others. Consider the psychological nature of human beings. As English playwright Oscar Wilde lamented, **“I forgot that every little action of the common day**

makes or unmakes character.” Each time a person dresses sexy, he or she becomes a little bit more narcissistic than before. But there’s more. Consider the nature of God. He is holy and responds adversely to sin. Since dressing sexy is narcissistic and tempts others to sin, it is itself a sin. God, therefore, responds adversely to it either now in this life or later in the life to come. For Christians, it’s now in this life as well as later. As all sins do, dressing sexy diminishes their capacity to act upon Jesus and to be acted upon by Him. All those consequences show us that when we dress sexy, we’re sowing the wind and reaping the whirlwind.

That then is one way we can sow – to the flesh. And we reap corruption, decay, when we do.

Sow to the Spirit

According to verse 8, there’s a second way – to **“the Spirit,”** meaning the Holy Spirit. To sow to the flesh means act according the nature of fallen man. To sow to the Spirit means to act according to the nature of the Holy Spirit. He is an objective and personal being who has specific attributes. To sow to the Spirit means to act in ways that reflect those attributes of His.

Paul gives a glimpse into the Holy Spirit’s nature in 5:22-23. That text lists **“the fruit of the Spirit.”** The word **“fruit”** there refers to conditions of being that the Holy Spirit produces in disciples and friends of Jesus. It includes love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. What the Holy Spirit’s doing is this, **“turning us into the same kind of thing as Himself,”** to quote C.S. Lewis. He was right, which implies that the Holy Spirit Himself possesses those same conditions of being, but limitlessly and perfectly. They are His nature. So, to sow to the Spirit means that we act in ways that are loving, joyful, peaceful, patient, and all the rest.

Years ago, a man who was angry about a difference of opinion he and I had about ministry gave me a scathing tongue lashing. I knew what I should do in return. Sow to the Spirit. Act according to His

nature. Objectively address the subject matter before us and do so with the **"fruit"** of goodness, to bestow benefit and blessing on him.

That illustrates what it means to sow to the Spirit, and verse 8 reveals what we reap when we do. It's **"eternal life."** The Greek word translated that connotes an other-worldly life. This life will be consummated, perfected, when Jesus comes again. But according to verse 8, sowing to the Spirit brings something of that life into existence right now, in the circumstance before us. Sowing to the Spirit, as a result, enhances others and us spiritually, psychologically, relationally, and/ or materially. It's highly beneficial to others and us.

Think of it in terms of the man who tongue-lashed me. Let's consider for a moment the nature of human personality.

Angry people who attack us count on our anger and resistance in response to stay in control. For one thing, our anger and resistance feed their anger and keep them motivated. For another thing, they justify further anger and attack in their minds. Further anger and attack are okay, they think, because our anger and resistance show we deserve it.

Responding with goodness though changes those dynamics. First, our goodness starves their anger to death. Their anger, not having our anger and resistance to feed on, withers and dies. Second, our goodness pulls them off their stance. They're no longer able to justify further anger and attack in their minds. Unless they're mentally ill or perverse, they evaluate themselves and ask, **"What kind of person am I anyway, being so bad to someone so good?"**

Knowing the nature of human personality, I grasp what happens when I sow to the flesh and get mad at and resist the tongue lasher. I reap decay. He gets angrier in return and we don't address the subject matter before us. We quarrel instead, which damages my relationship with Jesus and him. I also grasp what happens when I sow to the Spirit and am good to the tongue lasher. I reap eternal life. His anger subsides and we address the subject matter before us, which deepens my relationship with Jesus and him.

You get the idea. There's a second way we can sow – to the Spirit. And we reap eternal life when we do, now and forever.

Do Not Be Deceived

We now know what the law of sowing and reaping is and we need to get it straight. Notice Paul's opening statement in verse 7, "**Do not be deceived, God is not mocked (impugned).**" It implies what people frequently do. They deceive themselves. They think and act as if the law of sowing and reaping doesn't apply to them. They're somehow special, they think, and exempt from it. They can get away with it. They can choose a condition or behavior but reject the consequences. So they choose it. They can reap something different than they sow.

But they can't – any more than the farmer can sow corn and reap soy beans. The law of sowing and reap is as unyielding and unbending as the law of gravity is. It governs everyone. The Center for Disease Control, for instance, reports that 19 million new cases of STD's occur annually in the United States, the result of illicit sex. They're now "**one of the most critical health challenges facing the nation today,**" to quote the CDC. Why are so many people getting them? It's because they've deceived themselves. Most who get them say the same thing, "**I didn't think it would happen to me.**"

Let's get it straight. We will reap what we sow. If we have good sense, therefore, we'll firmly make and purposefully carry out two decisions. First, I will not sow to the flesh in anything. And second, I will sow to the Spirit in everything.

Conclusion

I leave you in closing with an instructive thought. Every time we say or do something, we're reaping and sowing, which means we're reaping and sowing scores of times each day. That makes the law of sowing and reaping a person and life defining one. Yes, we reap what we sow. So, let's habitually sow to the Spirit. We'll reap life if we do.