

SEEDTIME AND HARVEST OF CHARACTER

"Be not deceived,...he that soweth to the 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 APOSTLE here brings to our attention the fact that there is danger of some of the Lord's people being deceived. Some might think that they could live according to their earthly desires, fleshly desires, and then attend meeting, or observe other religious forms, and it would make them all right with God. Others might deceive themselves into thinking that they might live according to the flesh, and then by going to the Lord in prayer they might have the matter all forgiven and corrected, and still be as far along spiritually as those who live daily a life of faithfulness to God. Another error which has deceived many is the teaching that, after living according to the inclinations of the flesh in sinful ways, they can go to the priest and obtain absolution, and that this will make them all right again.

Now these are deceptions. God has established a general principle which applies both to the Church and to the world. This general principle operates along the lines of sowing and reaping. Suppose a man unfamiliar with the nature of certain seeds should sow seed of thistles or of tares. A little later he might visit his field and say, "This seed seems to have been all right. I see nothing wrong. It has not hurt the ground in any respect; the field looks as well as if I had sown timothy seed or clover seed. The plants are green and thrifty, and indeed make quite a fine appearance." But later in the season the nature of the crop would make very manifest the dire mistake in the choice of the seed sown.

In the natural world men are sure to reap in kind as they have sown. They would not expect to sow tare seed and reap a crop of

wheat. The law of cause and effect is no less inexorable in the spiritual realm. And so the Apostle says that "God is not mocked" – do not think that you can do an evil thing and get good results. Whoever "sows to the wind shall reap the whirlwind"; whoever sows to the flesh will reap accordingly; whoever sows to the Spirit will reap in kind.

THOUGHT THE BEGINNING OF CHARACTER

What is meant, then, by this word "sowing" when referring to spiritual things? Apparently it means a course of life, or conduct, that would bring good results or a course that would bring evil results. We sometimes hear the expression, "That young man is sowing his wild oats." The thought is that the conduct of such a one is evil; and that the conduct of the individual will react upon his character. We might go further and say that all conduct must be incited by previous thought. In other words, our thoughts are the initiative in what we are! To illustrate: When God would create the world He first had a Plan respecting it. All that He has been doing since has been the following out of a Plan that He originally had. We might say that it was the good thoughts of God which led to the good results.

So it has been in the case of Satan. Satan's course in the world has been that of sowing evil things, sowing tares. His course has been fatal to himself and injurious to others, and it was the result of the wrong thought he had before he committed the sin. He had said in his heart, "I will ascend into Heaven; I will exalt my throne above the stars of God;...I will ascend above the height of the clouds; I will be like the Most High." (Isaiah 14:13,14.) He had a covetous spirit, a selfish, presumptuous spirit, a spirit in opposition to God.

These two spirits are still operative in the world – God's Spirit and the spirit of the Adversary. In referring to things pertaining to humanity, the Apostle speaks of this Adversary spirit as being the

spirit of the flesh – not that it is the spirit of the flesh in its original perfection, but the spirit of the fallen flesh. It is the spirit of Satan, which has become dominant in the human family. The Apostle addresses the words of our text particularly to the Church, but with a good application to the world also. If any of the Lord's people who have been enlightened and made partakers of the Holy Spirit should live according to the flesh chiefly, they would surely not receive the prize of the High Calling. If they wish to attain glory, honor and immortality, they must live according to the Spirit of God, the spirit of God's Law, the spirit of righteousness. They must conform their lives to the life of Christ their Exemplar, or they can never hope to attain the things promised them.

Because of the imperfection of the flesh inherited through Father Adam, the Lord's children can never in this life attain the perfection that they would wish. There will be blemishes and weaknesses of brain, of thought, and of the entire body. But they should live as nearly up to the standard as possible, and the Lord will compensate for their unintentional weaknesses. His grace will be sufficient for them to enable them to overcome. But if they sow to the flesh, they will reap in the flesh – they will reap the evil. However, if they are still loyal to the Lord, and repent of their derelictions, striving to overcome, He will overrule these experiences for their good.

LOYAL HEART THE FIRST REQUISITE

It is therefore for the Church to sow according to the Spirit, to conduct themselves according to the Spirit of God, who is a righteous Spirit Being. In order to do this, we see that the heart must be right. So the getting of our hearts right is the very first thing the Lord sets before us. We cannot even become His children until our hearts are right. We must turn from sin and accept the atonement of the great Sin-Bearer. Then we must heed the words of our Lord, "If any man will be My disciple, let him deny himself,

take up his cross and follow Me." In so doing we are sowing to the Spirit. If we continue thus to sow, we shall reap the great reward – all the glorious spiritual things the Lord has promised to His faithful ones of the Gospel Age.

But in proportion as we are derelict, as we sow seeds of evil, in that same proportion shall we be sowing to corruption. This does not necessarily mean the Second Death; but there will be corrections and stripes for the things which are improper. Whoever, therefore, sows a little to the flesh will reap accordingly. If he continues to sow according to the flesh, he will reap a much larger measure of results – greater corruption. And if his life be given over to sin, if he has abandoned the life of the Spirit entirely, the effect will be the Second Death, which is the extreme penalty of wilful opposition to God.

Hence, sowing to the flesh might or might not mean certainly to reap the Second Death. It would surely mean to reap difficulty, tendencies away from God, in proportion to the evil sowing. With the spirit-begotten it would surely lead to the Second Death if the course is not changed. We see this matter illustrated in many Christian people. They begin the Christian course, and live to a considerable degree to the Spirit of God, yet they occasionally give way to the things of the flesh and more or less encourage the fleshly mind. They do not perhaps realize any immediate results, but there are evil seeds sown. These evil seeds, evil thoughts in the mind, even if afterwards repented of, may more or less corrupt **[R5666 : page 109]** the mind all the rest of life; they tend away from the Lord, away from the Heavenly things, and make so much more to fight against. The Christian should see to it that all of his course in life, his desires, his thoughts, are brought into accord with the spirit of a sound mind, the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit.

Sowing to the Spirit and sowing to the flesh would, we understand, mean either to live according to God's way or, on the

other hand, to live according to the spirit of the Adversary – to sow seed that will result either in the blessed fruits of the Holy Spirit of God or in the fruits of the fallen flesh – the corrupted, Satanized spirit with all its accompaniments. If we live according to our flesh, it will mean corruption, moral and spiritual degeneration; for we are in the corruptible condition.

PRESENT COURSE OF WORLD TO BEAR ON FUTURE

In their present condition the world cannot hope to gain everlasting life; for they have not come into relationship with the Life-Giver, although God has provided, as the Church knows, an opportunity for everlasting life to the whole world of mankind. But while the world is not yet on trial for this everlasting life, nevertheless their conduct has a decided bearing on their future. If now they are living according to the lines of selfishness – self-gratification – they will reap correspondingly, according to the influences that are at work in them. And this will leave them in a more and more corrupted condition as they continue so to live, and they will have more to overcome in the next Age, if they would ever gain everlasting life. They would be much more advanced and advantaged if they would follow the things of righteousness, if they would cultivate the principles of justice and love; and they will be much more degraded and handicapped if they follow the things of selfishness and impurity.

We might carry the matter clear back to Eden. In the case of Father Adam, when he sowed to self-gratification, when he ate of the forbidden fruit, he followed the wrong course; he failed to follow his best judgment, his conscience; he followed inclination. As a result he brought upon himself the death penalty, which gradually led to extinction of life; and all his posterity have shared his condemnation. Sad was the sowing, and most bitter and far-reaching has been the reaping. But through the mercy of God even man's terrible experiences with sin will prove a very valuable

object lesson to angels and to all of God's intelligent creatures throughout eternity.

