

LESSON 6

SOWING AND REAPING

Just as surely as everything in nature reproduces after its kind, harvests being as sure as sowings, so every one of us will reap what we sow in this life and be solely responsible for our destiny in eternity (CP Ga 6:7-8). This is God's law of sowing and reaping and it applies to every aspect of our Christian walk - to the giving of ourselves, our finances and our time to others; our financial support of the ministry; our moral behaviour and our Christian service. V8 clearly teaches that anyone who claims to be born again of the Spirit of God while consciously sowing to the flesh deceives themselves. It is folly for them to think that they will reap eternal life while they sow to things that will eternally damn them (CP Psalms 15:1-5; Pr 22:8).

There is no difference between the Old Testament and New Testament requirements for salvation. They are the same: only those who sow to the kingdom will reap the kingdom benefits (CP 1Cor 6:9-11; Eph 5:5). Paul is talking to two Churches here so this is for our admonition too. Anyone who persists in the evils of the wicked faces the same final judgement as the wicked (CP Hos 8:7). The seed of their wickedness will produce an abundant harvest of punishment. Sinful actions sow seeds that yield evil fruit (CP Pr 11:18). Those who sow righteousness shall have a sure reward (CP Psalms 126:5-6). These verses are generally used to teach the principle of sowing the gospel and reaping souls for Christ, and although that teaching can be applied, it is not what the verses mean literally. They simply express the great truth of sowing and reaping. The sowing of seeds accompanied by a spirit of brokenness will be abundantly blessed by God in the future. This encourages us to sow to righteousness through deeds of righteous obedience for a rich harvest of God's blessings (CP Pr 11:30-31). The righteous produce eternal life for sinners by winning them to God. Both the righteous and the wicked will reap what they sow (CP Eze 18:20-28). These passages clearly teach that once saved does not mean always saved as some teach. We can only be assured of a place in the kingdom if we are sowing to the Spirit at the end of our earthly life (CP Rev 22:11). As we are when we die is how we will be for all eternity. This clearly proves that there will be no chance to improve the life and character of anyone after they die (CP He 9:27). We need to know these scriptures in order to share them with others who do not know this (CP Lu 16:19-31).

There is marvellous teaching in this scripture. But first and foremost it does not teach that the rich go to hell and the poor go to heaven. Where we spend eternity is dependent entirely upon our relationship with Jesus, not whether we are rich or poor. What it does teach is that there is no intermediate state as some believe between death and our final destination in eternity called "purgatory". At death the soul and spirit of the righteous go straight to heaven while the soul and spirit of the unrighteous go straight to hell. There is no such place as "purgatory", and neither is there any further

opportunity for sinners to repent. The choices we make in our earthly life determine where we will spend eternity (CP Pr 21:13; 22:9).

If we want God to hear our prayers when we are in need then we must also hear and respond in love to the needs of others. God has a special concern for the weak and the helpless. They are very important in His plan of redemption and He blesses those who help them. If we share God's pity for those in need we can confidently expect Him to deliver us if ever we are in trouble ourselves (CP Pr 19:17). There is no clearer evidence in scripture than this of how God identifies with the plight of poor people. The help we give them becomes God's own debt to us. We should consider this the greatest privilege in life: to be able to lend to God (CP Psalms 41:1-3). *Poor* here means helpless and powerless, poor in health, weak and gaunt. The blessing promised to the saints here who minister to the needy is the resurrection. That is what "The Lord will preserve him and keep him alive" means in V2 (CP Psalms 112:9). Paul quotes this Psalm to encourage Christian giving (CP 2Cor 9:1-15).

This scripture teaches there are four things we must do in giving: we must give willingly from the heart; we must not give grudgingly; we must not give of compulsion; we must give cheerfully. Believers who give what they can to help those in need will find that the grace of God furnishes a sufficiency for their own needs and even more in order that they may abound in good works for others (CP Pr 11:24-25).

God blesses those who are generous, whether it be in their finances or the giving of themselves. We are all stewards of God's gifts and we must use them for His cause and for the benefit of those in need. God promises that those who are generous will get back more than they give (CP Ecc 11:1-6). We must always be willing to be generous and helpful and not withhold from anyone, for nobody knows when they may need help themselves. V3 illustrates the certainty of blessing. Just as surely as nature is unfailing, so then whoever helps others in need will themselves be blessed in due course. V6 is a similar teaching to Ga 6:9 (CP Ga 6:9-10). While ever we keep doing good in spite of the opposition we will encounter, in due course we will reap the fruit of the harvest, and notwithstanding that we are to do good unto all men, we are to be particularly concerned with the well-being of our brothers and sisters in Christ. In the Greek construction of V10 Paul is exhorting the Church to not only do good when the opportunity presents itself, but to look for opportunities to do good (CP Mt 25:31-46). All of our giving has to be as to God our source, for whatever we do we are doing it as unto Jesus. Jesus equates our treatment of those in need with our treatment of Himself: what we do for them we do for Him. Our Christian walk is not only a spiritual walk, it must also serve the material needs of others, especially our brothers and sisters in Christ (CP Jas 2:13-17). Here we are presented with the real test of

our faith. Christians are not justified by works, but because we are justified by faith, we do the works. This proves our Christian consecration to God's service and confirms our love for God and for each other (CP 1Jn 3:16-19). The only faith that saves is that demonstrated by works out of our love for God. This scripture is the exact counterpart of Jn 3:16. This is the acid test of Christianity by which we know whether we are following the example of God's love to others. If we are not willing to give of material things to others in need, we certainly would not lay down our lives for them (CP 2Cor 8:1-15).

2Cor 8-9 contain the most extensive teaching about Christian giving in the New Testament. The principles and promises in these two chapters are a guide for believers and Churches for all time. They teach that we belong to God and what we have is held as a trust for our Lord, that we must make the basic decision within our hearts to serve God and not money (CP Mt 6:24); that our giving is done to help those in need and to advance the Kingdom of God; that our giving should be in proportion to our income (CP 1Cor 16:1-2). It is not important how much we give as we learned from 2Cor 8:12, providing we are eager to give it. We can only give in accordance with what we have. We are not forced to give what we do not have. Giving is seen as proof of our love. It should be done sacrificially and voluntarily. By giving to God we sow not only money but also faith, time and service, thus reaping greater faith and blessing in return (CP 1Ti 6:17-19).

Here Church leaders are urged to teach against the selfish use of personal wealth and to persuade wealthy members of their congregations to give liberally to God's work and lay up for themselves treasures in heaven (CP Mt 6:19-24; Lu 12:15; 2Cor 9:5-6; Col 3:5; He 13:5). It is not enough that wealth and material possessions should be acquired simply for our own self-gratification. They must always be made available for the work of God (CP Lu 6:38). God's law of sowing and reaping dictates that blessings will always be returned for generosity. This teaches once more that giving and receiving go together, though we should never give in order to receive. That would be self-centredness - our giving would be profit-motivated instead of being motivated by love. Receiving is not an enticement to give but the law of sowing and reaping is a principle of life already established by God and we have no say in the matter. It is an assurance that sets us free to give (CP Ge 8:22). There are a lot of Christians however who expect to receive the kingdom benefits without ever giving into the kingdom. But how can God bless us with all the fullness of His blessings for giving if we do not give in the first place, and how can His kingdom be extended if we do not financially support it? (CP 1Cor 9:1-14). Paul was pointing out to the Corinthian Church here that it was their duty to keep him even though he chose to keep himself (CP 2Th 3:7-9). It is the Church's responsibility to

ensure that those who minister the word live off the word (CP Ga 6:6).

It is the duty of all who are taught the word to help provide material support for those who teach the word. This includes all those who pastor the Churches, missionaries, etc (CP 3Jn 5-8). This scripture teaches us that no workers of the word should have to seek help from those they are trying to evangelise. To have to seek help from unbelievers could hinder the gospel and expose the messengers of the gospel to charges of preaching for financial gain. Christians have a duty, and it should be seen as a privilege, to contribute to missionary needs and works. Workers of the word must not be treated like beggars, but received, sent and supported in a manner worthy of God (CP Mt 10:40; Lu 10:3-7; Php 4:10-18; 1Ti 5:17-18; Tit 3:13). Jesus promises that "he that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward." (CP Mt 10:41-42). This teaches us how important it is in God's economy for Christians to receive and support true messengers of the gospel but conversely, we should not receive and support anyone who does not proclaim God's truth according to the New Testament revelation, or who do not live godly lives according to God's righteous standards. If we support them we will bring ourselves into their condemnation (CP 2Jn 7-11).

It should be noted here that none of the scriptures studied so far concerning the giving of our finances into the work of God are referring to tithes, but to freewill offerings. The New Testament does not stress tithing but rather, as the scriptures so far studied indicate, invites Christians to give generously in response to the needs of others and as an expression of their love for God. A great many Christians believe that tithing is purely an Old Testament concept and does not translate to New Testament giving. They believe that under the New Covenant the supreme law of love has been substituted for Old Testament tithing and that New Testament giving is centred entirely around stewardship - the giving of ourselves completely to the work of God, which includes our time, our finances, and our material possessions. They believe that we are to give voluntarily, spontaneously and freely, not from a sense of obligation, nor with an intent to merit God's blessings. God has given wonderfully to us and is deserving of all that we might be moved to give Him. Many of these Christians use the tithe as the minimum standard by which they measure their giving to the Lord, but they do not accept that the tithe is required by scripture. They do not agree that scriptures teach that the tithe Abraham paid to Melchizedec established a precedent for tithing that New Testament Christians must follow. Rather they believe that Abraham's tithe had special symbolic implications related to establishing Christ's eternal priesthood. They believe this is

borne out by the writer of Hebrews when he contrasts Christ's eternal priesthood with the temporary Levitical priesthood (CP Ge 14:1-20 with He 6:17-9:17).

Whether or not we agree with that is beside the point here, suffice it to say that at the heart of all giving is the acknowledgement that God is the creator, the owner and the giver of all things, and what we give back to God is only a part of what He has given to us in the first place (CP Ge 1:1; Ex 19:5; 1Chr 29:11-16; Psa 24:1-2; 50:10-12; Hag 2:8; Jn 1:1-3; Jas 1:17). Everything we have belongs to the Lord. No one has anything that they had not first received from God (CP De 8:7-20; Job 1:21; Jn 3:27; 1Cor 4:7; 2Pe 1:3). (Concerning Job 1:21 we must remember that Job did not have a complete revelation of God when he said "... and the Lord hath taken away." Job did not know that it was not God but the devil afflicting him. He knew God gave him all he had and so he believed it was God also who took it away. But we know better -

we have the book of Job to teach us yet Job's misconception of God has been perpetuated in Christendom ever since. Let us not perpetuate it any further.) To sum up here, our stewardship is a valid test of our relationship with God (CP Mt 25:14-30). This parable of the talents warns us that our place and our service in heaven will depend on the faithfulness of our lives and stewardship here on earth. A talent represents our abilities, time, resources and opportunities to serve God while on earth. These things are considered by God as a trust that we are to administer on His behalf in the wisest possible way. We will all have to give an account of our stewardship to the Lord in due course and every work we do in the meantime will be brought into judgement (CP Ecc 12:13-14; Mt 5:20; Lu 16:1-2; Ro 14:12; 1Cor 4:1-2). Christian giving should always be characterised by what Paul says in 2Cor 9:7, "Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver."