

## “SOMETHING EVERY FARMER KNOWS”

or

## “THE LAWS OF THE HARVEST”

(Galatians 6:7)

*“Be not deceived, God is not mocked, for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.”*

The God of the Bible, the one true and living God, presides over a universe of law and order. No one really *breaks* God’s laws; a person only *illustrates* them. The theme of this study is “The Laws of the Harvest.” There are certain harvest-laws that prevail in every farmer’s field as he engages in the agricultural processes. In our text, the Apostle Paul clothes eternal laws in language derived from agriculture, or “fresh from the farm.” In other terms, the study could be called “the Law of Cause and Effect”, or “The Law of Retribution or Retaliation”, or “The Law of Compensation.” Because Paul’s statement in Galatians 6:7 is based on agriculture, it could be subtitled, “Something Every Farmer Knows.” I want to mention some five laws of the harvest that are revealed in every harvest field, in human life and experience, and in the Word of God.

### The Law of LABOR

The first law of the harvest I want to examine is *the law of labor*. The text says, “Whatever a man sows, that shall he also reap,” and the following verse says, “For he who sows to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.” Note the repetition of the word “sow” in these verses; it occurs three times. Without the agricultural exercises of cultivating, sowing and reaping, there will be no harvest. The one indispensable exercise in farming is to sow the seeds which will produce the crop. Sowing always precedes reaping, and the reaping of a desirable harvest proceeds from the sowing of the same kind of seed. If you reap without sowing, it is because someone else has sowed without reaping. And if you sow without reaping, someone else can reap without sowing. But sowing is necessary to reaping. And every farmer knows that if he is to adequately sow to bring in the sizeable crop he wants to produce, this will mean long and hard labor.

This law prevails also in the moral and spiritual world. Many an undesirable harvest comes in spiritually just because someone has sowed the seeds for that harvest, and many a spiritual blessing with enlarging returns is experienced simply because someone earlier sowed the seeds which would produce that harvest. The text says, “He who sows to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption.” This means that the person who only lives a self-curling, self-centered, self-serving, *selfish* life is constantly sowing seeds in the fields of his life and that he will reap an unwanted crop in the future.

In a remarkable parable recorded in Mark 4:26-29, Jesus told of a man who “cast seed into the ground,” then went his way to his regular activities, sleeping by night and rising to the activities of each new day. While he is busily engaged in his daily activities, “the seed springs up and grows, and he himself doesn’t know how.” Then Jesus made this straightforward statement, which I believe to be one of the most important things He said: “For the earth brings forth fruit of herself.” The Greek term translated “of herself” is *automate*, and it is a term which bears major emphasis in the Greek text. This means that it is, in effect, a loud shout from the page. You will recognize the Greek word *automate* in our English word, “automatic,” and that is its exact meaning. The statement of Jesus is this: when seed is sown in the earth, the harvest is *automatic!* Once the seed reaches the soil, the earth brings forth *automatically*. Now, every farmer knows that not every seed sown will be a part of the harvest, but he also knows that if *no* seeds are sown, there will be *no harvest*. So the presence of a harvest is a testimonial to the previous activity of seed-sowing, and the absence of a harvest is a testimonial to the absence of seed-sowing. In fact, the first harvest after a sowing will be proportionate to the quantity of seeds that were sown. II Corinthians 9:6 says, “He who sows sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he who sows bountifully shall reap also bountifully.” This law should be applied almost rigidly in the life of every Christian. Jesus said, “The seed is the Word of God, and the field is the world” (Luke 8:11). If the Christian sows seeds of self-curved living (“the flesh”) in the soil of his life, Paul said that the harvest will come back to him in “corruption”. If a Christian consistently sows the seed of the Word of God in the soils of the hearts of those people he meets, the harvest will be “automatic.”

Each Christian should be aware of the urgency of the labor that is involved in the spiritual exercises of sowing and reaping. He should educate himself about these laws of the harvest, and he should be sure he fully understands the nature of the seed and the importance of regularly sowing it. Let me give a strange example of this necessity and urgency in a story from early American history which I stumbled upon in casual reading.

Many years ago, when the United States Commissioner of Indian Affairs sent to the hungry Sioux Indians a supply of grain for sowing, instead of sowing the seeds for enlarging future harvests, they ate up the seed! In the same way, both sinners and saints often sacrifice their eternal future to the passing enjoyment of the present moment.

The opportunity for sowing will not last forever. Indeed, it is slipping through our fingers moment by moment. Sowing is an urgent act, and harvests do not wait on man’s convenience! Spiritually, every day of a man’s life is seed-time, a time of sowing. If he wants a happy harvest, he must be about the task of sowing suitable seeds. This is the law of labor, and it presents one of the greatest warnings as well as one of the greatest privileges and responsibilities a Christian can know.

### **The Law of LIKENESS**

The second law of the harvest I would mention might be called *the law of likeness*. Not only does a farmer reap *after* he has sown and *because* he has sown; he also reaps exactly *what* he has sown. Does not the text clearly say this? “*Whatsoever a*

man sows, *that* shall he also reap.” Let me repeat this law for emphasis: Not only does the farmer reap the harvest *after* he has sown the seed, he also reaps exactly *what* he has sown. The kind of seed that is sown determines the kind of crop that will be harvested.

This law was established by God at creation, and it is a standing, inviolable law. Genesis 1:11-12 says, “Then God said, ‘Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb that yields seed, and the fruit tree that yields fruit *according to its kind, whose seed is in itself, on the earth*’; and it was so. And the earth brought forth grass, the herb that *yields seed according to its kind*, and the tree that *yields fruit, whose seed is in itself according to its kind*. And God saw that it was good.” The term, “according to its kind”, occurs no less than *ten times* in Genesis chapter one, and thus God established and declared the law of likeness. And in each case, the law shows the likeness to be a *locked-in likeness*.

In drawing a contrast between two kinds of fruit, good and bad, Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, “Do men gather grapes from thorns, of figs from thistles?” The question presupposes a strong negative answer: “Never!” Then he enforced his question and answer with these words: “Even so, every good tree brings forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree brings forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit” (Matthew 7:16-18). The use of the moral terms, “good” and “evil,” indicates that he is not essentially talking about agriculture, but about human beings. Men reap exactly what they sow, and nothing else should be expected.

At this moment, I have in front of me a little Gospel tract entitled, “Want to Know Your Future?” It capitalizes on man’s pressing desire to know the/his future. The tract opens with these words: “Would you like to sit down at a table and write out your future? You can. This world is one of law and order. If you know the law, you can use it to your advantage. If you plant radishes, you’ll get radishes. You don’t expect pansies. If you plant wheat, you know you’ll reap wheat. You know this law of nature cannot be broken. The One who wrote that law in nature wrote the same law for us: ‘Be not deceived; God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap’ (Galatians 6:7). You are perfectly positive about getting corn if you plant corn, but you may be like many others and think you can sow one thing in your life and reap another. God says, ‘Don’t be deceived. You may think you can live for yourself, selfishly. Sure you can, but remember, *plant corn, get corn*. Can you think evil, read evil, hear evil, or watch evil without these becoming a part of you? No; what you sow, you will reap.’”

Note the very plain words that are used in the statement which follows our text: “For he who sows to his flesh (his self-life; that is, he lives selfishly) shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he who sows to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting” (Galatians 6:8). Note the two soils in which you may sow, pictured in the words, “to his flesh” and “to the Spirit.” The first term means that the person sows inwardly. That is, he sows for himself, into himself, for his own advantage. His worst sins are for himself, and even his best acts are still for himself. His action always terminates on himself, even when he is acting toward other people. He is the axis of his own life; he is the polar center of his own existence. The self-curl of his life is never corrected—and cannot be corrected without a new birth, what Jesus called “being born from above.” Every desire,

every attitude, every action that does not have God for its end and object is seed sown to the flesh. “Sowing to the flesh” is scattering these seeds of selfishness, which always must yield a harvest of corruption

There is a subtle statement of the law of likeness in one of the great chapters of the Bible, I Corinthians 3, but it will be necessary to look carefully at the statement to realize its declaration of this law. In I Corinthians 3:16-17, Paul wrote, “Know ye not that ye (plural pronoun, referring not to an individual Christian, but to the entire Corinthian church) are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? (again, plural, meaning ‘all of you’) If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye (again, ‘all of you’) are” (KJV) Any careful consultation of a Greek text, or a lexicon, or a good commentary, will show that the same verb is used in this verse: “If any man *defile* the temple of God, him shall God *defile*.” The same verb is used twice, though the KJV translates one “defile” and the other “destroy.” The use of the same verb indicates that the sin of mistreatment of the church, Christ’s Body, will lead to the same treatment from God. So the sinful response of men toward the church will bring a strong reaction of judgment from God—and this applies to Christians, first of all. Unfaithfulness to the Church will lead to God’s indifference to you!!! *Abuse of the Church invites God* to abuse the abuser; destructive attitudes and actions toward the Church invite reprisal-in-kind from God—and this is especially true of Christians, the members of the Body of Christ upon whom God depends for His self-expression (just as I depend on *my* body for my self-expression)!!! This aspect of judgment-in-kind, or reaping as we sow, should be seriously considered by each person until he adjusts his life to it.

Let me use a space-age illustration. Man was made to be a satellite revolving around God, drawing upon God’s power in absolute and happy dependence, just as man depends upon breathing oxygen to stay alive—and he does it happily and without argument or protest. But an alien factor has entered man’s experience and has corrupted his entire orientation. Due to this factor, which the Bible calls sin, *man wants to be the center of the universe. He persistently pushes to polarize everything around himself.* To paraphrase Augustine: “Thou hast made us to rotate around Thyself, O God, and our hearts will not be content until we are in that orbit.” But the rub is that man can’t *be* in full control because he himself is *out* of control (God’s control). So things tend to deteriorate toward an undesirable *reaping*. But a miraculous re-positioning, a re-polarizing, of one’s life is wonderfully possible. If it does not occur, the person will continue sowing “to his flesh,” and the harvest will be “corruption.”

There is a graphic illustration of the law of likeness in the book of Esther in the Bible. The dark character of the book is a man named Haman. In fact, Haman is quite sinister and evil. Conniving an evil plot to get rid of Morecai, a Jew whom he hated, Haman built a gallows on which he hoped to hang Mordecai by legal decree. But, through a series of Providential events, Haman was himself hanged on the very gallows he had prepared for Modecai. You see, your sins will whiplash on you and the judgment may be in exact kind as the sin committed.

Now look at the alternative presented in the text. “*But he who sows to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.*” What does this mean? Well, there are two kinds of “seeds” which a person may sow on the spiritual soil that is always before him. These are the seeds of “faith” and the seeds of “unbelief.” When a person hears the truth of God, he will respond with faith or with unbelief. Faith means, “Forsaking All, I Take Him,” and that critical act leads to a “Fantastic Adventure In Trusting Him.” *Believe me, that is wonderfully true!* The moment a person trusts Christ as his own personal Savior and Lord, the seed of faith is flung out from Him to Christ; this is “sowing to the Spirit.” Then, for the remainder of his life, he may continue sowing to the Spirit, but at the moment of his first sowing, he “reaps everlasting life”. “Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy,” Hosea said. Thus, any sowing you do, whether good or bad, is a “sowing to yourself” in the sense that the crop finally comes back to the sower. The possibilities of sowing righteousness are as great as the possibilities of sowing to the flesh, or sowing seeds of selfishness and evil, and the harvest is far more gratifying!

A doctor, or anyone else with a goal in life, has to be willing to spend many long years of preparation to reap the rewards of his profession. Is it not a tremendously good investment to sow once to the Spirit, reap everlasting life, then continue sowing in the soil of the Spirit for the few years you are on this earth in order to reap the same kind of harvest forever? What does it mean to “sow to the Spirit”? It means to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit of God, to live in the realm of the Spirit, to live a spiritual life, and to do that which pleases God (see Romans 8).

So, dear friend, here is your future in a line—you will reap exactly what you sow! This is the law of likeness.

### **The Law of LARGENESS**

The third harvest law that I will discuss could be called *the law of largeness*. Not only does a farmer reap *after* he has sown, and *what* he has sown, he also reaps *more* than he sows. The volume of the harvest is always larger than the volume of the seed sown. A sack full of seed can produce many, many bushels of grain. The volume of the crop brought in is totally disproportionate to the size of the seeds that are sown. A full-grown harvest may be gigantic in volume, but all of it is potentially contained in the seed that is sown, though its volume is much, much smaller than the volume of the coming harvest. Morally and spiritually, the full results of sin or holiness are potentially contained in the sinful or holy deed.

Several years ago, Judy and I visited two national parks in California, Yosemite and Sequoia National Parks. We were amazed at the sheer size of the giant Sequoias trees that grow in Sequoia National Park. If my memory is correct, we saw in Sequoia National Park trees that stand between 200 and 300 feet high. One day, fog had descended to a point just above the earth in the Park area, and it looked like a massive pipe organ with the tops of the pipes engulfed in a layer of smoke far above the earth. It was an eerie, mystical sight, and it impressed upon us again how big these trees really are. One day, we drove out on a fallen tree—and two cars could pass each other on the fallen

tree trunk! On another day, we drove our automobile through a gigantic hole carved out of the base of one of the living trees! While observing them one day, the thought suddenly entered my mind: “And all of this came from a single acorn!” This is the law of largeness. Each of those massive trees came from a single acorn that could easily be enclosed in the palm of your hand! This is the law of largeness.

Not only is it true that a single fruit of a single acorn may be the size of a Sequoia tree, but it is also true that an endless succession of multiplying Sequoia trees can come from a single seed (the acorn that spawns the trees). An acorn is the father of the full-grown tree, but it is also the father of innumerable and limitless forests. Here we see the law of largeness.

Jesus expressed the law of largeness in his well-known “parable of the sower” (Matthew 13:3-9, explained in Matthew 13:18-24). He spoke of seeds sowed on four kinds of soils. The first three seeds/soils proved to be non-productive because of handicaps in the soils. Then he described the fourth seed/soil arrangement in these words: “But other seeds fell into good ground and brought forth fruit, *some a hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold.*” In a good crop, a farmer may expect to reap much more than he sows. He knows that he can sow in one day a crop that will take ten men to reap.

Comparing the seed sown with the increasing volume of later harvests introduces us to the spiritual principle of multiplication. When God said to early man, “Be fruitful and multiply,” He was stating a law that applies both materially and spiritually. He fully expected man to biologically multiply, and when the full strategy of making disciples is explored, it becomes apparent that He expects exactly the same thing spiritually.

Some years ago, while preaching in several meetings in the Chicago area, I was taken to the Chicago Museum of Science and Industry. My mind is fuzzy about whether I actually saw this exhibit or merely read about it, but the illustration is the same in either case. Just inside the entrance of the Museum, there stood a large table which was marked like a giant checker board—with sixty-four fairly large squares. In the first square in the lower left-hand corner, one wheat seed had been glued into that square. In the second square (to the right), *two* wheat seeds had been glued. In the third square, *eight*. In the next square, *sixteen*. Then, thirty-two. Then, in the square in the lower right hand corner, square number eight, there were sixty-four wheat seeds glued in a small pile in that square. Then the other fifty-six squares on the board were empty. A bronze plaque in front of the table explained what was there. It explained that the other squares were empty simply because the enlarging process from square to square had filled the eighth square, and there was not enough room in the rest of the squares to accommodate the successively enlarging volume of the wheat seeds from square to square. Then the plaque added, “Had we continued to the sixty-fourth square, there would have been enough wheat seeds to fill the entire sub-continent of India *fifty feet deep!*” This is a vivid illustration both of the principle of multiplication and of the law of largeness. Here we see why we must carefully study the spiritual laws of the harvest, the matter of spiritual multiplication, and the necessity of regular seed-sowing with an eye to the future harvest.

A wise old adage says, “Anybody can count the number of seeds in an apple, but only God can count the number of apples in a seed.” This is the law of largeness.

### **The Law of LATENESS**

The third law of the harvest we will examine could be called *the law of lateness*. We have established that sowing always precedes reaping, that the sower reaps *the kind of crop he has sown*, and that he reaps *more* than he sows. Now, we will see that the sower reaps *later* than he sows. The text says, “He shall reap whatever he has sown,” and the “shall” suggests that the reaping comes after the sowing. The future reference is repeated twice in the following verse (6:8), and verse nine says, “*in due season* we shall reap.” *The future will simply be the harvest of the present attitude or action.*

A Sunday School teacher has just been relating to his class the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, and he asked the boys in the class, “Now, which would you rather be, boys, the rich man who lived sumptuously but died and went to hell, or Lazarus, the poor man who ended up in Heaven?” One boy answered, “I would rather be the rich man while I live, and Lazarus when I die.” As humorous as the answer was, it constructed an impossibility. The laws of the harvest correctly tell us that a person’s living determines his dying and his eternity. His eternity will simply follow the direction and momentum of his life on earth. An eternity of reaping will exactly follow the life of sowing.

This law of lateness expresses the consistent teaching of the Bible, of human experience, and of the world of agriculture. Every farmer knows that the sower does not reap the evening of the sowing. He knows that there is a season for sowing and a later season for reaping. He knows that the crop “springs up and grows” (Mark 4:27), always developing toward the full harvest, “first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear” (Mark 4:28), until “the harvest has fully come” (Mark 4:29).

Now, let’s apply this law Biblically, spiritually, morally, and *negatively*. I say “negatively” because the same thing is true in spiritual harvest *positively* as well. “He who sows *to the Spirit* shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting,” according to Galatians 6:8. In fact, in spite of our negative application and fears concerning this law, the positive side is the one more developed in the context (Galatians 6:7-10). However, because human beings insist on “sowing wild oats,” they must be warned of the enlarged, coming harvest. So let me address the matter negatively for a moment, and let it be remembered that Adam and his action are microcosms of the people and conduct of the entire human race.

This harvest law can be seen in the earliest human history. When Adam and Eve united in committing the first sin, they were reaping even before they were driven from the Garden of Eden later that same day. And the same kind of sowing and reaping have continued in the lives of all human beings (except One, Jesus, Who only sowed “to the Spirit”) from that day until today. One taste of forbidden fruit, and the poison has been spreading through the human bloodstream ever since. So this law has been demonstrated in an enlarging way for thousands of years—and yet man, deceived by sin (every human

being without God, without Christ, is under a delusion), continues flinging seeds of unbelief and sin into the soil of life, and he invariably reaps the crop he asked for. The Bible says, “He that soweth iniquity shall reap vanity” (Proverbs 22:8). “Vanity” means emptiness, and the word is often used to include all of the artificial substitutes that men practice to fill the vacuum. Multitudes (*multitudes*) of empty lives prove this truth. Empty speech, empty activities, empty living, abound everywhere, practiced by people who are just marking time as they live, and the activities they stuff into their lives are something to behold. The Bible says, “Because sentence against an evil work is not exercised speedily, therefore the hearts of the sons of men is full of evil,” but once the seed of sin hits the soil, the harvest is *automate (automatic)*, said Jesus in Mark 4:28. The harvest will not necessarily be *speedy*, but it will be *sure*.

The writer of Hebrews enforced this law when he said, “The farmer *waits* for the precious fruit of the earth, and has *long patience* for it, until he receive the early and latter rain” (Hebrews 5:7). This is actually a statement of the positive side of this law, and Christians must live with the awareness of this law if they are to maximize their stewardship, their service for Christ and others, and their own reward at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

### **The Law of LOVE**

There is an aspect of these laws of the harvest that does not “unravel” easily, but it is one of the most important of all. I call it *the law of love*. Every farmer knows that the harvests of future years must not be probated or aborted because he one day sows his last crop. He knows that if he is a wise steward he will invest in the future of farming for all future-generation farmers. He must leave his agricultural know-how as a deposit in the total farming mix. He must leave seeds which will multiply in and through future sowings. He must guarantee a crop for future generations. *He must make the means available for multiplication through future generations*

You see, all of us are “reaping” today because someone else lovingly sowed in the past, and surely we will want someone to reap in the future because we are faithfully, fully, and skillfully sowing today—*on God’s terms*. Remember that the Bible has a lot to say about what our activities are to be today, what lifestyle we are to live today, what strategy we are to follow today, in order to guarantee a maximum and enlarging crop in all future tomorrows. It is not enough to be decent, moral, good, even “Christian,” unless we send the Christian Gospel from our hands and hearts into an enlarging Gospel future. The reproduction and multiplication which Jesus modeled and mandated, if carefully practiced by me and you, will guarantee that enlarging future. This is why Jesus commanded us to “turn people into disciples” in the Great Commission, because disciple-making as it was revealed and practiced in the New Testament will expand toward infinity in future generations.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German theologian, pastor and teacher, said, “The truly righteous man is a man who lives for the next generation.” Elton Trueblood, wise teacher



and author, wrote that “the wise man plants a tree under whose shade he knows full well that he will never sit.” *Each of us is to be a link in a chain of love, a chain that connects the past generation with the next and will enlarge in the next generation because of what we forged in the link.* The chain has been made weak or strong because of Christians in the past. Will it be weaker, stronger, or break altogether because of us?

So, “let us not be weary in well-doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.” As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.” “In due season (harvest time) we shall reap”—if we lovingly sow Gospel seeds into men’s lives. We will reap *what* we sowed, *more* than we sowed, *later* than we sowed, and *because* we sowed.

How much will you be worth to the cause of Christ when you are gone? How much dividend will accrue to Him when you are dead? If the world stood a thousand years, would the influence you threw into the mix during your lifetime possibly contribute to Gospel success then? *Do you even realize that it could?* If you respond to Christ in love and obedience, thus building other people into reproducing disciples and disciple-makers, the product of that enlarging process might shock you at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

When most people die, their assets, influence, and impact are gone within a generation. But this is not so with a true disciple-maker. He should only gain more and more influence (though his name is not mentioned), accumulate more and more true riches, and receive rewards of staggering proportions. Remember, the final rewards are not reckoned until all the returns are in, and what you are sowing in the lives of people today will be the basis of those final rewards. If you love Christ, love people, and follow His Strategy in sowing into the lives of people with regard to a multiplying future, the law of the harvest dictates that the results will far exceed your expectations.