

Galatians 6:6-10

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Preacher: Nick Lauer

[0 : 00] You can be seated. Well, would you turn with me to Galatians chapter 6. That's page 975 in the Pew Bible.

If you want to follow along there, let me encourage you to do so. Galatians chapter 6. This morning, we're going to look at verses 6 through 10. We come to the end of the body of Paul's letter to the Galatians, and the end, particularly, of this section devoted to what Christ-centered, Spirit-filled life looks like.

This ethical primer at the end of Galatians, we come to its conclusion this morning. So page 975 in the Pew Bible, Galatians 6, 6 through 10.

Before I read this, let me pray. God, thank you for your word. Thank you that we can stand on each and every promise, Lord, and that your covenant is sure and that your hope is certain, Lord, and that your grace and mercy is sufficient for us.

God, we come to your word because we want to hear from you. We want to learn from you. We want to be encountered by you, and we want to be changed. So, Lord, open up the ears and the eyes of our hearts this morning to behold you and your word.

[1 : 06] Lord, we ask this in Christ's name. Amen. Let me read this text for us. Paul writes, So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone.

And especially to those who are of the household of faith. Now, perhaps like many of you this morning, I confess that I am not very knowledgeable when it comes to farming.

There were some farms around where I grew up, and my brother actually dated a farmer's daughter once. Seriously, he did. But growing up, that's about as close as I ever got to being personally involved in a life of agriculture.

And today, not much has changed. I have one and only one living plant in my office. And when the leaves don't fall off, I consider that a pretty big success because, in all honesty, I have killed my fair share of houseplants.

Beth can attest to this. No, I'm no farmer. If you're looking for advice on your home garden, I'm probably not the guy to ask. But here's one thing I do know.

[2 : 38] I know that in farming, there is this one surefire principle that every farmer knows. There is one unchanging rule that every farmer lives by.

And it's this. Whatever you sow, that's what you will reap. In other words, whatever seed you cast into the field and put down into the earth, that's the kind of produce, that's the crop that's going to come up when the harvest comes.

When farmers want to harvest corn, they plant corn. When they want to harvest barley, they plant barley. If you want strawberries to grow in your garden, you can't plant tomatoes. Because you reap what you sow.

It's such an obvious principle that it almost feels silly having to say it. You know it already. And I don't have to stand up here and explain it to you. However, what you do need to realize is this.

What our passage wants all of us to realize today is that each and every one of us, like it or not, is in the business of farming. Oh, you might be in medicine or law or education.

[3 : 45] You might be a parent or a student or a young professional. But no matter who you are, we are all in the business of agriculture. Whether we know it or not.

Because you see, this unchanging principle that you reap what you sow isn't just true of agricultural life. It's true of the spiritual life. It's not just true in the fields.

It's true in your heart. And that's what verses 6 through 10 are all about in our passage this morning. How we live our lives now, the choices we make, the thoughts we entertain, the actions we take, the priorities we pursue, the habits we foster, all of this will have consequences both in this life and

in the next.

How we live our life is like sowing. It's like casting seed into a field. And one day it will bring forth a harvest. Verse 7 states it plainly.

Whatever one sows, that will he also reap. And based on this inexorable principle, Paul issues both a stern warning and a deep encouragement for us this morning.

[4 : 57] So first, let's look at the stern warning. Don't be deceived, Paul says. God is not mocked. The one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption.

Don't be deceived. I wonder if some of us gathered together today are deceiving ourselves. You have been sowing to what Paul calls the flesh.

That is, the sinful nature. But you're expecting to reap something other than corruption. You are the farmer planting tomatoes in your field and hoping that strawberries are going to come up.

You're living your life in a way that ignores God, thinking that your life won't fall apart. But Paul says, don't be deceived. In other words, if you're doing that, you're fooling yourself.

And why are you fooling yourself? Because God cannot be mocked. You see, if we live one way and hope to reap another, we're not merely thumbing our noses at karma.

[6 : 05] We're not merely attempting to cheat fate. No, we're trying to mock the holy and just God who created the world and everything in it. And that is one thing, friends, you simply cannot do.

After all, you might cheat fate. And karma might just be a myth. But God, God is not mocked. But notice closely what Paul says here.

It's quite profound, actually. He doesn't say that if we sow to the flesh, we'll reap corruption from God. He says if we sow to the flesh, we'll reap corruption from the flesh.

You see, just as God created the physical world with a definite shape, with a definite fabric, in the same way God created the moral and the spiritual world with a definite shape, with a definite fabric.

There's an order to each, you see. And we all know that if you want to stay whole physically, you can't do things that strain or tear the given fabric of the physical reality, right?

[7 : 11] If I want my heart to stay whole and functional, I can't eat a diet of nothing but fatty foods, as much as I might like that. If I want my hand to stay whole and functional, I can't hold it in the middle of an open flame.

Both of these things will eventually strain and eventually tear the God-given fabric of the physical world. And it's the same way spiritually. There are things that strain and tear the God-given moral fabric of the world.

And that's what the Bible calls sin. And it will always bring forth corruption. What is corruption? It's disintegration, right? It's decay.

In other words, sin will break you to pieces. But of course, it doesn't always happen right away, does it? You can probably hold your hand in a fire for a few seconds before your hand starts to disintegrate.

Any adolescent boy who's been to a sleepover knows that. You can probably eat five guys' hamburgers every day for years before your heart stops beating.

[8 : 26] Every guy who's been to college knows that. And sadly, friends, you can sow to your flesh for a long time before you begin to reap spiritual corruption, before it breaks you to pieces.

But don't be deceived. You will reap what you sow. So let me ask you, friends. Are you deceiving yourself today?

Are you sowing one thing and thinking that you won't reap it in return? Are you sowing dishonesty in your marriage perhaps? All the while thinking that it won't break the fabric of your relationship and cause you to reap loneliness?

Don't be deceived. Are you sowing envy and jealousy? Toward your friends or toward your coworkers? All the while thinking that it won't break the fabric of contentment and cause you to reap the destruction of bitterness.

Don't be deceived. You will reap what you sow. Are you a Christian here today? Thinking that you can flirt with a little sin and enjoy a little godless pleasure and not reap the consequences in this life?

[9 : 48] Brother or sister, don't be deceived. Or maybe you're not a Christian here this morning. Maybe you're living your whole life without any real reference to God and Christ. Do you think that you can sow a whole life that completely ignores God and yet still hope to find him and the life to come?

Don't be deceived. God is not mocked. You will reap what you sow. I trust you feel the gravity of this verse, friends.

It is a stern warning. But I want you to know that it's issued in love. I don't want to see you reap the corruption that will inevitably come if you sow to your flesh.

It's pain and emptiness and loneliness. And as your pastor, I've seen it. And in some of your lives, I see it coming. Some of you today need to pull your hand out of the fire and stop sowing to your flesh.

It's a stern warning, but it comes in love. You will reap what you sow. But I also want you to hear this warning in the context of the rest of Galatians.

[11 : 14] You see, the Christians in Galatia were starting to believe that they had to be their own saviors by following the Old Testament law. And at the core, that's what the flesh, that's what the sinful nature really is.

It's that part of our heart that thinks we can and must save ourselves. It's the part of us that denies the gospel of free grace. It's the part that tries to make our own happiness and our own righteousness apart from Christ.

That's the flesh. So you see, we never really sow to our flesh thinking that we'll reap corruption. Of course not. We sow to the flesh because we think it's the only thing that will make us happy.

We think it's the only way to save ourselves. Why are you dating the person you know you shouldn't date?

Because you think that they will save you from the hell of loneliness. Why are you lying and cutting corners in your business? Because you think it will save you from the hell of financial failure.

[12 : 25] Why are you envious of the star athlete at school? Because you think that being him or her would save you from the hell of being a social nobody.

And for a while, it works. Until the crop comes in. And then you find that the loneliness in the relationship is worse than the loneliness outside of one.

You find that financial failure is worse because of the lying than without it. And you find that you're even more of a social outcast because no one, after all, wants to be friends with someone who is uncomfortable in their own skin.

But at the heart of this sowing to the flesh, don't you see, is a denial of the gospel of free grace. You see, the gospel says we can never save ourselves.

The gospel tells us that because of our sin, we deserve loneliness and failure and exclusion. But in the gospel, we're told of the one who can truly save us.

[13 : 34] We're told of the one who was sent from the Father's side and who went willingly into the far country. The one who went out into the fields of our corruption and our decay to find us.

The gospel tells us that Jesus Christ came and on the cross, he bore our sin. And in bearing that sin, it broke him to pieces. So that all those who trust in him can be healed and forgiven and set free.

Perhaps you're a Christian here today and you've lost your grip on the gospel of his grace. That's why the loneliness is breaking you to pieces. That's why the thought of financial failure or being unpopular is breaking you to pieces.

That's why each of these things feel so unbearable that you'll do anything to save yourself, including what you know is displeasing to Christ. That's why you're sowing to the flesh. Because you've lost touch with the gospel of his grace.

Now, if you see this in your life, friends, if the Holy Spirit is doing a work on your heart right now, what do you do? First, here's what you do.

[14 : 54] Remember that the love of Christ and his approval and his friendship are more lasting and satisfying than anything else. Friends, if you've got him, then nothing can really break you.

Is the Spirit reminding you of it even now? How he lived and how he died for you? How he bore the wrath for your sins and your place?

If so, then stop and take it in. Soak it in. And this week, why don't you find a song about the cross and sing it?

Take a verse about the cross and memorize it. Because you see, the only way to turn down the volume on your sinful nature that wants to save itself is by turning up the volume in your heart on Christ.

Who can save us and who has. Find the aspects of Christ's person and work that make your heart sing. Read through the gospels until you find one.

[15:56] Until it makes your heart come alive. And take that truth and hold it close. And worship him. But second, admit that you've been trying to find ultimate happiness in something other than Christ's love.

And realize that's why you've been sowing to the flesh. Confess whatever that thing is to God and bring it into the light. And do whatever it takes to allow the light of his glory to make that thing seem small and insignificant in comparison to him.

Do whatever it takes. Write it down on a piece of paper and burn it. And imagine the glory of God taking it up in smoke. Take it to a trusted friend. And pray together.

Mock it in the name of Christ like Martin Luther used to mock the devil and call him names. Because he knew he was forgiven by the blood of Jesus.

Friends, whatever you do, be ruthless. And don't be deceived by that thing any longer. Third, realize that being a Christian doesn't make your life problem free.

[17:03] There will still come loneliness and failure and hurt. But remind yourself that in Christ, these things are temporary.

There is a harvest that is coming. Remember that whatever takes place now can't rob you of eternal glory in the world to come. In fact, whatever scars you might get will only enlarge your heart to enjoy the love of Christ all the more.

And with that hope firmly in mind, friends, stop sowing to the flesh in whatever way you might be doing it. There might be consequences.

Your reputation might suffer. Your bank account might dwindle. Some of your friends might slowly disappear. But in the midst of it, you see, you will start to reap something much sweeter in return. Paul tells us in the rest of verse 8, the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. You see, this principle we've been considering, it works both ways.

[18:21] You reap what you sow as both a warning and an encouragement and a promise. Paul goes on to say in verse 9, let us not grow weary of doing good for in due season we will reap if we do not give up.

Brothers and sisters, don't give up. After all, you will reap what you sow. If you keep on sowing to the Spirit, then from the Spirit you will reap eternal life.

Now what does it mean to sow to the Spirit? One way to put it is that it means to obey God out of the grateful joy that flows from our free adoption in Christ.

Being made sons and daughters by grace, we serve Him with joy. That's what it means to sow to the Spirit. It looks like living out Galatians 5.13 through Galatians 6.5.

Living that out, this section that we've been studying for the last few weeks. It's walking in the Spirit. It's being led by the Spirit. It's keeping in step with the Spirit. It's serving one another through love.

[19:27] It's restoring one another in gentleness. It's bearing one another's burdens. We sow to the Spirit when we do all this and when we do it over the long haul.

Now let me say, maybe you're a new Christian this morning. If you're under the impression that the Christian life will be a walk in the park, the Bible would have us actually think very differently.

In Galatians 5, Paul compares the Christian life to fighting. And in Galatians 6, he compares it to farming. And neither activity, to my knowledge, sounds like a walk in the park.

Right? Two things I don't want to do on my day off. Get in a fight and work in a field. But Paul says, this is the reality of the Christian life.

You're into the fray and you're out in the field. Now think a little more deeply about this farming metaphor with me. I know we don't know much about farming, us New Havenites, but let's use our imagination and some common sense, right?

[20:34] The act of sowing surely involves at least three things. And each of these is true about the Christian life. First, sowing must involve diligence. You've got to get out in the sun and do the hard work.

And you've got to do it regularly. And you've got to be strategic and know the seasons and the crops and the conditions. And you've got to plan accordingly. It takes diligence. And second, sowing involves patience, doesn't it?

You won't see the results right away. It takes time. Days, even weeks might pass before you see even a single green shoot coming up through the earth. Patience.

And third, sowing involves trust. You've got to trust that the seed will do what it's supposed to do. You've got to trust that the weather will cooperate.

You've got to trust that the soil has enough to nourish the plant. You see, ultimately, growth comes through no direct power of our own. We simply sow the seed and let the seed and the soil and the sun do the rest.

[21 : 36] No amount of fretting or worrying or peaking will bring it up any faster. So there are at least three things that go into sowing.

Diligence and patience and trust. And all three are involved in living the Christian life, aren't they? All three are involved in sowing to the Spirit. And that, of course, can be wearisome.

Can't it? Maybe verse 9 speaks to you today. Maybe you're weary. Maybe you're even ready to give up, as Paul says.

You know, nearly every part of the Christian life, I think, can be wearisome. Can it? Practicing the means of grace can be wearisome. Prayer can be hard. Bible reading can feel dull.

Gathering for worship can feel lifeless. The sermon can go on and on. And on and on. Obedience to God's commands can also be wearisome.

[22 : 39] Yeah. Being ostracized at work because you refuse to join in the gossip. Weary. Refusing to respond in anger when someone wrongs you. Being patient with your children when they do the same thing you told them a hundred times not to do.

Serving. Ministering. That can be wearisome too, can't it? Doing the dishes every week after coffee hour. Meeting up with so-and-so who seems totally stuck spiritually and you just don't know what to say that'll get through.

Raising gospel issues with your family or friends or your neighbors or your work and getting shut down. Or worse, just getting a non-response. That can be wearisome.

In our passage, Paul specifically mentions sharing all good things and doing good and by this he probably has in mind supporting one another materially and financially and of course that can be very wearisome.

Can it not? Luther put it this way, he said, it's easy to do good once or twice but to stay with it and not be overcome by the ingratitude and malice of those you are helping.

[23 : 52] this is work and labor. Many people you help are unworthy. They don't deserve it. Many people will be ungrateful.

They won't thank you for it. And when you add to that the sheer number of people, the sheer magnitude of the need in the world, how could we not grow weary?

Are you weary this morning? But isn't it a comfort to know that Paul himself knows how we feel? After all, he does say, let us not grow weary.

He knew what it was like to labor long and hard with little sign of the coming harvest, with little fruit coming forward. But you know, more than that, Jesus Christ knows what it's like to be weary. Consider the humanity of Christ. The Gospel of Mark tells us that after a long day of ministry, Christ fell asleep on a cushion in a fishing boat in the middle of a storm.

[25 : 07] The Gospel of John tells us that from the cross, Jesus cried out, I thirst. Jesus knew what it was like to be weary. But the book of Hebrews says that for the joy set before him, he endured the cross.

What kept him going was the joy that he saw that was to come. He saw the joy of his father's heart rejoicing in his own obedience.

He saw the joy of you and me celebrating the salvation we'd be given for free. He saw the joy of the whole creation liberated from its bondage to decay and set free.

And seeing that joy, Christ endured. Think of the farmer out in his field. He gladly sows his seed because he expects a harvest.

If we set our minds on the hope of the harvest, we will do good works as gladly as the farmer sows his seed. And how much more gladly should we do so?

[26 : 24] After all, the farmer's harvest in a few months, it's going to be used up or it's going to spoil over time, won't it? But friends, our harvest is eternal. Paul says, if we don't give up, we'll reap eternal life.

And that phrase in the Bible means more than just life that doesn't end. It means a certain quality of life too. On the one hand, to reap eternal life means growth in Christlikeness to become more like him.

Remember the fruit of the Spirit that Paul described in chapter 5. Sowing to the Spirit yields this kind of life within us. Love and joy and peace and patience and kindness and on and on and on. It might be hard to notice those things at first, but Paul promises that we will. It's inevitable. So don't give up. But to reap eternal life also means growth in the depth of our communion with God. In John 17, Jesus says, this is eternal life that they know God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. As we sow to the Spirit, we find that our capacity to enjoy God grows.

[27 : 35] Imagine a heavy downpour. Wouldn't that be nice on a hot day like today? Imagine a heavy downpour. And you know, when we first become believers, it's like we have a Dixie cup and we hold it up to the rain.

And it feels great because our cup is overflowing with the love of Christ. But you see, as we grow and as we sow to the Spirit, that cup gets larger and larger and larger.

The Spirit takes our Dixie cup and hands us a jar and then He takes our jar and hands us a bucket. And over time, we experience more and more of the love of God as it rains down on us in Christ.

The depth of your communion with God will come. So don't give up. But of course, reaping eternal life isn't just something that happens in this life, is it?

Ultimately, Paul is pointing us forward to the world to come. When Christ returns and His kingdom is all in all, he says, those who sow to the Spirit now will be those who enjoy the Spirit-given entrance into the life of that world to come.

[28 : 43] Now, does that mean we earn our salvation by sowing to the Spirit? Not at all. Remember the context of the letter. Paul couldn't state more emphatically that we're saved by faith alone and not by works than in Galatians.

If you've missed that, then we've failed utterly and you've missed the whole point of our sermon series. We're saved by faith alone and not by works, but you see, that kind of saving faith that really gets a grasp of God's grace, saving faith like that is never alone.

True faith always issues forth in good works. Sowing to the Spirit, in other words, doesn't make you a Christian, but it's evidence that you are one. And that's why Paul can say without any hesitation, the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.

If you have the Spirit, then you are sealed for the life to come. So even though you might get weary, even though you might make sacrifice upon sacrifice to sow to the Spirit, even when the harvest seems a long way off, friends, don't give up.

You will reap what you sow and it will be glorious. Finally, Paul paints a picture of what it looks like not to give up. In verses 6 and 10, like bookends around this passage, Paul exhorts us to keep on doing good.

[30 : 16] In these two verses, he gives us three categories of people to whom we're to keep on doing good. Verse 6, those who teach the Word. The first half of verse 10 to everyone and the second half of verse 10, especially to the household of faith.

There they are. Now, I admit it's a bit awkward to preach on a verse like verse 6. Paul's basically telling the church to make sure they pay their pastors.

And to be faithful to God's Word, that's what I'm bound to tell you. So church, take care of your pastors. Now I know our culture's a bit cynical when it comes to the church and money, so let me just make a couple remarks.

First, this is one of the reasons why we preach through whole books of the Bible at a time. We don't skip hard passages and we don't simply just ride hobby horses. We want to hear the whole counsel of God and this is part of it.

You know, I didn't pick out this verse out of thin air because I'm happy with how you share all good things with your pastors. I didn't pick this verse out because of our annual budget meeting coming up.

[31 : 18] In fact, Trinity has a fine track record of taking good care of its ministers and for that we are grateful. But we still need to be reminded of these principles and that's why God puts them in Scripture over and over and over again.

But second, you see, it's actually a deep joy to support gospel ministry. You see, the health of a church depends primarily on the health of its teaching.

By supporting good pastors who can devote themselves full time to the study and ministry of the word, a church will flourish. And as the church flourishes, the community will too.

Martin Luther in his commentary on Galatians speculates that one of the reasons why the church in Galatia was so susceptible to false teaching was because they weren't actually providing adequately for their pastors to study and teach the word.

They didn't have faithful teachers that they were supporting and setting apart who could keep them from error, who could keep showering the gospel over them so they could know to not go back to the law. Now, we don't know if that's necessarily true.

[32 : 32] Luther's sometimes given to speculations. But it's certainly possible, isn't it? You see, one of the reasons I want Trinity to support its pastors now is not just so our current ministry can flourish.

But when you and I are long gone, I want to leave behind us a culture at Trinity, an ethos where we find faithful pastors and we support them well and they teach the word and keep the light of the gospel shining in New Haven.

that's what I want to leave behind, friends. I want Trinity to keep sowing and sowing so that we'll reap a great harvest. But the church isn't just to be generous with its pastors.

Paul says in verse 10 that we're to do good to everyone. Isn't that shocking? Especially in the first century. Outrageous. There's no one who's beyond the pale of the church's good works, neither class nor race nor nationality nor religion.

None of that is a barrier for genuine Christian kindness. We are meant to be looking out at the world God has placed us in and asking what needs can I meet with what God has given me?

[33 : 52] After all, God doesn't need your good works, but your neighbor does. And this is meant to make Christ look great, you see, because he poured out his life for us when we were enemies.

Now we can pour out our life to help those who might be completely at odds with us. We are to boldly and prayerfully look out into the world and ask, how can I love?

How can I give? But as we're doing that, Paul reminds us not to lose sight of those who are closest to us, not to lose sight of those who are sitting in this very sanctuary.

Especially take care of the household of faith, he says at the end of verse 10. When it comes to good works of generosity, our scope is to be everyone, but our priority is to be fellow believers. And again, this is a principle that is meant to make Christ look great.

What would it say about Christ if we didn't love and take care of our fellow believers for whom Christ shed his own blood? God, the more the church is seen to be a loving community, the more attractive the gospel will seem to those outside the church.

[35 : 07] How many of us came to a relationship with Christ because part of the means that God used was the loving kindness of the people of God? Is that true of you? So keep on doing good, friends.

Don't give up. We'll reap what we sow. And you know, as Paul's laying down these priorities, he says we're to do it as we have opportunity. He's making the point that the time for sowing won't last forever.

Like the text from 1 Peter that we read earlier, Paul is saying the end is near, just like the end of this sermon is near. The end is near, so use all your gifts for good and don't give up.

You see, Paul is reminding us that this life is short, but eternity is long. C.S. Lewis ends the Chronicles of Narnia by saying that all our life in this world and all our adventures are only the cover and the title page of the story that's to come.

Chapter 1 doesn't even begin until that day when the kingdom dawns and the harvest comes. And that story will go on forever, and every chapter will be better than the one before.

[36 : 17] So keep doing good, friends. Keep sowing to the Spirit. The harvest is coming, and it won't delay. Any sacrifice you make now, any hardship, any trial, it will seem like a blink compared to the age to come.

So as we finish this morning, I want us to take a walk together. Let's take a walk together out into the field of your life, and in my life too. Step out into the sun and feel its heat on your neck.

Feel the dirt under your feet. Look out at the plowed earth stretching toward the horizon. Push your hand down into the bag of seeds at your side, and feel them in your hand, and consider your life.

There you stand, brothers and sisters. Remember, you will reap what you sow. On the one hand, don't be deceived, but on the other hand, don't give up.

Keep on doing good, and above all, remember that by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the harvest is coming. Let's pray.

[37 : 40] Lord Jesus, we praise you this morning as the Lord of the harvest. Lord, we thank you for coming and for rescuing us from our sin and filling us with your spirit so that we can now live not in the fields of the flesh, but in the fields of your spirit.

Lord, will we continue to persevere by your grace and to sow in that direction. Lord, open up our minds to the harvest to come, and may we endure.

And may your name be glorified as we do good to all. In Christ's name, amen. Amen.