One of the sorriest areas of American politics for the past century or so has been our government's farm policy. More often than not, it is a system that rewards non-production, favors corporate farms over family farms, and makes sure those who make the mistake of planting in a flood plain are generously rewarded for their folly.

Now having treated you to about all I know concerning farm policy in the U.S. of A., I would like to speak a little more authoritatively about a related subject, namely God's farm policy. It is summarized in our Scripture text for today: “Whatever a man sows, this he will also reap.” In God's agricultural system no one reaps unless he has sown, but, by the same token, once a person has sown, the harvest is inevitable—for good or for ill. We will focus upon just five verses this morning, starting with Galatians 6:6:

*Anyone who receives instruction in the Word must share all good things with his instructor. Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.*

Before examining four basic principles regarding the Law of the Harvest, I want us to take a brief overview of the passage. Sowing and reaping are mentioned three times in these few verses. The fundamental point seems to be that . . .

**The harvest reaped bears a direct relationship to the seed sown. (7-8)**

Our tendency is to apply this truth negatively and only to the moral realm. If you sow lust, you will reap a corresponding harvest of guilt, broken relationships, and perhaps worse. If you sow alcohol abuse you will reap a damaged liver, a broken home, a lost job, or even death. If you sow laziness you will reap poverty and a lack of self-worth.

Now that is all true, and we will stress the moral applications of this law today, but Paul’s specific applications do not deal with immoral behavior, but rather with giving and serving. Notice that his first application comes before the principle, and is found in verse 6: “Anyone who receives instruction in the Word must share all good things with his instructor.” Why? Because the harvest reaped bears a direct relationship to the seed sown. In other words, the person who sows the Word of God has the right to reap material benefits from His work, and conversely, the one who shares generously with his teacher will reap blessings from God.

The other major application Paul makes is found in verses 9 & 10. Because the harvest reaped bears a direct relationship to the seed sown, “let us not become weary in doing good,” and “let us
do good to all people.” So the law of the harvest applies not only negatively when we make moral mistakes; it also applies positively when we give and serve as God wants us to.

Now one of the most important factors in Bible study is the context in which a passage is found. No verse or paragraph in Scripture should ever be studied in isolation. That is one of the most common errors of cultists and heretics; they can make the Bible say anything they want by just ignoring the context. All through our exposition of Galatians we have attempted to relate our current text to what has gone before, and today is no exception.

The clear theme of the last portion of Galatians is “life in the Spirit,” and particularly the importance of manifesting the fruit of the Spirit. The very first place the fruit of the Spirit should be evident, as we noted last week, is in interpersonal relationships. Paul now tells us the fruit should also be obvious in our giving and serving. He simply won’t allow us to think of life in the Spirit as some super-sanctified spirituality divorced from the nitty-gritty of everyday life. If we are not bearing one another's burdens, if we are not sowing our money in accord with godly principles, and if we are not doing good to all people, especially to our families and those of the household of faith, then we are not walking by the Spirit or manifesting the fruit of the Spirit, no matter how many services we attend each week or how long our quiet time is each morning. Nor will we reap the harvest we are hoping for.

Now we’re ready to consider the Law of the Harvest by means of four undeniable principles. Now a few of you may have a faint recollection of these four principles because I used them in a sermon on David’s sin with Bathsheba some 6 years ago. But we will expand upon them considerably this morning.

The principles behind the Law of the Harvest

1. The Principle of Investment: You reap only if you sow. You may hear about a farmer going to Uncle Sam to get paid for a crop he didn't plant, but one thing you will never see is a farmer taking his combine out to harvest wheat he never planted. When I was a kid I worked on my uncle's farm just outside Northfield, Minnesota. It was a dairy farm with about 160 acres of oats, corn, and peas. My uncle would rotate his fields so that he never planted the same crop in the same field two years in a row, and every fourth or fifth year he would give each field a rest so that the soil could be rejuvenated. The cows could graze on that field and in the process fertilize it, but no crops would be planted.

Now my uncle didn't get upset when corn didn't grow in the field where the cows were grazing. Why should he? He hadn't planted any corn there that year. So also Christians cannot expect to reap what they do not sow. If we do not sow love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleleness and self-control, we have no right to expect a harvest of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleleness and self-control. It's as simple as that. One of the practical illustrations of this principle is in regard to friendships. Everyone wants friends, but not everyone has friends. Take a moment and think of the person you know who has
the most friends. Now ask yourself, what is different about that person? If I were a betting man I’d wager that your answer would be, “He or she is friendly, generous, and listens well.” The harvest of friends is not an accident; it happens because an investment has been made in other people.

This is just as true for children and teenagers as it is for adults. Teens, if you are short on friends, try being one. Be kind, considerate, loyal, and respectful, and avoid the behaviors that may attract attention but demonstrate immaturity. Friends won’t come out of the woodwork the first day you try it, but over a period of time I can almost guarantee you some good, solid friendships will result.

2. The Principle of Identity: You reap only what you sow. We have already said one thing you will never find is a farmer harvesting a field he failed to plant. Another thing you will never find is a farmer taking his combine out to harvest wheat when he planted corn! That which is harvested is that which is planted. Likewise our text says a person reaps what he or she sows. And God cannot be mocked; He cannot be hoodwinked.

Verse 8 pictures the Christian life as a country estate as two fields in which seed may be planted. “The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.” The one field is the field of the sin nature we were born with. The seeds are largely thoughts and deeds which conform to the works of the sinful nature, as we saw in Gal. 5:19-21. To sow to the sinful nature is to pander to it and excuse it, instead of crucifying it.

Every time we allow our mind to harbor a grudge, entertain a lustful fantasy, or wallow in self-pity, we are sowing in the field of the sinful nature. Every time we linger in bad company whose influence we know we cannot resist, every time we selfishly refuse to meet the emotional needs of family members, every time we watch a filthy movie, visit an inappropriate internet site, or listen to degrading music, every time we take a risk which strains our self-control, we are sowing to the sinful nature.

And what is the inevitable harvest when one sows to the sinful nature? Destruction, God says. Corruption. The word refers to moral decay, and like gangrene it will spread to more and more areas of our lives. The only way to get rid of gangrene is to cut off the leg or arm that is infected and throw it away. My mother was a nurse, which came in handy since I was very accident prone. One of her most vivid memories is that during nurses’ training in Minneapolis she had to carry a leg down from the operating room to the lab—a leg without a person attached, a leg cut off due to gangrene. The problem started with a little cut which was not attended to, which resulted in infection, which was ignored, and finally gangrene set in. The only way to save the person's life was to cut off the leg.

Likewise, sin results in moral gangrene in people's lives. What does that look like? Broken relationships, broken minds, broken emotions, broken bodies, broken dreams. Sometimes it
starts out like an insignificant cut—a person tells a lie, then another one to cover up that one, then he lies about bigger things, and pretty soon everything is out of control. Or one can begin to flirt with someone other than one’s spouse, which leads to intimate conversations, which leads to meaningful touches, and pretty soon once again everything is out of control.

Sometimes the only way to get rid of moral corruption is through major surgery. God has to take us to the woodshed. We may lose someone very important to us; we may go bankrupt; we may lose our health. But the discipline of the Lord is redemptive; i.e. it is designed for our ultimate benefit, not to punish. Sure, “No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it” (Hebrews 12:11).

I’ve seen a lot of people go to God’s woodshed. I’ve seen the inside of the woodshed myself. It’s not a fun place to be. But it’s better than being abandoned by God. I’ve seen that, too. I’ve seen people whom God gave up on, in the words of Romans 1:24,25: “God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts . . . God gave them over to shameful lusts.”

But thankfully, the field of the sinful nature is not the only field in which we can plant; we can also plant in the field of the Holy Spirit. Sowing there is the same as setting the mind on the things of the Spirit or walking by the Spirit. Again the seeds we sow are thoughts and deeds. It has to do with the books we read, the company we keep, the leisure activities we pursue, the worship habits we develop, and the diligence with which we pursue our career “as unto the Lord.”

And what is the harvest we can expect when we sow to the Spirit? Paul says we will reap eternal life. I am pretty sure the Apostle is not using “eternal life” here as a synonym for “salvation from hell.” We don’t earn our salvation by the thoughts and deeds we sow, as he has made abundantly clear earlier in the book of Galatians. I believe he is using “eternal life” to describe the quality of life that results when we sow to the Spirit of God—it is a life that appreciates the eternal as opposed to the temporal, the healthy as opposed to the harmful, the important as opposed to the trivial, the spiritual rather than just the material. In other words, when we sow to the Spirit, we begin a process of spiritual growth and vitality which pays eternal dividends.

A final thought about the Principle of Identity: some Christians sow to the sinful nature every day and wonder why they do not reap holiness and righteousness. I remember talking to a man who was lamenting his sour marriage—he claimed there was no love left in it. I asked him what he had invested in his marriage, and he mentioned the beautiful home he had provided and the fact that his wife and kids had everything they wanted. But sadly he couldn’t understand that the harvest he was experiencing, namely a loveless marriage had more to do with other seeds he had planted, like his 80 hour per week schedule and the vacations he regularly took without his wife and children. A beautiful house is no substitute for a beautiful home, and a beautiful home is probably not possible when dad is working 80 hours a week. He was sowing in the field of
neglect and expecting to reap a satisfying marriage. It can’t happen.

3. The Principle of Increase: you reap more than you sow. What farmer would plant a sack of grain in order to harvest a sack of grain? The only reason he plants a sack of grain is he believes the return will be much greater than the initial investment. The spiritual harvest also multiplies. Now this is a beautiful thing to behold when we are sowing to the Spirit. Take, for example, the sowing to the Spirit that is represented in generous giving. Virtually the universal experience of Christians who have practiced generous biblical giving is that the spiritual rewards far outweigh the financial sacrifice. In 2 Cor. 9:6 Paul actually promises that: “whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.”

By the way, would it be OK for me to take a moment here at the beginning of the year and challenge all of us to practice regular, proportionate, generous giving right from the first of the year? Every year since I can remember we get behind in our giving by the 3rd week of January and stay behind all year until December. Then we have to cajole people to dig deep to help end the year in the black. Amazingly the congregation almost always comes through, but if we were all giving regularly, and off the top, it wouldn’t be necessary to scramble for 25% of the year’s budget in the last month. Also the staff and the Mission Committee and others who are dependent upon those gifts could plan ahead so much better.

Consider also the sowing to the Spirit that is represented in regular Bible study and prayer. Such a person reaps the harvest of a close walk with God and the peace and contentment that go with it. And what about the sowing that is done when we invest quality and quantity time with our spouses and children? And the sowing that is done when we share out faith? Listen to Psalm 126:6: “He who goes out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with him.”

I said that the Principle of Increase is a beautiful thing to behold when we are sowing to the Spirit. However, it is a tragic truth when we are sowing to the sinful nature. Hosea 8:7 puts it this way: “for they sow the wind, and they reap the whirlwind.” Paul Lawrence Dunbar, a brilliant African-American poet who died an alcoholic at age 33 in 1906, wrote his own autobiography in one of his poems. It expresses powerfully this Principle of Increase:

This is the price I pay
Just for one riotous day.
Yes, I'll regret in grief
And sorrow without relief.

Suffer I will, my friends,
Suffer until the end.
Until the grave shall
Give me relief.

Small was the thing I bought
Small was the thing at best.
Small was the debt, I thought,
But, O God, the interest, the interest!

You see, the principle of compound interest, which Einstein called the most powerful principle in the universe (or it used to be before your Money Market dropped to .2%!), operates in the spiritual harvest as well. People would never abuse alcohol, even once, if they understood the tragic results it can lead to in the lives of everyone around the abuser. People would not engage in sexual immorality, even once, if they could foresee the results of an unwed pregnancy, a sexually transmitted disease, a broken home, and the feelings of guilt and shame that are inevitable. People would refuse to lie if they understood the end result to which that little lie may lead.

And we must never think we are exempt from the Law of the Harvest just because we are believers. God does not give preferential treatment to believers in regard to sin’s consequences. Christians are just as susceptible to sexually transmitted diseases or cirrhosis of the liver or lung cancer as are pagans when they participate in sinful or harmful activities.

Oh, there are times when God may sovereignly and graciously alleviate some of the consequences of sin. I think it’s appropriate to pray, as David did when his infant son was sick, that God will not give us all that is due us. However, it would be a mistake to expect Him to remove the consequences, for the Law of the Harvest plays a very important role in continually reminding us of His love and of the need for holiness in our lives. Frederick Myers has the courage to offer this prayer: "Purge me from sin, but never from the pain."

4. The Principle of Interval: you reap only after you sow. Verse 9 reads, “Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.” No matter what the farmer plants, the crop must have time to grow and ripen. Likewise, the outcome of our investment in the Spirit is not always immediately known. Sometimes the harvest comes years later. Sometimes it will be apparent only in eternity. Eccl. 11:1 reads, “Cast your bread on the surface of the waters, for you will find it after many days.”

Waiting, of course, is not a strong suit for many of us. A man in our church in St. Louis bought 10,000 shares of Microsoft stock in 1990, but in the couple of months he owned it, it didn’t go anywhere, so he sold it. That same stock is worth over $250 million today! One commentator complained, “Christians frequently act like children in reference to this harvest. They would sow and reap in the same day.” When we have sown in the Spirit we need to have patience to wait for the harvest. A troubled marriage cannot be turned around over night; a sexual addiction will not be cured over night; a lifetime of bad habits cannot be reversed over night. But we can start sowing to the Spirit now and eventually reap a harvest if we do not give up. If we don’t start now, it will be that much longer before the harvest will be realized.

The principle of interval, however, is also a factor when we sow to the sinful nature. And that causes some of us to be careless, believing somehow that we will escape the harvest. We will not. There will be a payday someday. It is blessedly true that God can and does forgive men of
their sins–but consequences still follow.

The application of the law:

Now before I conclude, I want us to take the time to consider in a little more detail the two applications of the Law of the Harvest that Paul makes in our text.

1. The law of the harvest applies to the believer's giving. (6) We noted earlier in verse 6 that because the teacher shares the good things of the Word of God, the congregation is to share all good things with the teacher. I think almost any pastor feels a bit self-conscious when addressing this subject. But the Apostle repeatedly taught that the spiritual shepherds of the church should be supported by the gifts of God's people. In 1 Corinthians 9:11-14 he wrote,

If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we reap a material harvest from you? . . . Don't you know that those who work in the temple get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in what is offered on the altar? In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel.

1 Tim. 5:17,18 goes on in the same vein: “The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, (that literally means double pay), especially those whose work is preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, ‘Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain,’ and ‘the worker deserves his wages.’” While it’s not very flattering for a pastor to be likened to an ox, the imagery serves to make the point well. Just as an ox can’t work to his full potential if he isn’t given enough food to maintain his strength, so the teacher or preacher can’t do his best if he is struggling to provide the necessities of life.

Note, however, that it is the shepherd who does his work well and works hard who deserves to be supported. It is the worker, not the shirker, who deserves his wages. There have always been people in ministry who abuse the calling. Even today there are sufficient examples, especially among media ministers, of enormous salaries unjustified by corresponding attention to the preaching and teaching of the Word.

I believe this congregation has acted very responsibly in regard to paying its pastors. I would be remiss, however if I restricted the application of verse 6 just to pastors and professional ministers. There are many others who teach the Word faithfully and well besides full-time clergy. Are we to share all good things with them, too? What if they have a good job and don't need financial support?

Well, there are other ways to fulfill this exhortation. If there's an ABF leader who has significantly built the Word of God into your life or a S.S. teacher who has done so in your child's life, why not invite that person over for a meal, or give them a gift of appreciation, or think of some creative way to show gratitude. Paul's concern is that we place a sufficiently high value upon those who teach us God's Word.
If this responsibility is shirked, not only is the teacher cheated, but so is the learner, for he is robbing himself of the blessing of giving. Whatever a person sows, this he will also reap.

The second specific application of the Law of the Harvest the Apostle makes is to Christian service.

2. The law of the harvest applies to the believer’s service to others. (9,10) Verse 9 says, “Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.” While Paul never wearies of telling believers they cannot win God's favor by doing good deeds, he equally never wearies of telling them to do good deeds anyway. Doing good is like sowing seed. What is the harvest? Paul doesn't tell us specifically, but I think we can figure it out. Christian benevolence always produces good results eventually. In the life of the recipient it brings comfort, relief and encouragement. It may lead a sinner to repentance and to salvation. It may serve to arrest the moral deterioration of society.

And in the life of the one who is doing the good works there is also a harvest—not salvation, for that cannot be earned—but a harvest of joy, fulfillment, greater responsibility, and ultimately, rewards in heaven for faithful service. But all that is predicated upon not growing weary—and waiting for the appointed time when God will choose to produce the harvest.

Please take note of the little phrase, “as we have opportunity” in verse 10. There is a certain time of the year when a farmer can plant his crops. If he misses that time, the opportunity is gone. So also in the realm of Christian kindness, we must be ready when the opportunity is there, when the need is great. If we let it pass, God may give the opportunity to someone else, and to that person will go the harvest as well. Remember the words spoken to Queen Esther: “If you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place and you and your father's house will perish. Who knows whether you have not attained royalty for such a time as this?”

Finally, the Law of the Harvest has an important corollary.

The corollary to the law: It is this: You can do nothing about last year's harvest, but you can affect the ones to come. Do not say, “It's too late! I've sown my wild oats and I'm guaranteed a harvest of corruption. So why not just sow a few more?” Let me warn you. There's such a thing as a 20-bushel harvest and there's such a thing as a 60-bushel harvest. I’ve heard teens say, “I’ve already lost my virginity, so why not continue my sexual activity?” I’ve heard adults say, “I’ve had an affair; I’m already an adulterer, so what difference does it make if I continue?” The answer is that sexual sin, in particular, is cumulative in its effect. The more you sow to the sinful nature, the greater and more tragic the harvest will be.

By the same token, if you have failed to use your resources and time to sow in the field of the Spirit, it’s not too late to begin now. Yes, you’ve wasted a lot of good years, but God speaks in the book of Joel about restoring the years the locusts have eaten. Good seeds planted today may sprout and produce a harvest even after you’re gone.
One further thought. I have said there's nothing we can do about last year's harvest. That's not quite true. We can accept God's forgiveness. Sin is never acceptable to God and someone has to pay. But instead of you having to pay Jesus stepped forward and said, "I'll pay," and by dying in your place He satisfied God's wrath toward sin. Though sin is never acceptable to God, repentant sinners are. Jesus said to a woman caught in the very act of adultery, "Go now and leave your life of sin." Tainted people can come to God by faith and receive, in effect, a transfusion of Christ's blood. God declares all those who receive Jesus and trust in Him, "not guilty."

**Prayer:** Lord, we are reminded again that the consequences of sin are Your megaphone to get our attention and sometimes to keep our attention. Father, we invite you as the Divine Surgeon, to use your scalpel on our lives so that we may be healed. Purge us from sin, but never from pain, if the pain is needed to draw us close to You. Amen.

i. The consequences of sin may even follow us into eternity. In our Sunday at Six Bible study on Heaven, we've been talking about the Judgment Seat of Christ. Listen to this sobering verse from 2 Cor. 5:10: “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.” I do not believe there will be punishment for sins in Heaven, but I believe this verse indicates that there will be consequences, probably in terms of the level of privilege and responsibility we are given in Heaven that are related directly to our actions here on earth.