

What is in view

It might seem that most of Paul's concern in the letter to the Galatians has been getting our theology right. And, to some degree, that may be a correct perception. But Paul is well aware that *right living* flows out of *right theology*. His letter to the Galatians is not simply about getting their thinking Biblically oriented, he also wants Biblical thinking to usher in Biblical, grace-rooted, Spirit-led living as well. And that is what we focus on this week—the “living out” of the truth he has been teaching.

What is helpful to note

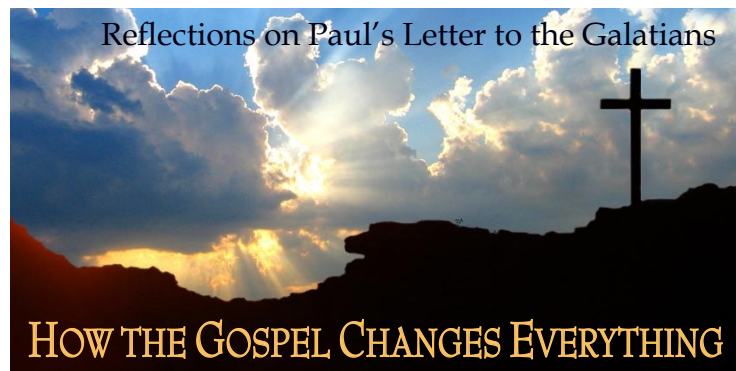
Basically, what is in view in the section we will explore today is one extended metaphor: the idea of sowing and reaping. This image might only vaguely “connect” for many of our people; we just don't do much planting and harvesting in our day-to-day lives. For those Paul first wrote to, the image is rich and multi-layered.

At the root of his thought is a simple concept; sowing results in crops! That is, there is a “cause and effect” process that goes on in life. (Some contemporary examples? Put the wrong fuel in your car, it runs poorly. Invest in the wrong mutual fund, you will have much less to retire on.)

Now we do need to root Paul's idea of sowing and reaping in the broader context of Galatians. So, let's walk through the essential components.

First, Paul is talking about sowing into *two different kinds of fields* (6:8). Keep in mind that the focus is not so much on what is being sown but *into what* one sows. (In this sense, Paul's metaphor is similar to Jesus' parable of the sower/soils as found in Mark 4:1-20. In that parable, as here, the

“Sowing to the Spirit means following the Spirit's lead. Sowing to the Spirit means living for God's pleasure instead of our own pleasure.”
Philip Graham Ryken



primary focus is on the soil into which the seed is sown.)

We also need to note that the contrast between *two kinds of living* has been a recurring theme in this letter. The contrast between *flesh-living* and *Spirit-living* has been common. Notice how it appears in 3:1-6; 4:21-31 and 5:16-24. “Flesh living” is the kind of life focused on: 1) what we can do “naturally;” 2) rules-based living; and 3) externals. “Spirit living” is the kind of life focused on: 1) what Jesus does for us; 2) grace-based living; and 3) what is going on in our hearts through the agency of the Spirit.

What then does it mean to “sow” to either the flesh or to the Spirit? It appears to be about *the way of life you give yourself to*. Clearly, we could talk about “sowing” in terms of specific actions or activities (and that would not be entirely without benefit), but the risk in doing so would be to reduce this “sowing and reaping” to a collection of rules to follow. (“Do these things, avoid these things!”) But, as we have seen, Paul is more interested in what is going on in our souls, in our thinking, in our believing than in getting our behavior to conform to some external standard.

The result of living in right relationship with the Spirit will be the fruit of the Spirit. Thus, “sowing to the Spirit” is one of the ways that Paul speaks about living in right relationship with the Spirit. We will reap the right “crop” (the fruit of the Spirit) if we “sow” into the right field (inclining ourselves to live in dependence on the Spirit).

Talking to your group

The opening questions attempt to leverage a contemporary parallel to the idea of sowing and reaping. Investing for retirement bears some likeness to Paul's idea. The best investment is the one that is invested in the most productive way (the focus being on “the field” in which the investment is sown) and the “crop” that comes in comes as one waits. This is Paul's thought in Galatians.

Try and maintain the focus on the *into what* idea of the sowing; Paul seems to be underscoring the *orientation of our sowing*. Are we really living as if the Spirit-led life is the life we are designed for? Do we really want to hear from the Spirit and have His fruit overflow in our lives? Are we longing to cultivate a prayerful communication with the Spirit so we can keep in step with Him? If so, we are “sowing to the Spirit” and the result will be a rich experience of life.

“The point [of verses 6:8] is not the seed that is sown but the field in which it is sown. What a man is to harvest depends upon the nature of the soil in which he sows. That which is natural and native to man (his own flesh) is different from the Spirit. And he who lives for the flesh, shall reap of it. Whoever devotes his life to the Spirit, shall reap life from the Spirit.”
Herman Ridderbos

Questions for Reflection and for Group Discussion

Thinking . . .

Most people do some planning for the “retirement years.” If you have started investing, how do you decide how and where to invest?

What is the biggest challenge to any investor as he or she waits for the return on the investment?

Reflecting . . .

As you read Galatians 6:7-10, keep the investing idea in mind as it might help you understand what Paul means about sowing and reaping.

What is the danger of deception that Paul has in mind here? In what way(s) might a follower of Jesus be deceived?

When Paul describes the sowing, what is he underscoring? What is the critical aspect of the sowing that he is stressing?

Why is it important for Paul to remind his readers (and us) to “not grow weary” in doing life the way the Spirit intends for us to live? Why is there a risk of growing weary?

Responding . . .

Drawing on what else you have been learning about life in the Spirit from Galatians, how would you describe what it means to “sow to the Spirit”?

What would it look like for you to do more “sowing to the Spirit” this week?

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Reflections on Paul’s Letter to the Galatians



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