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LIFE AND DEATH

## CHAPTER 7: SOWING AND REAPING

*GALATIANS 6:7-8 – “Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.”*

I PRESUME that the principle or the law which the Apostle lays down in this text will be admitted to be one universally received and acted upon with respect to this life; that men in general have learned by observation and experience that there is an exact correspondence between the seed sown and the harvest reaped; that they do not expect to gather grapes off thorns nor figs off thistles, but they expect that just as they sow in this physical world so they will reap. On this principle, parents instruct and counsel their children. They teach their children that according to their industry, application to their studies, their virtue, and care to improve their opportunities in youth will be their prosperity, health, and honour in maturer years and you will all say that is right counsel. Masters teach their servants that according to their punctuality and attention to business will be their success and prosperity in worldly things; while, on the other hand, that to be idle and indifferent to the interests of their employers, to waste their time and throw away their opportunities, will bring disgrace and poverty in old age. And I suppose that everybody approves of such counsel. They say, ‘Yes, that is too manifest to be contradicted’; and if I were to leave the operation of this law with its application to this life, there would not, be a dissentient voice in my audience; everybody, whether they acted upon it or no, would say, Amen. But you see the Apostle does not leave it here, but takes hold of this law and follows it on its operation into the moral and spiritual world and into eternity; and so I want as far as may be this afternoon to follow with Paul in tracing this law of moral fruit-bearing with respect to the soul, and into eternity.

And first I want you to note that the Apostle lays down in this text the principle that just as in natural things, so in spiritual things men reap according as they sow. He asserts that God has made it a fundamental principle of His government that men shall reap morally and spiritually, as they do physically, according as they sow. You can set at naught this law, but that will not deliver you from the sad and terrible consequences of its operation. God has settled it. The decree has gone out of His mouth, ‘that whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he reap’; and with the decree He has energized, so to speak, every moral action with the awful power of reproducing itself with increase;



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in other words, God has so made me in my body, my soul, and my spirit, that I cannot help reaping tomorrow according as I sow today, notwithstanding the intervening night's sleep. God has so made me, and I cannot get away from that, because it is the law of my being. If God were to die tomorrow, and if Heaven were to be extinguished, and Hell were to be extinguished, if I remained what I am, I should go on reaping as I have sowed. The operation of this law does not depend on anything outside of myself.

Let us just look, in the second place, at the development or working out of this law in actual experience. We will take for illustration the case of a little child. We will suppose that this child has arrived at the point of intelligence sufficient to define for himself right and wrong. Now then comes temptation, circumstances combine, and Satan presents a temptation to commit some sin, perhaps to tell a lie, or to appropriate something that is not his own. The moral sensibility of the child is shocked. He shrinks, so to speak, back from evil; and yet there is a perverse inclination in him which leads him in that direction, not for the sake, mind, of committing sin but for the sake of the self-gratification which the sin will bring. Nobody sins for the sake of committing sin, except he is become a demon.

Young man, when you do something which your conscience condemns, and which you know that the Holy God disapproves, it is not because you want your conscience to condemn you and God to disapprove you. Oh, no; it is because you like that thing, you want the gratification which the indulgence will bring. You are sorry, perhaps, that it is sinful; but you do it for the gratification of yourself, and thus commit sin in doing it. It is so with the child. It does not want to sin. Perhaps he has had a praying mother, and has been warned and cautioned, and he stands trembling, as it were, on the brink of fate. Satan urges the temptation, shows the desirableness of the object, pushes the child, so to speak, on to it; while conscience and the Spirit of God exhibit the consequence of the sin, persuade and lure the child in the opposite direction. Who shall settle what that child will do? God will not invade the freedom of the will even of a child of seven years old. No one can decide for him, no one in Heaven, earth, or Hell, but himself. Now we will suppose the child gives himself over to this temptation, gives his will over on the side of evil. He says, 'Yes, I will have that thing. I don't care about the consequences, I will have it!'; and he commits the sin—sows his first seed to the flesh. Now, wherein is the child in a worse position than he was before? How does the harvest of corruption begin to spring up? The very first effect of sin is to darken the understanding and harden the heart; consequently, instead of the shame and remorse which always follows a guilty act, leading



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the child, as it ought, to repentance and confession, the evil seed having conceived in the child's soul, brings forth falsehood and deception. To his darkened understanding and blunted moral perception it appears indispensable that the sin should be hidden; accordingly, he commits, perhaps, ten more sins in order to hide the first, and these in their turn produce a still more abundant harvest of corruption.

Of course the next time temptation is presented, the fall is easier, the child suffers fewer qualms of conscience; and if he be placed in circumstances of temptation continually, ten to one he will become a confirmed liar or a confirmed thief, as the case may be, if God does not interpose by some extraneous agency to prevent it. Sowing to the flesh naturally brings forth corruption. This would be a fortunate congregation if there were not some illustrations of this experience here! Ah! perhaps there is a young man in this Hall who left his father's house ten or five years ago, a comparatively pure and innocent youth, with holy aspirations, noble principles, and with the desire and intention to serve God. He kissed his mother and sister, and bade them good-bye with a heart bounding with anticipations of future prosperity and progress, and he intended to be good. But soon some fiend in human shape crossed his path, and perhaps lent him some insidious, venomous, hellish book, asking him to read it; and when he appeared to hesitate, laughed at him, and said, 'Oh, you are not tied to your mother's apron-strings now, you know. You are going to be a man on your own account; you can surely read this.'

#### THE FIRST QUESTIONABLE BOOK!!

Here just let me say to you who are parents, whatever else you leave undone, train your children in moral courage. Teach them from five years old to be hold enough to say 'No' to the tempter. Teach them to despise the man that can't bear to be laughed at. Teach them to stand in the light of God, and to say 'No' to Hell, and to all Hell's emissaries. Oh, that you would! You do not know what could be done in this direction with the Holy Spirit's help. But I am afraid a great many persons never try to do this. As that young man went home, looking over the first three or four pages of that book, he saw what it was, and what it was likely to do, and his conscience and the Spirit of God said, 'Shut it up and put it in the fire.' But he thought he would have to meet his so-called friend, and he did not like the idea of being laughed at. And so he let his will go over on the side of evil. He read it, and thus brought the first hellish breath of impurity over his being—he sowed his first seed to the flesh, and that young man would rather shrink into Hell than tell this congregation what the crop has been. Ah,



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if an angel had told some of you, three, five, ten years ago, that you would become what you are today, you would have laughed him to scorn. Whence has come this change, this harvest of corruption? From your own sowing. You have sown to the flesh. Conscience protested, the Spirit warned, but you followed your inclinations, gratified your senses, and thus have benumbed your moral nature and scathed your soul.

You remember the first questionable place you visited, how the Spirit thundered in the ears of your soul, that house is the way to Hell, going down to the chambers of death. But you stifled the voice of conscience, and yielded your will to unlawful gratification, and ever since you have been sowing to the flesh. I ask you, What are YOU reaping? for with some here the reaping has begun already! Ah, you are reaping a seared conscience, a blasted character, blighted prospects, a diseased body, and, in hours of solitude and sickness yet to come, hurricanes of anguish, remorse, and despair. Verily, 'God is not mocked.' But I beseech you to remember that you are your own destroyer. God has not clone it; angels have not done it; your parents have not done it; the Devil has not done it, he has only tempted you, whereas a whole legion of devils could not have forced you. No; you yourself have done it—you are your own executioner.

Oh, young men who have not yet entered the snare of the fowler, beware, shut your ears and your eyes to evil insinuations.

#### NEVER READ AN EVIL BOOK

If you chance on one, the moment you suspect its character, put it in the fire, and thus prevent it becoming a minister of death to any other soul. Do not let your soul be soiled with evil; keep clean as far as you are clean. It is an infinite advantage not to have known the Devil's dirtiness, not to have had anything to do with the unfruitful works of darkness, of which it is a shame even to speak or to think. Keep your hearts with all diligence, for out of them are the issues of life. Keep your imaginations, and don't allow polluting thoughts to gain access by any preventable mediums. Resist the Devil, and he will flee from you.

Further, I want you to observe that the most terrible penalties of this law are spiritual even in this world; though the body, the character, and the circumstances as a rule, partake in the corruption, it is the SOUL that reaps the principal harvest of woe. Go ask that poor emaciated prodigal, dying of



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the rottenness implanted in his bones by a career of intemperance and vice ask him what constitutes his severest suffering, his direct misery? He will not tell you of the prostration, the fever, and anguish of his body, but of the remorse, the agony, and apprehension of his soul. He cries, 'Oh, never mind my body; it is my soul, my poor soul!' If anybody here has ever stood by the side of such a bed, have you not read in the more than mortal agony of such a face the words, 'Be not deceived; God is not mocked?' There are some cases in which it seems, as though God lifted the curtain of mortality before the soul passed but of time, so that those around may see as far as possible the future heritage of woe consequent on a life of sin.

Alas! We in The Salvation Army get many awful illustrations of this. I will give you one or two which rise before me at the moment. One of our Officers was fetched late one night to visit a young man said to be dying. In relating the story he says: 'I shall never forget the scene; I could not get it out of my mind for many days and nights. When I entered the attic, I found the relic of a fine young fellow of about twenty-eight or thirty years of age, with beautiful black eyes almost standing out of his head, his hands clenched in agony, and he crying out in awful tones, "Curse them! curse them! WHERE ARE THEY? They have helped me to this, and now they have left me to die alone!" He referred to his evil companions. Our Officer drew near, and tried to calm and comfort him by inspiring hope of mercy and pardon, but he could produce no effect; the young man's rage and vengeance at the realization of his desperate state, and of the villany of those who had lured him on to it, could not be restrained, but continued to vent itself in wild denunciations and curses, until the one friend he had with him was obliged to retire and leave him to die with our Officer only in the room. He died in a perfect frenzy of rage and despair! Surely on his coffin-lid there should have been inscribed, 'He that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption.' That young man was a minister's son, and had been trained at college! Alas!

I fear this fact might have something to do with his downfall, if it be true, which I fear it is, that our colleges are much more prolific of infidelity and debauchery than of godliness and self-discipline!

Another case, which I had also from the lips of a devoted Officer, was that of a young woman who had allowed herself to be drawn from the paths of virtue into the vortex of impurity and corruption. Our visitor was sent for by a neighbour who had been alarmed by the shrieks of the dying girl. When he got to her bedside, he found her fingers so fast locked in the tresses of her hair that it was vain to try to disentangle them, and she was screaming, 'My soul is murdered, MURDERED! It's too late, too



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late! I'm lost, lost, LOST!' And thus she died. I might go on to multiply illustrations, but these are surely sufficient, sinner, to show you what the harvest must be of a life of sowing to the flesh.

Truly God has made sin to be its own punishment!

If the soul be immortal, there is only one thing necessary to its everlasting misery, and that is that it remain sinful.

I want you to note, further, that we have no reason to suppose that death in any way changes or annuls the action of this law. Both sound philosophy and Scripture assert that death is powerless to destroy or alter the nature of the soul, except, indeed, it be to quicken and intensify its faculties by removing the fleshly coil: none of its faculties will be destroyed or suspended; it will simply change worlds, enter on a new sphere of existence, and it will be amenable to the same law and the same God as in this life.

Reason as well as Scripture pronounces at the death of every sinner, 'Let him that is filthy be filthy still.' If this be true, it follows that, so far from death repealing this law of moral reproduction, it will greatly facilitate its operation, by removing those barriers which exist in this life. Here the worst of men reap only partially as they sow: this is a state of probation, not of retribution. And therefore God has ordained many alleviating circumstances and ministries of mercy to palliate, or, if men would let Him, to turn away the bitter fruits of their evil sowing, and induce them to begin to sow to the Spirit. But, after death, the sowing time will be ended, and there will be no further hindrance to the full harvest of woe and corruption springing from the evil seed sown in this life. Oh, sinner, what will you do then? All the enchantments of sinful sowing will have passed away for ever, and there will be nothing left but the DOLEFUL REAPING for ever and ever. Be not deceived. Do not let Satan lull you to sleep again. For as surely as you reap today according as you sowed yesterday, notwithstanding the night's sleep which has intervened, so surely must you reap in eternity as you have sown in time.

Further, the text and many other passages seem to indicate an analogy in kind as well as in degree between the character of the seed sown and the harvest to be reaped. This may be as literally true as that like begets like the world over; and therefore each soul may find its particular sins to have in them, the germ of their principal punishment. The 'worm that dieth not' has often been supposed to be the gnawings of conscience finally awakened on account of the sins of time. Alas! We know that



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this terrible imagery of our Saviour cannot be worse than the thing signified. We know also that it may be fitly applied to the cravings of sinful passion and the pangs of remorse even in this life; how much more when all the sources of gratification are eternally dry, all the alleviations withdrawn, all hope of relief dead. Ask the wretched slave of any sinful appetite what is his highest misery, and he will tell you the suffering consequent upon the cravings of his passion when he has no means to gratify it. 'Oh,' cried a poor dying drunkard awhile ago, with frantic and maniacal shouts, 'give me brandy: I will have brandy; I can't die without brandy; give me brandy.' Now, suppose the soul given up to the complete mastership of any sinful passion for ever, without one solitary source of gratification, and you have a being who may fitly appropriate the language which Milton puts into the mouth of Satan, 'Oh, could I flee myself, myself am Hell!'

Sinner, do you see that you are sowing a seed of corruption, whose hellish brood will sting your naked soul through all eternity? You are sowing to the flesh; but do you see what the harvest must be? for God has so made you, that if there were no material hell, while you exist and remain guilty, you must be a hell to yourself. Do you see you have no choice? you must go on eating the bitter fruit of your own doings for ever.

#### WHAT WILL YOU DO?

You cannot kill your soul; it is made of material on which you cannot lay violent hands—it will live in spite of you. What will you do? You have been sowing to the flesh all your life. You say, 'I have no power to sow to the Spirit, to righteousness, and to God.' Do you say, 'Woe is me, I am undone; there is no hope?' Are you tired of sowing to the flesh? are you willing to begin to sow to the Spirit? If so, Oh, joyful news! There is help, desperate as your case may be. Help is laid upon One that is mighty.

Only a God could meet your case, and lo! a God has met it. Jesus Christ, the Righteous. He has not destroyed this law, but He has found a way by which to deliver those who come to Him from its awful consequences by letting its envenomed tail so to speak, sink into His own bosom, and Himself bearing the punishment due to your deadly sowing, in His own 'body on the tree. He who knew no sin has been made a curse for you, that you might be made a partaker of the righteousness of God in Him.



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If you will only come to Him, and cast your guilty soul on His sacrifice, He will free you from the bitter consequences of your past evil ways. And He will, 'better still, renew your mind, and put a new spirit within you, so that henceforth you shall be able to sow to the Spirit. And then this terrible law of which we have been speaking will become your friend, and you' shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.

He has done this for some of us. We once sowed to the flesh, 'more or less in outward acts, but all alike in heart. We lived unto ourselves, and are now ashamed of the fruits of our evil sowing. But 'He saved us by the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost and He will save you if you will let Him. 'Oh!' said a young man the other day, 'but the marks, the stain, can never be got off.' 'Oh, yes!' we replied, 'they can; there is one medium, and ONLY ONE, that can wash the blood-red hand and the blood-red conscience too, and that is the precious blood of Christ.' We could show you thousands in the ranks of The Salvation Army once as bad as you, and most likely a great deal worse.

Men and women, some of them, who have been favoured with every advantage in youth—wept over and entreated by Christian parents, loved and laboured for by teachers and ministers, who notwithstanding, had wandered to the ends of the earth, and committed every sin that human nature is capable of—hardened, besotted, brutalized, sunk to the lowest level of debauchery and crime. And yet now they are washed, they are sanctified and restored to favour with God and man, all through the Blood. Will you try it? Will you put your foot down, and say this afternoon, 'By the grace of God, I will never sow another seed to the flesh?' Will you let go all your miserable provision for the gratification of the flesh? and will you come and pledge yourself to be the Lord's in righteousness and in true Holiness? If you will, be sure you shall know the blessing of sowing to the Spirit in this life, and in the next you shall reap 'life everlasting.' May God help you! Amen.

From a series of lectures by Catherine Booth in 1883.