

Text: Galatians 6:7-10 – Living in Light of Eternity

Exegetical Big Idea: The Christian is called to enduring faithfulness to God in this life, with the hope and expectation that the results of that faithfulness will have eternal results.

Homiletical Big Idea: **You will harvest what you plant, so plant things that last for eternity.**

Fallen Condition Focus: Humans are short sighted. We either are prone to sinning without thinking of the consequences, or fail to be obedient because we fail to see the results and reward.

Background:

Paul has laid out for the Galatians what it means for the believer to have freedom in Christ. By grace, through faith, the believer is completely forgiven of their sin and given adoption into God's family. Not only is the believer firmly established in Christ, but Christ is established in the believer by the person of the Holy Spirit. Paul has been urging the Galatians to realize this reality and has written then commands like "walk with the Spirit", "be led by the Spirit", and "keep in step with the Spirit".

All those are speaking of the here and now faithfulness to God's leading.

But now Paul is talking about planting to the Spirit, which is future looking. That's Paul's reminder to the Galatians that the end goal of our faith and life is not simply for the here and now, though that is important, but ultimately we live in the light of eternity to come.

We ought to think about, and anticipate the life to come, and live our lives in light of eternity.

Intro:

There are things in life that have exceptions to the rule. Take for example the English language. We have rules for the English language, like what sounds letters make, and what vowels sound like depending on how they are placed in the word. But there are so many exceptions to the English language that make absolutely no sense. Take for example the letters "gh". They sound differently depending on if they make up the word "through", or if they are part of the word "tough". Why is that? There is no logical behind it. It's an exception.

But there are other things in life that simply have no exceptions. Gravity for example always works in one way and has no exception. Today gravity is pulling you down, and it pulled people down to the earth thousands of years ago, and it always will. Spring has always come after winter. There has never been a year where it went directly from winter to fall. That's the rule and there is no exception.

Paul today in these verses points out another one of life's rules that have no exception. That rule is this "a person reaps what they sow". It is a hard and fast rule that what is harvested, is always what was planted. And of course Paul is not giving us gardening tips, but a rule for life.

When Paul talks about sowing, or planting, he is talking about the life choices that you make today. He is talking about how you are living your life now. And when he talks about reaping, or harvesting, Paul is making the true statement that your actions have consequences that will be seen later. That may mean sometime in this lifetime, but it also and ultimately means, for eternity.

The truth is, everybody is planting something with their lives. And because everyone is planting something, everybody will harvest that they are planting. What Paul is urging the Galatians, and what we need to hear today is that:

You will harvest what you plant, so plant things that last for eternity.

(Vv. 7-8) We know exactly what we are planting, because we plant according to our heart's desire.

Paul begins these verses with a command. He says “do not be deceived”. Now being deceived is not something that a person usually does on purpose. Being deceived is usually done without our being aware, or by someone who wants to convince us of something. It's almost certain that Paul has in mind the false teachers here. That's exactly what the false teachers are trying to do to the Galatians. They are trying to convince them that obeying the law of God (along with faith in Jesus) is what makes a person right with God. Paul has made it crystal clear that faith alone in Jesus alone makes someone right with God. So not only is Paul warning the Galatians against the false teachers, and warning that following their teaching will only lead to destruction, but in a way it's a warning to the false teachers themselves. The warning here is that God cannot be mocked.

But isn't God mocked all the time? All throughout history God has been mocked. All you need to do is turn on the T.V. and see that the world mocks God and his people all the time! So how can Paul say “God is not mocked”? And the language used here is not that God *shouldn't* be mocked, as in we should be careful not to. The language here is that it is a reality that God is simply *not* mocked. Mocking God is trying to convince yourself that you can live your life *your* way instead of God's way, and thinking you will get away with your sin.

What Paul is saying here is that no matter what kind of insult or rebellion is thrown at God, God will always be proven right and holy, and those who try and mock him will be proven foolish and defeated.

[My mind thinks of the Philistines in the time of Samuel. The Israelite army went out to fight against the Philistine army, and the two evil sons of Eli the high priest decided that they would bring the ark of God to the battlefield. This was not uncommon. Joshua after all marched the ark of God around Jericho. But the two sons did this treating God's ark like a good luck charm. Certainly, they thought, we can twist God's arm to helping us win this battle because after all, his ark is here! In this way they were treating God with contempt, or mocking him. But God was not mocked! The Israelites were defeated and the ark captured by the Philistines. Furthermore, the sons died in the battle. But that's not even the end of it! The philistines then took the ark and put it in the temple of their god. They were declaring that their god was victorious of the God of the Israelites. They were mocking God. Except God was not mocked. He broke the head off of the statue of their god and inflicted the philistines with sickness and rats. When the philistines had had enough of the punishment of God, they sent the ark back to Israel.]

God was never mocked in all of that. He proved to be holy and right, and everyone else wrong.

So how does someone try and mock God today? Simply put, to try and mock God is to live life the way you think you should live it, and live life contrary to God's design and laws, and think it'll all work out!

Paul explains this when he says “whatever one sows, that will he also reap.” When Paul says “whatever one sows” he means that one way or another you are making a choice in what you are planting. Everyone is planting something, meaning everyone is making choices with their lives now. Those choices

come from either the desire to honour God and our love for God, or honour ourselves and out of love for ourselves. We deceive ourselves if we think we can live a life that is contrary to God and dishonoring to him and think it'll all work out! We deceive ourselves if we think God will forget about our sin, or somehow be ok with it.

Your life today, is a life of planting. The everyday choices you are making is an act of planting, that will grow into an outcome later. Paul clearly indicates that things are not planted accidentally. Paul says "whatever one sows". We are the ones doing the planting! Nobody is planting by accident, it is a choice. And everyone plants according to what is most desired in their heart. And this means something very important. We know exactly what we are doing when we plant seeds in our lives.

[A few years ago our family had a pass to get into Point Pelee. We would go to the boardwalk and the out to the point and let the kids get some energy out. It's a nice drive actually from the gate to the point. Nice enough to forget that there is a speed limit. So if you didn't know already, there is a speed limit. And, also in case you didn't know, the park has rangers that can pull people over for speeding. I know this because I did the research for you. I remember I was driving down that road and saw the white ranger vehicle behind me, and instantly I knew I was getting pulled over. I forget my speed but I was definitely speeding. So yes, he pulled me over into one of the parking lots. Now there are two ways to go about this. One way is to deny any wrongdoing and demand to see proof I actually was speeding and try and argue my way out of it. But I couldn't do that, because I knew exactly what I was doing. I had no excuse. I planted the seed of speeding, and now I was reaping the harvest of a potential ticket. So I admitted it. I told him I was sorry and wasn't paying attention and that I was in the wrong. He let me off, which was very nice of him. It could have had something to do with the fact that one of the kids who had been sleeping had just woke up and was now screaming as the ranger is trying to talk to me, but either way I was happy I wasn't getting a ticket! But he didn't have to. I was speeding, and I deserved a ticket.]

Nobody is going to stand before God, and be surprised that they sinned against him! We know exactly what we are doing. Paul had said just a few verses ago that the works of the flesh are evident. And the outcome of the works of the flesh is death.

Paul explains this in verse 8. He explains that the one who sows "to his own flesh" will reap "corruption". When Paul says "to his own flesh", he is obviously meaning the person who lives a lifestyle of sin. This lifestyle of sin will only lead to corruption.

The idea of corruption here is simply the idea of destruction. Sin is destructive. First of all it's destructive to life now. I've never heard of sin between a husband and wife bringing them closer together. I've never heard of a teacher praising a student for cheating on a test. I've never heard of a boss giving a promotion to a person who has stolen money from a company. These are obviously big examples, but it's the same thing in everyday life. If you are a person who has been caught lying, or gossiping, what does that do to the relationships with the people around you? Nothing good.

But ultimately here the picture is eternal destruction. If you live a lifestyle that is marked by sin and rebellion against God, why would you think God will usher you into his presence when your time here on earth is done. You didn't desire his holiness on earth, you won't desire it then. You will reap a harvest of destruction.

But there's good news. There's another part to verse 8. But the one "who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life". What does this mean? Well if sowing to the flesh means living a life that is in rebellion against God and making yourself your own god, then sowing to the Spirit is the exact opposite! Sowing to the Spirit means living a life that honours God as your creator and authority, and acknowledges that his ways are best. And this too is deliberate! Which means nobody is holding you back but yourself. And the result of this is *not* eternal destruction, but eternal life. This is nothing short of life in the very presence of God, where sin and pain is gone, for all of eternity.

Now you may say "what, is Paul advocating for earning eternal life with how we live?" Absolutely not. The first seed to be sown is the seed of faith in Christ. And that's good news, because before any of us come to Christ our gardens are absolutely full of weeds, which are the evil deeds that we've done. When a person comes to Christ in faith and repents of their sin, God weeds the garden! The seed of faith in Christ is planted and God causes it to grow. The person who has accepted the grace of God then starts living a life of obedience, out of response.

What needs to be asked of all of us is "what are we planting". It's a deliberate action! Either a person is living to please themselves, or they are living to honour God. And don't be deceived,

You will harvest what you plant, so plant things that last for eternity.

But you know what else is true? Living a life of obedience to God is hard work, and it can get weary.

(V. 9) Don't give up just because you can't see the results yet

Paul realizes that the Christian life is not easy! And it's easy to get discouraged when the results of our labour are not immediately seen. That's why he writes in verse 9 "and let us not grow weary of doing good".

If you've been a Christian for any length of time you understand what this means. We are called to do good in every area of life, wherever we are, and every moment of every day. And certainly, living in obedience is a joy for sure, but it can nonetheless be discouraging when we do our best to live a life of obedience, and we don't see immediate results.

This is certainly true in ministry. It's rare there are immediate results after preaching a sermon, or teaching a lesson. This isn't only true for pastors, but for everyone. How often do you see immediate results from encouraging someone at church, or helping a kid find a passage in their Bible, or greeting someone as they come in? These are all good things, and things that don't often have immediate results. This is just as true in every day life as it is in ministry. Raising children,

Paul was also not immune to this. He picks his words carefully. He does not say "you guys" at the start of verse 9, but "let us". Paul understood the weariness of doing good and not seeing immediate results. I think the "let us" statement here is a reminder that we are in this together. Paul had just talked about bearing each other's burdens. Here is a burden that we can bear for each other! Let us encourage one another to do good.

A reminder here that word order is important. We can easily read this and think that getting weary is a sin, that we should always be at full energy ready to do anything that comes our way. But that's not what Paul is saying. In the original language the words "doing good" come first in the sentence. When this happens that means that the emphasis here is on the "doing good". In other words, it's not

weariness in general that we need to avoid, but weariness in doing good specifically. Weariness and tiredness is a part of life. In fact it's actually a good part of life. You are meant to feel tired at the end of the day! We are meant to feel tired because it is a reminder that we need rest. Rest is a gift from God to enjoy and a reminder that the only one who doesn't need rest is God. In fact, since we are commanded to rest and Sabbath, resting is part of doing good!

In all of life, whether we eat or drink, or even sleep, we ought to do it all for the glory of God. That's what Paul is talking about.

Why not give up doing good? Because harvest season is coming. Paul says that "in due season" there will be a harvest. That is anticipatory language. We may not have it yet, but we can be sure it's coming.

[We have lots of farmers in Leamington, and some here at our church. I don't know much about farming myself but I do understand one concept, namely, the hope of anticipation. We have just come out of the spring time, when crops are planted. Now I don't know how much it costs to sow a field with seed, but I can't imagine it's cheap. I also don't know how long it takes to sow a field, but I can't imagine it's a 15 minute process. I also don't know how much all that machinery costs to make the planting process easier or quicker but I can't imagine that it's free. The point is, there is so much time and money and effort put into planting a field, and how much return is there on that investment? Nothing! Why does the farmer plant? In anticipation of the harvest.]

The Christian life is like that! We live our lives of obedience and glory to God not, in anticipation of what is to come. There is one key difference however between us and the farmer. It's possible for the farmer to lose his entire investment. Maybe a flood drowns the crops, or a sickness, or drought, or any number of things. The Christian however does not have to worry that our planting will return empty. Look again at verse 9 at the word "will"

Here's the reality for the Christian. Whatever good that you do in your life that is glorifying to God and for the building up of his people, no matter how small or how insignificant you may think it is, God will do something with that! Sure, *you* might not see how exactly God does something with it, and it might not be what you think he *should* do with it, but it is an absolute certainty that every action that the believer does to glorify God will turn into a harvest.

[I had been doing some studying in Romans lately. If you've ever read Paul's letter to the Romans you know it's a heavy book in terms of theology! It has some huge doctrines that are central to the Christian faith. The whole book is an amazing read, and then it ends with chapter 16. After all the glorious theology in the letter, chapter 16 seems like an odd way to end since it is just a bunch of names that Paul wants to say hi to. We don't know who most of these people even are! Until you look a little closer of course. One name that Paul mentions is a guy named Epenetus. Paul simply says about Epenetus that he is "the first convert to Christ in the province of Asia". The area of Asia that Paul was referring to is admittedly different than the continent of Asia that we know today, but there's a significant truth to that verse. The reality is, before there were many converts to Christ, there was one. One guy, Epenetus, heard the gospel and believed. The seed of the gospel was planted in Asia. Paul lived to see a bit of the harvest of that seed for sure, but he never saw the full extent of it.]

We have no idea what God is going to do with our good deeds of obedience. It might not be as dramatic as we see with Epenetus, but you can rest assured that God will cause it to grow.

Are you praying for someone to come to faith in Christ? Maybe it's your kids or a family member or friend? Don't stop. Don't give up because it hasn't "worked" yet. It won't go to waste. Are you a beacon of light at your work or school, where you are not like those around you who delight in the world? Keep doing good, and modeling for them the joy of Christlikeness. Are you suffering in the body or suffering in the heart and striving to keep your trust and joy in the Lord? Don't stop. God will turn that into a harvest.

We have no idea what God is going to do with our deeds that honour him. But one thing is for sure. He will grow it.

But wait, if we read a little further Paul says "if we do not give up". Are we to understand that Paul is saying it's possible for a Christian to throw it all out and walk away from living for Christ? I don't think Paul is saying that at all. I think what he is saying is that the harvest will reveal those who have planted good, versus those who have planted evil. This is what we call "the perseverance of the saints", and it's the doctrine that by faith in Christ you are in God's hand and are held there no matter what. Nothing can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus. And because God causes his people to persevere, the harvest at the end of their lives will be the harvest of a lifetime of sowing good.

God persevering his people also proves something else, namely, the goodness of God to hold us through all of life's hardships. We will look back on day and see the gracious hand of God on our lives and how he gave us strength to continue to sow good for his glory.

But I don't think eternity is solely the "due season" that Paul is talking about! I think God in his graciousness to us allows us to see glimpses and get tastes of the harvest even now. Just like Epenetus was a taste of a larger harvest, we do see the beginning of the harvest now often.

[One commentator likened this to a family who goes and picks berries. Our family has done this on many occasions. We will often pick many buckets of berries with the intention of making jam or pies or crisps or things like that. But even while we're picking for the future (and if the place allows it!) you can pick a berry and eat it right then and there.]

It is the case sometimes that people we are praying for come to Christ. It is the case sometimes that our good deeds see a return for good. It is the case sometimes that our extending of grace to others deepens and restores relationships. It's not always the case but it is sometimes, and when it does praise God for that and let it encourage you on to further planting goodness, because it's a taste of the fullness of the harvest to come when Christ returns. Don't give up planting just because you can't see the results yet.

You will harvest what you plant, so plant things that last for eternity.

(V. 10) The time to plant is now

Paul goes on to say "so then" in verse 10. In light of the reality that those in Christ will plant in the Spirit and harvest eternal life, and in light of the fact that God will cause the harvest to grow and it is a certainty, what are we to do? The answer is simple, start planting!

Paul says "as we have opportunity, let us do good..." If it's true that God will cause our good deeds to glorify him, and he will make sure it happens, then what reason do we have not to start right now?

Now we might look at this verse and say “well then, I need to start looking for opportunities to do good”. But is that what Paul is saying? Are opportunities for good like fireflies that light up for a moment but are gone before you can catch them? Is Paul saying that opportunities are few and far between and we can only capitalize on them when they show up? I don’t think so at all. I think Paul is indicating here that we already have opportunity to for glorifying God!

Paul is saying “you currently have every opportunity right in front of you, so take it!”

[I have been married now for almost 11 years. When we were dating, and when we were first married I had the notion that I needed to show my love for my wife in large extravagant ways, and if I didn’t do that she wouldn’t know I loved her. I remember planning an elaborate date night when we were dating, complete with invitation and candles and jazz music. I thought that expensive gifts and surprises were the way she would know I love her. And don’t get me wrong, it’s nice to do those things once in a while! But you know what I’ve come to learn? I don’t need to go searching for the big ways to show my wife I love her, because opportunities for that are plentiful and right in front of me. I can show my wife I love her when I make tea at night for her. I can show her I love her when I come home from work and take all the kids out for a bit to give her some time to relax. I can show her I love her by looking her in the eyes and listening to her when we have a conversation. That’s not expensive and it’s not complicated. I don’t have to go searching for these opportunities, they are always right in front of me.]

If you’re waiting for big opportunities to show God just how awesome you can be, you’re doing it wrong. God is not calling you to be faithful in the large things, without first being faithful in the small things. The question to ask is “today, in the everyday things of my life, how can I do good for God’s glory and the benefit of others?” How can you serve your wife or husband or kids today? How can you encourage or help someone in a need today? How can you show Christlikeness today? Don’t worry about the result, let God take care of that, you just ask how you can sow good where God has called you today.

And who we are supposed to do good to? Everyone. This is easy enough when people are nice. But we all know that’s not the case. People are often hostile towards Christians. Paul however does not give us the excuse that we may show evil to those who show evil to us. I know it’s not easy, and yet we are called to do good even to those who hate us.

Do you know why we are called to do good to those who hate us? Because by doing so we demonstrate what Christ has done for us. Never forget that you were at one point an enemy of God. In fact you hated God. You wanted above all else to be your own god, and you despised the Lord. Christ had every reason to leave you in your sin and let you perish, and you deserved it. I did too. But that’s not what Christ did. He became your servant. He humbled himself, though he didn’t have to, and gave himself for you. While you were still a sinner, and in rebellion against God, he died for you and reconciled you to God. If Christ was willing to do that for you, then can we not then be carriers of that goodness to those who are still in their sin and enemies of God?

And this goodness has to start with us in the church. Paul says “especially those who are of the household of faith.” Once again we see the language of family. Paul reminds us that we are connected and united in Christ. What holds us together, our bond, is the strongest bond there can possibly be. Which means if we cannot show love and do good to those in the family of Christ, there is simply no way you can love those outside the family of God in a Christ like way. We can be a church with all the best

programs and biblical preaching, and cool music, and whatever else. But if we have no love for each other, Paul says we are like a resounding gong. It's just noise and nonsense.

But instead, what if we were a church that was known for its sacrificial love for each other? What if we were known to be a people who were committed to seeing Christ formed in each other? What if we were known for gentleness with each other when we sin against each other? What if we were known to be quick to give mutual help for the burdens of life? All of a sudden we're not a resounding gong, but the melody of salvation to the world.

That's the kind of harvest I want to see, and I know you do too if you are in Christ, because that's a harvest that will last for eternity. The time for planting for that harvest is now. Let's plant now and just see what God will do with it.

You will harvest what you plant, so plant things that last for eternity.