

Sowing to Flesh or Spirit?

Galatians 6:7-16

Cradock Presbyterian Church

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Who would ever ridicule God? Surely none of us! And even folks who claim they're non-believers wouldn't do that – they might be wrong, and who would want to take a chance on being wrong regarding God?

Yet that's the suggestion right up front in this passage, that somehow God is being mocked, being ridiculed. If you remember how Paul argues, he does it sort of backwards. He gives the *conclusion* first, then gives the reasons. What's the reason he says God is being mocked? "For you reap whatever you sow." Common sense, I guess, but how is God being mocked here? It's all about flesh versus Spirit.

First, there was the Law. You know, all that good stuff God gave Moses back there on Mt. Sinai. It was supposed to be a help for us humans. It became distorted, *corrupted*, because it became, not a spiritual thing, but an earthly thing. Read "earthly" as "of the flesh," and you're right where Paul is in this letter. I suppose that requires a little explanation. When Paul says "flesh," he's not talking about the tissue surrounding our bones. Nor is he talking about "*sins* of the flesh," sexual stuff, as some folks think. He's contrasting two different realms of existence. To live "according to the flesh" means to have your life oriented to the things of this world. To live according to the spirit, on the other hand, means to live your life oriented to God.

So, the Law that was supposed to be spiritual became "of the flesh," of this world. You see many examples in the New Testament. One of my favorites is the story of the rich young ruler who came to Jesus, asking, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?"

First, Jesus asks him about obeying the Law, which this young man says he has done perfectly. Then Jesus tells him there is one thing he lacks, which is all the wealth he has! He will cover this “lack” if he goes and sells it, and gives the money to the poor! You remember how that story ended. The rich young ruler went away sad, because he couldn’t, or wouldn’t, let go of all the earthly things he had. He had made obedience to the law an accomplishment, a worldly thing, NOT a way to get closer to God, which is spiritual. So he couldn’t think in terms of the Spirit; he couldn’t let go of the things of this world.

So the point is, God is mocked when we think we don’t have to make a choice between flesh or spirit. It’s really about where you want to be. Do you want to be with God, living in his Spirit, living not according to the flesh but to God’s intentions? Or do you want to center things on yourself? – which is really what you do when you live to the flesh, to the world. Here’s the thing: if you live according to the flesh, that means all your works in this life are like sowing to bad ground. Except, the bad ground is you yourself, *your* ambitions, *your* desires. And pay attention to Paul’s words about corruption! Sowing to your flesh means you will “reap corruption.” That word for “corruption” also means *destruction*. You destroy yourself if you go that way, if you remain centered on yourself, remain centered on the world.

But if you go as you should, if you “sow to the Spirit,” now you’re on good ground. Paul says “you will reap eternal life,” but it’s clear he believes it’s more than that. In chapter 5, in the section right before ours, Paul contrasts the “fruits of the flesh” with the “fruits of the Spirit.” Sowing to the flesh yields you the following fruits: “fornication,

impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these.” You might have noticed that some of those things listed aren’t *acts*, they’re ways you live.

Enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, and envy are down times in life. They’re times when life feels bad, and a believer can feel disconnected from God. Paul concludes this list by saying, “those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.” I say that if you do the action things he lists here, you’ll end up with those “modes of living,” those negative feelings, that he also lists.

Then Paul lists the things that result from sowing to the Spirit: “the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.” Now, look at those things! They’re NOT works, not a one of ‘em; what they are, are conditions of a good life. So here comes the question: Which way would you like to live? I think that’s the point that gets missed here. We focus on the end of the section; we miss the power of God’s promise to us in these lists. Live according to the Spirit, says God, and your life will be just *awesome*. God says: My son came and died to ensure that you’d get to live this good life. Why would you choose any other way?

And then we come to the end of Paul’s words on all of this, and they seal the deal. “May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.” Paul is saying, I have been freed from living according to the flesh. So what does that mean? It means eternal life. In Jesus Christ, God has seen to it that not only will we have eternal life if we believe, but our *earthly, fleshly* lives will be just terrific. Which life do you want? The fleshly life that

ends up in corruption, that ends up in destruction? Or the one that's great now, and ends up in heaven with God?