

Do Unto Others And Reap What We Sow

Two Principles Regarding Holiness

John W. Ritenbaugh

Given 23-Jan-10; Sermon #974B

In my previous sermon on the priesthood ("The Priesthood of God (Part 6)"), I opened by expounding briefly on the fact that a very important aspect of holiness is that we must grow to love each other as Christ has loved us. This sermon will briefly cover two aspects of what we must give ourselves over to in order to accomplish this. We are going to begin in Matthew 11.

Matthew 11:28-30 Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.

During the 1960s, there was a philosophical concept that was floated in the public arena by a theologian by the name of Fletcher. That philosophy was called "Situation Ethics." It promoted the thought that Christianity and most especially the keeping of the Ten Commandments were unreasonably difficult and in fact binding. The concept was illustrated by positing circumstances in which obedience put a Christian into an inescapable "catch 22" situation.

For example, would Jesus lie to save His mother's life? If He responded one way, His mother would die. If He responded the other way, He would die. Many similar scenarios were devised which if they did occur would certainly put the Christian into a "lady or the tiger" situation.

The philosophy may have persuaded some, but enthusiasm for it died quickly because it had several holes in it about a mile wide. One of the largest of which is that it did not take God's oversight of His children into consideration at all. In other words, would they ever get into that kind of a situation?

Human nature does tend to make this way complicated. But I wonder if we grasp God's law in all its simplicity compared to the way this world has chosen. How or by what means or what way do people's lives become laden so that a weariness is produced?

We are going to string three concepts together here. The first one is in Leviticus 18:5. You do not really need to turn to it, because I am just going to stay here for a second or two. This should actually be a well known scripture:

Leviticus 18:5 You shall therefore keep My statutes and My judgments, which if a man does, he shall live by them.

This is saying essentially that, "*If you keep My commandments, you will live in My favor, and you will be blessed.*" That is the implication of what He is saying.

Now I want you to go to I Timothy 1. Paul wrote this to Timothy:

I Timothy 1:5 Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith.

Interpreted: the purpose of the commandment is to produce a wonderful, favorable living circumstance for a person.

We were just in Matthew 7, and we are going to go right back there again and read one of the verses that he went through there just ever so briefly.

Matthew 7:12 Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.

Now simply stated, this is the formula for making right, practical use of God's Word: "*Do unto others, including God Himself, as you would have others do unto you.*" Do we realize this is an active, dynamic, living law? Keep it and its God-intended purpose will be produced in one's life.

Everyone wants to be loved, respected, and to have peace and security in their life even as you do. Nobody wants to be offended, taken advantage of, and trod upon. Neither do you. We all want to be served, maybe even pampered. We want to be given consideration. We want to be heard. There is a way that these things can be produced so we can have them the right way and in the right amount. God was talking about balance.

Are you aware, that the way to produce these things in or for yourself is to give others the same love, respect, and kindness that we want for ourselves? There is a reciprocity here.

If we stop to think about this principle before acting, it is going to severely put restraints upon our selfish actions that might otherwise produce a negative reaction. Would you want to have done to you or said about you the thing you are about to say to another? Put the shoe on the other foot. Do you want to be gossiped about, lied to, and stolen from? Nobody wants those things. Why do we do it to others? Well, there are reasons for that.

Let us go—connect another thing to this—to Acts 20. Paul is speaking:

Acts 20:35 I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, "It is more blessed to give than receive."

Along with Matthew 7:12, do we believe this principle? They are linked. They cannot really be separated from one another. We have to give of ourselves in order to get from others the way we want to be treated by them. This verse, Acts 20:35, defies normal, carnal reasoning. Carnality in human nature is self-centered.

What this proverb of Jesus' is teaching us is that when one gives, both the recipient and the giver are blessed. It may not be immediately, but it starts the ball rolling in that direction.

Now, other teachings of Jesus in other places clarify that we are not to give in order to get. That motivation will destroy what one has done. It is just like we are making a business out of it. No, this is something that has to be done out of a simple and pure heart because Jesus commanded it, and we want to glorify Him. So giving to get should not be our motivation. However, on the other hand, it is also true that when one does give, he is blessed even as the receiver is.

We can make an equation out of this. But, the answer would be, one can lose only when the motivation is self-centered.

We are going to look at this in a little bit different context, just very briefly, going back to the book of Matthew again, this time to chapter 20.

Matthew 20:26-28 Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.

This is telling us that the most important in God's eyes is the servant. When one begins to do to others what they want done to them, they are putting themselves at the service of the other person. They are voluntarily doing this.

One who truly gives of himself ends up being the chief. We are not to do this in order to get to be there, but I just want to show you that God is showing that there is a blessing for doing as He says. Even as He said in Leviticus 18: "If you keep my commandments, you will be blessed." That is a promise.

So what I am trying to help you to see, right at this point in the sermon, is that doing unto others as you would have others do unto you...there are blessings that will flow from God because this is done.

One of the blessings is going to be holiness, because God requires of those who are training for the priesthood that they love one another as Jesus loved them. So in doing this we are making ourselves servants of others, and that is exactly what God wants.

The greatest servant of all is God Himself. He lives to give. He tells us in Hebrews 1 that He upholds all things by the word of His power. We can break this down into areas that are really easily understood, and they are true nonetheless, and they are important to life. Like every breath of air we take is the result of a gift from God, because He is not allowing things to fly apart. He keeps it going, so that we might be able to share the Kingdom with Him.

Let us go back—we are going to start adding something to this—to Ecclesiastes 11. We will begin to expand out from the Matthew 7:12 verse.

Ecclesiastes 11:1-2 Cast your bread upon the waters, for you will find it after many days. Give a serving to seven and also to eight, for you do not know what evil will be on the earth.

Now this will give you more understanding as we move along here. But, this is a very practical piece of wisdom from God's Word in living the right kind of life and becoming holy through serving one another and doing unto others as we would have others do unto us.

So we are going to link this piece of wisdom with another law. It is back in the book of Galatians.

Galatians 6:7-10 Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. And let us not grow weary

while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those of the household of faith.

Like Matthew 7:12, this is a simple but, on the other hand, gigantic principle. It is (like Matthew 7:12) a living law, and Paul is counseling that we not be deceived into thinking that God is somehow fooled or overlooking our pretended obedience. We cannot get away with that with Him. He wants this to be done out of a pure heart, out of simplicity; because He has commanded it, we are going to do it.

Now we are going to go back to Proverbs.

Proverbs 11:18 The wicked man does deceptive work, but he who sows righteousness will have a sure reward.

God guarantees it. We cannot lose except the motivation be wrong.

Proverbs 22:8 He who sows iniquity will reap sorrow. [Some Bibles say “calamity.” Whatever one sows, that is what they are going to reap. Iniquity produces calamity.] And the rod of his anger will fail [come to ruin].

A simple analogy using gardening will illustrate this: You sow many carrot seeds and a big crop is produced, sow a few seeds and one can expect just a small crop.

The last line says that those who sow evil will produce nothing toward God’s Kingdom, and thus they will be failures. They may be a great financial success, but as far as God is concerned, because God is overseeing all, they are going to be failures.

Life is very much like a garden. If you sow gossip, you are going to reap trouble. Sow strife, and you are going to get it back. Sow love, and you will get it in return.

To really appreciate this, we must grasp that we are sowing every day of our life. So we must stop and consider, “What am I sowing even at this present time?” Is our mind drifting off somewhere? It is going to affect the crop.

We are all prone to ask from time to time, “Well, I have been sowing for a long time and when am I going to reap?” Consider this, though. Sometimes it is a long time between sowing and reaping. If you sow a tomato plant, you will get a crop in roughly seventy days. Plant a pecan tree, and it might be twelve to fifteen years before you get a crop.

Redwood trees live a long, long time, and they grow to huge heights. Every year they produce prodigious amounts of seeds. However, it takes a forest fire to burst open the husk so the seeds can hit the soil, be embedded in it, and produce another tree. How many times does a forest fire come along where there are redwood trees? You get the point.

God has arranged these things in nature so we can learn from them, and every situation is not going to produce what we would like to see produced at the same time—usually that is pretty fast, because we are naturally impatient.

So what does this mean in practicality to what I am talking about here? It means that we have to learn that we have to give of ourselves serving one another; we have to give to others as we would like to be given to. But, do not expect that a huge crop is going to be produced all at once, because the ground, the soil, the person—the nature and experience of that person that we do good toward and treat the way they would like to be treated—is going to be different for every single person.

We have got to set our mind, set our will, to follow through with what God says in this living law and do it and trust Him—that we are nonetheless going to be blessed.

So in a garden there might be a fairly long time between sowing and reaping, and in between it requires a lot of work: watering, fertilizing, weeding, before reaping. But the big payoff comes at harvest time—I am talking about the resurrection. So like the farmer, we must exercise faith while interim labors are going on.

There is a fine example that our Savior set before us in the book of Romans 5.

Romans 5:6-8 For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly, for scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

Here is our primary example. Within the church this is what we are called to do: to follow what our Savior did; and despite the person we might like to gossip about, say cruel things about, do cruel things to; we have got to restrain ourselves. Would you want to be treated exactly the same way that you are about to treat this other person (or say about them)?

In II Timothy there is an example again of our Savior. Here is advice that Paul gives to Timothy. It really does apply to all of us.

II Timothy 2:24-26 And a servant of the Lord [which every one of us] must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will.

Now what our Savior is doing all along the way as our High Priest: He is doing the spiritual equivalent of watering, fertilizing, and weeding that we might be reaped at the resurrection.

One thing that we should not forget is that it must be considered, when we feel that no crop is being produced, that in many cases we are still reaping what we have sown in the past. Sometimes the soil and the seeds have been damaged because of past occurrences, and it takes time for those things to be healed within us.

Jesus warns us in the book of Luke, in chapter 14, that we are going to be bearing a cross. He says in verse 27:

Luke 14:27 And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.

The cross that we bear, brethren, is our worldly, Satan-educated minds. When we are converted it does not go away; it is still there. It is going to produce problems, and we are going to continue to follow its urgings from time to time.

In our converted life, God will eventually bring us face to face with the very things that have caused us suffering in the past, and all too often we have not pulled all the weeds out, and we have ignored the actual causes by glossing over them.

So always remember that we carry with us the mind that we were converted with; it has to be overcome. And from time to time, it is going to cause us problems with our brethren.

Back to the book of Proverbs again. This chapter, in Proverbs 10, shows a number of actions where the failure to sow the right things—the failure to do unto others what you would have done unto you—causes the reaping of a bad crop.

Proverbs 10:4 He who has a slack hand becomes poor, but the hand of the diligent makes rich.

Do we really carry through with what Jesus said to do there in Matthew 7:12? Are we dealing with a slack hand, or are we diligent to treat others the way we want to be treated?

Proverbs 10:6 Blessings are on the head of the righteous, but violence covers the mouth of the wicked.

Sow the wrong thing in word, and we are going to reap what we deserve. Not too good.

Proverbs 10:11 The mouth of the righteous is a well of life, but violence covers the mouth of the wicked.

Sow the wrong thing, you get pain back. Sow the right thing, blessings will eventually come.

Proverbs 10:12 Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all sins.

Which are we sowing: hatred or love?

Proverbs 10:19 In the multitude of words sin is not lacking [Some of us cannot stop talking, and we are surely going to sow the wrong things. That is a warning from God, not from John Ritenbaugh.], but he who restrains his lips is wise.

Proverbs 10:21 The lips of the righteous feed many, but fools die for lack of wisdom.

Proverbs 10:29 The way of the Lord is strength for the upright, but destruction will come to the workers of iniquity.

Well, some people may complain and say, “Well, I mean to do well...does not sincerity mean anything?” I suppose that it counts for something, but how much I do not know.

I am going to give you a true story. Sounds kind of weird, because one can almost wonder how anyone could be this way. But, it really did happen. This is what happened. A man told me of a

neighbor friend of his father who was giving fine, diligent care to what he thought were tomato plants. They looked somewhat like them, but in reality they were something altogether different. Despite the man's sincerity, not one tomato was produced.

There is a similarity here with the wheat and the tares. They look alike, but there is a difference—a spiritual difference—between the two. The one produces the right thing; but the bad things that the tares produce do not show up until later. Eventually it will come out. That is why Paul said, “Do not be deceived.” We have got to set ourselves to sow the right things.

This man with his non-tomato plant undoubtedly had some measure of faith in what he was doing or he would not have given it such diligent care. But that combination of sincerity and faith does not produce a crop of tomatoes, because truth is also required with sincerity. Then sincerity means something.

John 4:24 says that we must worship, respond to God, in spirit and in truth. We cannot hide the false things from Him, because He is watching and He is judging.

I am going to give you another story. I did not actually see this one happen. But it happened in the welding shop that I worked in when I was in the steel mill. A minor fire broke out in our shop. That was not real unusual because, you know, where there is welding around, there is going to be a fire created sometimes.

The man who inadvertently started the fire was getting a little agitated. He was looking around for something to put the fire out. He did not want to be embarrassed by the boss showing up and here he has a fire roaring. Suddenly, another man came running up with what looked like a bucket of water and handed it to the fellow. The guy took it, thinking it was water, and threw it on the fire—it was kerosene. No one got hurt. The man who ran up with the bucket knew it was kerosene. He had done it as a joke. Some joke! I tell you, though, everybody laughed, except for the guy who had this kerosene fire roaring in front of him

I tell this only because guessing and reality and so forth—things have to be true in order for sincerity to have any impact on what one is doing.

Let us begin to make this more personal to the church. Let us go back to Luke 6. This is Luke's version of the Sermon on the Mount. He says:

Luke 6:27 But I say to you who hear: Love your enemies. . .

We are not just talking about people in the church, here; this may be people out on the street. But we can develop enemies within the church as well. Somebody offends, and the offended person begins to perceive that person as an enemy. “They have done me dirty,” they might think within themselves. But Jesus says:

Luke 6:27 . . . do good to those who hate you. . .

Wish them well. Do them good. Speak well of them. Try to procure for them good from others. Suffer their contempt or ill treatment patiently. Give up your goods rather than lose your meekness. Do more good than you receive evil. Out give them with goodness. Look at verse 32:

Luke 6:32 But if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them.

When we give love to one who loves us, do you know what happens? We get it right back. We receive an immediate harvest. That is why we do not mind giving it. In fact, in most cases, we joyously and generously give it. We do not have to wait. This is the crux of much of our hesitancy regarding doing good.

Luke 6:35-36 But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For he is kind to the unthankful and evil. Therefore be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

Now these verses give indications that in order to give this depth and quality of love, we need supernatural help. But this level requires giving without despair, not begrudgingly.

Luke 6:37-38 Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. [You see what God is describing... What you give comes back to you. It is a living law. It is going to happen.] Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you.

You will at least get back what you gave. This is the way to produce unity in the church of God. This is the way that love has to be expressed within the church of God. This will produce a holiness that cannot be matched in any way, shape, or form in the world, because God is involved. He will bring the fruits to pass, and the harvest will be sown.

The kind of love that I am talking about here is like...well, when I used to go to the movie theater, and I wanted to get popcorn, I was hoping that person behind the counter would put that popcorn in there, shake that box, and push it down there so that I really got my money's worth out of it. Or when I went into the ice cream store and they were spooning out the ice cream into my cone or into my box, I wanted them to push it down so that I got a lot.

That is the quality and quantity of love that God wants us to give: pushed down, shaken together, running over. Can we do it? We can. God would not be giving us these commands if we could not. Those who have His Spirit can do it.

I want to show you something sobering before we close this off. I want to go to Hosea 10, because it makes use of this reaping and sowing command.

Hosea 10:11-13 Ephraim is a trained heifer that loves to thresh grain [Ephraim in this context either means the ten northern tribes or possibly the Ephraimites themselves, but I think it is really the ten northern tribes]; but I harnessed her fair neck, I will make Ephraim pull a plow [getting bad treatment here]. Judah shall plow [too]; Jacob shall break his clods. [Look at this instruction, how it changes:] Sow for yourselves righteousness; reap in mercy [Boy! What a reward]; break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek the Lord, till He comes and rains righteousness on you [What a blessing

for doing the right sowing. But He goes back now]. You have plowed wickedness; you have reaped iniquity, you have eaten the fruit of lies, because you trusted in your own way, in the multitude of your mighty men.

We can take this right down to personal, individual levels. Instead of loving somebody, we ignore them. Instead of loving somebody, we speak poorly of them. We gossip about them. We run them down. Instead of doing good for them, we do nothing.

Hosea 10:14-15 Therefore tumult shall arise among your people, and all your fortresses shall be plundered as Shalman plundered Beth Arbel in the day of battle—a mother dashed to pieces upon her children [Boy, what a thing to reap]. Thus it shall be done to you, O Bethel, because of your great wickedness, at dawn the king of Israel shall be cut off utterly.

Let us close this off in Proverbs 26. This is a good proverb to remember.

Proverbs 26:2 Like a flitting sparrow, like a flying swallow, so a curse without a cause shall not alight.

The instruction is clear. Blessing or cursing lies in the power of what we sow. What we sow is the precipitator of what we reap. However, if we get things started in the right direction, by doing unto others as we would have others do unto us, the path is cleared for the right results to be given by God as He promises.