

DOING GOOD TO BRING THE HARVEST

GALATIANS 6:6-10

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Please focus your thoughts with me on one verse of scripture taken from the passage we just read. It is a verse of scripture that can make a big difference in our lives if we let it. It can help answer a difficult question about life, and it can become a great source of encouragement when we can't see the results of our labors. The verse I am referring to is GALATIANS 6:9. That verse says, "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up." I want to take a close look at the words found in this verse of scripture.

The key word that helps us to understand the meaning of this verse is the word "harvest". When the apostle Paul urged his readers to do good, the main thing he had in mind was a harvest. The verses of scripture that appear before verse 9 emphasize that the main thought in the apostle Paul's thinking was a harvest. Verse 7 says, "A man reaps what he sows." And, in verse eight, he twice uses the words "sowing and reaping." These are all farming expressions which are used to illustrate that there is a direct relationship between our labors and the fruits of our labors.

Therefore, the emphasis in verse 9 is not on just doing good things, but doing good things with the motive of producing a certain kind of harvest. This central idea of doing good to produce a harvest begins and ends with two warnings. The first warning is not to grow weary, and the second warning is not to give up. In this verse, growing weary and giving up are seen as the two main things that hinder people from doing good. We are told to guard against these things.

I will now use these words found in GALATIANS 6:9 to form an outline for this sermon. First of all, let us consider the meaning of the word "harvest." After that, let us consider what it means to do good. And, finally, let us look at the two things which hinder us from doing good, that is weariness and giving up.

First of all, consider the meaning of harvest. One possible meaning of this word is that every individual will reap what he sows. In other words, if we do good things, then we will reap good results. And, of course, the best and final result that we are looking for is heaven. For people who think this way, heaven becomes the ultimate harvest and going to heaven becomes the strongest reason for doing good.

But, it seems selfish to think in this way. To say that we should do good things so that we will gain

personally even sounds selfish. In other passages of scripture, the apostle Paul seems to have an attitude that is completely the opposite from the thought of doing good just so one can get to heaven. For instance, in ROMANS 9:3, Paul makes a shocking statement that reveals a very unselfish attitude. ROMANS 9:3 says, "For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, the people of Israel." In other words, Paul would rather go to hell if it could prevent others from going to hell. This is a completely unselfish kind of attitude which stands in contrast to the notion of doing good just so I can get to heaven.

The idea of doing good to get to heaven also contradicts the theology of the Apostle Paul. In several passages of scripture, the apostle clearly states that just doing good alone will not get a person into heaven. For instance, in EPHESIANS 2:8-9, the apostle Paul said, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from ourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast." And in TITUS 3:5 he said, "God saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of His mercy..." The idea that we should do good in order to get to heaven contradicts the theology of Paul found in other places in the Bible.

So if the harvest in GALATIANS 6:9 does not refer to the individual benefit that one receives when one does good, then what does it refer to?

I personally believe that the harvest here refers to something much larger than just individual blessing. I believe it refers to a much broader blessing. In the Bible, reference is made to a final harvest that will come at the end of the world. Jesus spoke of this harvest in the Parable of the Weeds. Matthew 13:30 records Jesus as saying, "The harvest is the end of the age." In JAMES 5:7 we also see the idea of a harvest coming at the end of the age. JAMES 5:7 says, "Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop and how patient he is for the autumn and spring rains."

The harvest that comes at the end of the age is the harvest of all those who have been saved by the grace of God through the blood of Jesus Christ. It is the ultimate harvest. JAMES 5:7 says that it is a "valuable crop." God places great value on this final harvest. God works toward that harvest. He longs for it, and He waits patiently for it. God wants us to do the same.

So our real hope and reason for doing good should not be a selfish one. The real reason why we go on doing good even when we don't feel like it is not so that some day we can personally gain from it; rather, it is for the final harvest that we labor. To add one more soul to that harvest must become the inspiration of every good thing that we do.

The final harvest brings glory to God. It is God's victory and God's glory, and we must see it that way. Our reason for doing good is to produce a harvest that will bring glory to God. That should be our greatest hope in this life. Listen to the words of the apostle Paul as they are recorded in ROMANS 5:2. That verse says, "And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God." The hope of bringing glory to God should cause us to rejoice.

Think of how the final harvest is God's final victory which brings Him glory. JOB 38:7 tells us that, when the world was created, "the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy." But, the words of ROMANS 9:22 reveal that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth since the fall of man. ROMANS 9:19 says, "All of creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed." The whole universe longs for the day when the final harvest will be revealed. If the morning stars sang together and the angels shouted for joy when the universe was originally created, then just think about the rejoicing that will happen when things are finally restored to the way they were when they were originally created. There will be great rejoicing over God's final victory.

Every little good thing that we do should relate to that big event. Every mundane task that doesn't seem to matter, if it is done out of a heart to glorify God, will contribute to the final harvest. We must never lose our vision of that harvest. It must be the inspiration behind every good thing that we do.

And what do the "good things" mentioned in GALATIANS 6:9 refer to? At first glance, it may seem to have a narrow meaning. GALATIANS 6:6 talks about sharing good things with those who instruct us in the word. One might guess that the good things that Paul is talking about here are referring to giving financial support to those who are doing the work of teaching. But, those who give instruction in the Word need more than just salary. Even more important than salary, they need things like prayer and sympathy and cooperation. So we must think about the good things here as being broad in meaning. We must think of the good things as being any kind of spiritual and practical support directed toward those who are communicating God's Word. And, the words of GALATIANS 6:10 even broaden the meaning further. Those words urge us to "do good to all people,

especially to those who belong to the family of believers." For the sake of the final harvest, we need to think about doing good things for all people, especially those who are trying to share the truth about God to others.

When I am trying to decide what organizations or people to contribute to, I will first consider those organizations and people who are committed to communicating to others the truth about God. I should do this, because I am concerned that my contribution will do the most to contribute to the final harvest.

So the most important thing about doing good is that we make the final harvest the main reason for the good things that we do. Our motive must be taken into consideration. There are many good things that people do. Giving money to charity is one. Teaching, counseling, encouraging, and visiting the sick and those who are in prison, serving as an usher or parking attendant—these are all good things that we can do. But, it isn't what we do that God is so concerned about. It is the reason why we do it. The first half of GALATIANS 6:8 tells us that, if we do these things to please ourselves, then we will not be contributing to the final harvest. In fact, it will be just the opposite. The harvest that we will reap will be destruction. On the other hand, the last half of verse 8 tells us that, if we do good things to please the Spirit of God, then we will reap eternal life. In other words, good things done with a good motive will cause people to seek God and find eternal life.

When we do good works with the final harvest in mind, then we are cooperating perfectly with God. When God created the universe, he labored for six creation days. And on the seventh creation day He rested. But, since the fall of man God has not been resting. He has been working to restore things to their original state. One day, after healing a man on the Sabbath day, Jesus made a statement which emphasizes this fact. His words are recorded in JOHN 5:17. He said, "My Father is always at His work to this very day, and I, too, am working." God never rests from working for the final harvest. So when we are doing good in order to add souls to the final harvest, we are cooperating with God.

So what does it mean to do good? Most important of all, it means working for the final harvest even when there seems to be no result. It is easy to do good when we see response. We feel a sense of fulfillment when we see people responding to our labors. But when there is little visible result, we tend to be discouraged.

Think about the ministry of Christ Himself. Think of all the good that He did and all the truth that He taught.

JOHN 21:25 says that Jesus did so many good things that, if all of them were written down, even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written. But, what was the immediate result of all those good works? On the night of His arrest not one person stood beside Him. They all forsook Him and fled. But, the fact that our Lord did not see a lot of immediate results to His labors did not stop Him from doing good.

Serving faithfully week after week when it seems as though nothing is happening is what it means to do good. It is like the farmer working the soil and planting the seed in an area that seems so barren, but he doesn't stop working. It is the preacher who can't see anyone responding to his sermons, but he doesn't stop preaching. It is the Sunday school teacher who doesn't see any change in the lives of his students, but he doesn't stop teaching. That is what it means to do good.

And, what are the things that cause us to want to stop doing good? They are weariness and giving up. What is weariness? It is not physical weariness that is being discussed here. It is not bad to feel physical exhaustion as a result of our labors. And when we are physically tired, we should not feel guilty about taking a rest or a vacation from time to time. Jesus rested when He was tired and we should too. Physical tiredness is not our enemy.

The weariness mentioned in GALATIANS 6:9 is mental weariness. Mental weariness is our enemy. It is the kind of feeling that comes upon us all from time to time and makes us say things like, "Oh, what's the use of continuing." It is an attitude that makes us lose our drive. Even though we may continue to do good, we do it with a lack of enthusiasm, because it no longer seems meaningful. This is the kind of weariness that we all face from time to time. It creeps up on us before we realize it, and it causes us to feel depressed. It comes especially to those who are overextended in their doing good. It is always better to do a few good things well than it is to attempt to do

many good things but do nothing very well. However, regardless of how many good things we do, weariness will eventually come; and when it does, we must fight against it.

If we don't fight against it, then we will soon encounter the second kind of temptation, the temptation to give up. Giving up is the final outcome of weariness. We eventually lose all power and desire to do good, so we simply give up.

And how are we to fight against the temptations of weariness and giving up? There is really only one way, and that is to never lose vision of the harvest. We should not be laboring to save the world from destruction or even to make the world a better place to live. Those are not bad things to labor for, but they are things that will eventually cause a person to despair; because the world will not become a better place to live and it will some day come to an end. The only thing really worth working for is the final harvest. We must be convinced that this will happen and that the good things we are doing today can have an influence on that harvest. It is this vision that will keep us doing good even when everything around us seems so dark.

So the words of GALATIANS 6:9 help to answer one of life's difficult questions; namely, why continue doing good when the world is coming to an end anyway? The answer is that we work to increase the harvest that will come when the world does come to an end. And the words of GALATIANS 6:9 can help to encourage us when we are seeing few results from our labors which is often the case in affluent societies such as the one in which we live. A vision of the harvest can help us to fight against weariness and giving up.

May the Lord use the words recorded in GALATIANS 6:9 to make a big difference in all of our lives. And may others see the difference so that even more souls will be added to the great harvest at the end of the age.