SOW TO YOURSELVES

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A SERMON
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"Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy."
Hosea 10:12

HUSBANDMEN are now devoting their attention to putting the seed into the ground. They know right well that without sowing in the present they cannot expect a reaping in the future. Seed-time has many lessons. That which we shall learn this morning is very personal and practical.

Our hearts are like a field, and if we let them alone the only crop we shall get will be the natural weeds of the soil, together with those tares which the evil spirit is quite sure to scatter whether we sow good seed or not. We are to sow beside all waters, but we must not neglect to sow *to ourselves*.

There is need that we sow good seed in our own gardens, or else it will little avail us to have planted and watered others. It is concerning this sowing of the home farm, this seeding of our own peculiar acre, that I shall now speak. May the Spirit of God bless the Word.

Before I launch into the subject, it may be well to observe that it does not apply to unrenewed hearts. It is in vain to sow unto yourselves till the soil has been prepared by our Father, who is the Husbandman. Even Christ's own seed of the Word, pure from His own hand, brings forth no fruit when it falls on unprepared hearts.

His ministers are bound to scatter the seed in all places—on the hard rocks, on the highways, and amongst thorns—but still no harvest ever comes till the soil is broken up, and made receptive of truth, by the Spirit of God.

Our text stands in the midst of a number of agricultural similes, and it is preceded by that of ploughing. "I will make Ephraim to ride; Judah shall plow, and Jacob shall break his clods." Without ploughing, what is the use of sowing? Some soils need ploughing and cross ploughing—they are so heavy by nature that in them the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and only by mighty tearings of the soil are they saved.

Have you ever had a broken heart, dear hearer? Did the Spirit of God ever drive the black horses of the law across your heart, with the sharp ploughshare of condemnation, killing your false hopes, wounding your spirit, and revealing your secret sins? For if you have not known something about this, I cannot tell you to sow to yourself in righteousness. You are not prepared for that step, you must be ploughed first. I pray the divine Spirit to operate upon your heart to the breaking up of your fallow ground, that you sow not among thorns.

Let us also add another statement, lest we should be misunderstood. Even when we speak to the people of God, and bid them, "Sow to themselves in righteousness," we by no means forget that all true culture of the heart comes of the Spirit of God. We exhort men as the Scriptures do, as active, intelligent beings.

We exhort them as much as if there were no Holy Spirit, but we also pray to the Holy Spirit to make our exhortations, the efforts of His servants, effectual for the designed end. Without His divine operations, neither the precept of our text, nor any other, will be obeyed. In this, as well as in every matter connected with the Gospel, grace reigns.

If the first sentence of the text might seem to breathe legality, "Sow to yourselves in righteousness," yet the second clause of it most effectually evangelizes it, for it says, "Reap in mercy." Unless we reap eternal wrath, we must reap in mercy. If anything comes of what we do, if our prayerful anxiety and

earnest faith as to the condition of our heart shall be really productive of holiness, it will be the result of infinite mercy and the effect of the Spirit's energy.

Even the desire to be right before God arises from the operation of the Spirit of God, and all the righteousness which is found in us comes by divine power, and is not of ourselves, but like the whole of salvation, it is the gift of God. So, while I exhort, and entreat, and persuade, I am not forgetful of the Divine One, without whose gracious working we can do nothing at all.

We will now draw nigh to the text. First, my brethren, *we must not neglect seed time*, and secondly, *we must not neglect harvest when it comes*.

I. WE MUST NOT NEGLECT SEED TIME.

"While the earth remaineth, seed time and harvest shall not cease." Both are needful, and therefore God has decreed that time for both shall be given to men. All life is in some respects a sowing. All that we think, say, do, or leave undone is a sowing for the harvest of the last great day, and if we sow to the flesh, we shall of the flesh reap what always comes of the flesh, namely, corruption. But if we sow to the spirit, we shall of the Spirit reap what is congruous to the spirit, namely, life everlasting. As a man soweth, so shall he reap.

It is not, however, upon that form of sowing and reaping that I am going to speak to you this morning. As I have already told you, we shall deal with the *inner life*, for I think the connection shows that this is what was meant, for the prophet is evidently dealing with the people themselves, and their condition of heart before God. The outward sowing of righteous actions in the field of the world is doubtless very important, but none the less so is the secret sowing of the enclosed garden of the heart.

Our subject will be just this—that after we have been ploughed by conversion, we need to take great care that our spiritual culture commences and is carried on. The little spot enclosed by grace out of the world's wide wilderness now calls for our attention, and claims the holy skill and industry needful to spiritual husbandry.

It must be sown with the good seed of the Word, even the precious truths of Scripture, that so from its soil there may be produced a harvest which shall be garnered with abounding joy, and bring glory to God. The first thing after conversion to Christ is confession of Christ, and the next is instruction in Christ.

I fear that too many professed converts leap over these hedges, and endeavor to become teachers at once. Without joining themselves to the church of Christ, or becoming disciples in His school, they rush to the front, endeavoring to teach before they have been taught—and if they are the least checked, they resent it as an interference, and cast suspicion upon the zeal of their advisers.

They call themselves disciples, and repudiate all discipline. They say they are soldiers of the cross, but they can neither march in line nor keep step, neither will they submit themselves to order. They appear to think that the moment they are born, they are fathers. The instant they are enlisted, they are officers.

Now, conversion is the beginning of the spiritual life and not the climax of it. It makes a man a disciple, and the main thing a disciple has to do is to learn. After he has learned, he will be able to teach others also, but not till then. I have often said to you that nothing can come out of you that is not in you—and therefore if there is not something put into you to begin with, you may go out to war, but as you have neither shot nor powder in your gun, the enemy will not be much injured by your valor.

We must be filled before we can run over. It is necessary for the Christian man to be prepared for holy service, that in fact what he does for God should be a harvest growing out of himself, because of a previous seed time, during which much precious seed was put into him.

Let us take note upon this sowing, and ask, first, *what shall we sow*? Here is our heart, a ploughed field, ready to receive the seed. What shall we sow? I answer, see to it, my brethren, that there is sown in you a real faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Let it be of the simplest and most childlike kind. Do not trouble yourselves with definitions which darken counsel by words without knowledge.

Hold on to Christ as a babe clings to its mother with its arms around her neck. Trust Him, depend upon Him, rest in Him, and in Him alone. But mind that your faith is real reliance on Jesus, for I meet with some who think that faith is to believe that you are saved. But if indeed you are not saved, such faith will be a lie, and you will entangle yourselves in the net of false confidence.

Others think that faith is to believe that Christ died for them, when at the same time they think that He died for everybody, and then of course He died for them. Surely there can be no particular virtue or power in believing what is a self-evident inference. Many believe that Christ died for them, and yet they are not saved.

Savingly to believe is to trust Christ—see that you have this trust sown in you. You ought to know why you trust Him, and what He did for you, and in what relationship He stands towards you and God. You should be able, not merely to sing about His blood, but to know the doctrine of atonement, to grasp the blessed fact of His substitution, and know the reconciliation thereby effected. To know whom you have believed should be one of the chief objects of your life.

I am afraid that some who profess to have been converted do not even know the A B C of the Gospel, namely, what is the faith of God's elect, and on what does it rest? Take heed to yourselves that you be not ignorant here, but let your heart be well-sown with simple reliance upon the eternal Son of God, who loved us and gave Himself for us.

Sow to yourselves, and see that in your soul there is repentance of sin. Do not fall under the notion that the necessity for repentance is over. I have heard it said that repentance is "merely a change of mind." I wish that those who so speak had undergone that change. It is a sad sign of a faulty ministry when men can depreciate that precious grace.

Mark you, no sinner will ever enter into heaven who has not repented of his sins. No promise can be found in the inspired page of eternal life to men who live and die without repentance. It is an old-fashioned virtue, I know, but it is in fashion with the angels, who rejoice over sinners who possess it.

Know, my dear young friends, that sin is an evil and a bitter thing, and the language to be used about it is such as David employed in the fifty-first Psalm. Pray to God to convince you of your guilt, and ask Him to enable you to flee from every false way. Seek grace to detect sin, and as soon as ever you discern its presence to fly from it as you would from a deadly serpent.

May there be wrought in you an inward abhorrence of sin, and a loathing of yourself because of your tendency to transgress. "Ye that love the LORD hate evil." "Hating even the garment spotted by the flesh."

May you also have a full conviction that in you, that is, in your flesh, there dwells no good thing—that your nature is empty, and void, and waste, like the chaos of old, except as the blessed Spirit shall brood over you, and the everlasting God shall new create you. There needs to be in your soul a deep sense of its ruin, or you will not prize redemption, and much of the godly sorrow of repentance, or you will not know the ecstasy of forgiveness. O for a plentiful sowing in tears that we may reap in joy.

Labor, also, to have sown in you a clear knowledge of the Gospel. Do not be satisfied to see men as trees walking, but ask for the eye cleansed even of the smallest mote. Be thankful if you have only a little sight, but let your gratitude lead you to pray for the removal of every scale. If you are really to bring forth a harvest of wheat without tares, you must distinguish between things that differ, for a man's belief affects his life more than some imagine.

You ought to know the plan of redemption, the system upon which God grants salvation. It will be a great advantage for you to understand the two covenants, and to see plainly the distinction between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace. He who is clear upon that matter has grasped the marrow of theology, and possesses the clue to the precious Gospel of Jesus Christ. I would have you know the doctrines of grace and understand them, and be able to defend them with Scriptural arguments whenever they are assailed.

Young people, I pray you, be willing to learn. Learn before you teach. Do not go blundering out to tell the tale of mercy before you have considered it, and in some measure understood its grand points.

God forbid that I should damp your zeal, but I implore you to put a little knowledge with it, or else the best of causes will suffer at your hands.

Become apt to teach by being first apt in learning. Grow in grace and in the knowledge of your Lord and Savior. Fill your basket with bread from His hand, or you will never feed the multitude. I would have you well-equipped for battle with the adversaries of the faith, or at any rate, able to give a reason for the hope that is in you with meekness and fear.

Do not even be satisfied with clear knowledge. Ask for living principles growing out of this knowledge. The religion of passion is flimsy. The religion of principle will endure wear and tear. Heat and excitement too often engender a mushroom life, which dies as readily as it is produced.

We want you to know the truth so as to feel its power, till it dominates your entire nature, sways the sceptre of your soul, and becomes a resident monarch within you. Then will you be able to stand alone, and you will not need a crowd about you, or a flaming orator to hold you in your place—you will know whom you have believed, and be persuaded that He is able to keep that which you have committed to Him.

Oh, if our young friends, and old friends too, were well-sown in this fashion, so that the truths they profess to believe had a living roothold in their souls by the Holy Ghost, what churches we should have, and what little injury would the Pope and the infidel be able to do to us! A man may hold a religion—he may hold fifty religions, and have a new one every week and be none the better—it is the religion which holds the man which will save him.

Your Bibles printed on paper are a blessing, but to have the Scriptures written on the heart is far better. We need not so much the doctrine which has been driven into the brain by argument, but the truth wrought into the soul by experience, through the teaching of the blessed Spirit. Would to God that living principles were thus sown in all hearts.

The great point is that whatever is sown in us should be sown *in righteousness*, that is to say, that it is really sown, and that honest seed is taken into our hearts. If you sow in error, however sincerely you sow it, it will produce bad results upon your intellect. "Sow to yourselves in righteousness." Do not take handfuls of seed out of your grandfather's basket simply because *he* put it there—see whether it is God's seed.

Do not snatch haphazard at what is in the creed, or the articles of your church—go to the winnowed corn of Scripture—sow that, and that only. And though we, or an angel from heaven, should teach you anything contrary to the infallible Word of God, refuse such seed a lodgment in your hearts. Pray God to forgive the preacher his mistakes, but do not follow him therein.

Pray to "sow to yourselves in righteousness." Receive truth and only truth, and beseech the Lord to give you an honest grip of that truth—for there is such a thing as "holding the truth in unrighteousness." It is very easy to be untrue to truth. Truth held by a bad man is as a jewel of gold in a swine's snout. The fair lily of truth should be held in a clean hand.

Nor is this all. Let us ask the Lord to rid us of the mere pretense and mimicry of faith. Away forever with a sham faith. Never talk fictitious experience. Do not borrow bits from this man, and bits from that, and retail them as your own—this is unrighteous. Pretense in religion is a sort of blasphemy.

May all our religion be such as will stand the test of the day of judgment. I charge you, make sure work in this matter. If, indeed, the Lord has ploughed your heart, the field belongs to Him. Therefore obey His Word, and remember how He forbids His people to sow with mingled seed. Let all that which is sown in you be true, honest, gracious, loving, Godlike, and divine, so when the harvest comes you shall not lose what you have wrought. God help you thus to sow.

The second inquiry is, *How shall we sow it*? The answer is, Sow in the Lord's appointed manner. The means of grace are ordained of God to help us in sowing, watering, weeding, and fostering the good seed.

Let us, in dependence upon the Holy Spirit, sow the heart first by diligently studying the Word of God. Every believer ought to be a student in Christ's college. We who preach the Gospel are to go into all the world, and make disciples of all nations.

Now, a disciple is a learner. Are all the people who professed to have been converted during the late special services learners? I should like to know for one where they are. I have anxiously asked several of my brethren, the pastors of the neighboring churches, and they do not know. I should like to discover the churches which have received these new converts, for wherever I inquire, I hear of one or two, but scarcely any more—and up to this moment my earnest inquiries have brought me nothing but bitter disappointment.

If these thousands were made disciples, how is it that they do not come under discipline? They professed to be converted, how is it that they have not united themselves with our churches? Do they need no instruction, or are none of us fit to edify them? Conversion should be the commencement of discipleship, but where are the disciples? Some months have now passed, and with deepest sorrow I inquire with what churches are they associated. Where are they learning the way of God more perfectly? I should rejoice to know.

My young brethren lately brought to Jesus, search the Scriptures through and through. Be not satisfied with simply knowing the way of salvation, ask to know all that God has revealed, for there is nothing unnecessary in that book. There is not a leaf that we could afford to tear out and throw into the fire and say, "It is a superfluity." It is all to be studied, and we must give ourselves to the study of it by reading it, by hearing it, and by bowing ourselves to the influence of the Holy Spirit, that He may lead us into all truth.

How shall we sow? Why, by an inward reception of the truth into the soul. I cannot tell you how the branch takes in the sap, but I know it does take it in. And you must receive God's truth into your hearts as living sap to your souls—it is the living and incorruptible seed which lives and abides forever.

I want you not only to know the truth in theory, but to receive it in its inward power into your very souls as babes receive milk, that you may feed thereon and grow. Only by such feeding can you come to the measure of the stature of perfect men in Christ Jesus.

You can, also, thus, "sow to yourselves in righteousness" by much prayer, much praise, and much of every form of communion with Jesus Christ. O men, if you are to do exploits, you must be strong, and you cannot be strong except in the Lord, and in the power of His might.

O men, if you are to be holy, you must commune with the Holy One, and get a glow upon your countenance reflected from the face of your Lord. In His light only can you shine as lights in the world. To say you are converted is little. We desire your sanctification, your growing likeness to the Lord. I do not know whether I make my meaning fully apparent, but I mean this, that we must by all means that God has put into our power make our hearts to be a well-stored seed plot, in which there shall grow for God all manner of precious fruits, which afterwards we shall reap and use to His glory.

You are trying to sow others, some of you, have you sown yourselves with that seed which yields seed to the sower and bread to the eater? Look to yourselves, for if you leave home culture unheeded you may have to complain with the spouse, "They made me a keeper of the vineyards, but my own vineyard have I not kept."

I am certain that if we want to spread religion we must begin by securing the improvement of those who are Christians already. Until the army of the Lord shall be stronger, and every man shall have more of the force of divine life, we cannot expect to see the nations conquered by the church of God. Look you well to this matter, and see that you use the means of God's ordaining, that by the power of the Spirit you may sow to yourselves.

Thirdly, *when shall we sow to ourselves*? What is the proper sowing time? I answer, specially at the time of conversion, and immediately after your new birth. Very much depends upon the soil being well-sown when it is newly ploughed. Then the heart is tender, the soul is in the formative stage—like clay

on the potter's wheel, or like wax that has just been melted—it is then ready to receive the right impression and form.

When Paul was converted, he went into Arabia for a time, and these months were, I have no doubt, the most profitable that Paul ever spent, for there he communed with God, and his mind was impregnated with the truth. Perhaps he had never been so great an apostle during the rest of his life if it had not been for that little tarrying in Arabia.

The disciples, after the resurrection of our Lord, were to *tarry* at Jerusalem till they were endowed with power from on high. O you Christian people, see to it that you give your first thoughts after your conversion to being edified, and built up in your most holy faith. It will be the most practically useful to others in the long run if, like your Lord, you take time to do your Father's business rather in the quiet of Nazareth's contemplation than in bearing unripe fruit.

But brethren, it is not immediately after conversion alone, I take it, that every Christian should sow unto himself in righteousness. We must be always sowing, and if we do not we shall not be always reaping. Ask the best instructed Christian, and he will tell you that he knows more of his own folly than ever he did, and is more willing to be a learner now than when he first entered into the school of Christ. Lord, teach us still, teach us every day. Even to grey hairs, still instruct us, that we may have the power to instruct others.

There should be a special sowing, it seems to me, whenever we desire a special harvest. Notice our blessed Lord—whenever He was about to do some special action, such as sending out the twelve, we always read that He retired to pray. Praying was His habit, but there were peculiar seasons when He had more of it than usual, that more power might go out from Him.

Whenever you are about to be, as you hope, a great soul-winner, wait on the Lord more abundantly concerning it. If you are about to pass through an extreme trial and need great strength, to yield a greater harvest of patience, have a greater sowing of grace by drawing nearer to God.

Our grace should always be at the flood tide, but even then some flood tides are higher than others, and we may pray the Lord to give us a spring tide flood when extraordinary grace is required. Again, I say, look well to yourselves, lest you lose that which you have wrought. Seeing there remains a rest for the people of God, let none of us even seem to come short of it.

With all your gettings, get understanding. With all your doings, see to it that your inner man is not neglected, that you walk before the Lord in secret, and are not negligent in soul communion with Him. See that you walk circumspectly, that you grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. Ever sowing should we be, for we have to be, in practical holiness, ever reaping.

In the next place, *why do so many omit to sow*? It may be, first, because they are lifted up with the notion that they do not require sowing. How idle is their conceit! Here is a piece of land that has just been enclosed from the devil's common, and it has for years produced only briars and thorns, it *must* need sowing.

Is there good seed in it by nature hidden among the clods? Impossible. Do you believe that because it has been ploughed it may now be let alone, and a harvest will come spontaneously? You know better. The novice is not to be set up as a teacher, he should sit down as a scholar. He may tell what he knows—so far he has been sown, and so far he may produce a harvest—but how can he tell what he does not know, and how shall he communicate to others what has never been communicated to himself?

We do not pick up religious knowledge and maturity by instinct. We are bound to search out the meaning of the Word of God, and yield ourselves to the illumination of the divine Spirit. We must prove our conversion to be true by being teachable as little children. We are not to rush naked to the fight, but to seek full equipment—and that we have not in ourselves—helmet and shield and sword are to be sought for in the armory of God.

Some do not like the sowing because it is very quiet work. A young man spends an hour searching into the truth of a certain doctrine. Well, that will never be put into the newspapers, or written in the reports of a society, and nobody will extol him for it—hence he is apt to despise such exercises. He goes

hour after hour to the Lord Jesus, and begs to be instructed in the deep things of God—nobody will sound a trumpet about that.

No, nor do they sound trumpets when they sow fields—the shouting is left till they bring in the sheaves. But the sowing must be done though nobody shouts over it, and you must search the Word and get your souls well-sown, none the less, but all the more, because it does not bring you applause.

Sometimes it is even suggested that to cultivate the heart by quiet study is a waste of time. The sower in sowing does not see any immediate result. Rather, as he scatters his handfuls, he perceives a waste in his basket, and there is so much less corn in the granary. Results there are none, except his weariness as he toils over the furrows—yet he is a wise man.

Yes, and you, dear friend, must not be snatching at results too soon. I am glad that you are wanting to win souls. May that passion be increased in you, but gladder still shall I be if you combine with that passion the prudent thought that you must ask His blessed Spirit to make you a vessel fit to be used. If you have been trying to produce a harvest for God without any preparatory sowing, you have only to take counsel of common sense and learn your error.

You must be conscious that in some points you do not succeed. You are be staggered by infidel objections, you are often completely nonplussed when talking with inquirers, because you do not know how to meet the questions put to you. Sometimes you blunder over a text, and cannot make head or tail of it. Well, come to school a little while before you go out as a teacher. Come and be ploughed and sowed a little before thinking about the harvest home.

Sowing, besides, is often very sorrowful work. We read of some who sow in tears. To learn costs humiliation, and weariness, and trouble, and crying, because of the task. I have cried my way into many a truth. I believe there is many a portion in God's Word whose meaning will never reach you except you will work your passage, as some poor men do when they want to go to America.

You cannot open these sealed treasure-houses without hard thought, long toil, much prayer, much conquering of prejudice, and yielding up of the soul to the Holy Spirit. This is a kind of labor which always pays well, and when it is over, your other work for God will be much lightened.

After the sowing is over, the husbandman rests, and the seed springs up both by night and by day, he knows not how. And so by thorough seeding of the soul with the truth, studied and understood, there comes forth a future crop with wonderful ease, and spontaneous growth.

Lazy people generally take the most pains in the long run. It is a saving of time and effort to store the mind and heart thoroughly at the very first. The shoeing of the horse, and the buckling on of the harness with care will save time in the journey. Victualling a ship before it sails is a part of the means by which a safe and speedy voyage is procured. Your peace and strength in later years will amply repay you for care and effort now. Sow in the present that you may reap in the future.

Last of all, on this point, *why should we sow*? We should sow *unto ourselves* and cultivate our hearts very carefully, because our lives must after all, as to their results, depend upon this sowing. If a man sows scantily, if he learns little, if he receives little of the Spirit of Christ into him, his life must be feeble and barren. How can there be a rich harvest from a scanty sowing? Little cast into the soil ends in little coming out of it. If a man sows in a patchy way, attending only to a few selected truths and graces, as some do, there will be a patchy character as the result.

Some brethren have been thoroughly well-sown as to one furrow, and there is a first-rate crop in that place. But then they neglect other portions, they do not strive before God to obtain all grace, or to know all truth, and as a consequence their life is faulty in many points. Complete experience and watchfulness of every point are needful to the formation of a complete character.

Beware of a half obedience in the heart, or a semi-illumination of the mind, for these will create an inconsistent character—a garden here and a desert there.

Be cautious also not to sow with mingled seed, for this was forbidden of old, and if you do it, there will be a bit of wheat in one place and a bit of tares in another, and you will be trying to serve God and

mammon. Too many professors are as pleased with the tares as with the wheat, and scarcely know one from the other.

As the eastern plant called in our version a tare is very like the wheat, so there are counterfeits of the virtues, and these deceive many. If we sow only with the good seed of truth, we shall realize a holy, influential, acceptable character, but mingled seed will produce fickleness, inconsistency, and poverty of character, and we shall bring no glory to the great Husbandman. I am certain I am right in enforcing this point upon all the children of God with great earnestness.

Brethren, do you believe that people would be carried away with Ritualism, which has now grown to be undisguised Popery, had they been fully instructed in the doctrines of our Protestant faith? I do not believe it would have been possible. At the present moment the wolves leap into our churches, and they find easy prey where the people are least instructed and least established in the Gospel. The people that know nothing for themselves, nothing by heart knowledge, are readily deceived.

But where there are a clear understanding and a fervent love for the Gospel, where there are spiritual growth and an abundant communion with God, arising out of inward vital principle, men are not carried away by every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of man and his cunning craftiness, but they stand fast, rooted and grounded in Christ. This steadfastness is a part of the harvest of which I have now to speak in conclusion.

II. WE MUST NOT NEGLECT THE HARVEST.

If a man with constant watchfulness, holy fear, devout prayer, and simple faith in Jesus seeks to cultivate his own heart, he may expect fruit to come of it, both towards himself and his God. Towards himself one fruit will be stability, as I have already said. The man will be able to say, "O God, my heart is fixed. I will sing and give praise."

He is not to be decoyed by the vauntings of the finders of new truth, nor by the contemptuous sneers of modern thinkers, who deride the good old way, nor by those mighty discoverers who have found out that there is no truth at all.

Experienced believers know and are persuaded and have firm moorings. Oh, be well-sown, for then you will be stable, and out of that stability will come solid comfort. Half the fears of Christian people rise like mists from the marshes of their ignorance. If we knew the promises better, knew the Gospel better, knew God better, and knew Christ better, we should not have a tithe so many fears.

Remember that as the soul is penetrated with the spirit of the Gospel, it will be filled with peace and consolation.

"'Tis religion that can give
Sweetest pleasures while we live,
'Tis religion must supply
Solid comfort when we die."

Those sweet pleasures and solid comforts are the harvest which those reap who look well to the good sowing of their souls. Those whose hearts are sown by grace possess joys utterly unknown to other professors. What rapture and delight are frequently bestowed on those who have drawn near to God, and had their souls full of Him!

"Blessed are the people that know the joyful sound, they shall walk, O LORD, in the light of your countenance." When others famish they shall feed, and when others faint they shall renew their strength, because their souls have learned to stay themselves on God alone.

One blessed fruit of this sowing is boldness in the Lord's service. The men that know their God shall be strong and do great exploits. He who fears God much, fears not men. He has been living near to God, and cares no more for the opinions of men than for the howling of the wind over the moor. With this courage comes patience under suffering—the man who is full of grace is able to bear the Lord's will

whatever it may be. This is a blessed fruit of the Spirit. You who think resignation a light thing may yet live to prize it. These are a few of the fruits which grow in a soul well-seeded by grace.

Now notice the text says that though we sow in righteousness we must reap *in mercy*. If any fruit, beloved, ever comes out of your earnest prayerfulness and watchfulness, it will be mercy that gives it to you, for do what you will, anything that is God-like and holy must be planted, and nourished, and supported by divine power, and nothing short of it.

If you have shown any holy courage or gracious patience, or sacred stability, or hallowed experience, or spiritual joy, or heavenly rapture, or true holiness, it is mercy that has enabled you to reap this precious fruit. God bids you sow, it is your duty so to do, and to be jealous over your own spirit, but to reap to the glory of God is entirely the gift of His grace, from first to last, and we must cheerfully own that it is so.

The text most pointedly bids us *reap*. "Reap in mercy." There is fruit upon you if you have sown aright in the power of the Spirit of God, therefore reap it. That is to say, when the season comes, be ready with the outward fruits of your inward grace. Let patience be ready in affliction, and perseverance in the day of labor. As you bring forth these things, bless the Lord for them. Do not be exalted by them, for you are to reap in *mercy*—if you were to reap in any other way, you might be exalted—but be humble, for it is mercy that gives you the graces which flourish in your soul.

Take care to bless God for every good and perfect gift, and whatever comes out of your inner life, reap it so as to lay it out for the good of others, in order that God may be glorified. If there be in you any zeal, courage, patience, and what not, as the result of the inner culture, then come forward and spend it for your Redeemer's praise. Remember you have nothing which you have not received, and having received it, you are bound in gratitude to expend it for Him who gave it to you.

But closing, let us see to it, I say, dear brethren and sisters, that all of us be keeping our hearts with all diligence before the Lord. It is the Spirit's work, we have admitted this, over and over again, but the Spirit of God awakens us to activity, and does not lull us into a passive condition, for He would have us careful that these things be in us and abound, that we be not barren nor unfruitful.

He would have us see that we come not short in any good thing, but that we abound in all knowledge, and all love, and all patience to His glory, that thus our life may show that we have indeed come under the fostering husbandry of our Lord Jesus Christ.

I would to God we were as a church lifted up to a higher platform altogether, the whole of us, by one blessed lift from the divine Spirit. And then I would to God that out of us there might be chosen more ministers of Christ, more mighty soul-winners, more missionaries among the heathen, and more of every order of soldiers for Christ.

When our Master needs workmen, He does not take those who are sick. If you had to lay a railway you would not go to Brompton Hospital, and pick out all the consumptives there, and give them a pickaxe or a spade to try and throw up embankments or dig cuttings. No, but you would select the strong men, the men of brawny arms, the men of muscle, who know how to wield crowbar and spade. And so will God do in His church.

We must be strong in grace, strong in secret, strong in private prayer, strong in fellowship with God, strong in vital principle within us, and after that the Lord will let us loose as a church upon His foes, like a tornado sweeping everything before us. We cannot bring out of ourselves what is not in us, we must go to God to be filled or we cannot run over. Lamps may shine, but they must be trimmed with oil, or else they will smell amiss and cease to shine.

We must have food, or we cannot keep up our stamina. We must live upon Christ. We must be nurtured with His very heart's blood, or else the life in us will only be a life of pain and panting, but not a life of triumph and of realization. See you to this, and may God bless you therein.

As for you who are not ploughed, I beseech you remember that you can bring forth no fruit to God. Be ashamed at your barrenness, and cry mightily unto Him that He would deal graciously with you, and

bring you to Jesus, for now you are nigh unto cursing, and ere long, unless grace prevent, your end will be to be burned. May God save you for Christ's sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—EPHESIANS 4

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—719, 119 (VER. II) 4-6, 39

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.