

Sowing to the spirit or sowing to the flesh

Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh shall from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit shall from the Spirit reap eternal life. And let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we shall reap if we do not grow weary. So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith. Gal 6:7-10 NASB

You see God is very good, and He is very faithful. However the way we relate with Him sometimes leave us exposed to disappointment. We are dealing with a faithful God but many times we do so with unfaithful hearts.

Let me use the issue of sowing and reaping as an example at this time concerning the faithfulness of God. Many times we give and eagerly expect God to give us something in return, but most of these times we get nothing and we are disappointed. We are disappointed because we were promised that God will answer within a period of time by the preacher who motivated us to give. The time promised have since come and gone but you did not get anything, as it is written, *“Harvest is past, summer is ended, and we are not saved” (Jer 8:20)*. This created confusion in our minds. But I want to tell you there is no need for confusion; the problem is most likely that you sowed to the flesh and from the flesh you reaped disappointment. The one who will be blessed is the person who sowed to the spirit.

What does it mean to sow to the flesh as against sowing to the spirit?

I want to tell two stories here to illustrate the answer.

There was a woman, May Kay Ash, of the Mary Kay Cosmetics fame; one day her pastor requested her to speak so as to motivate the church members to give towards the construction of the children’s wing of their church. The project had dragged on for quite a while and at the pace they were going it seemed as if the children would be adults long before the completion would happen. She accepted to do this while hoping the far date chosen for her to speak would never come. She was shy to stand up in front of the congregation. Long story made short, the day finally came and she was too busy to prepare her speech the night before. But while she was getting dressed that Sunday morning, a voice came up deep inside her saying, “offer to double anything that would be contributed towards this project today.” She testified that if people say they hear God speak, that was her own experience that seemed like He spoke to her.

She got to church and her turn to speak finally came. She beat around the bush for a while and then finally blurted it out: “Whatever you guys give this morning, I will match with my own personal contribution.” Now, it had to be cash or cheque, pledges were not accepted. All contributions had to be in not later than the following day. In her wildest imaginations, she expected nothing more than 10,000 dollars or thereabout, after all the contributions hardly ever totalled more than 2,000 dollars in previous times when such an appeal had been made.

The next day came and she got a phone call informing her that the sum collected was 106,000

dollars. She was shocked to hear that as one can easily understand. That was the amount she had to match, and immediately too according to the rule set by her. The church elders agreed to release her from the pledge but she insisted that since she gave her word she had to fulfil it. Her thought was to go to the bank and get a quick loan.

Within the hour, the same phone rang again. This time it was her son who was calling to report to her that an investment she made a while ago, which she had forgotten about, was beginning to yield. Her share in the oil drilling business was going to be over 100,000 dollars a month. His first words to her were, “how come everything you touch turns to gold?”

Mary Kay Ash concluded her account of this occurrence by saying, “you can’t out-give God.”

Note why this woman gave her gift to the Lord and what, if anything, she was expecting from the Lord for it. Please keep the story in mind because I will refer to it after narrating a second one.

There was a great man of God, John Alexander Dowie, who lived around the turn of the 19th into the 20th century. This man manifested the power of God greatly, preached powerfully against sin and reintroduced the truth of divine healing by the power of the name of Jesus to the church. He was an Australian who eventually lived and died in the US. In his latter days this man had serious problems and fell into a difficult financial state. One of those days of need, a man (Mr Shadd by name) gave him 50 dollars. That amount would be equivalent to way over 1000 dollars in today’s money. This Mr Shadd himself sorely needed this money to meet a mortgage payment on his own house, but he chose instead to honour this great man of God who was also in need. The man of God thanked him and prayed a short prayer that God would supply his needs.

The next week, to his intense surprise, Mr Shadd received a communication from his brother in which he promised to pay off the entire mortgage, a promise which was fulfilled. This was definitely a miracle of divine supplies.

Again, please note why this man gave to the Lord (in giving to the man of God), and what he was expecting, if anything, from the Lord for the act of giving.

Let us now put those stories together.

Both Mary Kay Ash and Mr Shadd did not give because they wanted to receive. Their personal needs were not in view when they made their offerings. One person gave as obedience to the prompting of the Holy Spirit and because she believed in personal integrity. She swore to her own hurt and yet did not change her mind or actions (Ps 15:1,4). She also had a passion for the progress of work in her assembly. She did not for once think of getting millions in return even though that was what she ended up with.

The second person gave because he had compassion on a man used greatly by God. His gift to God through this man was a gift of both love and honour. He actually placed his house at risk of being repossessed without thinking of what he would get in return. He was not bargaining with God; he just honoured His man. The Lord fulfilled a word in his life, the word that says “He that honours me I will honour.” The Lord bestowed the honour of fully owning his home on him.

Both of these givers, according Paul in the letter to the Galatians, sowed to the spirit. They reaped not just because of *what* they sowed but more importantly because of where they sowed into. You either sow to the flesh or the spirit.

These stories are without doubt very moving, and such stories are often told again and again to motivate Christians to give. A preacher would finish teaching from certain verses of the Bible, tell similar stories to these and then start asking those who would like such miracles to quickly rush to the altar with a large offering. People are challenged again and again to quickly take money they need for something else and 'give to God' so that He can release a miracle for them.

"Don't you want to be a millionaire like this woman?" they would say, "then make a pledge that is bigger than what you can afford, and go and get a loan to pay it off. Do this and see what God will do."

"You may need that money to save your business or your house, but if you will receive a miracle like Mr Shadd, you have to send in that money right now to this ministry or this TV station. As we are preaching the word of God with your money, God will be moving in your business. Get ready for a message that will save your home."

"Your seed must be painful for it to bear fruit for you. Can't you see that these people gave what pained them?"

You have heard all these kinds of statements again and again. People would usually start rushing to give so that they might get something out of God as a reward. Unfortunately, they miss one crucial point—the people they think they are copying did not have these kinds of motives in their hearts when they did what they did. And motive matters with our God.

But I, the Lord, search all hearts and examine secret motives. Jer 17:10 NLT

Those people whose stories we read sowed to the spirit; **but people are responding by sowing to the flesh.** Whether you are sowing to the spirit or to flesh is determined by your motive for giving. This is why you probably have not received anything for all the offerings you have given; you have been sowing to the flesh.

When your need is the reason why you are giving that offering, you are sowing to the flesh. Your giving should never be because of your needs but because of the need of the person you are meeting. It is called giving, not investing. You should give because you trust in God totally (*Please see my teaching tract, "Cheerful Giver"*).

When the personal reward is what is in your mind as you are giving, you are sowing to the flesh. The true reward that Christians should expect from God is the joy of seeing His will done. That was the reward that Jesus had in His mind as He went to the cross. His joy was that you and I would be saved and delivered from all our troubles, made into children of God who can carry His glory. That was His satisfaction. If you are going to be sowing into the spirit, you must learn to enjoy seeing your money bring forth good results in the lives of other people.

Another point we must highlight from the stories we saw earlier is that in both cases, the persons giving were not expecting what they received. God just went beyond them and did what they did not ask Him for. Isn't that wonderful? They were totally not expecting the things that happened and yet the Lord did those things for them. Solomon was not expecting a visitation from God when he offered up a thousand burnt offerings, but God responded with a special visit, offering him anything he would ask for. God does do beyond what we ask or think.

Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think. Eph 3:20 NLT

Don't worry about it; God knows you and knows your needs. You do not need to tie your giving to your need.

How do you sow to the spirit therefore in practice?

Simple, do as Paul said:

And let us not lose heart in doing good... So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith.

The habit of doing good as often as we have the opportunity without getting tired of so doing is how you sow to the spirit. You do this without thinking of what you will get personally out of it and without scanning the horizon for your reward. Do not set your eyes on the coming reward. Derive your joy just from seeing that your work is done and that God is pleased with your works. If you focus on yourself and what you will get in return, your seed is to the flesh and you will be an easy prey for those who peddle the gospel and take people captive with smooth words.

Selah



Apr 2015