

GOD IS NOT MOCKED.

EVENING JULY 30, 1893.

The seventh verse of the sixth chapter of the Epistle to the Galatians:

"Be not deceived; God is not mocked. For whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."

This admonition is given by the Apostle in immediate connection with the subject of contributions to the work of the Lord. He has just said to the brethren, "Let him that is taught in the Word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things." And he says just below, in the same connection, "As we have opportunity let us work that which is good toward all men, and especially toward them that are of the household of the faith." So, when he says in this connection, "Be not deceived; God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap," his special aim is to enforce the duty of liberality to the cause of Christ, and to the wants of the poor; but you will observe that, whilst that is his especial object, he draws the conclusion that such is our duty toward those who teach, and toward the poor, from the universal law governing our whole life here--that what we sow, that shall we also reap. This he lays down as the universal law of God's government over us, and when he says, "Be not deceived" about this, "God is not mocked," he means to inform us that, if we should think that we can sow one thing and reap another we would be [202] thinking that we had the power to mock God--that is, to defy him by overriding his plans and arrangements. Men are very apt to think they can do that. They do so many things by means of their perseverance and determination that they are very apt to conclude they can do anything they choose, whether it pleases God or not; that they can go on trampling God's laws under their feet as long as they choose, and still come out well. Paul knew very well that men were prone to deceive themselves into such an idea as this, and hence he says, "Be not deceived; God is not mocked. For whatsoever a man soweth, that *shall* he also reap."

Having made this statement, he goes on to another--a broad universal statement, growing out of the same great fact: "He that soweth to his flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption"; and, on the other hand, "he that soweth to the spirit, shall of the spirit reap life everlasting." This is God's fixed and unalterable law; and the man who thinks otherwise is deceived, and imagines that he can mock God.

What does the Apostle mean by sowing and reaping, in this latter portion of the text?--"he that soweth to the flesh" and "he that soweth to the spirit"--what is meant by that? A man does not literally sow to his flesh, does not literally sow to his spirit, consequently, the word "sow" here is used figuratively. But what does a man do when he is literally sowing? You have all seen men at it, and the kind of sowing in those days was not with a drill machine, but the old style of sowing--broadcast with the hand, the only sowing that was known in Asia, and that is known there yet. Have you noticed that man going across the field sowing? He puts his hand into the bag that is swung over his shoulder, gathers up a handful of seed, and scatters it to the right, to

[203] the left, and in front, and as he moves on he keeps scattering it at every step, and leaves a broad swath of it stretching out behind him. Now the Apostle contemplates every man that lives as doing something which he compares to that sowing. Every step he takes, he is scattering something to the right, to the left, and in front, and leaving it scattered all along the road behind him. What is it? He has especial reference here to a man's money. Well, there are some people who sow money--a young spendthrift, for instance, who has plenty of it. But all of us sow a good deal of it; it gets away; slips through our fingers some way, and is scattered all along the road that we travel. But money is not all that we sow. Every word that drops out of our mouths falls round about us, makes an impression, and is left behind us; and every deed, every act of our lives--indeed our life is made up of moments that have been compared to grains of gold that we are scattering along our pathway from the cradle to the grave. I presume, then, this sowing which the Apostle speaks of includes all that we do that has any moral character in it--our whole course of life. We are sowing, sowing, constantly sowing, and will be till we lie down in the grave.

But what is meant by sowing to the flesh? I do not suppose the Apostle means merely giving money and time and energy to feeding the physical man, and furnishing it with clothing and drink; in other words, I think the word "flesh" is used figuratively, as it so often is in the Scriptures, for the baser part of our nature--our passions and appetites. To sow to the flesh, then, means to devote our time, our energies, our words, our money, and all that we are scattering along our path, to the gratification of earthly and sensual desires.

Now the man that sows thus the Apostle says shall [204] reap. There is a reaping coming for that man just as certain as there is for the man who sows wheat or oats or any other grain; and as he sows, he shall reap.

What is it that the man shall reap who sows to the flesh? It is a very awful word--corruption! corruption! You know what corruption is--corruption of the flesh. The most hideous thing on this earth to a human being is the body of a man when it has gone to corruption. If it is the body of the dearest friend we have on earth, we desire, in the language of Abraham, to bury it out of our sight. He said of his beloved Sarah, "Give me a burying place, that I may bury my dead out of my sight."

Well, I think that this word, too, is used figuratively. The good man goes to physical corruption when he dies, as surely as the bad man does. When the Apostle says, "He that soweth to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption," what corruption does he mean? I think he applies the word "corruption" to the condition of the soul--a figurative application of it. But brethren, if a corrupted, decayed, putrefied, rotten body is a thing to be abhorred, what must be a putrefied, rotten, corrupted soul? I wish we could realize it. He that sows the actions and thoughts and money and energies of his life to the flesh, shall reap as his harvest a corrupted soul, is the teaching of this passage. If men could be made to believe this, they would sow to the flesh no longer; we would every one quit our sowing to the flesh. But why don't we believe it when it is in God's word? Well, we are deceived; we think that we can mock God. We think that we can go on in spite of God and sow to the flesh all our days, and some way or other escape that eternal corruption. That is what men think. If you could only make these wicked men who are sowing to the flesh every day--some of them most desperately engaged in it--realize that the harvest [205] of a corrupt soul will be their harvest bye and bye, every one of them would stop it. But they are

deceived; they think they can mock God. When that hard sinner thinks over the question, What will become of me? he says, "Well, I have been in a good many tight places, and I have gotten through; I may get into a tight place yet with God, possibly, but I think there is some way for a man to get through, and I am going to trust to my chances;" and so he goes on. He thinks that as he has gotten around men, and circumvented and outwitted them, and gotten out of every scrape thus far, when he comes to get into an entanglement with God he can slip around Him some way or other; thinks he can mock God. Paul says he can not do it. "God is not mocked."

There is one story (or rather a piece of true history) related in the book of Kings, (I Kings,) which always appeared to me, since I first came to think of it, as if it were written for the very purpose of illustrating this great doctrine of the Apostle. You know he tells us, respecting a great many things written in the Old Testament, that they happened for examples, and that they were written for our admonition on whom the ends of the world have come. I think this must be one of them.

It is a story connected with the history of Ahab, that wickedest of all the kings who had reigned over the ten tribes down to his day. You recollect that he wanted the vineyard of Naboth, which lay adjoining his palace grounds, and by which, if he had it, he could extend those grounds and make them so much more beautiful and delightful as a summer residence; for Jezreel, where he then resided, was the seat of his summer palace. The breezes from the Mediterranean sweep across a level plain, and pass through Jezreel away to the mountains of Gilead, and then come back, blowing alternately east and west, and giving great relief in the hot season. [206]

Being disposed to act honestly about it at first, he proposed to Naboth to buy his vineyard. "I will give thee the worth of it in money, or I will give thee a better vineyard." Nothing could be fairer than that. But Naboth had been born and reared on that little piece of land. His father before him, and *his* father before *him*, and away back to the time of Joshua, when the land was first parcelled out, had lived there, and when he thought of parting with it, his love for the old ancestral home took fresh possession of his soul, and although it was the king, he said, "God forbid that I should let you have the inheritance of my fathers." No money could buy it. And I love Naboth because he so loved the old home. I always have a great deal of respect for a man who, when he gets able, goes back to where his forefathers lived, and buys the old place, and fixes it up. I have been made to feel a great deal more respect for old Fred Douglass lately, that now he has money, he has gone up in Maryland and bought the old farm that his old master lived on when he was a little boy, and is going to spend there the remnant of his days.

Ahab was one of those men who, like a spoiled child, can never be satisfied if they do not get what they want. So he went home and dropped down on the bed, and turned his face toward the wall, and would not eat. I would not be surprised if we have farmers in Kentucky who desire to buy a certain piece of ground from a neighbor and can not get it, and are just as childish as Ahab. Jezebel comes in, and wants to know what is the matter. He tells her. She says, Get up and wash your face and eat. You shall have that vineyard. So she sends word to the rulers of the city, to proclaim a fast, and set Naboth on high before the people, and bring in two men of Belial who will swear against him that he had blasphemed [207] God and the king, and then to take him out and stone him to death. Suppose that you had been one of those magistrates, what would you have done? You would not have obeyed the order? Then you would have died; for Jezebel would

kill any man if he disobeyed her. She thought no more of cutting off the head of a man than that of a chicken. So those men concluded that rather than die for disobedience to the queen, they would execute her commands on Naboth, and they did it. When they sent word that it was done, she went to the king and told him, "Now go up and take possession of the vineyard; for all those that were in your way are dead." Ahab obeyed. He was one of those gentlemen who obey their wives, They mounted their horses, had some of the chief officers of the court with them, and rode into the vineyard; and I suppose they were talking about what improvements would be made; where a nice summer-house should be built; where the flower-bed should be; and where the gravel walk should be; and young Athaliah, Ahab's daughter, then about fourteen--what a nice time she and her companions would have in these delightful grounds! While this was going on, they turned toward the gate, and there was Elijah the prophet walking in. This scared Ahab. When he drew up within speaking distance, he said to Elijah, "Hast thou found me, O my enemy?" "I have found thee. And thus saith the Lord God before whom I stand, Dogs shall lick thy blood, even thine, O king, where they licked the blood of Naboth." He turned on his heel and went away. Ahab was so scared that it nearly made him sick.

A few years went on and Ahab got over his scare. A great many wicked men reach a point in life when they are desperately scared. They do better for a while, and people begin to think they are going to reform and be [208] good; but they get over it. Ahab got over it. Not many years after this, Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, proposed and brought about a marriage between his son, the young prince Jehoram, and Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab. Jehoshaphat came up to visit Ahab, and while he was there Ahab spoke to him about the king of Syria having taken possession of Ramoth-gilead, a city on the other side of the Jordan, and belonging to Ahab's kingdom; and he said to Jehoshaphat, "Wilt thou go over with me to Ramoth-gilead and fight against the Syrians, and take our city from them?" Jehoshaphat says, "My army is as thine, and I am as thou, and I will go;" but he says, Let us enquire of the Lord, whether we will prosper if we go. Well, Ahab calls in four hundred prophets, and puts the question to them in public, while the two kings are sitting on thrones near the gate of the city, "Shall we go up to Ramoth-gilead? And will the Lord prosper us?" And every one of the four hundred prophets said, Yea. Of course, when a man as wicked as Ahab is on the throne, and wants a lot of prophets around him to suit him, and has plenty of money to give to them, he can always have as many of that kind as he wants. Ahab had four hundred, all claiming to be prophets of the Lord. One man, Zedekiah, fixed up some horns, and put them on himself, and went pushing around, and said, "with these shall the king of Israel push the king of Syria, and prevail against him." But Jehoshaphat, a very good man in his way, a worshiper of God, was suspicious of all these prophets, and he said to Ahab, Is there not yet here another prophet of God, whom we may enquire of about this matter? Ahab says, Yes, there is another, one Micaiah, but I hate him because he always prophesies evil. Nevertheless, says Jehoshaphat, send for him, An officer was [209] immediately sent for Micaiah. That officer knew which side of his bread was buttered, and he thought he knew just exactly what kind of advice to give to the prophet; so as they were walking along to where the kings were sitting he said to the prophet, "Micaiah, all the prophets have prophesied good for the king. Now do you prophesy good." Micaiah answered him, "As the Lord lives, before whom I stand, the word that God shall put in my mouth, will I give to the king." Micaiah was not a man with an india-rubber conscience. When he is brought in, Ahab says: "Micaiah, shall we go up to Ramoth-gilead, and will the Lord prosper us if we go?" Micaiah says, "Go; the Lord shall prosper thee." But somehow or other, I suppose it was from the tone in which he spoke, Ahab took him to mean the

very opposite of what he had said, so he said, "How many times shall I exhort thee not to tell me any lies in the name of the Lord?" Micaiah then opened his mouth again and said: "I saw the Lord sitting on his throne, high and lifted up, and all the angels round about him. And the Lord said, Who shall go forth for me and persuade Ahab to go up to Ramoth-gilead and fall there? And one spirit said, I will go. The Lord said to that spirit, By what wilt thou persuade him? The spirit answered, I will go down and be a lying spirit in the mouth of his prophets, and I will persuade him to go up to Ramoth-gilead and fall there." Of course, all the crowd understood that Micaiah was making a parable here, or an allegory, and he meant by it that these prophets were all lying, every one of them, and that as sure as Ahab went up to Ramoth-gilead he would fall. Ahab understood it that way. So he said to the officer, "Take that man into the city and put him in prison, and feed him on the bread of affliction and the water of affliction, until I come again in peace." [210] As the officer led Micaiah away, he looked back at the king and said, "If thou dost return in peace, then the Lord has not spoken by me." Ahab knew just as well as he knew his name that Micaiah had spoken a prediction which he had received from God, and he knew as well as Micaiah did, that those other prophets were lying. But, did he go to Ramoth-gilead? Yes, he went. Did he think he could mock God? I suppose he did. He determined to try it, at any rate. So, when the two armies were about to go into battle, he said to King Jehoshaphat, You go into battle with your royal robes on, and I will go in in disguise. What did he do that for? It may be that somebody who has a special spite against me as a king will try to kill me, and that this is what Micaiah was counting on, and God was counting on, when they said I would fall in this battle. I will go in in disguise, and I will make it a point to keep in a safe place, and to go through the battle without being killed. He was determined not to be killed in that battle.

There was a very curious thing going on in the Syrian army just at the same time, just before that battle. Ben-Hadad, the king of Syria, had a personal dislike for Ahab. So he called the thirty commanders of the different divisions of his army into a council of war, and gave them this command--"In this battle, fight not against any man except the king of Israel;" so when that battle was joined, there were thirty men on the opposite side commanded to hunt out and kill the king of Israel, and not to fight anybody else until they killed him. Now, if Ben-Hadad had known what Micaiah had prophesied, and what Elijah had prophesied, about the fate of Ahab, and was anxious that God's prophesies should be true, he could not have done [211] anything, to save his life, better calculated to help God out, than this command to the thirty captains. Those thirty captains saw the crest of a king and made a rush for him; but he made some kind of an outcry, I suppose calling his men to rally around him, and they discovered that it was Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, so they stopped and turned away, because the king had told them not to fight anybody but Ahab. And when the battle was over, and they were called before their king, and he said, "Did you kill Ahab?" what do you suppose was their answer? I judge they would have to say, O, king, we obeyed thy command. We hunted around and looked for a king, and when we found one, we made a rush for him, but it was the wrong king; we pushed into the thickest of the fight, but if Ahab was in the army, we could not find him. So we failed. What did that show? That God did not want the help of those thirty men. But did Ahab escape? No. A soldier in the Syrian army drew his bow, and let fly the arrow without taking aim at anybody in particular, and that very arrow passed between the joints of the armor of Ahab, and passed through his body as he stood in his chariot. He bravely stood his ground until the battle was over, saying to the charioteer, Bear me up; hold me up; so that his men might not see him fall and be panic-stricken. But when the battle was over, and his men, returning, came near the palace, just opposite the

vineyard of Naboth, where there was a pool of water, they took his body out and washed the blood out of the chariot, and the dogs ate it where they had eaten the blood of Naboth. And thus it was proved that God could not be mocked. He could guide an arrow that was shot without aim, and He did not need the help of the thirty warriors of the enemy's forces. He did not [212] need Ahab's royal crest upon his head to guide that arrow to the right man. "God is not mocked." When He says a thing shall be done, it will be done.

Now, then, it was in view of such facts as these, of which Paul's mind was full in the experiences and history of the past, as well as full of the enlightening Spirit of the living God, that he said to men who are sowing to the flesh and think there is some way to escape the reaping of eternal corruption, "Be not deceived; God is not mocked." It will come; sure as the throne of God shall stand, his decrees will stand fast. Do not deceive yourselves into the idea that you can circumvent and outwit the Almighty. Is there any man here to-night who has been sowing to the flesh? Just as sure as the past has been what it has, the future will be what is here declared, unless there is an end to that sowing.

Thanks be to God that through the provision of the gospel of the grace of God, and through it alone, a man who has been sowing to the flesh a certain period of his life may escape reaping corruption by the mercy and love of God, who forgives the past and delivers us from it; but this deliverance can be obtained only by ceasing to do wrong, learning to do well, and casting yourselves in good time upon the mercy of your God. Will you do that, and will you do it to-night? That is the question to which all I have said has brought me, and has brought you; and it is the only thing that gives meaning and value to the facts which I have laid before you.

There is another thing in this passage for us to thank God for. While it is true and unalterable that he who sows to the flesh shall reap corruption, it is equally true that he who sows to the spirit shall reap life eternal. God is not mocked on either side. All the demons in hell, and all the wicked men on earth, and all the angels in heaven, [213] if they should undertake the ruin of a man, could not prevent one who has sown to the spirit from reaping life eternal. So, are you sowing to the Spirit? Go on rejoicing every day, and hope with a sure hope for everlasting life at the end of your time and your labor. Are you sowing to the flesh? Turn right about, and begin this very night sowing to the spirit, devoting your time, your money, your energies, your all, to the cultivation of your spiritual nature, so that eternal life may be the harvest you shall reap. [214]