

The Sow/Reap Principle

Some people call it Karma. Some people say, "What goes around comes around." Christian mystery writer, Dorothy Sayers, calls it the "law of the fire." She explains that in this world there are two kinds of law: the law of the stop sign and the law of the fire. Stop-sign laws are created by people. They're enforced by people through fines, reduction of rights or jail. The penalty for breaking a stop-sign law can vary, however, from state to state or even from time to time. Things that used to be illegal years ago aren't illegal anymore.

But the law of the fire is different. It's like God's laws which have consequences bound up in their very nature forever. So, if you put your hand in an open fire, it will be burned. It doesn't matter how old you are or how much money you have or at what point in history you live. Put your naked hand in the fire and it will be burned. She adds:

The moral law of God is like the law of the fire. You never break God's law; you just break yourself on them. God can't reduce the penalty, because the penalty for breaking the law is bound up in the law itself. ⁱ

The apostle Paul put it this way: (Gal. 6:7-8)

Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.

Esther chapter 7 is a clear example of the law of the fire and the sow/reap principle. The plot is moving at light speed now. We'll slow it down to be able to notice three important elements of the sow/reap principle embedded in it. First...

I. Truth Is Revealed.

Esther holds her second banquet and makes her request. It's clear that she still isn't sure what the king's response will be. Again, even though he keeps saying, "...what is your request? It will be given you. Even up to half the kingdom..." she's obviously nervous that when she asks him to issue a new decree, his attitude will change. It's a pretty big ask! Egotistical kings like Xerxes don't generally make decrees just so they can issue a contradictory decree a few days later. It tends to make it look like you don't know what you're doing and most kings don't want to leave that impression. But Esther knows there's no other way out. Time is short, so she makes her appeal:

...If I have found favor with you, O king, and if it pleases your majesty, grant me my life – this is my petition. And spare my people – this is my request. (Esther 7:3)

Now, let's hit the pause button. We need to feel the tension in the room. Esther is really a twenty-something nobody. Yes, she's queen, but Xerxes and Haman are the two most powerful, experienced and (let's face it) down-and-dirty politicians on earth! Haman who crafted the genocide plan is sitting right there! If Esther says

anything that causes the king to sympathize with him, the “show is over” and she probably loses her head. So, notice the detail of her appeal to the king. Beth Moore, in her study of Esther, writes this:

At first glance, her ceremonial introduction (*“If I have found favor with you, O King”*) sounds identical to the one she used at the banquet the night before. But she made one slight change that hosted a world of difference. This time she did not address him in the more distant third-person form: *“If I have won the King’s favor.”* She spoke directly to him in a far more intimate tone: *“If I have found favor with YOU, O king.”* In our immodest, say-whatever-you-think culture, we may not fully appreciate the difference, but in an ancient society it spoke volumes. ⁱⁱ

Esther then lays out the full truth:

For I and my people have been sold for destruction and slaughter and annihilation. (Esther 7:4)

This is undoubtedly the first time the king has understood that his queen is Jewish. But now the truth is out. Esther risked her life, told the truth and was willing to suffer any consequences that might have come. Her actions indicate that, for her, letting the truth be known was even more valuable than her life.

How valuable is the truth to you? A visiting professor at the Univ. of Calif., Santa Barbara, asked her college students to keep a log of the number of times they told a lie in one week. The results were fascinating. Overall, the group lied to 30% of the people they interacted with. 30%. Their lies fell into two categories. Some lies were “self-centered;” they lied in order to make themselves look better. Other lies were “other-centered;” they lied to avoid hurting someone else’s feelings. But the experiment also found that small lies, “white lies,” were more often told to strangers and deeper, more significant lies were told to loved ones. ⁱⁱⁱ

John 1:14 says that Jesus was full of two things: grace and truth. We need to empty ourselves of lying and fill ourselves with grace and truth if we’re going to call ourselves Christ followers.

But I think we all know that “how” we tell the truth makes a difference as well. Ed and Barb Waltz have a daughter named Deb who has cerebral palsy. They had hoped she would be able to walk one day. After performing a battery of tests, they met with the doctor who bluntly told them, “It’s extremely unlikely that your daughter will ever walk.” Barb was devastated but asked, “But what kind of shoes should I buy for her?” She was hoping that some kind of an orthopedic shoe might somehow help. The doctor just said, “Buy whatever kind of shoes you want. She won’t be using them to walk in.” Barb burst into tears.

Several months later, Ed and Barb met with another doctor on another issue but Barb asked again if there was any kind of shoes that might enable Deb to take even a few steps. This doctor paused, then he looked compassionately and directly into Barb’s eyes and said, “You know what I would do if I were you, Mrs. Waltz? I’d buy the prettiest pink shoes I could find, with purple shoe laces.”

Ed said, “We talked about our two doctor’s appointments on the way home. Both doctors told us the [truth]. I’m ashamed to say what we felt like doing to the first doctor but the second one we felt like hugging.” ^{iv} Eph. 4:15 tells us:

...speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.

Esther masterfully spoke the truth in love. The second element of the sow/reap principle that we see in this passage is...

II. Wrath Unleashed.

There's a connection in the Bible between truth and wrath; have you ever noticed that? One of Jesus' favorite things to say was the phrase, *"I tell you the truth..."* He's quoted as saying that over 70 times. But truth is not always applauded. In fact, it often makes people mad. And why was it that people got so mad at Jesus? It was because of the nature of the truth that He spoke. Heb. 4 says:

For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. (Heb. 4:12)

Jesus was constantly speaking this truth that Hebrews 4 says is like a sword, an implement of war. It divides soul and spirit, it judges our thoughts and attitudes. Do you see the connection between the truth of God and the wrath of God? They have similar goals. (Stay with me!) The truth of God reveals evil and the wrath of God destroys evil. Truth, in the Word of God, lights things up. Ps. 119:105:

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.

In John 3:20 Jesus said:

Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed.

So, the truth of God reveals evil, it lights it up so we can see it. And then, the wrath of God is released to destroy that evil. Col. 3:5, 6 say:

Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.

Because of these, the wrath of God is coming.

Now, here's another law of God's Universe. This is critically important!! Eventually, God's wrath will be applied to all evil, to all sin. Do you understand that?

Rev. 20 describes exactly how God's wrath will be applied to our sin:

And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened... The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. (Rev. 20: 12, 15)

Have you sinned? Yes, you have. And so have I. Rom. 3:23:

...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

So, according to this universal law, God's wrath will be applied to our sin. It absolutely is going to happen!! But it can be applied to our sin in one of two ways. First, if you do nothing, God's wrath will fall on you personally because the sin is part of you!! In the New Testament, after Paul has listed all kinds of sins, he writes:

Now we know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth. But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed. (Rom. 2:2, 5)

If you do nothing about your sin, eventually (maybe not today, maybe not for 30 years, but eventually) the wrath of God will fall on you. Queen Esther's truth revealed Haman's evil. Haman chose not to do anything about his sin. Now, the wrath of God is unleashed on Haman with breathtaking speed through King Xerxes:

King Xerxes asked Queen Esther, "Who is he? Where is the man who has dared to do such a thing?"

Esther said, "The adversary and enemy is this vile Haman."

Then Haman was terrified before the king and queen. The king got up in a rage, left his wine and went out into the palace garden. But Haman, realizing that the king had already decided his fate, stayed behind to beg Queen Esther for his life.

Just as the king returned from the palace garden to the banquet hall, Haman was falling on the couch where Esther was reclining.

The king exclaimed, "Will he even molest the queen while she is with me in the house?"

As soon as the word left the king's mouth, they covered Haman's face. Then Harbona, one of the eunuchs attending the king, said, "A gallows seventy-five feet high stands by Haman's house. He had it made for Mordecai, who spoke up to help the king."

The king said, "Hang him on it!" So they hanged Haman on the gallows he had prepared for Mordecai. Then the king's fury subsided. (Esther 7:5-10)

Do you see how quickly this all happened? Once the wrath of God begins, there's no time to think. You are suddenly, instantly swept away. For any of us who don't deal with our sin, what Haman experienced that day will one day happen to us! WHOOSH! And it's over. Once the wrath is released, it's over in an instant.

But there's a second way that the wrath of God can be applied to your sin. In II Chronicles, Hezekiah and his people both commit sin. It's described this way:

But Hezekiah's heart was proud and he did not respond to the kindness shown him (by God); therefore the LORD'S wrath was on him and on Judah and Jerusalem. Then Hezekiah repented of the pride of his heart, as did the people of Jerusalem; therefore the LORD'S wrath did not come upon them during the days of Hezekiah. (II Chron. 32:25, 26)

Repentance is the only shield that can protect you from the wrath of God. Do you see that in this passage? Wrath was coming, it was on its way but then, "...Hezekiah repented of the pride of his heart, as did the people of Jerusalem..." There are so many examples of this in the Bible. David gives us another in Ps. 32:

Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered.

When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long.

Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD" - and you forgave the guilt of my sin. (Ps. 32:1, 3, 5)

Last week, we saw that God gave Haman a golden opportunity to repent of his evil. While he was walking Mordecai through the streets and shouting, "This is

what is done for the man the king delights to honor," I believe Haman's heart was screaming at him, "What were you thinking? You were so wrong to let your anger lead you into sin. Repent now before it's too late!" But Haman refused to repent.

God's wrath WILL eventually be applied to all sin. So, how does repentance work? It works this way: on the cross, Jesus took your sin on Himself. Is. 53:

Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed (by the wrath of God!) for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. (Is. 53:4, 5)

Jesus was "crushed" by the wrath of God while carrying your sin. It was the wrath of God destroying your evil, which Jesus was holding, that killed Him. If you repent, if you acknowledge that your sin killed Jesus, and ask Him to forgive you, you will never have to withstand the full force of the wrath of God, which you and I surely deserve. So, the wrath of God WILL eventually destroy your sin. The only question is this: when it comes, will you be holding your sin and be destroyed with it or will you have given your sin to Jesus so that He can save you? Which brings us to our last teaching point concerning the sow/reap principle, which is the fact that...

III. The Reaping Is Seed-Specific.

Paul's explanation of God's sow/reap principle again is this:

A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature (like Haman), from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit (like Mordecai and Esther), from the Spirit will reap eternal life. (Gal. 6:7-8)

If you're a gardener, you know that what you harvest from your garden is highly dependent on what kind of seeds you sow. If you plant tomatoes, you'll harvest tomatoes. No rational gardener will plant tomato seeds and expect to harvest beans.

Paul is telling us that it's the same in the spiritual realm. But have you ever known anyone who planted seeds of anger and expected a crop of peace? Or someone who planted seeds of gossip and expected a harvest of trust? Haman planted seeds of anger, revenge and murder. He should not have been surprised by the crop that was produced.

What kind of seeds did you sow last week? Maybe you need to go back and dig up some of those seeds and replant with seeds that will produce the crop you really want? Whatever you decide, you can be sure of this: one day, the reaping will take place! Haman sowed evil seeds. Eventually, they produced a harvest of destruction. Don't follow his lead. This week, ask the Spirit of God to help you choose the best seeds. Then, be patient. Gal. 6:9 reminds us:

Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.

Let's pray...

-
- ⁱ Haddon Robinson, "Crafting Illustrations," PreachingToday.com 9/12/2011
- ⁱⁱ Beth Moore, *Esther: It's Tough Being A Woman* (Nashville: LifeWay Press, 2008), p. 156
- ⁱⁱⁱ Joceyln Voo, "Honestly, all of us are liars," www.cnn.com (1-21-08)
- ^{iv} Clark Cothorn, pastor of Living Water Community Church, Ypsilanti, Michigan