

## The Reaping Season

By Greg L. Bahnsen

Don't let anyone fool you. Ideas are not irrelevant. The most basic way that people think – the way they see themselves and the world around them – makes a walloping difference to their world and their behavior in it.

For instance, plenty of people think of this as a “chance” world. Things happen randomly, with no necessity or sufficient reason, and certainly with no transcendent direction by a sovereign God. Even the regularities of nature “just happen” to be the way they are and could be different – perhaps will change in the future. Even our alleged evolutionary past is thought to be fortuitous, not guided by any purpose or aim. There is no inner connection that links all things in the world, links all events, and accounts for a causal order in our experience.

Christians know that this outlook is mistaken. Their hearts have been changed by the power of God's grace, and their eyes have been enlightened to the truth of God's self-revelation in the Scriptures. So they have come to believe what the bible says about God's sovereignty and His providential control of everything in the world and everything that transpires there. The living and true God “works all things after the counsel of His own will” (Eph. 1:11) – all things. God has a purpose for every event in the world, every detail of our personal experience. He even numbers the hairs of our heads (Matt. 10:30). And God is a personal God, with infinite knowledge and wisdom, and a holy character. The way in which He governs the affairs upon earth is not mechanical and devoid of moral considerations. “The LORD is righteous in all His ways and holy in His works” (Psa. 145:17).

Unbelievers who see this as a random, chance world have made a fundamental mistake in their view of reality and their view of history, then. But so what? Is not this just an isolated error in their philosophical outlook, an abstract and irrelevant defect in their doctrine? Not at all. Do not let anyone fool you: *ideas have consequences*. Because people think things happen by impersonal chance, they are not led to believe that there is a connection between their ethical opinions or behavior and the way things turn out for them in the world – or for the society around them. If all events are at base random, then there is no reason to expect that the moral character of a person's attitudes and actions will have any bearing upon the quality of his life or his society. This leaves us quite free to make moral mistakes in our convictions or conduct, as well as culturally free to alter our mores. If the world is random, then ethics can be relative. Regardless of what you think and do about right and wrong, there is “no harm, no foul.”

This kind of foolish thinking is diametrically at odds with the wisdom taught in the inspired book of Proverbs. The choices which people make will make a definite difference to how well they get along in this world. God is the Creator of the world, and He governs it according to His character and aims. Therefore, to live contrary to God's revealed will is to disregard “the Maker's instructions.” You cannot get along well in God's world when you disregard or disobey God's word. And for that reason it does not make good sense to sin. Personal and cultural happiness are not unrelated to personal and cultural submission to God's law. Although the Tempter would have us think otherwise, the fact is that doing what seems best in our own eyes does not bring pleasure and prosperity ultimately. To be blunt: sin is stupid.

The wisdom of God is personified in Proverbs 1:20-33. It cries aloud for men to heed His words. Does it make any real difference whether people listen to God's wisdom and instruction? Does it matter if they conform to His direction or not? You had better believe that it does. God declares that if His counsel is set at naught, he will have the last laugh – “I also will laugh at your calamity . . . when distress and anguish come upon you” (vv. 24-27). There will be consequences to disobedience. “They hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of Jehovah; they would have none of My counsel and despised all My reproof. *Therefore* they shall eat of the fruit of their way” (vv. 29-31). On the other hand, by stark contrast, God's wisdom promises that those who hearken to His word will enjoy the pleasant consequence of security (v. 33). Chapter 2 in Proverbs continues the same theme. Honoring God's commandments (v. 1) is wise (v. 2) and beneficial (vv. 7-11) – it brings longevity and peace (3:1-2), good health and prosperity (3:8-10). Surely then: “Happy is the man that finds wisdom” (3:13). Compare the remainder of chapter 3 for yourself. Read on in chapter 4. You cannot miss it.

The point should be obvious that the quality of our moral choices will affect the quality of our lives, individually and corporately. It is utter foolishness to believe that erroneous thinking about ethics and human behavior,

along with attendant moral transgression, will prove irrelevant in this world. God will scoff at those who scoff at His word (3:34), and He will hold fools up to shame (3:35). The way of wickedness is thus difficult and unrewarding. "The way of the wicked is a darkness; they know not at what they stumble" (4:19). Sin and rebellion against God are suicidal. "He who sins against Me wrongs his own soul: all those who hate Me love death (8:36). This is, then, a moral universe where God personally and sovereignly controls all events with a view to His holy character and plans. Those who depart from the revealed will of the Lord not only incur eternal guilt and the curse of God, they likewise live contrary to good sense and curse themselves to the miseries of sin.

There was a time when our culture had a general sense of the truths rehearsed above. For all of the doctrinal deviation and defects which existed, there was a generalized Christian perspective on life and how it should be lived. People believed in a personal God who controlled the outcome of events. People believed in moral absolutes reflecting God's holy character. People believed that there was some relationship between happiness and prosperity in God's world and submission to God's will. But not today. The spirit of our age is not one which sees God as a reality with which to reckon seriously. Our general outlook does not take God to be a person who is sovereign and holy. The culture about us has adopted a relativistic understanding of morality. This has been the generation of revolutions – in our view of authority, in our pursuit of sexual pleasure, in our educational aims and methods, in our use of the legislature and judicatories, in our financial habits and respect for private property, etc. Ours is a century which has seen dramatic reversals in the written and unwritten codes of personal conduct.

So how is it going? What kind of consequences are we experiencing for our tinkering with the moral absolutes found in God's revealed will? An honest look around leads me to suggest that the late twentieth century can be called "the season of reaping." Our departures from God's word are making a visible impact upon our lives in this world. The consequences are not subtle, nor are they desirable. One would think that even the spiritually blind would be able to see this (though they cannot, as Scripture teaches).

God's word clearly teaches us that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of all knowledge (Prov. 1:7; Col. 2:3). Our schools have proceeded along another path altogether. God is seen as irrelevant to science and history, if He exists at all. His moral guidelines are just one opinion among many, it is thought. For years schools have played the hypocritical game of religious neutrality. Where has this gotten us? Are our children more literate today? more tolerant of differing viewpoints? more industrious and self-sacrificial? more respecting of authority in this world? The questions are rhetorical for anyone who pays attention to even the liberal media. Our schools are in perpetual crisis – academic decline, financial failure, student apathy and misconduct.

God's word clearly teaches that the joy of sexual intimacy has been ordained by God for marriage – monogamous, heterosexual marriage (Matt. 19:4-6; I Cor. 6:9-10, 18; 7:2). In our century we have seen the abandonment of God's standards in favor of divorce at personal discretion. We have seen in the theater, movies, popular music and now even prime-time television the promotion and condoning of illicit sexual relations between unmarried people. Homosexuals have come out of the closet to demand acceptance as people involved in nothing more than an alternative lifestyle. Yet our culture has not gained greater satisfaction for its disdain for God's law. There is greater heartache and despair over relations which prove meaningless or temporary. There are scores of young people burdened with the effects of their promiscuity when they are ill equipped to raise children – and the statistical incidence continues to rise, not fall, even with birth control and sex education. Gonorrhea and herpes are visited upon licentious living with lasting, painful ramifications, AIDS has already killed thousands in our culture and will destroy the dignity and life of thousands more. Homes are destroyed by the effects of pornography and infidelity (by wives as much as husbands nowadays). The increase of sexual crimes – from date rape to child molestation – is horrifying and disgusting.

God's word clearly teaches that we are to honor those in authority over us and not only respect, but protect, the property of others (Ex. 20:12, 15; Psa. 50:18; I Pet. 2:13). However, in the present moral environment, a parent who attempts to enforce respect for authority by an appropriate spanking of a wayward child could face charges of child abuse. Children, instead, grow up to abuse their teachers, use any manner of profanity against police officers, show disdain for the elderly, resent the imposition of work standards by an employer, and do whatever pleases themselves. They do not have to listen to anybody. Vandalism of private property is rarely stopped, even by neighbors who know that it is taking place. Theft is so common in some major cities (and crimes of violence so pressing) that the police will not even come out to take a report of incidents. Entire divisions of police departments are given to nothing other than cases of stolen automobiles.

God's word clearly teaches that human life is to be respected and protected because it images God Himself (Gen. 1:26; Ex. 20:13; Jas. 3:9). Our culture no longer sees inherent value in human life, but evaluates it only

in terms of utilitarian considerations. The developing baby is murdered by abortion if the pregnancy is inconvenient or otherwise unwanted. Statistics on abortion prove that our society's bloodthirstiness and insensitivity have surpassed even the worst estimates of Hitler's genocide. Questions in medical ethics – from test-tube babies to disconnecting life-support systems – are determined by reference to the usefulness or happiness of patients, if not that of their prospective parents or heirs. Human life, to be brief, has become cheap.

Many, many other examples present themselves to us in daily affairs and news broadcasts. What we see all around us is the mounting evidence that disobedience to God does not bring happiness and prosperity, but despair, suffering and misery. "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man sows, that shall he also reap" (Gal. 6:7). Our society has been sowing the seeds of sin, and now it is reaping corruption (v. 8). Indeed, we are experiencing an ever-worsening season of reaping, having thought that our departure from God's revealed will would be irrelevant to our happiness. "There is a way that seems right to a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death" (Prov. 14:12).

This is an opportune time to remind ourselves and others of the Biblical truth that God's commandments were never meant to be a burden, but were rather revealed *for our good* (Deut. 10:13). It is an opportune time to demonstrate to those around us the foolishness of sin for us as individuals or as a society. It is an opportune time to call them to the promise of eternal life in Christ the Redeemer, and in so doing, to promote walking in the path of life by submission to Christ our King. The season of reaping is an opportune time, you see, for obeying the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20) – making disciples of all nations and teaching them to observe whatsoever Christ has commanded. The season of reaping is, at the same time, a season for important *sowing*.