

1 Corinthians 9:11

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things?

Analysis

If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things? Paul applies the agricultural metaphor directly to his relationship with the Corinthians. He "sowed" (Greek *speirō*, σπείρω) spiritual seed—the gospel, teaching, discipleship—resulting in their conversion and growth. The Greek *pneumatika* (πνευματικά, "spiritual things") denotes eternal, heavenly realities; *sarkika* (σαρκικά, "carnal things") refers to material, earthly provisions like food and money.

Paul argues from greater to lesser: if apostles give the invaluable (eternal life, divine truth), is it unreasonable to receive the temporal (daily bread)? The word "reap" (*therizō*, θερίζω) continues the harvest imagery—ministers gather material support as fruit of their spiritual labor. This is not mercenary; it is divinely ordained reciprocity. Paul echoes Jesus' teaching: "The laborer is worthy of his hire" (Luke 10:7). Yet Paul will refuse this harvest (v. 12), modeling sacrificial ministry.

Historical Context

Greco-Roman patronage systems involved reciprocal exchange: benefactors gave money, clients gave honor and service. Paul reframes this cultural norm theologically: the exchange is not patron-client but spiritual-material. Churches do not hire apostles as employees; they provide for those who have given them the

gospel. This protects ministry from commercialization while ensuring ministers are sustained.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. How does contrasting "spiritual things" with "carnal things" highlight the value disparity?
2. Why is it appropriate for those who benefit spiritually to support ministers materially (Gal 6:6)?
3. How does Paul's willingness to sow without reaping (v. 12) challenge prosperity gospel theology?

Interlinear Text

εἰ	ἡμεῖς	ὑμῖν	τὰ	πνευματικὰ	ἐσπείραμεν	μέγα
If	we	unto you	G3588	spiritual things	have sown	is it a great thing
G1487	G2249	G5213		G4152	G4687	G3173
εἰ	ἡμεῖς	ὑμῶν	τὰ	σαρκικὰ	θερίσομεν	
If	we	your	G3588	carnal things	shall reap	
G1487	G2249	G5216		G4559	G2325	

Additional Cross-References

Romans 15:27 (Spirit): It hath pleased them verily; and their debtors they are. For if the Gentiles have been made partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister unto them in carnal things.

Galatians 6:6 (Parallel theme): Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things.

2 Corinthians 11:15 (Parallel theme): Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works.

Matthew 10:10 (Parallel theme): Nor scrip for your journey, neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves: for the workman is worthy of his meat.

2 Kings 5:13 (Parallel theme): And his servants came near, and spake unto him, and said, My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? how much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean?

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