

Breaking Up The Fallow Ground

Charles G. Finney

Updated and edited by Steve Grochow

Break up your fallow ground for it is time to seek the Lord till He come and rain righteousness upon you...Hosea 10:12

The Jews were a nation of farmers, and it is therefore a common thing in the scriptures to refer for Illustrations to their occupation, and to the scenes with which farmers and shepherds are familiar. The prophet Hosea addresses them as a nation of backsliders; he reproves them for their idolatry, and threatens them with the judgments of God. My design in this Lecture is to show how a revival is to be promoted.

A revival consists of two parts: as it applies the Church, and as it applies the ungodly. I will speak on this occasion of a revival in the Church. Fallow ground is ground which has once been tilled, but which now lies waste, and needs to be broken up and mellowed, before it is it is ready to receive grain. I will show, as it applies to a revival in the Church

1. What it is to break up the fallow ground, in the sense of the text.
2. How it is to be performed.

I. WHAT IT MEANS TO BREAK UP THE FALLOW GROUND.

To break up the fallow ground, is to break up your hearts, to prepare your minds to bring forth fruit unto God. The mind of man is often compared to the ground in the bible. The word of God is the seed sown there, the fruit representing the actions and emotions of those who receive it. To break up the fallow ground therefore, is to bring the mind into such a state that it is fitted to receive the Word of God. Sometimes your hearts get matted down, hard and dry, until there is no such thing as getting fruit from them until they are broken up, and mellowed down, and fitted to the Word. It is this softening of the heart, so as to make it feel the truth, which the prophet calls break up your fallow ground.

II. How is the fallow ground to be broken?

It is not by any direct efforts to feel. There are great errors on the subject of the laws which govern the mind. People talk about religious feeling as if they could by direct effort, call forth religious affection. But this is not the way the mind acts. No man can make himself feel in this way, simply by trying to feel. The feelings of the mind are not directly under our control. We cannot just will or decide to have religious feelings. They are purely involuntary states of mind. They naturally and necessary exist in the mind under certain circumstances calculated to excite them. But they can be controlled indirectly otherwise there would be no moral character In our feelings, if there were not a way to control them. We cannot say, "Now I will feel so-and-so toward such an object."

But we can command our attention to it, and look at it intently, until the proper feeling arises. Let a man who is away from his family bring them up before his mind and will he not feel? But it is not by saying to himself, "Now I will feel deeply for family." A man can direct his attention to any object about which he ought to feel and wishes to feel, and in that way he will call into existence the proper emotions. Let a man call up his enemy before his mind, and his feelings of enmity will rise. So if a man thinks of God, and fastens his mind on any of God's character, he will feel, emotions will come up by the very laws of mind. If he is a friend of God, let him contemplate God as a gracious and holy being, and he will have emotions of friendship kindled in his mind. If he is an enemy of God, only let him get the true character of God before his mind, and look at it, and fasten his attention on it, and then his bitter enmity will rise against God, or he will break down and give his heart to God.

If you mean to break up the fallow ground of your hearts, and make your minds feel on the subject of religion, you must go to work just as you would to feel on any other subject.

Instead of keeping your thoughts on everything else, and then imagining that by going to a few meetings you will get your feelings started, go the common-sense way to work, as you would on any other subject. It is just as easy to make your minds feel on the subject of religion as it is on any other. God has put these states of mind under your control. If people were as unphilosophical about moving their limbs as they are about regulating their emotions, you would never have reached this meeting.

If you mean to break up the fallow ground of your hearts, you must begin by looking at your hearts: examine and note the state of your minds, and see where you are. Many never seem to think about this. They pay no attention to their own hearts, and never know whether they are doing well in religion or not; whether they are gaining ground or going back; whether they are fruitful, or lying waste. Now you must draw off your attention from other things, and look into this. Make a business of it. Do not be in a hurry. Examine thoroughly the state of your hearts, and see where you are: whether you are walking with God every day, or with the devil; whether you are serving God or serving the devil most; whether you are under the dominion or the prince of darkness, or of the Lord Jesus Christ.

To do all this, you must set yourself to work to consider your sins. You must examine yourselves. And by this I do not mean you must stop and look directly within to see what is the present state of your feelings. That is the very way to put a stop to all feeling. That is just as absurd as it would be for a man to shut his eyes on the lamp, and try to turn his eyes inward to find whether there was any image painted on the retina. The man complains that he does not see anything! And why? Because he has turned his eyes away from the objects of sight. The truth is, our moral feelings are as much an object of consciousness as our senses. And the way to find them out is to on acting, and using our minds. Then we can tell our moral feelings by consciousness, just as I could tell my

natural feelings by consciousness if I should put my hand in the fire.

Self-examination consists in looking at your lives, in considering your actions, in calling up the past, and learning its true character. Look back over your past history. Take up your individual sins one by one, and look at them. I do not mean that you should just cast a glance at your past life, and see that it has been full of sins, and then go to God and make a sort of general confession, and ask for pardon. That is not the way. You must take them up one by one. Get a pen and paper and write them down as you remember them. Go over them as carefully as a merchant goes over his books and as often as a sin comes before your memory, add it the list. General confessions of sin will never do. Your sins were committed one by one; and as they come to you, review and repent of them one by one. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you your past sins. Now begin, and take up first what are commonly, but improperly, called Sins of Omission.

1. Ingratitude. Take this sin and write down under that heading all the times you can remember where you have received favors from God and others for which you have never expressed gratitude or thankfulness. How many cases can you remember? Some remarkable change of events, that saved you from ruin. Write down the instances of God's goodness to you when you were in sin, before your conversion, for which you have never been half thankful enough; and the numerous mercies you have received since. How long the list of instances, where your ingratitude has been so black that you are forced to hide your face in confusion! Go on your knees and confess them one by one to God, and ask forgiveness. The very act of confession, by the laws of suggestion, will bring up others to your memory. Put these down. Go over them three or four times in this way, and see what an astonishing number of mercies there are for which you have never thanked God.

2. Lack of love to God. Think how grieved and alarmed you would be if you discovered any lack of affection for you in your wife, husband, or children; if you saw another absorbing their hearts, and thoughts, and time. Perhaps in such a case you would nearly die with a just and virtuous jealousy. Now, God calls Himself a jealous God; and have you not given your heart to other loves and infinitely offended Him?

3. Neglect of the Bible. Put down the cases when for perhaps weeks, or longer, God's Word was not a pleasure. Some people, indeed, read over whole chapters in such a way that they could not tell what they had been reading. If so, no wonder that your life is spent at random, and that your religion is such a miserable failure.

4. Unbelief. Recall the instances in which you have virtually charged the God of truth with lying, by your unbelief of His express promises and declarations. God has promised to give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him. Now, have you believed this? Have you expected Him to answer? Have you not virtually said in your hearts, when you prayed for the Holy Spirit: "I do not believe that I shall receive"? If you have not believed nor expected to receive the blessing which God has expressly promised, you have charged Him with lying.

5. Neglect of prayer. Think of the times when you have neglected secret prayer, family prayer, and prayer meetings; or have prayed in such a way as more grievously to offend God than to have omitted it altogether.

6. Neglect of the means of grace. When you have made stupid and meaningless excuses to prevent your attending meetings, have neglected and poured contempt upon the methods of salvation, simply because you dislike spiritual duties?

7. The manner in which you have performed those duties. That is, with lack of feeling and lack of faith in a worldly frame of mind, so that your words were nothing but the mere chattering of a wretch who did not deserve that God should feel the least care for him. When you have fallen down upon your knees and "said your prayers" in such an unfeeling and careless manner that if you had been put under oath five minutes after, you could not have said for what you had been praying.

8. Lack of love for the souls of your fellow-men. Look around upon your friends and relatives, and remember how little compassion you have felt for them. You have stood by and seen them going right to hell, and it seems as though you did not care if they did go. How many days have there been, in which you did not make their condition the subject of a single fervent prayer, or display a glowing and devoted desire for their salvation?

9. Lack of care for the lost. Perhaps you have not cared enough for them to attempt to learn their condition; perhaps not even to take a missionary magazine. Look at this, and see how much you really care for the lost, and write down honestly the real amount of your feelings for them, and your desire for their salvation. Measure your desire for their salvation by the self-denial you practice, in giving of your substance to send them the Gospel. Do you deny yourself even the hurtful and unnecessary desires of life, such as tea, coffee, and tobacco? Do you cut back on your style of living, and hesitate not to deny yourself any inconvenience to save them? Do you daily pray for them in private? Are you putting money aside to put into the treasury of the Lord when you go up to pray? If you are not doing these things, and if your soul is not agonized for the poor benighted heathen, why are you such a hypocrite to pretend to be a Christian? Why saying you are a Christian is an insult to Jesus Christ!

10. Neglect of family duties. Think how you have prayed before your family, how you have prayed, what an example you have set before them. What direct efforts do you habitually make for their spiritual good? What duty have you not neglected?

11. Neglect of social duties.

12. Neglect of watchfulness over your own life. In how many instances you have hurried over your private duties, and have not been fully responsible in performing your duties, nor honestly made up your accounts with God; how often have you entirely neglected to watch your conduct, and, having been off your guard, have sinned before the world, and before the Church, and before God!

13. Neglect to watch over your brethren. How often have you broken your covenant that you would watch over them in the Lord ! How little do you know or care about the

state of their souls! And yet you are under a solemn oath to watch over them. What have you done to make yourself acquainted with them? In how many of them have you interested yourself to know their spiritual state? Go over the list, and wherever you find there has been a neglect, write it down. How many times have you seen your brethren growing cold in religion, and have not spoken to them about it? You have seen them beginning to neglect one duty after another, and you did not reprove them, in a brotherly way. You have seen them falling into sin, and you let them go on. And yet you pretend to love them. What a hypocrite I Would you see your wife or child going into disgrace, or into the fire, and hold your peace? No, you would not. What do you think of yourself, then, to pretend to love Christians, and to love Christ, while you can see them going into disgrace, and say nothing to them?

14. Neglect of self-denial. There are many professors who are willing to do almost anything in religion, that does not require self-denial. But when they are required to do anything that requires them to deny themselves-oh, that is too much! They think they are doing a great deal for God, and doing about as much as He ought in reason to ask, if they only doing what they do just as well as not; but they are not willing to deny themselves any comfort or convenience whatever for the sake of serving the Lord. They will not willingly suffer reproach for the name of Christ. Nor will they deny themselves the luxuries of life, to save a world from hell. So far are they from remembering that self-denial is a condition of discipleship that they do not know what self-denial is. They never have really denied themselves a ribbon or a pin for Christ and the Gospel. Oh, how soon such people will be in hell! Some are giving of their abundance and are giving much, and are ready to complain that others do not give more; when, In truth, they do not themselves give anything that they need, anything that they could enjoy if they kept it. They only give of their surplus wealth; and perhaps that poor woman who puts in her mite, has exercised more self-denial than they have in giving thousands.

From these we now turn to Sins of Commission.

1. Wordily mindedness. What has been the state of your heart in regard to your worldly possessions Have you looked at them as really yours-as if you had a right to dispose of them as your own, according to your own will? If you have, write that down. If you have loved property, and sought after it for its own sake, or to gratify lust or ambition, or a worldly spirit or to lay it up for your families, you have sinned, and must repent.

2. Pride. Recall all the times you can, in which you have detected yourself in the exercise of pride. Vanity is a particular form of pride. How many times have you detected yourself in consulting vanity about your dress and appearance? How many times have you thought more, and taken more pains, and spent more time about decorating your body to go to Church, than you have about preparing your mind for the worship of God?

You have gone caring more as to how you appeared outwardly in the sight of mortal man, than how your soul appeared in the sight of the heart-searching God. You have, in

fact, set up yourself to be worshiped by them, rather than prepared to worship God yourself. You sought to divide the worship of God house, to draw off the attention of God's people to look at your pretty appearance. It is in vain to pretend flow, that you do not care anything about having people look at you. Be honest about it would you take all this pains about your looks if every person were blind?

3. Envy. Look at the cases in which you were envious of those whom you thought were above you in any respect. Or perhaps you have envied those who have been more talented or more useful than yourself. Have you not so envied some, that you have been pained to bear them praised? It has been more pleasant for to you to dwell upon their faults than upon their virtues, upon their failures than upon their success. Be honest with yourself; and if you have harbored this spirit of hell, repent deeply before God, or He will never forgive you.

4. Censoriousness and bitterness. Instances in which you have had a bitter spirit or harbored a grudge toward someone? How many times have you spoken of Christians in a manner completely lacking charity and love? Love always hopes for the best but count the time in which you suspected the worst.

5. Slander and gossip. The times you have spoken behind people's backs of the faults, real or supposed, of members of the Church or others, unnecessarily, or without good reason. This is slander. You need not lie to be guilty of slander: to tell the truth with the design to injure is to slander.

6. Levity. How often have you joked before God as you would not have dared to joke in the presence of an important official? You have either been an atheist, and forgotten that there was a God, or have had less respect for Him, and His presence, than you would have had for an earthly judge.

7. Lying. Understand now what lying is. Any form of designed deception. If the deception be not designed, it is not lying. But if you design to make an oppression contrary to the naked truth, you lie. Put down all those cases you can recollect. Do not call them by any soft name. God call them LIES, and charges you with LYING, and you had better charge yourself correctly How innumerable are the falsehoods perpetrated every day in business, and in social intercourse, by words and looks, and actions, designed to make an impression on others, for selfish reasons that is contrary to the truth.

8. Cheating. Set down all the cases in which you have dealt with an individual, and done to him that which you would not like to have done to you. That is cheating. God has laid down a rule in the case : "**All things whatsoever you would that men should do to you, do even so to them.**" That is the rule. And if you have not done so you are a cheat. Mind, the rule is not that you should do "what you might reasonably expect them to do to you:" for that is a rule which would admit of every degree of wickedness. But it is : "**As you WOULD they should do to you.**"

9. Hypocrisy. For instance, in your prayers and confessions to God. Set down the instances in which you have prayed for things you did not really want. And the evidence

is, that when you have done praying, you could not tell for what you had prayed. How many times have you confessed sins that you did not mean to break off and when you had no solemn purpose not to repeat them? Yes, have confessed sins when you knew you as much expected to go and repeat them, as you expected to live.

10. Robbing God. Think of the instances in which you have misspent your time, squandering the hours which God gave you to serve Him and save souls, in vain amusements or foolish conversation, in reading novels or doing nothing; cases where you have misapplied your talents and powers of mind; where you have squandered money on your lusts, or spent it for things which you did not need, and which did not contribute to your health comfort, or usefulness. Perhaps some of you have laid out God's money for tobacco. I will not speak of intoxicating drink for I presume there is no professor religion here that would drink it, and I hope there is n one that uses that filthy poison, tobacco. Think of teachers, of religion using God's money to poison themselves with tobacco!

11. Bad temper. Perhaps you have abused your wife, or your children, or your family, or employees, or neighbors. Write it all down.

12. Hindering others from being useful. Perhaps you have, weakened their influence by mslnuahons against them. You have not only robbed God of your own talents, but tied the hands of somebody else. What a wicked servant is he who not only loiters himself but hinders the rest! This is done sometimes by taking their time needlessly; sometimes by destroying Christian confidence in them. Thus you have played into the hands of Satan, and not only showed yourself an idle vagabond, but prevented others from working.

If you find you have committed a fault against an individual, and that individual is within your reach, go and confess it immediately, and get that out of the way. If the individual you have injured is too far off for you to go and see him, sit down and write him a letter and confess the injury. If you have defrauded anybody, send the money, the full amount and the interest.

Go thoroughly to work in all this. Go now. Do not put it off; that will only make the matter worse. Confess to God those sins that have been committed against God, and to man those sins that have been committed against man. Do not think of getting off by going around the stumbling-blocks. Take them up out of the way. In breaking up your fallow ground, you must remove every obstruction. Things may be left that you think little things, and you may wonder why you do not feel as you wish to feel in religion, when the reason is that your proud and carnal mind has covered up something which God required you to confess and remove. Break up all the ground and turn it over. Do not "balk" it, as the farmers say; do not turn aside for little difficulties; drive the plough right through them, dig deep, and turn the ground up, so that it may all be mellow and soft, and fit to receive the seed and bear fruit "**an hundredfold.**"

When you have gone over your whole history in this way, thoroughly, if you will then go over the ground the second time, and give your solemn and fixed attention to it, you will feel that the things you have put down will suggest other things of which you have

been guilty, connected with them, or near them. Then go over it a third time, and you will recollect other things connected with these. And you will find in the end that you can remember an amount of history, and particular actions even in this life, which you did not think you would remember in eternity. Unless you take up your sins in this way, and consider them in detail, one by one, you can form no idea of the amount of them. You should go over the list as thoroughly, and as carefully, and as solemnly, as you would if you were just preparing yourself for the Judgment.

As you go over the history of your sins, be sure to decide upon present and entire reformation. Wherever you find anything wrong, take care of it at once, in the strength of God, to sin no more in that way. It will be of no benefit to examine yourself, unless you determine to change in every particular that which you find wrong in heart, temper, or conduct.

If you find, as you go on with this duty, that your mind is still all dark, cast about you, and you will find there is some reason for the Spirit of God to depart from you. You have not been faithful and thorough. In the progress of such a work you have got to do violence to yourself and bring yourself as a rational being up to this work, with the Bible before you, and try your heart till you do feel. You need not expect that God will work a miracle for you to break up your fallow ground. It is to be done by means. Fasten your attention to the subject of your sins. You cannot look at your sins long and thoroughly and see how bad they are, without feeling, and feeling deeply. Experience fully proves the benefit of going over our history in this way. Set yourself to work now; decide that you never will stop until you find you can pray. You never will have the Spirit of God dwelling in you until you have unraveled this whole mystery of iniquity, and spread out your sins before God. Let there be this deep work of repentance and full confession, this breaking down before God, and you will have as much of the spirit of prayer as your body can bear up under. The reason why so few Christians know anything about the Spirit of prayer is because they never would take the pains to examine themselves properly, and so never knew what it was to have the hearts all broken up in this way. You see I have only begun to lay open this subject I want to lay it out before you, in the course of these Lectures, so that if you will begin and go on to do as I say, the results will be just as certain as they are when a farmer breaks up a fallow field, and mellows it, and sows his grain. It will be so, if you will only begin in this way and bold it on till all your hardened and callous hearts break up.

REMARKS.

1. It will do no good to preach to you while your hearts are in this hardened, and waste, and fallow state. The farmer might just as well sow his grain on the rock. It will bring forth no fruit. This is the reason why there are so many fruitless ministers in the Church, and why there is so much organization and so little deep-toned feeling. Look at the Sunday school, for instance, and see many tools there are and how little of the power of godliness. If you go on in this way the Word of God will continue to harden you, and

you will grow worse and worse, just as the rain and snow on an old fallow field make the turf thicker and the clods stronger.

2. See why so much preaching is wasted, and worse than wasted. It is because the Church will not break up their fallow ground. A preacher may wear out his life, and do very little good, while there are so many "stony ground" hearers, who have never had their fallow ground broken up. They are only half converted, and their religion is rather a change of opinion than a change of the feeling of their hearts. There is mechanical religion enough, but very little that looks like deep heart-work.

3. Preachers should never satisfy themselves, or expect a revival, just by starting out of their slumbers, and blustering about, and talking to sinners. They must get their fallow ground broken up. It is utterly unphilosophical to think of getting engaged in religion in this way. If your fallow ground is broke up, then the way to get more feeling is to go out and see sinners on the road to hell, and talk to them, and guide inquiring souls, and you will get more feeling. You may get into an excitement without this breaking up; you may show a kind of zeal, but it will not last long, and it will not take hold of sinners, unless you hearts are broken up. The reason is, that you go about it mechanically, and have not broken up you fallow ground.

4. And now, finally, will you break up your fallow ground? Will you enter upon the course now pointed out and persevere till you are thoroughly awake? If you fail here, if you do not do this, and get prepared, you can go no farther with me. I have gone with you as far as it is of any use to go until your fallow ground is broken up. Now, you must make thorough work upon this point, or all I have further to say will do you little good. No, it will only harden, and make you worse. If, when next Lecture-night arrives it finds you with unbroken hearts, you need not expect to be benefited by what I shall say. If you do not set about this work immediately I shall take it for granted that you do not mean to be revived, that you have forsaken your minister, and mean to let him go up to battle alone. If you do not do this, I charge you with having forsaken Christ, with refusing to repent and do your first works. But if you will be prepared to enter upon the work propose, God willing, in the next Lecture, to lead you into the work of saving sinners.

— A Treasury of Great Preaching