

# Breaking Up the Fallow Ground

An Outline For Repentance

by Charles. G. Finney

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This article is for Christians who have had trouble finding the true peace that is promised with conversion. For those who are frustrated because they are constantly struggling with weakness and sin, this could well be the very help they've been praying for. Charles Finney saw countless tens of thousands of true conversions and all before the days of radio, TV, or mass publications. We thank God for continuing to anoint and use his writings.

Many thousands have been helped by this article to break through to God's precious forgiveness. Remember one thing as you read this - God loves you so much, and is waiting for you to be thoroughly cleansed by His grace through repentance.

"Break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek the Lord until He comes to rain righteousness on you..." Hosea 10:12

The Jews were a nation of farmers, and it is therefore a common thing for God to refer, in the Scriptures, to scenes from their daily lives as illustrations. Hosea addresses them as a nation of backsliders, but uses words that farmers and shepherds are familiar with. He rebukes them for their idolatry and sharply warns them of the impending judgments of God.

Fallow ground is ground which has once been tilled, but has gotten hard and now lies waste. It needs to be broken up and made soft again, before it is ready to receive seed. If you mean to break up the fallow ground of your heart, you must begin by looking at your heart - examine carefully the state of your mind and see where you are. Many people never even seem to think about doing this. They pay no attention to their own hearts, and never know whether they are doing well in their walk with the Lord or not - whether they are bearing fruit or are totally barren.

Now you must draw off your attention from all other things and look into this right now! Make a business of it, do not be in a hurry.

Self-examination consists of looking at your life, considering your motives and actions. . . calling up your past and seeing its true character. Look back over your past history. Take up your individual sins one by one, and look at them. This doesn't mean that you just take a casual glance at your past life, see that it has been full of sin, and then go to God and make a sort of general confession, asking forgiveness. General confessions of sin are not good enough. Your sins were committed one by one; and as much as you are able, they ought to be reviewed and repented of one by one. It's a good idea to take a pen and some paper as you go over them, and write them down as they come to mind.

Go over them as carefully as a businessman goes over his books; and as often as a sin comes to your memory, write it down! Now begin, and start with what are usually, but improperly, called **sins of omission** (i.e. things you didn't do that you should have!).

**1) Ingratitude** (Unthankfulness). Take this sin, for example, and write down under this heading all the times you can remember where you have received great blessings and favors from God for which you have never given thanks. How many cases can you remember? Some remarkable protection where your life was spared, some wonderful turn of events that saved you from ruin. Write down the instances of God's goodness to you when you were still in sin, before your conversion, for which you have never been half-thankful enough - and the uncountable mercies you have received since. How long the list of times where your ingratitude has been so black that you are forced to hide your face in shame! Get on your knees and confess them one by one to God, and ask Him to forgive you. As you're confessing these, they will immediately remind you of others . . . write them down too. Go over them three or four times in this way, and see what an incredible number of times God has given you mercy for which you have never thanked Him!

**2) Lack of Love for God.** Think how grieved and alarmed you'd be, if you suddenly realized a great lack of affection for you in your wife, husband, or children - if you saw that someone else had captured their hearts, thoughts, and time. Perhaps in such a case you would almost die with a just and holy jealousy. Now, God calls Himself a jealous God. Have you not given your heart to other loves and infinitely offended Him?

**3) Neglect of the Bible.** Put down the cases where for perhaps weeks or longer, God's Word was not a pleasure to you. Some people, indeed, read over whole chapters in such a way that afterwards they could not tell you what they had been reading. If that is so with you, no wonder your life has no direction, and your relationship with God is in such a miserable state.

**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. If you have not believed or expected to receive the blessings which God has clearly promised, you have called Him a liar.

**5) Lack of Prayer.** Think of all the times you have neglected private prayer, family prayer, and group prayer meetings; or you've prayed in such a way as to grieve and offend God more than if you hadn't prayed at all.

**6) Neglect of Fellowship.** When you have allowed yourself to make small and foolish excuses that have prevented you from attending meetings. When you have neglected and poured contempt upon the gathering of the saints merely because you "didn't like church"!

**7) The Manner In which You have Performed Spiritual Duties.** Think of all the times when you have spoken about God with such a lack of feeling and faith, in such a worldly frame of mind, that your words were nothing more than the mere chattering of a wretch who didn't deserve that God should listen to him at all. When you have fallen down upon your knees and "said your prayers" in such an unfeeling and

careless way that if you had been put under oath five minutes later, you could not say what you had been praying for.

**8) Lack of Love for Souls.** Look around at all your friends and relatives, and think of how little compassion you have felt for them. You have stood by and seen them going straight to hell, and it seems as though you didn't even care! How many days have there been when you have failed to make their wretched condition the subject of even one single fervent prayer, or to prove any real desire for their salvation?

**9) Lack of Care for the Poor and Lost in Foreign Lands.** Perhaps you have not cared enough about them to even attempt to learn of their condition. Do you avoid missions magazines? How much do you really know or care about the unconverted masses of the world? Measure your desire for their salvation by the self-denial you practice in giving from your substance to send them the Gospel.

Do you deny yourself even the hurtful excesses of life, such as tobacco or alcohol? Do you defend your standard of living? Will you not suffer yourself any inconvenience to save them? Do you daily pray for them in private? Are you setting aside funds to put into the treasury of the Lord when you go up to pray? (As in the story of the widow's mite - Mark 12:41-44.) If your soul is not agonized for the poor and lost of this world, then why are you such a hypocrite as to pretend to be a Christian? (See Matt. 25:31-46.)

**10) Neglect of Family Duties.** Think of how you have lived 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 welfare?

**11) Lack of Watchfulness Over Your Witness.** How many times have you failed to take your words and actions seriously? How often have you entirely neglected to watch your conduct and speech, and having been off your guard, you have sinned before the world, the church, and before God!

**12) 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 duty to watch over them. What have you done to get to know them better? How many times have you seen them falling into sin, and you let them go on? And you pretend to love them? Would you watch your wife or child going into disgrace, or falling into a fire, and hold your peace?

**13) Neglect of Self-Denial.** There are many professing Christians who are willing to do almost anything in religion that does not require self-denial. They think they are doing a great deal for God, and doing about as much as He ought to reasonably ask, but they are not willing to deny themselves any comfort or convenience whatsoever 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. They are so far from realizing that self-denial is a condition of discipleship, that they do not even know what it is! They have never really denied themselves a ribbon or a pin for Christ and the Gospel. Some are

giving from their abundance, and giving a lot - and will even complain that others do not give more - when in truth, they are not giving anything that they need, or anything that they would enjoy if they kept it. They only give from their surplus wealth!

### **Now we turn to sins of commission . . .**

**14) Love of Things and Possessions.** What has been the state of your heart concerning your earthly possessions? Have you looked at them as really yours - as if you had a right to use or dispose of them as your own? If you have, write it down! If you have loved property and sought after it for its own sake, or to gratify ambition, you have sinned and must repent.

**15) Vanity.** How many times have you spent more time decorating your body to go to church, than you have in preparing your heart and mind for the worship of God? You have cared more about how you appeared outwardly to men than how your soul appeared in the sight of God. You sought to divide the worship of God's house, to draw off the attention of God's people, to look at your pretty appearance. And you pretend that you do not care anything about having people look at you? Be honest about it! Would you take all this pain about your looks if every person were blind?

**16) Envy.** Look at the cases in which you were jealous of those who were in a higher position than you. Or perhaps you have envied those who have been more talented or more useful than yourself. Have you not so envied some, that it has caused you pain to hear them praised? It has pleased you more to dwell upon their faults than upon their virtues... upon their failures rather than their successes. Be honest with yourself, and if you have harbored this spirit of hell, then repent deeply before God.

**17) Bitterness.** Recall all the instances in which you have harbored a grudge or a bitter spirit toward someone, or have spoken of Christians in a manner completely devoid of charity and love. Love "hopes all things," but you have given no benefit of doubt, and have suspected the worst.

**18) Slander (Gossip).** Think of all the times you have spoken behind people's backs of their faults (real or supposed) unnecessarily and without cause. This is slander. You need not lie to be guilty of slander - to tell the truth with the intent to injure is slander.

**19) Levity (A spirit of excessive humor).** How often have you joked before God, as you would not have dared in the presence of an earthly dignitary or important official. You have either been an atheist and forgotten that God existed - or you have had less respect for Him and His presence than you would have had for a mere judge on earth.

**20) Lying.** Now understand what lying is. Any form of designed deception is lying. If you purpose to make an impression other than the naked truth, you lie. Put down all those cases you can recollect. Do not call them by any soft names. God calls them lies and charges you with lying, so you'd better charge yourself correctly! Think of all your words, looks, and actions designed to make an impression on others contrary to the truth, for selfish reasons.

**21) Cheating.** Set down all the cases where you have dealt with anyone in a way you yourself would not like at all. That is cheating. God has said that we should treat all men in the same manner we would like to be treated. (Matt. 7:12) That is the rule. And if you have not done so you are a cheat! God did not say that you should do what you would expect them to do, for if that were the rule it would allow for all kinds of wickedness in our actions. But it says, do what you would want them to do to you! (Have you cheated the government? i.e., unemployment insurance, welfare, food stamps, social security, student loans, etc., gained by fraud?)

**22) Hypocrisy.** For instance, in your prayers and confessions to God, set down all the times in which you have prayed for things you didn't really want. How many times have you confessed sins that you never intended to stop doing? Yes, you have confessed sins when you knew in your heart you as much expected to go and repeat them, as you expected to live!

**23) Robbing God.** Think of all the instances in which you have totally misspent your time, squandering the hours which God gave you to serve Him, and save souls. Precious time wasted in vain amusement or worthless conversation, in reading worldly novels, or even doing nothing; cases where you have misused your talents and ability to think. Think of how you have squandered God's money on your lusts, or spent it for things which you really didn't need, which did not contribute to your health, comfort, or usefulness. Think of a professing believer using God's money to poison himself with tobacco or intoxicating drink!

**24) Bad Temper.** Perhaps you have abused your wife, or your children, or your family, or employees, or neighbors. Write it all down!

**25) Hindering Others From Being Useful.** 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 is useless himself, but hinders the rest! This is done sometimes by taking their time needlessly. Thus you have played into the hands of Satan, and not only proved yourself to be an idle vagabond, but prevented others from working also.

**26) Idols and Other Religions.** (I found as I was sitting down to write out my sins, that there were whole categories of sins that are common today, that would never even have been spoken of to the church in Finney's day. Some of these include fornication and sexual sins, the whole area of false peace induced by drugs, and occult involvement - including astrology, witchcraft, meditation, yoga, and the whole gamut of Eastern religions and philosophies, etc. -Keith)

### **Some Important Guidelines To Follow**

**1)** If you find you have committed a fault against anyone, and that person is within your reach, go and confess it immediately and get that out of the way. If they are too far away for you to go and see them, sit down and write them a letter (or better yet call them), confessing the injury you have committed against them. If you have defrauded anybody, send the money - the full amount and the interest.

**2)** As you go over the catalogue of your sins, be sure to resolve upon immediate and entire reformation. Wherever you find anything wrong, commit yourself 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 aspect, that which you find wrong in heart, temper, or conduct.

**3)** Go thoroughly to work in all this! Go now! Do not put it off - that will only make matters 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 about getting off easy by going around the stumbling blocks. Take them up out of the way. In breaking up your fallow ground, you must remove every obstacle. Things may be left that you may think are little things, and you may wonder why you don't have your peace with God, when the reason is your proud and carnal mind has covered up something which God has required you to confess and remove.

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 or weight of them. You should go over the list as thoroughly and as carefully and as solemnly as if you were preparing yourself for the Judgment! (I Cor. 11:31)

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