

Breaking Up the Fallow Ground

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(with much thanks to Mr. Finney)

Jeremiah declares to the backslidden children of Israel, "For thus says the Lord to the men of Judah and Jerusalem: 'Break up your fallow ground, and do not sow among thorns.'" (Jeremiah 4:3, NKJV) Furthermore, Hosea prophesies " Jacob fled to the country of Syria; Israel served for a spouse, and for a wife he tended sheep. Sow for yourselves righteousness; reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek the Lord, till He comes and rains righteousness on you." (Hosea 10:12-13 NKJV)

Fallow ground is ground that had once been tilled but now lies in waste; ground that needs to be broken up before it can receive seed. Too often our spiritual lives become like "fallow ground" We have tasted the good things of God's grace and have brought forth good fruit, but we find ourselves in a spiritual wasteland, the "ground" overgrown, fallow. When we get this way spiritually there is only one solution, we must "break up the fallow ground."

You know you need "breaking up" when: your heart is cold toward God; God's blessings seem to always pass you by; you are in strife; you are unsubmitted; you neglect doing the word; sin reigns in your life; your "vision" has dimmed. Just what is it in your life that is to be "broken up" when you "break up the fallow ground"? Your "heart" is the "ground" that must be broken up. Remember parable of sower - "heart" is your will, or more precisely the ultimate choices, the ultimate life purpose, from which proceed the other choices you make. For example, you might hear of someone who says "My life's dream is to be a doctor. I am going to be a doctor no matter what else I do." All the other choices that person makes stem out of that ultimate purpose to be a doctor. What courses he takes, what schools he intends, what his social life is like, all revolve around and are subordinate to that one choice. Now, there may be choices even further back of this person's choice to be a doctor. Why does he want to be a doctor? As long as one can answer the question "why?", there is a choice further back. In regards to our relationship to God, the choice ultimately collapses down to "do I will to serve God?" or "do I will to serve self?" That is, is my ultimate purpose in life doing God's will or pleasing myself? One choice is love, the other choice is selfishness. When selfishness creeps in and supplants our desire to please God and Him alone, our "ground" has become "fallow" and is in need of "breaking up."

To break up the "fallow ground" your heart must be "broken"! The Psalmist writes, "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, A broken and a contrite heart - These, O God, You will not despise." For the heart to be broken and contrite there must be knowledge of the truth, a realization, a "conviction", that you are "missing the mark" somewhere and that that sin must be rooted out. Without this realization you will continue "in the dark", thinking that everything is all right and your condition is normal. Only truth can show us a actual spiritual condition. What will perform the "breaking up"? Before a farmer can

break up a field that has become fallow he needs a sharp plow to cut through the earth. In the same way, a sharp "plow" must be applied to the "fallow ground" of the heart. Jesus taught us that the Holy Spirit would be the One Who would bring conviction. "And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment:" (John 16:8 NKJV)

But the question is how does He accomplish this task? By moving on the heart in some mysterious and incomprehensible way? No, rather through the preaching, teaching, and meditation upon, the truth of God's Word! Romans 10:14, "How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?" The truth of God's Word must be applied to your life if your fallow ground is to be broken up! "And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." (John 8:32, NKJV) In 1 Timothy 2:4, Paul writes to Timothy that God "...desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." Then in Hebrews 4:12, Paul writes "For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." It is when the truth of God's Word illuminates our lives that the fallow ground begins to be broken up, and our hearts become "tenderized" to God's will and desire for us. We must allow the Word to examine us, to shine into every area of our lives and ask ourselves, "does my life match what the Word declares?" Too often, rather than raise our lives to the standard the Word of God sets, we lower the Word down to the standard of our lives! We become like the man James speaks of who "...observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was." When the truth of the Word illuminates our lives and shows us those areas that lie fallow, what comes next?

How must we respond to God's truth if that fallow ground is to be broken up? Acts 2:37-38 provides a wonderful example of the results of penetrating preaching and the response acceptable to God. "Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Men and brethren, what shall we do?' Then Peter said to them, 'Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'" Notice, the truth cut through their "fallow ground" and penetrated their hard hearts - they recognized their own sin! Then Peter calls for the response, "Repent!" Repentance is the only proper initial response we can offer when the truth illuminates our sin.

Now, repentance does not mean simply feeling sorry for your sins, or sorry that you got caught! Repentance is a change of mind (understanding) and heart (will) about that sin. That is, when we truly repent, our thinking comes into agreement with God's concerning the sin in our lives. We truly see it to be sin, a violation of His moral law and a rebellion against His righteous government! When our understanding changes, then our wills will change, i.e. we will act upon that new understanding. This is what God means when He declares through the prophet Ezekiel, "Cast away from you all the transgressions which you have committed, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit." We must turn (cast!) away from our sin and seek God with all our hearts! As we come to God, as we seek Him with our whole heart, we must allow the Holy Spirit to change our lives! 2

Thess 2:13 states "But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth," Belief in the truth a part, but salvation also comes through sanctification by the Spirit. You cannot sanctify yourself through works of law, through rules and regulations and by trying to live up to a standard of righteousness. You can be sanctified only as you allow the Holy Spirit access to and control of your life. God does not demand us to change ourselves, but he does expect us to yield to, and cooperate with, the Holy Spirit in our sanctification. "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, in whom you were sealed for the day of redemption." (Eph. 4:20. RSV)

Next you must surrender your whole self to the Lord! 1 Thessalonians 5:23 tells us "May the God of peace himself sanctify you wholly; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." (RSV) God wants your whole self, not just a part. So many come to Christ with the assumption that they can give bits and pieces of themselves to Him as they please. This arises out of the false idea that we are made up of different "parts" which can be separated and dealt with individually. We may be made up of "spirit and soul and body", but one without the other two is not anything. "You" are the combination of your "parts", and without the integrated whole you are not "you". Thus, to give God 95% of yourself is to actually hold yourself back from Him. As long as that 5% is "yours", you have not given "yourself" to God! God is not going to bless one area of your life if you have refused to give Him every area!

Are you ready to break up your fallow ground? John 1:4, 9 states "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men...That was the true Light which gives light to every man who comes into the world." Are you willing to be honest with God and yourself and allow Him to change you? If so, the light of God's Word will shine in your life and reveal to you those things which must be broken up. Like a farmer clearing his field, the divine "husbandman" will clear out your life so that His fruit will flourish. As the Apostle John wrote, "My little children, these things I write to you, that you may not sin..." (1 John 2:1)