



## Articles and Sermons :: How to Repent-Charles Finney

**How to Repent-Charles Finney - posted by UntoBabes (), on: 2012/10/3 13:17**

Chapter 4

HOW TO REPENT

“Break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek the LORD, that he may come and rain righteousness on you.” (Hosea 10:12)

The Jews were a nation of farmers, and it is therefore common in the Scriptures to use illustrations from their occupation and to refer to scenes familiar to farmers and shepherds. The prophet Hosea addresses them as a nation of backsliders. He rebukes them for their idolatry, and threatens them with the judgments of God. Fallow ground is ground which has once been tilled, but which now lies waste, and needs to be broken up and softened, before it is ready to receive grain. I will show:

I. What it is to break up the fallow ground, in the sense of the text.

II. How it is to be performed.

I. WHAT IS IT 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 human mind is often compared in the Bible to ground, and the Word of God to seed sown in the ground. The fruit represents the actions and affections 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 it is impossible to get fruit from them until they are broken up, softened, and fitted to receive the Word. It is this softening of the heart, so as to make it feel the truth, which the prophet calls breaking up your fallow ground.

II. HOW IS THE FALLOW GROUND TO BE BROKEN UP?

It is not by any direct efforts to feel. People fall into a mistake on this subject from not studying the laws of mind. People talk about religious

feeling as if they could, by direct effort, call forth religious affection.

1 But this is not the way the mind acts. No person can make himself feel in this way, merely by trying to feel. The feelings of the mind are not directly under our control. We cannot directly will religious feelings.

They are purely involuntary states of mind. They naturally and necessarily exist in the mind under certain circumstances that evoke 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. One cannot say, “Now I will feel so-and-so towards 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 my family.” A person can direct his attention to any object, about which he ought and wishes to feel, and in that way he will call into existence the proper emotions.

Let a person bring his enemy before his mind, and his feelings of enmity will rise. So if a person thinks of God, and fastens his mind on any aspects of God's character, he will feel— emotions will come by the very laws of mind. If a person 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 a person is an enemy of God, only let him bring the true character of God before his mind, 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 with 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 engaged, use common sense as you would

1 The two key terms of this sentence, feeling and affection, are used interchangeably by Finney, but have different meanings than those used today. To understand feeling or affection merely as equivalent to emotion fails to capture the significance of these words. In the century before Finney, the great Christian preacher Jonathan Edwards heavily used the phrase "religious affection" and would influence many later writers. Edwards defined affections as "the more vigorous and sensible exercises of the inclination and will of the soul." Thus Finney also used the word affection, along with the term feeling, to represent the exercises and expressions of the will. It resembles the biblical word "heart." While feelings and affections include emotions, it has wider breadth and significance. As another example of these terms being confusing to today's reader, Finney sometimes talks about how a good Christian will raise the standard of feeling in a congregation. Such a sentence becomes meaningful in light of this definition of feeling.

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 illogical 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 your attention away 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 of 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. Self-examination consists in looking at your lives, in considering your actions, in recalling 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. It will be a good thing to take a pen and paper, as you go over them, and write them down as they occur to you. Go over them as carefully as a merchant goes over his accounting books, and as often as a sin comes before your memory, add it to the list. General confessions of sin will never do. Your sins were committed one by one. As far as you can remember them, they should be reviewed and repented of one by one. Now begin, and take up first what are commonly, but improperly, called Sins of Omission.

1. Ingratitude. Take this sin, for instance, and write down under that heading all the instances you can remember when you have received gifts from God for which you have never expressed gratitude. How many cases can you remember? Some remarkable providence, some wonderful turn 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 catalogue

of instances, where your ingratitude has been so blatant 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.

Write 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 decrease of affection for you in your wife, husband, or children—if you saw another engrossing their hearts, and thoughts, and time. Perhaps in such a case you would practically die with a just and virtuous jealousy. Now, God calls himself a jealous God, have you not given your heart to other loves and in nitely 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

2 This lecture, one of Finney's most famous, is an excellent example of his drawing from the example of Jonathan Edwards. In the tract *Christian Cautions: The Necessity of Self-examination*, Edwards exhorted his readers to systematically examine their lives for sin. The exercise that Finney is about to explain is very similar to that of Edwards in his tract. Edwards asked his readers to examine their lives for a set of sins that he described. Because Edwards believed in the necessity of living a holy life in order to be saved, this was an essential exercise of the Christian. As he writes in the tract, "Though men reform all other wicked practices, yet if they live in but one sinful way, which they do not forsake, it may prove their everlasting undoing" (Section I, Heading 2, Subheading 3). Since ignorance was no excuse, people were exhorted to proactively and diligently test their lives by the Bible. Edwards' Scriptural supports for this exercise included the following verses: Deuteronomy 4:9, Psalm 139:23-24, Proverbs 4:23, Matthew 26:41, Luke 21:34-36, 2 Corinthians 13:5, Ephesians 5:15, Hebrews 3:12-13.

had been reading. If so, no wonder that your Christian walk is such a miserable failure.

4. Unbelief. Recall the instances in which you have practically charged the God of truth with lying, by your unbelief of his clear 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 practically 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 that God has clearly 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 to offend God more grievously than to have omitted it altogether.

6. Neglect of the means of grace. When you have made tri ing excuses to prevent your attending meetings, have neglected and poured contempt upon the means of salvation, merely from dislike of 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 God's least concern. Think of when you have fallen down upon your knees and "said your prayers" in such an unfeeling and apathetic manner that if you had been put under oath ve minutes later, you could not have remembered what you had been praying for.

8. Lack of love for the souls of others. Look around at 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 demonstrate serious desire for their salvation?

9. Lack of care for nations without the gospel. Perhaps you have not cared enough for them to attempt to learn their condition, perhaps not even to read 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 resources to send them the gospel. Do you deny yourself even the hurtful superuities of life, such as tea, coffee, and tobacco? Do you reduce your standard of living, and embrace subjecting yourself to any inconvenience to save them? Do you daily pray for the lost in private?

Are you saving something 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 in agony for the poor ignorant lost, why are you such a hypocrite to pretend to be a Christian? Why, your profession is an insult to Jesus Christ!

10. Neglect of family duties. Think 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 good? What duty have you performed?

11. Neglect of watchfulness over your own life. In how many instances have you ignored your private duties, and have neither taken yourself to task, 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!

12. Neglect of watch over your fellow believers. 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 fellow believers 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! Would you see your wife or child going into disgrace, or into the re, and hold your peace? No, you would not. What do you then think of yourself, to pretend to love Christians and to love Christ, while you can see your fellow believers going into disgrace, and say nothing to them?

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. 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 the Lord should reasonably ask. But they are not willing to deny themselves any comfort or convenience for the sake of serving the Lord. They will not willingly suffer hardship 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 remembering that self-denial is a condition of discipleship that they do not know what self-denial is. They have never really denied themselves a ribbon or a pin for Christ and the gospel. Oh, how soon

such professing Christians will be in hell! Some are giving from their abundance, and are giving much, and are ready to complain that others do not give more. However, 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. Perhaps that poor woman, who puts in her mite<sup>3</sup>, has exercised more self-denial than they have in giving thousands.

From these we now turn to Sins of Commission.

1. Worldly 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 use them as your own, according to your own will? If you have, write that down. If you have loved property, and pursued it for its own sake, or to gratify lust, ambition, a worldly spirit, or to acquire it for your families, you have sinned and must repent.
2. Pride. Recollect all the instances you can in which you have found yourself being proud. Vanity is a particular form of pride. How many times have you found yourself pursuing vanity about your dress and appearance? How many times have you thought more, put more effort, 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 cared more how you appeared outwardly in the sight of mortals, 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's house, to draw off the attention of God's people to look at your pretty appearance. It is in vain to pretend now that you do not care at all about having people look at you. Be honest about it. Would you take all this effort 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 way. 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 hurt to hear them praised? It has been more agreeable to you to dwell upon their faults than upon their virtues, upon their failures than upon their success. Be honest with yourself. If you have harbored this spirit of hell, repent deeply before God, or he will never forgive you.
- 3 A reference to the woman in Mark 12:41-44.
4. Criticizing. Think of instances in which you have had a bitter spirit, and spoken of Christians in a manner without charity and love. Charity requires you always to hope the best the situation will allow, and to offer the best explanation for any ambiguous conduct.
5. Slander. The times you have unnecessarily spoken behind people's backs of the faults, real or supposed, of members of the church or others. This is slander. You do not need to lie to be guilty of slander. To tell the truth with the intent to injure is to slander.
6. Levity. How often have you tri ed before God as you would not have dared to tri e in the presence of an earthly ruler? You have either been an atheist and forgotten that there was a God, or have had less respect for him than you would for an earthly judge.
7. Lying. Understand now what lying is: any form of designed deception. If the deception is not designed, it is not lying. But if you intend to make an impression contrary to the plain truth, you lie. Put down all those cases you can remember. Do not call them by any soft name. God calls them LIES, and charges you with LYING, and you had better charge yourself correctly. How many are the falsehoods committed every day in business, and in social interactions, by words, and looks, and actions, designed to make an impression on others, for sel sh reasons that is contrary to the truth!
8. Cheating. Write down all the cases in which you have done to an

individual that which you would not like to have done to you. That is cheating. God has laid down a rule in the case, "Whatever you want others to do to you, do also to them."<sup>4</sup> That is the rule. And if you have not done so you are a cheat.

9. Hypocrisy. For instance, consider your prayers and confessions to God. Write down the instances in which you have prayed for things you did not really want. And the evidence is, that when you finished praying, you could not remember 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?

10. Robbing God. Think of the instances in which you have wasted your time, squandering the hours that God gave you to serve him and save souls. Think of cases of vain amusements or foolish conversation, in reading novels or doing nothing, misapplying your talents and powers of mind, or squandering money on your lusts, or on things that you did not need, and which did not contribute to your health, comfort, or

usefulness. Perhaps some of you have spent God's money for tobacco. I will not speak of intoxicating drink, for I presume there is no professing Christian here that would drink it, and I hope there is not one that uses that filthy poison, tobacco. Think of a professing Christian using God's money to poison himself with tobacco!

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

12. Hindering others from being useful. Perhaps you have weakened their influence by accusations against them. You have not only robbed God of your own talents, but also tied the hands of somebody else. What a wicked servant is the person who not only wastes his own life but also 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 vagrant, 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, sit down and write the person 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 him, and to people those sins that have been committed against them. Do not think of getting off track 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 are small 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 that God requires you to confess and remove. Break up all the ground and turn it over. Do not "balk" at it, as the farmers say. Do not turn aside for little difficulties. Drive the plow right through them, aim deep, and turn the ground up, so that it may all be broken and soft, and fit to receive the seed and bear fruit "a hundredfold."

When you have thoroughly gone over your whole life history in this way, if you will then go over the ground a second time, and give your solemn and fixed attention to it, you will find that the things you have put down will remind you of other related and connected things of which you have been guilty. Then go over it a third time, and you

will remember 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 cannot understand the amount of your sins. You should go over the list as thoroughly, and as carefully, and as solemnly, as you would if you were preparing yourself for the Judgment.

As you go over the catalogue of your sins, be sure to resolve upon present and entire reformation. Wherever you find anything wrong, resolve 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 correct in every way that which you find wrong in heart, temperament, or conduct.

If you find as you go on with this duty that your mind is still clouded and unfocused, there must be 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 must force yourself as a rational being up to this work, with the Bible before you, and try your heart until 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 thoroughly look at your sins for long 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 the work now. Resolve that you will not stop until you find that 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. The reason why so few Christians know anything about the spirit of prayer is because they will not take the trouble to examine themselves properly, and so never know what it is to have their hearts completely broken up in this way.

You see that I have only begun to deal with 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 softens it, and sows his grain. It will be so, if you will only begin in this way and keep on until 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, useless, 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 professing Christians in the church who are not bearing fruit, and why there is so much external showcase yet so little deep feeling. Look at the Sunday school, for instance, and see how much showcase there is 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 lumps stronger.

2. See why so much preaching is wasted, and worse than wasted. It is because members of 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 a change of opinion rather than a change of the feeling of their hearts. There is plenty of mechanical religion but very little that looks like deep heart-work.

3. Professing Christians 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 illogical to think of getting engaged in religion in this other way.

If your fallow ground is broken 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 experience more feeling. You may become excited without this breaking up of fallow ground. You may show a kind of zeal, but it will not last long, and it will not take hold of sinners, unless your hearts are broken up. The reason is that you go about it mechanically, and have not broken up your fallow ground.

4. And now, nally, will you break up your fallow ground? Will you enter upon the course now pointed out and persevere until you are thoroughly awake? If you fail here, if you do not do this, and get prepared, you can go no further 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 the next lecture-night arrives, it nds you with unbroken hearts, you should not expect to bene t from 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 in46 tend 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 Â“do the works you did at rstÂ”5. But if you will be prepared to enter into the work, I propose, God willing, in the next lecture, to lead you into the work of saving sinners.

5

**Re: How to Repent-Charles Finney, on: 2012/10/3 13:48**

While not a big fan of Finney by any stretch of the imagination, this is some pretty good stuff here.

Krispy

**Re: - posted by UntoBabes (), on: 2012/10/3 14:09**

well Krispy, Thank God for your open mindedness.

This is just one chapter taken from the book "True Christianity" which you can read on line here.

<http://www.bigbigforums.com/vent-whine/526493-free-true-christianity-charles-finney.html>

**Re: - posted by ArthurRosh, on: 2012/10/3 15:55**

"Things mayÂ be left that you think are small things, and you may wonder why youÂ do not feel as you wish to feel in religion, when the reason is that yourÂ proud and carnal mind has covered up something that God requires you to confess and remove."Â

Â“Though men reform all other wicked practices, yet if they live in but one sinfulÂ way, which they do not forsake, it may prove their everlasting undoingÂ” - Edwards

**Re: , on: 2012/10/3 17:21**

Thank you for posting this. I agree with probably 90 plus percent of Charles Finneys understandings.



**Re: - posted by UntoBabes (), on: 2012/10/3 18:27**

I am thinking of what could happen if the individual believer and the church body began to take that path of repentance.

We cry for revival and blame God for not listening, yet we have not done our part.

I listened to and read about many accounts of revival and it all seem to follow this same pattern.

take for example the "Shantung Revival" ( link below )

First step the church took was to confess the sins that were obvious and as the Spirit revealed more sin they went about doing more confession to God and each other and making restitutions for wrong done. As God saw that they were serious about being serious a revival was on.

So is it really that we are waiting for God to act or could it be that He is waiting for us to act?

<https://www.sermonindex.net/modules/mydownloads/visit.php?lid=652>

**Re: How to Repent-Charles Finney - posted by phoe (), on: 2012/10/5 6:06**

Blessed to come across this article.

Thank u for posting this.