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FRUITFULNESS: BREAKING UP THE FALLOW GROUND

by Dan Trygg

There is a need to cultivate our hearts for spiritual growth. In Jer. 4:3,4, the Lord declares to the men of Judah, "Break up your fallow ground, and do not sow among thorns. Circumcise yourselves to the Lord and remove the foreskins of your heart..." **What is fallow ground? Ground that has laid dormant, unworked, and uncultivated.** Consequently, even though it has an underlying fertility, it becomes unfruitful because, without cultivation, it is quickly overrun by weeds. The ground becomes hard and covered with a thick layer of undergrowth. In spite of its potential for fruitful growth, it is a very hostile environment for the introduction of new seed. **What must a person do in order to make any parcel of fallow ground profitable? He must break up that ground** with a plow or spade. In turning over the soil, he not only prepares the soil by making it soft and friable, he also removes the competing weeds by plowing them under. Their death actually provides added nutrients to the soil. Thus, the once-hostile environment is quickly turned into soil which is conducive to new growth.

In spiritual terms, breaking up the fallow ground of our hearts is analogous to repentance. Biblically, repentance is a change of mind, the recognition and response to new insights which transform one's perception of reality. Spiritual blindness and self-deception keep us in bondage. Paul, in II Cor. 10:3-5, referred to deeply rooted or established areas of deception that oppose the truth, called "strongholds". **These thought patterns must be assaulted and torn down in order for truth and freedom to be established in our experience.**

The other illustration used by Jeremiah was **uncircumcision of the heart** (Jer. 4:4; cf. 9:25,26). In Dt. 10:16, this same figure is used in conjunction with another familiar expression which is employed to depict stubbornness, i. e., being "**stiffnecked**". This was a word picture taken from dealing with animals that were stubborn and rebellious. If an animal was "stiff-necked", it was being resistant to wearing the yoke, and fought against complying with its master. **Both word pictures, then, referred to one that is callused, stubborn, and unrepentant.** "Brokenness" and "circumcision of the heart" both come by repentance (Psa. 51:17). In turning away from our old practices and world view, and agreeing with God's mind set, we begin to prepare the soil of our hearts. When we abandon the status quo of the self-directed life, then room is made for the new life to be manifested.

Is this repentance all that is needed, then, to produce the fruit of the new life in us? Certainly not. This is only the very important *beginning* of a much larger process. As the prophet Isaiah said, "Does the farmer plow continually to plant seed? Does he continually turn and harrow the ground? Does he not level its surface, and sow dill and scatter cummin, and plant wheat in rows, barley in its place, and rye within its area? For his God instructs and teaches him properly. For dill is not threshed with a threshing sledge, nor is the cartwheel driven over cummin; but dill is beaten out with a rod, and cummin with a club. Grain for bread is crushed, indeed, he does not continue to thresh it forever. Because the wheel of his cart and his horses eventually damage it, he does not thresh it longer. This also is from the Lord of hosts, who has made His counsel wonderful and His wisdom great" (Isa. 28:24-29). **Continual "repentance", in the sense of starting over again and again, would actually be counterproductive.** Not only would the introduction of the profitable seed be left only to chance, which is a very unreliable process, but the good seed would also be continually uprooted with each fresh plowing. On the other hand, without any plowing at all, seed would be wasted upon the fallow ground. Plowing, then, is a necessary first step, but, when accomplished, must give way to the sowing of the seed. **After initial repentance, we need to systematically build a new understanding** by putting God's Word into our lives. Note, too, that **there is more to soil preparation than just turning**

over the ground. Fertilization, picking out stones, and the forming of beds, rows, or hills for the different crops are other pre-planting considerations. One of the lessons of Isaiah 28 is that **different crops require the wisdom of different gardening techniques and different tools.** All varieties of fruitfulness will not come about by the repetition of one method applied across the board for every area of life.

In conclusion, in order for fruitfulness to come to pass in our experience, there must be a breaking up and abandonment of our established thought and habit patterns. This is necessary so that room may be made for new growth. An open, teachable heart will receive truth and respond to the Holy Spirit's leading much more easily than one that is hard and callused with old attitudes and perspectives. New fruit cannot be produced where old or unprofitable growth crowds out its way. Repentance, then, at any stage of a person's life, is the necessary beginning to the process of spiritual gardening. **Change will not come about where there is not a recognized need and desire for it.** A hunger and thirst for righteousness comes from a heart that knows its need. The honest cry of such a heart will be answered by God.

Father, give us that healthy balance of being teachable, pliable and open to change, without becoming too introspective. Lead us in putting aside old ways, to make room for new growth. Keep our hearts responsive to Yours.

FOR MEDITATION: Matthew 5: 3,6.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven... Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied."

Protestantism: An Expression of Diversity

"The Reformation of the 16th century resulted in what we now call Protestantism, a new dimension in the Church's history. Its most notable quality is diversity, recognizing that people think different thoughts even when they seek to witness to the same Gospel. Human creativity, finitude, and selfishness have always made the interpretation of right faith and order difficult, and have produced many perplexing ambiguities in the Church. What is distinctive about Protestantism is that it accepts these ambiguities as part of its heritage, as both a sign of health and a symptom of sickness. A Protestant must always seek to discern the difference. Such diversity has occurred because Protestantism has been a movement which consciously has assumed the burden of relating its message directly to the concerns and problems of people in specific historical contexts. Human problems may remain largely the same in all ages, but the questions have been asked in new ways and have demanded different kinds of solutions in each time and place, ...for the Church -- like any other institution -- has been shaped by its culture.

"In the Protestant Reformation, however, diversity had a focus of unity in the principle of the supreme authority of the Bible. It is the message of the Bible that must be related to each particular situation. Protestants have emphasized the right of the individual to think his or her own thoughts, wherever they may lead, as long as his or her life and thinking take their cue from the message of Scripture, however that message is understood. Protestantism is the story of individuals and groups who have taken their understanding of the Gospel so seriously that they have been willing, if necessary, to create new forms of the Church; though it must be recognized that the reformers of the 16th century broke reluctantly with the Roman institution in order, they believed, to preserve its apostolic heritage. Protestantism, then, has to do not so much with a *church*, as in Roman Catholicism, but with a movement made up of *churches*, though both seek to understand the reality of the universal Church. Protestantism is a story to be told; it cannot be defined by a single religious concept."

From *One Body... Many Members* by Philip J. Anderson. Chicago: Covenant Press, 1983. Pp. 19,20.