

## FINNEY FINIS

Behind the Baptism of the Spirit, and the endowment of power set forth by R.A. Torrey, Gordon, Evan Roberts, Mrs. Penn-Lewis and many others, stands Charles G. Finney. And he just as definitely stands behind the methods, and general failure, of our past and present-day Revivalism.

Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones shares a telling insight concerning the Finney revival methods: "Finney was a man who taught quite definitely that, if one applied a given technique, one could have a revival at any time. This is the essence of Finney's teaching in his book on Revivals. But history has surely proved that Finney was quite wrong. Many have tried to plan revivals by using his technique and have done so honestly, sincerely, and thoroughly, but the desired revival has not come. One of Finney's cardinal errors was to confuse an 'evangelistic campaign' and a revival and to forget that the latter is always given in the sovereignty of God. It never results from the adoption of certain techniques, methods and organization.

"It seems clear from the historical facts that Finney himself for a number of years was in the midst of a true revival. During the course of this revival certain things such as confession of particular sins, and certain other accompaniments appeared. These results Finney seems to have misinterpreted and as a result, propounded his theory that, if people can be persuaded to confess their sins, revival will take place. It is the fallacy of believing that if we produce the **result** and **consequences** of revival, we shall have the revival itself!

"Indeed, in copies of the 'Oberlin Evangelist' containing articles by Finney (after his period as an evangelist and when he had become a Professor of Theology), there are indications that the writer himself had become somewhat suspicious of his own techniques. There are statements written by Finney such as the following: 'If I had my time over again I would preach nothing but holiness. The converts of my revivals are a disgrace to Christianity.' The suggestion is that the tremendous pressure which this evangelist's methods brought to bear upon the will and emotions, produced only temporary results." (Conversions, Psychological & Spiritual, p. 31.)

Mr. Finney and his co-workers all made the same candid observations concerning the results of the Finney revivals. In 1834, James Boyle wrote: "Dear brother Finney: 'Let us look over the fields where you and others and myself have labored as revival ministers, and what is now their moral state? What was their state within three months after we left them? I have visited and revisited many of these fields, and groaned in spirit to see the sad, frigid, carnal, contentious state into which the churches have fallen—and fallen very soon after our first departure from them.'" (Perfectionism—B.B. Warfield, p. 26.)

"No more powerful testimony is borne, however, than that of Asa Mahan, who tells us—to put it briefly—that everyone who was concerned in these Finney revivals suffered a sad subsequent relapse: the people were left like a dead coal which could not be reignited; the pastors were shorn of all their spiritual power; and the evangelists—'among them all,' Mahan says, 'and I was personally acquainted with nearly every one of them—I cannot recall a single man, brother Finney and father Nash excepted, who did not after a few years lose his unction, and become equally disqualified for the office of evangelist and that of pastor'." (Ibid., p. 27.)

Mahan shares further telling information about the ministry of Mr. Finney: "No individual, I believe, ever disciplined believers so severely and with such intense and tireless patience as my brother Finney. Appalled at the backsliding which followed his revivals of 1831-32, his most earnest efforts were put forth to induce among believers permanence in the divine life. In accomplishing this he knew of but one method: absolute and fixed renunciation of sin, consecration to God, and purpose of obedience.

"During his pastorate in Chatham Street Chapel, in N.Y. City, for example, he held forth weeks in succession special meetings in his church for perfecting his work, and never were a class of poor creatures carried through a more severe process of discipline than were these. Years after, as their pastor informed me, those believers affirmed that they have never recovered from the internal weakness and exhaustion which had resulted from the terrible discipline through which Mr. Finney had carried them, and this was all the good that had resulted from his efforts.

“When he came to Oberlin, and entered upon the duties of his Professorship, he felt that God had given him a blessed opportunity to realize in perfection his ideal of a ministry for the churches. He had before him a mass of talented and promising theological students, who had implicit confidence in the wisdom of their teacher, and with equal sincerity would follow his instructions and admonitions. He accordingly, for months in succession, gathered together those students at stated times, instructed them most carefully in regard to the nature of the renunciation of sin, consecration to Christ and purpose of obedience, required of them.

“Then, under his teachings and admonitions, they would renew their renunciations, consecrations and purpose of obedience, with all the intensity and fixedness of resolve of which their natures were capable. The result, in every case, was one and the same: not the new life, joy and peace, and power that was anticipated, but groaning bondage under the law of sin and death. At the commencement, and during the progress of each meeting, their confessions and renunciations, their solemn consecrations and vows of obedience, were renewed, if possible, with fuller determination than ever before.

“Each meeting, however, was closed with the same dirge song: ‘Look, how we grovel here below,’ or, ‘Where is the blessedness I knew, When first I saw the Lord?’ or, ‘Return, O Holy Dove, return.’ And as they went out, not their songs of joy and gladness were heard, but their groans became more and more terribly audible.” (Autobiography, p. 245-.)

Since nearly all Revivalism during the past one hundred years has carbon-copied Finney’s methods, it might be well for us to take a good straight and honest and fearless look at some of Finney’s theology that naturally affected his methods for revival.

ORIGINAL SIN- “We deny that the human constitution is morally depraved, because it is impossible that sin should be a quality of the substance of the soul or body. It is, and must be, a quality of choice or intention, and not of substance. To represent the constitution as sinful, is to represent God, Who is the author of the constitution, as the author of sin. What ground is there for the assertion that Adam’s nature became in itself sinful by the fall? This is a

groundless, not to say ridiculous, assumption, and an absurdity.” —C.G. Finney (Finney’s Systematic Theology, pp. 249, 250. See also pp. 236, 245.)

JUSTIFICATION BASED UPON SANCTIFICATION- “We see that, if a righteous man forsake his righteousness, and die in his sin, he must sink to hell. Whenever a Christian sins he comes under condemnation, and must repent and do his first works, or be lost.” (Ibid., p. 124.)

REGENERATION- “Regeneration implies an entire present change of moral character, that is, a change from entire sinfulness to entire holiness.” (Ibid., p. 291. See also p.285.)

OBEDIENCE- “That which the precept demands must be possible to the subject. That which demands a natural impossibility is not, and cannot be, moral law. To talk of inability to obey moral law is to talk nonsense.” (Ibid., p. 2.)

ENTIRE SANCTIFICATION- “It is self-evident, that entire obedience to God’s law is possible on the ground of natural ability. To deny this, is to deny that a man is able to do as well as he can. The very language of the law is such as to **level its claims to the capacity of the subject**, however great or small that capacity may be. ‘Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy mind, and with all thy strength.’ Here then it is plain, that all the law demands, is the exercise of whatever strength we have, in the service of God. Now, as entire sanctification consists in perfect obedience to the law of God, and as the law requires nothing more than the right use of whatever strength we have, it is, of course, forever settled, that a state of entire sanctification is attainable in this life, on the ground of natural ability.” (Ibid., 0. 407. See pp. 405-8.)

SECURITY OF THE BELIEVER- “It is not intended that saints, or the truly regenerated, cannot fall from grace, and be finally lost, by natural possibility. It must be naturally possible for all moral agents to sin at any time. Saints on earth and in heaven can by natural possibility apostatize and fall, and be lost. Were not this naturally possible, there would be no virtue in perseverance.” (Ibid., p. 550. See also pp. 110, 392.)

\* \* \* \* \*

There is healthy spiritual progress ahead for any church that has courage and insight enough to break out of the time-worn, Finney-fostered, revivalism rut. Revivalism never has and never can produce that which above all else is needed in our churches—mature, Christ-centered, fruitful soldiers of the Cross. Concerning the results of the 1860 Moody-Sankey revival campaigns in Britain, J.B. Stoney wrote:

“Show me one devoted man the fruit of a revival conversion. Every one who comes out for the Lord has had a very private history. You will notice that the conversion in private is always the deepest”  
“Many have been converted under revival preaching, but not one so converted ever grows in the soil in which he was born, beyond a mere babe. God in His mercy transplants them into better soil, but then invariably they are the most earnest and warmest refusers of the soil and ministry in which they were born.” (Letters, Vol. I).  
And his contemporary, John Darby, wrote, “.....the revival work, and the tone which accompanied it, has introduced a mass of persons from whom God alone can deliver us.” (Letters, Vol. III.).

The answer to revivalism is personal cultivation of the individual believer, and that by the leaders of his particular fellowship. Think for a moment of what it means in the development of a new convert to have someone more mature, preferably the one who brought him to Christ, carefully to take him along for the first year or so in prayer, study, fellowship and service. Think also of what it means to the believer who begins to hunger for real depth in the Lord Jesus to have a father or mother in Israel bring him on over a period of several years, guiding him in profitable study, in his understanding of how God deals with self, etc., etc. Is this not infinitely better than bringing a professional stranger into the church for a week or two every year, who seeks to get at the entire Church during a few brief evenings, and that with no two believers in attendance at the same stage of spiritual need and development?

Notice what is advocated along this line by one who does things enmass:

QUESTION - “If you were pastor of a large church in a principle city, what would be your plan of action?”

DR. B. GRAHAM - "I think one of the first things I would do would be to gather a small group of eight or ten men around me that would meet a few hours a week and pay the price! It would cost them something in time and effort. I would share with them everything I have, over a period of a couple of years. Then I would actually have a group of ministers among the laymen who in turn could take eight or ten or twelve more and teach them. I know one or two churches that are doing that, and it is revolutionizing their church. Christ, I think, set the pattern. He spent most of His time with twelve men. He didn't spend it with great crowds. In fact, every time He had a great crowd it seems to me that there weren't too many results. The great results, it seems to me, came in His personal interviews and in the time He spent with the twelve."

If the average church leadership would begin on this principle with but six who were ready, and in two years these worked with their six, in just four or five years that church would have some thirty or forty believes able to nurture others. Most of the sound and sincere pastors labor throughout their entire ministry, plus the efforts of all the revivalists hired during those years, and yet never come near this wealth of trained and established co-workers.

"When shall we learn that our power to reach the masses beyond our little circle we immediately touch,, depends upon our leading the Christians into such a knowledge of God that they become centers and channels of blessing to those around them? Do we see that this is the 'short cut' to the 'regions beyond?' Do we see that this is effectual work? Do we see that six souls, matured and knowing their God so that they are 'more than conquerors' in every circumstance of life, represents better and deeper work than fifty brought to Christ remaining as babes in Christ, and easily swamped by contrary influences when gone beyond our reach?"

Year in and year out our Christians are being subjected to the multiplied routines of hired outside help. Is it any wonder that stability and abiding fruit barely exists in our midst? Steady, healthy believers should not be the exception, but the rule. This is not a matter of survival, but of conquest! The spiritual responsibility of the church rests upon its leaders, and the sooner this is fully faced the sooner each will settle down to the work at hand. And it

will not be long before they will make sure that others of the fellowship are developed so that the load, along with the resultant blessing, is shared.

Christians have the right to expect encouragement, training and teaching from the leadership with which they are in fellowship—that which gives them personal, individual help—that which understands and cares about them and their problems—that which has developed spiritually and is able to soundly and patiently and thoroughly share and teach each one, “Till we all come into the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:” (Eph. 4:13).

“The Holy Spirit came to reproduce Jesus Christ in the lives of men and women. The Church is that or it is nothing: the teaching relates to that, or it has no meaning. Any movement of the Spirit is in that direction, or we have entirely misunderstood. Everything has to be tested by that. All our activities and efforts and energies and expenditures; all our sacrifices and machinery, our movements and our teaching: everything that has become a part of ‘Christianity’ has to be tested by that one rule: Is it resulting in the reproduction of Jesus Christ in the lives of men and women, so that it is demonstrated from Heaven that the Lord Jesus is as truly in this world now as ever He was in history?” —T. A-S.

Yes, each and every believer in the fellowship must be fed, and thereby “built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone” (Eph. 2:20). Year in and year out the entire ministry of the entire leadership—pulpit, Bible classes, fellowship groups, prayer meetings, personal nurturing in church and at home—everything must be geared to this end. Each believer must be brought to the place of feeding upon and abiding in the Lord Jesus Christ, Who is his Life.

As the believer is carefully fed and learns to feed for himself he is not only off the helper’s hands, but he continues to grow in Christ—more and more taken up with Him, and less and less concerned with himself. He develops from a burden, to a pillar of the church. He is less and less involved with the civil war in the heart, and becomes “a good soldier of Jesus Christ.” The Lord Jesus is increasingly free to manifest Himself to him, and through him to

others—others in church, home, neighborhood, school, work, etc. As a natural result, individuals are drawn quietly and steadily to Him. The believer becomes the evangelistic arm of the church; and not only that, but the nurturing arm as well. “Go ye.....and teach all” (Matt. 28:19).

Our young people (and each of them will respond to prayerful, personal, persistent and tactful cultivation in the things of the Lord Jesus Christ through the friendship of a mature leader), have the right to be sufficiently developed in their faith to be able to go away either to secular or Christian college, as the Lord leads, and not return embittered, disillusioned and frustrated spiritually, nor drawn into any of the several Neo’s extant. And these same young people also have the right to be established in Christ’s sufficiency so as not to be sent off to the foreign field only to become spiritual casualties, as some thirty percent and more do today before the expiration of their first term. Then too, they have the right to be spiritually prepared for marriage and a family, the realm of one of the most appalling needs of all, both in and out of the Church.

“I am afraid that many souls backslide and drift away simply because we are not near enough to the Lord, and have not sufficient affection to give them a word of encouragement. It is no use trying to set the old man down; you may lecture and hammer him with all your might, but he can stand all the blows that you can give him. You must keep your eye on that which is of the Lord in the saints, and lay yourself out to encourage that. There is no other way to help another. There is something which is of God in every saint: it may be very weak and small, but we must build on that—we must encourage that.” —C.A. Coates

The status quo must go! It is neither right nor fair for the believer to have to remain a “parasite-of-the-pew,” subjected mainly to little more than evangelistic messages and exhortations; with rarely a clear and understandable word as to **how** to “be,” before attempting to “do.” And with all the other ministries of the church more or less unrelated, the average believer is in chronic condition for the annual “revival” meetings. “Reviving,” “experiences,” “re-consecrations,” and even “blessings” tend to minimize and even block his necessary day-by-day growth in the Lord Jesus

Christ. Sad, sad to say, the revival “remedy” is actually the cause of the general malady!

Often the affect of the average series of revival meetings upon the individual is traumatic. Unfed spiritually, frustrated, self-centered, sin-stricken and problem-plagued, the believer is subjected to the annual or bi-annual meetings where he is blasted, blistered, peeled and shamed; then pushed or pulled into some sort of repentance, confession, and re-consecration; and finally thrust out to bring the lost in to hear the revivalist. All this in spite of the fact that he has not been fed, nurtured and developed enough to enable him to “be” and “do” all that is enforced upon him. All this on top of the fact that the few he does manage to inveigle within the sound of the Gospel are for the most part totally unprepared for what they will be exhorted and oftentimes actually tricked into doing—make the “decision,” or some sort of “commitment.”

And those who do come through in spite of such circumstances all too often amount to little more than spiritual invalids at best, due to their abortive beginning.

“The life with the most favorable beginning will come to maturity the soonest. Let us aim at wellborn souls. Let us seek to do more careful sowing, so as to send converts out into the world handicapped as little as possible at the start. Nay, even more, let us remember that our own level oft-times determines the level of those we lead to Christ. A feeble tree produces sickly fruit. Let the life be strong in us, and it will be strong in those we win to Christ.”

“.....grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.” (II Peter 3:18). “Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly.....” (I Peter 5:2).

The Scriptural basis for the alternative to revivalism has not been presented here. For that the following books are recommended:

EVERY-MEMBER EVANGELISM - J.E. Conant, 190 pages. This is a proven classic, based on the deeper truths for growth and service.

NEW TESTAMENT ORDER FOR CHURCH & MISSIONARY-Alexander R. Hay. Over 500 pages of Scriptural depth for the maturing and outreach of the believer, and hence the fellowship.

We'll share some of the good things from these two books: "The impression is too often left that the Lord's command to go after the lost ought to be enough for any Christian. But it is not enough! The Great Commission is sufficient authority, but it is not sufficient motive. It is not the imperative of an external command that sends us after the lost, it is the impulse of an indwelling Person. We may be commanded forever to take the Gospel to the lost and it will never move us, but when we are fully possessed and controlled by Him whose life it was to seek and to save the lost, we shall go, command or no command. Back of all successful work for the lost is an inward spiritual impulse; and back of the impulse is the Holy Spirit who reproduces Christ in us; and the brand mark of it all is the Cross, the living experience of which must both enter and control the life before we are fit for service." —Dr. J.E. Conant (Every-Member Evangelism, p. 123.)

"A great source of weakness among all God's servants, is unfaithfulness in the ministries of faith and prayer. These ministries require unwavering constancy. The continual encroachment of other things upon the time required for prayer must be resolutely refused. We have always found that whenever there has been a slackening in these ministries the spiritual level of the work has declined immediately and the enemy has begun to advance. For a time the machine might keep going on its own momentum—and with what pushing we were able to do—but it soon became evident that the true source of power had been cut off.

"Or, we may mistake our enthusiasm for faith, building upon fleshly appearance instead of a true spiritual foundation. We may be tempted to spoil our new converts. This is a very common error. How many promising young lives have been injured in this way? We push them forward, making much of them, until they become self-confident, proud and useless. And so our hand is stretched out, in self-assurance, to hasten God's work, to steady the ark, or to strike the rock and, later, when we see the weakness of our work, we think, perhaps, that God has failed us." (A.R. Hay-N.T. Order For Church and Missionary, p. 525.)