

Charles Finney & American Revivalism

Introduction

I. Brief Biography: Charles Grandison Finney (August 29, 1792 – August 16, 1875)

II. Theology Under His Practice

A. Theological Foundations

B. Doctrine of Sin

“Moral depravity, as I use the term, does not consist in, nor imply a sinful nature, in the sense that the substance of the human soul is sinful in itself. It is not a constitutional sinfulness. It is not an involuntary sinfulness. Moral depravity, as I use the term, consists in selfishness, in a state of voluntary committal of the will to self-gratification (ST, 231)

C. Atonement

D. Regeneration

“It is not a change in substance of soul or body. If it were, sinners could not be required to effect it...No, such a change is needed, as the sinner has all the faculties and natural attributes requisite to render perfect obedience to God. All he needs is to be induced to use these powers and attributes as he ought.” (ST, 285)

E. Freedom of the Will

“The human will is free, therefore men have power or ability to do their duty.” (ST, 325)

“The strong language often found in scripture upon the subject of man’s inability to obey God, is designed only to represent the strength of his voluntary selfishness and enmity against God, and never to imply a proper natural inability.” (ST, 350)

F. Justification

“For sinners to be forensically pronounced just, is impossible and absurd” (ST, 384)

“The intellect revolts at a justification in sin” (ST, 402)

G. Faith

H. Preaching- Evangelism

I. His Gospel

III. New Measures

A. Public Recognition:

B. Manipulative Techniques:

IV. Revival vs Revivalism

A. Revival:

- i. Ordinary means of grace
- ii. A plain, clear and careful presentation of the Truth
- iii. Deep and solemn conviction of sin

David Rice, Kentucky revival of 1803 “there appears to be in the subjects of this work a deep heart-humbling sense of the great unreasonableness, abominable nature, pernicious effects and deadly consequences of sin, and the absolute unworthiness in the sinful creature...a deep mourning on account of their own sins.” (Ian Murray, *Revival & Revivalism*, 157)

iv. Prayer

Princeton revival of 1815 student recalls “It was powerful and pervading, and fruitful in the conversion of young men to God, and it was quiet, unexcited, and entirely free from all devices or means beyond the few and simple which God has appointed, namely, prayer and the ministry of the word.” (Ian Murray, *Revival & Revivalism*, 141)

v. Impact on young people

vi. Love and esteem for Christ and his worship

vii. A burden for missions

B. Revivalism

A revival is not a miracle according to another definition of the term miracle something above the powers of nature. There is nothing in religion beyond the ordinary powers of nature. It consists entirely in the right exercise of the powers of nature. It is just that, and nothing else. When mankind become religious, they are not enabled to put forth exertions which they were unable before to put forth. They only exert powers which they had before, in a different way, and use them for the glory of God. A revival is not a miracle, nor dependent on a miracle, in any sense. It is a purely philosophical result of the right use of the constituted means as much so as any other effect produced by the application of means...A revival is as natural a result of the use of the appropriate means as a crop is of the use of its appropriate means. (Finney, Lectures on Revival, Lecture 1, 11.)

C. Why was Finney Opposed?

Resources:

Samuel Miller, “Revivals of Religion” in Garretson *Princeton and the Christian Ministry Vol. 1.*

Ian Murray, *Revival and Revivalism* (Banner of Truth, 1994)

Ian Murray, <https://banneroftruth.org/us/resources/articles/2007/charles-g-finney-how-theology-affects-understanding-of-revival/>

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