

AMERICA'S CHRISTIAN HERITAGE

As taught by Pastor Ron Baity

December 10, 2017

We have been looking at some of the people God greatly used in bringing about a spiritual revolution in America. Today we continue that train of thought as we study some of the highlights of the life of Charles Finney.

I. THE BEGINNING YEARS OF CHARLES FINNEY

A. Finney was born in Warren, Connecticut, in 1792.

1. He was the youngest of nine children.
2. He was the son of a farmer.

B. Finney:

1. Had a six-foot three-inch stature.
2. Had piercing eyes.
3. Was inclined with musical skills.
4. Had leadership abilities.

C. Church had an early impact on Finney.

1. He and his family attended a Baptist church in Henderson, New York.
2. His pastor led emotional, revival-style meetings.

II. THE CONVERSION OF CHARLES FINNEY

A. Finney began studying law:

1. The law books of that day contained so much Scripture, especially Blackstone's Law Commentaries, that Finney came under conviction.
2. In those days, when a person had committed a crime, on most occasions beside the offence was a passage of Scripture pointing out the offense.

B. In testifying of his conversion, Finney picks up with his study of Law:

"I found that the authors frequently quoted Scripture, and referred especially to Moses as authority for many of the principles of common law. This excited my curiosity so much that I went and purchased a Bible, the first I had ever owned; and whenever I found a reference to the Bible, I turned to the passage and consulted it in its connection. This soon led to my taking a new interest in the Bible, and I read and meditated on it

much more than I had ever done before in my life. However, much of it I still did not understand.

But I was very proud without knowing it. I had no regard for the opinions of others, and was unwilling to have anyone know that I was seeking the salvation of my soul. When I prayed I would only whisper, after having stopped the key-hole to the door, lest someone should discover me. And I kept my Bible out of sight. If I was reading it when anybody came in, I would throw my law books upon it, to create the impression that I had not had it in my hand. I was unwilling to converse with the minister, because I did not want to let him know how I felt, and for the same reason I avoided conversation with the elders of the church.

Then one night in October 1821 a strange feeling came over me, as if I was about to die. I knew that if I did I should sink down to hell; but I quieted myself as best I could until morning. At an early hour I started for the office. But just before I arrived at the office, something seemed to confront me: 'What are you waiting for? What are you trying to do? Are you endeavoring to work out a righteousness of your own?'

Salvation seemed to me an offer to be accepted; it was full and complete; and all that was necessary on my part, was to give up my sins, and to accept Christ. North of the village lay a piece of woods, and I turned and bent my course toward these woods, feeling that I must be alone, and away from all human eyes and ears, so that I could pour out my prayer to God.

But still my pride showed itself. As I went over the hill, it occurred to me that someone might see me and suppose that I was going away to pray. Probably there was not a person on earth that would have suspected such a thing, had he seen me going. But so great was my pride, and so much was I possessed with the fear of man, that I crept along under the fence, till I got so far out of sight that no one could see me. Then I penetrated into the woods and knelt down for prayer, vowing that I would give my heart to God, or never come down from the woods again.

The next morning, a client came into the office and said to me, 'Mr. Finney, do you recollect that my cause is to be tried at ten o'clock this morning? I suppose you are ready?' I had been retained to attend this suit as his attorney. I replied to him, 'Mr. B-, I have a retainer from the Lord Jesus Christ to plead his cause, and can no longer plead yours.' He looked at me with astonishment, and said, 'What do you mean?' I told him, in a few words, that I had enlisted in the cause of Christ; and that he must go and get somebody else to attend court; I could not do it. Without making any reply, he went out, and I sallied forth from the office to converse with those whom I should meet about their souls. I had the

impression, which has never left my mind, that God wanted me to preach the Gospel, and that I must begin immediately.”

III. THE MINISTRY OF CHARLES FINNEY

A. One biographer wrote of him:

“When he opened his mouth he was aiming a gun. When he spoke bombardment began. The effects of his speaking were almost unparalleled in modern history. Over half a million people were converted through his ministry...in an age when there were no amplifiers or mass communications he spearheaded a revival which literally altered the course of history.”

B. Chaos and revival followed him throughout his ministry;

1. One man came to his meeting with a pistol in hand;
 - a. His intent was to kill the speaker.
 - b. That evening the man fell to the floor and was soundly saved.
2. After his conversion, the first man Finney spoke to about his soul was his boss, a judge.
 - a. The judge was struck with such conviction of sin that he could not look at Finney.
 - b. He left the office under deep conviction and a few days later was saved in the same woods where Finney was saved.
3. In a Christian shoemaker’s shop, Finney demolished the argument of a Universalist and watched him go over a fence and into the woods to find Christ as his Saviour.
4. A fellow lawyer heard Finney preach and left his meeting saying; “He is in earnest... but his is deranged.”

C. Finney was a revolutionary.

1. He placed his lifetimes experiences in a book entitled *Lectures on Revival*.
2. He went to Heaven on August 16, 1875.