

Charles G. Finney

--The Link Between the First and Second Great Awakenings in America

By Jay Rogers

“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.”¹

Charles Finney was born the year after Wesley died; appropriately, because the revival events of Finney’s life became the link from the First Great Awakening of one century to the Second Great Awakening of the next. His life and writings influenced more people toward revival and social reform than any other preacher of the last century. He hated slavery with a passion and became a champion of many social reform issues of the 18th century. His convictions were born in the fires of revival and shaped by a keen lawyer’s mind committed to the full authority of the Bible. So effective were his writings that they have been the impetus for revivals around the world since his death.²

Extravagant and emotional in his preaching, perhaps no other revivalist of his day was as effective and controversial as Finney. Everywhere he went tumult followed him—it was either revival or riot—reminiscent of the power that followed the first century apostles in the

Book of Acts. His most controversial measures included allowing women to lead prayer during meetings, appealing by name to sinners while preaching, long protracted meetings without a planned format, and teaching the possibility, even the necessity, of totally eradicating sin both in the individual and in society. Some estimate that over 80% of his converts during the revivals stayed true to Christ without ever backsliding. This was due to his urgent message stressing holiness and purity. In later years, he moved away from sensationalism and put more emphasis on the power of the Holy Spirit through prayer.

As a theologian, he is best known for his Revival Lectures. No other books have been so mightily used of God to promote true biblical revival. In it, he explains what a revival is and treats at length related subjects as the place of faith and prayer in relation to revival; the need for the baptism in the Holy Spirit; methods to be used in the quest for souls; hindrances to revivals; instructions to new converts; and how to grow in grace.³

Notes

1. Perry Miller, *Charles Finney*, cover.
2. Finney, *The Heart of Truth*, cover.
3. Winkie Pratney, *Revival*, (Springdale, PA: Whitaker House, 1983) pp. 116-127.

(Reprinted with permission from The Forerunner International, P.O. Box 362173, Melbourne FL 32936-2173.)