

Principles of Prayer

Charles G. Finney

Introduction To The "40 Days Of Prayer"

Background information regarding Charles G. Finney:

Taken from: **ChristianHistory.net**

Charles Finney

Father of American revivalism

posted 8/08/2008 12:56PM

The 29-year-old lawyer Charles Grandison Finney had decided he must settle the question of his soul's salvation. So on October 10, 1821, he headed out into the woods near his Adams, New York, home to find God. "I will give my heart to God, or I never will come down from there," he said. After several hours, he returned to his office, where he experienced such forceful emotion that he questioned those who could not testify to a similar encounter.

"The Holy Spirit ... seemed to go through me, body and soul," he later wrote. "I could feel the impression, like a wave of electricity, going through and through me. Indeed it seemed to come in waves of liquid love, for I could not express it in any other way."

After his conversion, Finney prepared for ministry in the Presbyterian church and was ordained in 1824. Hired by the Female Missionary Society of the Western District, he began his missionary labors in the frontier communities of upper New York. A rigid Calvinism dominated the theological landscape, but Finney urged his listeners to accept Christ openly and publicly. His style differed too; his messages were more like a lawyer's argument than a pastor's sermon.

He rode from town to town over what was known as the "burned-over district," a reference to the fact that the area had experienced so much religious enthusiasm that it was thought to have burned out. Newspapers, revivalists, and clergy took notice of the increasingly rowdy meetings—meetings unlike those of reserved Calvinists.

During this time, Finney developed what came to be known as "New Measures." He allowed women to pray in mixed public meetings. He adopted the Methodists' "anxious bench": he put a pew at the front of the church, where those who felt a special urgency about their salvation could sit. He prayed in colloquial, common, and "vulgar" language. Most of these New Measures were actually many decades old, but Finney popularized them and was attacked for doing so.

The zenith of Finney's evangelistic career was reached at Rochester, New York, where he preached 98 sermons between September 10, 1830, and March 6,

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1831. Shopkeepers closed their businesses, posting notices urging people to attend Finney's meetings. Reportedly, the population of the town increased by two-thirds during the revival, but crime dropped by two-thirds over the same period.

From Rochester, he began an almost continuous revival in New York City as minister of the Second Free Presbyterian Church. He soon became disenchanted with Presbyterianism, however (due largely to his growing belief that people could, with God, perfect themselves). In 1834, he moved into the huge Broadway Tabernacle his followers had built for him.

He stayed there for only a year, leaving to pastor Oberlin Congregation Church and teach theology at Oberlin College. In 1851, he was appointed president, which gave him a new forum to advocate social reforms he championed, especially abolition of slavery.

Finney produced a variety of books and articles. His *Lectures on Revivals of Religion* (1835), a manual on how to lead revivals, inspired thousands of preachers to more consciously manage (critics said "manipulate") their revival meetings. His *Lectures on Systematic Theology* (1846) teach his special brand of "arminianized Calvinism."

Finney is called the "father of modern revivalism" by some historians, and he paved the way for later mass-evangelists like Dwight L. Moody, Billy Sunday, and Billy Graham.

NOTE TO MHPC GROW GROUPS:

Like many Evangelists, Charles Finney challenged the brand of Christianity of his day. Thousands came to Christ through his ministry. However, there are points that he made that not everyone is going to agree with. These points Finney are clearly debatable. This is understood and expected. However, Finney presents many powerful insights into prayer that any Christian can use to assist with increasing their prayer life. Let's take this journey together over 40 days, and allow God to use it to transform us as we seek Him in prayer.

It is suggested that each individual read each devotional/section as indicated on the "40 Days" calendar (one a day for 40 days). During each week's Grow Group meeting, each group should review the 7 readings of the previous week, using the suggested discussion questions.