

REVIVAL AND REVIVALISM

The Second Great Awakening (1790–1840)

* *This lecture provides summary points and documentation from Iain Murray's excellent book, Revival and Revivalism (455 pp., Banner of Truth Trust), which documents the remarkable events surrounding the Second Great Awakening.*

Introduction

- The First Great Awakening primarily took place in the 1730s and 1740s—though religious revival continued to spread for some time after that.
- But, by the time we come to the 1780 and 90s, there is need once again for revival in the now, newly formed, United States— in part this can be explained by the American Revolutionary War, which represented a massive disruption in social life; and in part, this is due to the realities of frontier life in the west, where most settlers did not have easy access to a church
- The beginnings of the Second Great Awakening were gradual, but most historians point to the late 1790s as the beginning. It involved leaders from several different denominations—primarily Presbyterians, Methodists, and Baptists.
- Commenting on the differences between the First and Second Great Awakenings, Iain Murray notes:

Iain Murray: “While its name rightly puts the Second Great Awakening in succession to the first of the 1740s, it fails to alert us to the measure in which they differed. [FIRST] For one thing, there was a remarkable difference in time scale. The duration of the first Great Awakening extended through three to five years at most; the duration of the second was not less than a quarter of a century, and, in the opinion of most, several years longer. . . . [SECOND] The second was of far greater geographical extent and reached far more people. Abel Stevens, the Methodist historian, believed that at the beginning of the nineteenth century ‘religious interest’ was ‘universal, if not simultaneous, from Maine to Tennessee, from Georgia to Canada.’ . . . [THIRD] In the 1740s few congregations outside the Presbyterian and Congregational bodies were stirred into new life even though Whitefield, the foremost preacher, was an Anglican. But in the early 1800s, in addition to these two denominations, Baptists, Methodists, and others, including the Episcopal Church, were all affected.” (*Revival and Revivalism*, 118–120)

Leading Up to the Awakening

- The institution that would eventually become Princeton University was founded by New Light Presbyterians (those who supported the Great Awakening) in 1746. Classes first began in 1747. Early supporters included both George Whitefield and Jonathan Edwards.

Iain Murray: “All the evangelical leaders of the Great Awakening were ardent supporters, if not trustees, of the College—none more so than George Whitefield. He called it ‘a glorious plan set on foot’ and expressed the conviction that ‘the spreading of the gospel in Maryland and Virginia in a great measure depends upon it.’” (*Revival and Revivalism*, 38)

- Though its education was not limited to training pastors, many of its graduates did become ministers and evangelists. “Around 500 of the 2,500 graduates of the first eighty years fulfilled the primary intention of its founders by becoming preachers of the gospel.” (*Revival and Revivalism*, 38)
- It was known then as the College of New Jersey, and would not officially be renamed Princeton until 1896 (after the town where it is located).
- Princeton’s first five presidents all had relatively short tenures: Jonathan Dickinson (1747), Aaron Burr, Sr. (1748–57), Jonathan Edwards (1758), Samuel Davies (1759–61), Samuel Finley (1761–1766).
- Stability came under the Scottish minister, John Witherspoon (1768–94), whose tenure at Princeton was marked by revival (specifically in the 1770s). The result of this Princeton revival was that many of the students were born again, and a large percentage became ministers of the Gospel.
 - As a side note, John Witherspoon was one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence. The Continental Congress even met at Princeton for several months in 1783, making it the capital of the United States for that short duration.
- Among these students was John McMillan (1752–1833), who would become a leader of Presbyterian churches in western Pennsylvania. He is known as the “apostle of the West” for his work there. He was also committed to the education of the next generation of pastors, and is regarded as a founder of Pittsburgh University (then called, “Pittsburgh Academy”). Throughout his life he trained over 100 other ministers and preached some 6,000 sermons.

Regarding his conversion, McMillan wrote: “I never saw that I was a lost, undone sinner, exposed to the wrath of a justly offended God, and could do nothing for my own relief.

In this situation I continued until I entered College at Princeton, in the spring of 1770. I had not been long there, until a revival of religion took place among the students, and I believe, at one time, there were not more than two or three but what were under serious impressions. On a day which had been set apart

by a number of the students to be observed as a day of fasting and prayer, —while the others were at dinner, I retired into my study, and while trying to pray, I got some discoveries of Divine things, which I had never had before. I saw that the Divine law was not only holy, just and spiritual, but that it was good also, and that uniformity to it would make me happy. I felt no disposition to quarrel with the law, but with myself, because I was not conformed to it. I felt that it was now easy to submit to the Gospel plan of salvation, and felt a serenity of mind to which I had hitherto been a stranger. And it was followed by a delight in contemplating God’s glorious perfections in all his works. I thought I could see God in every thing around me.” (Sprague, *Annals*, 3:350–51)

- Several other Princeton graduates, Thaddeus Dod, James Power, and Joseph Smith (not the Mormon), also traveled west and focused on pastoring and on education. Together with McMillan, they established the first presbytery west of the Allegheny Mountains.

Iain Murray: “These men, and the people whom they served, lived plain and resolute lives amid astonishing hardships. There were no mills to grind flour for bread and no roads bringing goods across the mountains. Such scarce commodities as iron and salt had all to be carried by pack-horse. No stone, brick, or frame house existed in the region in 1781; log cabins—made without saws, planes, or nails—provided the only homes, their small window-openings covered by oil paper or linen. Not a single church building existed in the region before 1785, some sources say 1790. Worse than these deprivations was the peril of attacks from Indians which did not finally end until 1794. . . . Remarkably, it was amid such primitive conditions and at a time when, further east, the attention of the nation was still absorbed in the Revolutionary War (1775–83), that the first records of revival in western Pennsylvania are found” (*Revivals and Revivalism*, 51).

- Describing these early revivals, McMillan wrote:

John McMillan: “The first remarkable season of the outpouring of the Spirit, which we enjoyed in this congregation, began about the middle of December, 1781. It made its first appearance among a few who met together for social worship, on the evening of a Thanksgiving day, which had been appointed by Congress. This encouraged us to appoint other meetings for the same purpose on Sabbath evenings; and the appearances still increasing, Sabbath night societies were continued with but little interruption for nearly two years. It was then usual to spend the whole night in religious exercises; nor did the time seem tedious, for the Lord was there, and his work went pleasantly on. Many were pricked to the heart with deep convictions, and a goodly number, we hope, became the subjects of renewing grace. At the first sacramental occasion after the work began, forty-five were added to the church, many of whom continued bringing forth the fruits of righteousness, and filling important offices in the church, until they were removed to the world of spirits. This time of refreshing continued, in a greater or less degree, until the year 1794. Upon every sacramental occasion, during this

period, numbers were added to the church, who gave comfortable evidence of having obtained a saving change of heart; but, as I neglected to keep a register of their names, I cannot now ascertain their number” (Sprague, *Annals*, 3:352).

- Baptist preachers in the mid-1700s were likewise charged by the Great Awakening. Preachers like Daniel Marshall, Samuel Harris, and David Thomas proclaimed an evangelical gospel in the same vein as George Whitefield.

Iain Murray: “Their evangelistic preaching was the same in content to that of Whitefield and the other leaders of the 1740s. The Separate Baptists were immigrants from New England where Whitefield’s ministry had influenced them deeply. Only on church polity and baptism did they differ from him, which is said to have occasioned the Englishman’s humorous comment, ‘My chickens have turned to ducks’” (*Revival and Revivalism*, 66).

- By 1792, the Baptists claimed a membership of some 65,000 church-goers.
- During this same time, Methodist preachers began having great success in the colonies, especially in the south.

Iain Murray: “An idea of the numbers affected at this time can be judged from records kept by the Methodists. When ten Methodist preachers met for their first Conference in July 1773, the total number of men and women belonging to their societies had been 1,160. . . . In 1780, when total Methodist membership in America stood at 8,540, 7,808 were to be found in the South. . . . In 1784, its membership at 14,988, Methodism ‘had increased approximately 1,400 percent in the short span of ten years, or at a rate of about six times the increase of the American population.’” (*Revival and Revivalism*, 74)

- Though the preachers of the Great Awakening had all been Calvinistic, the Methodists (under the influence of John Wesley) began to repudiate Calvinism as a dangerous error.

The Second Great Awakening

- In spite of these revivals in the mid-1700s, the end of the eighteenth century was a time of spiritual decline and uncertainty in the American colonies.

Iain Murray: “While a number of churches continued to grow slowly, Christians commonly spoke of ‘dark times, of ‘low conditions’, and of a ‘falling off’. It was universally believed that there had been no general awakening since the 1740s. Edward Dorr Griffin, who commenced his ministry in 1792, observed that ‘Long before the death of Whitefield in 1770, extensive revivals in America had ceased’” (*Revival and Revivalism*, 115).

- This decline is part of what made the contrast of the Second Great Awakening so remarkable.

Iain Murray: “The decline of Christian influence before a revival has sometimes been exaggerated in order to emphasize the scale of the subsequent transformation. The Second Great Awakening in America requires no such distortion of history in order to justify its title. By any assessment, an extraordinary period of Christian history began around the beginning of the new century. Voltaire is said to have claimed that by the early nineteenth century the Bible would have passed ‘into the limbo of forgotten literature’. Instead, by 1816 many Americans considered themselves to be living in ‘the age of Bibles and missionaries’” (*Revival and Revivalism*, 116).

- Part of the initial wave of revival is seen in the growth of the denominations. The Presbyterians grew from 70,000 to 100,000 from 1800–1810. Baptist membership increased from 95,000 to 160,000, and the Methodists added roughly 100,000 new members during that same decade.
- **NOTE:** At this point, it is important to draw attention to the fact that the revival had been unexpected. Like the first Great Awakening, it had not been planned for or manipulated. Rather, it was viewed as a great and unexpected work of the Holy Spirit (attributed on the human level only to prayer and the preaching of the Word).

Iain Murray: “What special means were used to promote these revivals? The answer is that there were none. . . . The facts are indisputable. A considerable body of men, for a long period before the Second Great Awakening, preached the same message as they did during the revival but with vastly different consequences—the same men, the same actions, performed with the same abilities, yet the results were so amazingly different! The conclusion has to be drawn that the change in the churches after 1798 and 1800 cannot be explained in terms of the means used. Nothing was clearer to those who saw the events than that God was sovereignly pleased to bless human instrumentality in such a way that the success could be attributed to him alone” (*Revival and Revivalism*, 126–28).

- Revival in the churches resulted in the founding of numerous evangelical organizations, including the American Board of Foreign Missions (1810), the American Bible Society (1816), and the American Tract Society (1825). Revival also came to a number of college campuses, including Yale under the leadership of Timothy Dwight (grandson of Jonathan Edwards).
- At this same time a number of seminaries were started, for the specific purpose of training men for ministry. (This was somewhat unknown prior to this time.) The most significant of these seminaries was Princeton Theological Seminary, which was started in 1812, under the leadership of Archibald Alexander (1772–1851) and Ashbel Green (1762–1848). Green would later serve as president of Princeton College. Although the

two institutions are separate, they were closely connected from the beginning. Princeton Seminary would come to play an important role in the history of evangelicalism, especially during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

- In the early 1800s, revival also came to the wilderness of the west. In particular, revival came to Kentucky under the preaching of Baptist and Presbyterian evangelists. James M’Gready (a student of John McMillan) was one of the first to introduce the “camp meeting”—a format that would become popular in frontier evangelism. These camp meetings followed the traditional Scottish model of occasionally meeting in the open-air for communion services.

Iain Murray: “At the communion services held at Gasper River in July 1800, M’Gready made it known beforehand that visitors should come prepared to camp on the ground. Attendance at these services was unprecedented, some travelling distances of forty or even 100 miles, and the communion season became ‘the camp meeting’. These occasions quickly multiplied and, becoming interdenominational in character, were later called ‘general camp meetings’” (*Revival and Revivalism*, 152).

- Though the frontier of Kentucky saw great religious revival, it also saw abuses and excesses. It is here, then, that emotional fanaticism, hysteria, and disorder began to take place.

Iain Murray: “Of the physical phenomena attending the revival that of ‘falling’ became the most common. People dropped ‘as if shot dead’ and they might lie, unable to rise, conscious, or unconscious, for an hour or for much longer. Some fell who had previously been skeptical of everything. Many—150, 250, even 800—were recorded as falling during camp meetings. . . . The potential for disorder increased when the numbers assembling necessitated open-air gatherings and camp meetings” (*Revival and Revivalism*, 164–65).

From Revival to Revivalism

- Such excesses, when they occurred, tended to have more to do with the personality of the preacher and the spiritual ignorance of the people, than with any true revival. Yet, they began to lay a foundation for later preachers who would focus on emotional manipulation as a means to produce revival, rather than focusing on the Word of God and trusting His Spirit to do a work.

Iain Murray: “[Such fanaticism] certainly showed that revival as such provides no safeguard against ignorance and error and that these dangers are increased rather than lessened when connected with fervent professions of faith in the Bible. Where there existed leadership and well-taught congregations in the Second Great Awakening, unity and catholicity [doctrinal orthodoxy] were generally

maintained. Where these were absent the opposite could well result” (*Revival and Revivalism*, 177).

- Along with these excesses, the Methodists’ emphasis on human free will began to convince many evangelists of their need to convince and persuade the audience using whatever means were deemed necessary. For example, Methodists continued to use the ‘camp meeting’ model, even after other denominations found it no longer necessary.

Iain Murray: “The Methodists, harnessing, as they thought, a lesson from Kentucky, came to believe that the organization of mass meetings was a very effective part of evangelism. Emotion engendered by numbers and mass singing, repeated over several days, was conducive to securing a response. Results could thus be multiplied, even guaranteed” (*Revival and Revivalism*, 184).

- Moreover, Methodists continued to openly decry Calvinism, seeing the doctrine of election as antithetical to an evangelistic spirit.
- In addition to a “camp meeting” format, Methodist evangelists promoted the idea that “falling” during an evangelistic service was a sign of genuine spiritual experience. Additionally, they began initiating altar calls and a system of inviting mourners to the front.

Iain Murray: “Incautious as they tended to be, Methodists knew too much of true religion to make ‘the falling exercise’ the test of the number of converts. Something else was needed and it was found in what became known as ‘the invitation to the altar’” (*Revival and Revivalism*, 185).

- The revivalism of the Methodist camp meetings would be taken to a new level several years later under the ministry of Charles G. Finney.
- Prior to Finney, however, the ministries of several New England pastors including Edward Dorr Griffin, Asahel Nettleton, Lyman Beecher, Edward Payson, and Gardiner Spring deserve mention. These men, unlike Finney, recognized that “revival is not something that men can plan or command as they will; the revivals in the Northeast, which occurred over a period of thirty years, followed no pattern or sequence” (*Revival and Revivalism*, 201). Unfortunately, Beecher would later come to support Finney.
- These men, further understood that the true evidence of conversion is a changed nature, and that the outward signs of conviction may not necessarily constitute a true conversion. They emphasized man’s sinful inability and rested in the work of God’s Spirit to change the sinner’s heart.

Charles Finney

- Charles Grandison Finney was ordained in the Presbyterian Church in June 1824. He quickly gained a reputation as an effective evangelist. After meeting with Asahel Nettleton in 1826, Nettleton wrote this:

Asahel Nettleton: “Those ministers and Christians who have heretofore been most and longest acquainted with revivals are most alarmed. [It was through the avoidance of such techniques as Finney advocated that] the character of revivals, for thirty years past, has been guarded. If the evil be not soon prevented a generation will arise, inheriting all the obliquities of their leaders, not knowing that a revival ever did or can exist without all those evils” (*Nettleton and his Labors*, 348).

- Nonetheless, Finney came to see his “new measures” as a necessary part of his evangelistic technique.

Iain Murray: “The new measures were to be defended by Finney as of the essence of revival, and by the stand he thus took the whole controversy became personalized around himself. If the measures were inseparable from the work of the Spirit, then to oppose them, or their defenders, was to oppose revivals, indeed, to oppose God” (*Revival and Revivalism*, 240–41).

- Of course, Finney’s new measures weren’t really new at all. They had been borrowed from the Methodist camp meetings.

Iain Murray: “The encouragement of physical responses to preaching (such as falling to the floor); women speaking in worship; meetings carried on through long hours and on successive days (protracted meetings); and, above all, inviting individuals to ‘submit to God’ and to prove it by a ‘humbling’ action such as standing up, kneeling down, or coming forward to ‘the anxious seat’—all came straight from the procedures that some Methodists had been popularizing for a quarter of a century. ‘The anxious seat’ was only the altar call and the mourner’s bench under another name” (*Revival and Revivalism*, 242).

- In a sermon entitled “Make Yourselves a New Heart” (1831), Finney told his audience:

Charles Finney: “I will show you what is intended in the command of the text. It is that a man should change the governing purpose of his life. A man resolves to be a lawyer; then he directs all his plans and efforts to that object, and that, for the time is his governing purpose. He directs all his efforts to that object and so has changed his heart. . . . It is apparent that the change now described, effected by the simple volition of the sinner’s mind through the influence of motives, is a sufficient change, all that the Bible requires. It is all that is necessary to make a sinner a Christian” (Quoted in review in *Biblical Repertory and Theological Review* [1832], 295).

- Finney openly denied the sinner’s total inability, teaching instead that man has the ability to convert himself. “When God commands us to do a thing it is the highest possible evidence that we can do it. He has no right to command unless we have the power to obey.”

Charles Finney: “These doctrines I could not receive. I could not receive [Calvinistic] views on the subject of atonement, regeneration, faith, repentance, the slavery of the will, or any of the kindred doctrines” (*Memoirs*, 46).

- Speaking of Finney’s gospel presentation, Gardiner Spring recounted:

Gardiner Spring: “Men were instructed that all that is necessary in order to become Christians is to *resolve to become Christians*, and that the purpose and determination to become Christians are themselves the religion of the Gospel. . . . It was the teaching of some that the renovation of the heart, instead of being the work of the Holy Spirit, is the creature’s work and that the power of the Spirit consists in *persuading the sinner* himself to perform it. The principal advocate of these new measures and these Pelagian errors was the Rev. Charles G. Finney” (*Personal Reminiscences*, 1:221).

- With regard to revivals, Finney openly taught that they should be expected and “promoted, by the use of means designed and adapted specially to that object.” He criticized those who thought that “that a revival was a miracle, an interposition of Divine power, with which they [Christians] had nothing to do, and which they had no more agency in producing than they had in producing thunder, or a storm of hail, or an earthquake” (Charles Finney, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*).

Iain Murray: “For Finney an appeal for *public action* had become an essential part of evangelism. He believed that all that was needed for conversion was a resolution signified by standing, kneeling, or coming forward, and because the Holy Spirit always acts when a sinner acts, the public resolution could be treated as ‘identical with the miraculous inward change of sudden conversion’” (*Revival and Revivalism*, 250).

- Finney’s theology (specifically, his rejection of total depravity) was influenced by Nathaniel William Taylor, who was a leading figure at Yale Divinity School (which was established in 1822). Taylor—in an effort to explain human responsibility in salvation—rejected the straw man of Calvinism that he had created (namely, the idea that God “made men sinners” and would “send them to hell for the sins he had directly created in them, or compelled them to commit by the force of omnipotence”). In part, Taylor was motivated by an effort to defend against Unitarian attacks on orthodoxy by making the gospel more acceptable.

Iain Murray: “The solution . . . was to assert that sin and guilt can *only* be attributed to men’s voluntary choices. All that needs to be changed in the unconverted man is his will, not his nature. As Taylor’s biographer observed, the

doctrine of total depravity was central in the Unitarian attack on orthodoxy, and in departing from that doctrine Taylor and his New Haven colleagues were trying to ‘restate Calvinism in more acceptable terms’” (*Revival and Revivalism*, 260–61).

- Taylor’s teaching became known as the “New Divinity,” and it was this theological grid that Finney used in implementing his “new measures.” Of note is the fact that, among other doctrines which Finney denied or reinterpreted was the atonement.

Iain Murray: “According to [Finney’s] view, Christ’s death was not a payment of debt on behalf of those whose sins he bore; it was rather an action to satisfy public justice, making it safe and possible for God to forgive those who repent and believe. So the act that secures forgiveness is man’s, not Christ’s. ‘The atonement itself does not secure the salvation of any,’ wrote Finney. ‘When a sinner repents that state of feeling makes it proper for God to forgive him’” (*Revival and Revivalism*, 262).

- Finney’s methods caused major controversy and splits within New England Presbyterianism and all of American Christianity. Even formerly close friends, Asahel Nettleton and Lyman Beecher, parted ways over Finney (with Nettleton opposing Finney and Beecher supporting him). In 1838, the Presbyterian Church split into the Old and New School.
- Over against the new measures, Archibald Alexander (of the newly formed Princeton Seminary) sought to stand against Finneyism and the New Theology of the New Divinity.

Archibald Alexander: “[Some are preaching that] man is in possession of every ability which is requisite for the discharge of his duty. That it is as easy for him to repent, to exercise faith, and to love God, as to speak, or eat, or walk, or perform any other act. . . . Nothing is more in the power of a man, they allege, than his own will; and the consent of the will to the terms of the Gospel is all that is required to constitute any man a Christian. . . . [In response,] it is attended with many advantages to bring into view ancient heresies, for often what modern innovators consider a new discovery, and wish to pass off as a scheme suited to remove all difficulties, is found upon examination to be nothing else than some ancient heresy clothed in new dress” (from *Revival and Revivalism*, 269–70).

- Finney asserted that his new measures would guarantee results and revivals. With regard to conversion, Finney claimed that “The prayer of faith is always answered by the specified blessing prayed for. . . . We see that pious parents can render the salvation of their children certain. Only let them pray in faith and be agreed as touching the things they shall ask for, and God has promised them the desire of their hearts.”

Iain Murray: “It was now claimed as proven that the use of ‘the anxious seat’, and its attendant teaching, *always* saw the multiplication of converts; and, the argument went, as such a result could not be without the working of divine power, God must be setting ‘his seal to the doctrines that were preached and to the means

that were used'. What was indisputable was that making 'conversion' a matter of instant, public decision, with ascertainable numbers immediately announced in the religious press, produced a display of repeated 'successes' on a scale never before witnessed. Numbers *seen* to be responding were claimed as more than sufficient evidence for the rightness of the changes in practice and teaching" (*Revival and Revivalism*, 283).

- Finney claimed that the success of his new measures could be seen in their numeric results. Yet, even by his own standard, Finney's manipulative techniques failed.

Iain Murray: "Finney's claim that success proved the rightness of his cause could be tested by facts; the facts, however, reveal evidence contrary to Finney's thesis. In the early 1830s Finney repeatedly asserted that if preachers adopted his convictions there would be continuous revival. Many men did adopt them and the practices that went with them but the revival that 'would never cease' never came. On the contrary, the Second Great Awakening, which had begun under doctrinal preaching different from his own, came to an end and no protracted meetings could recall it. The excitement of 1831 seems to have been the point of termination. [Even Finney himself, lecturing in 1835, admitted that:] 'Ever since [the revivals of 1831] the glory has been departing and revivals have been becoming less and less frequent—less and less powerful'" (*Revival and Revivalism*, 285–86).

- Iain Murray asserts that the reasons Charles Finney's new measures were so widely accepted was due to four factors: 1) their visible, numeric success which trumped the need for a biblical defense of the new methods; 2) Christians wanted to see visible success and the new measures offered it in a new and exciting way; 3) the new measures were introduced in a time of true revival, and gained credibility as a result; and 4) the supposed success of Finney's methods received much more publicity than the clear harm that was done to the church as a result.
- In bringing his discussion on the Second Great Awakening to a close, Murray draws a clear distinction between true revivals and revivalism.

Iain Murray: "Until about 1830 it would appear that one single definition of [revival] prevailed. A revival was a sovereign and large giving of the Spirit of God, resulting in the addition of many to the kingdom of God. . . . In 1832, preceding Finney[']s *Lectures*] by three years, an American Presbyterian minister and writer by the name of Calvin Colton went into print with the novel theory that genuine revivals could be classified into two different types: the old and the new. . . . The new, he believed, were the same in character and nature [as the old], but they had only begun to occur in recent years because previously men had not learned 'how, as instruments, to originate and promote them'. The reason this second type of revivals had not been known before was simply that the use of *means* in order to the promotion of revivals had not previously been studied" (*Revival and Revivalism*, 374–75).

- While true revival is a supernatural work of God, “revivalism contains no real element of mystery: psychological pressure, ‘prayer’ used to create expectancy, predictions of impending results, the personality of the ‘revivalist’ pushed to the fore, the ‘appeal’—these, and kindred things, are generally enough to account for the extraordinary in its success” (*Revival and Revivalism*, 380).

ADDENDUM:

A WOLF IN SHEEP’S CLOTHING (By Phil Johnson)

How Charles Finney’s Theology Ravaged the Evangelical Movement

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IT IS IRONIC that Charles Grandison Finney has become a poster boy for so many modern evangelicals. His theology was far from evangelical. As a Christian leader, he was hardly the model of humility or spirituality. Even Finney's autobiography paints a questionable character. In

his own retelling of his life's story, Finney comes across as stubborn, arrogant—and sometimes even a bit devious.

Playing with Fraud from the Outset

Finney's ministry was founded on duplicity from the beginning. He obtained his license to preach as a Presbyterian minister by professing adherence to the Westminster Confession of Faith. But he later admitted that he was almost totally ignorant of what the document taught. Here, in Finney's own words, is a description of what occurred when he went before the council whose task it was to determine if he was spiritually qualified and doctrinally sound:

Unexpectedly to myself they asked me if I received the Confession of faith of the Presbyterian church. I had not examined it;—that is, the large work, containing the Catechisms and Presbyterian Confession. This had made no part of my study. I replied that I received it for substance of doctrine, so far as I understood it. But I spoke in a way that plainly implied, I think, that I did not pretend to know much about it. However, I answered honestly, as I understood it at the time [Charles Finney, *The Memoirs of Charles Finney: The Complete Restored Text* (Grand Rapids: Academie, 1989), 53-54].

Despite his Clintonesque insistence that he "answered honestly," it is clear that Finney deliberately misled his examiners. (His ability to parse legal terms would have served him well had he been a politician in the late Twentieth Century. But he betrays an appalling brashness for a clergyman in his own era.) Rather than plainly admitting he was utterly ignorant of his denomination's doctrinal standards, he says he "spoke in a way" that *implied* ("I think") that he did not know "much" about those documents. The truth is that he had never even examined the Confession of Faith and knew *nothing at all* about it. He was woefully unprepared for ordination, and he had no business seeking a license to preach under the presbytery's auspices. "I was not aware that the rules of the presbytery required them to ask a candidate if he accepted the Presbyterian Confession of faith," Finney wrote. "Hence I had never read it" [*Memoirs*, 60.] So when he told his ordination council that he received the Confession "for substance of doctrine," *nothing could have been further from the truth!* Nonetheless, the council naively (and all too willingly) took Finney at his word and licensed him to preach.

Finney's credibility is further marred by the fact that when he later read the Westminster Standards and realized he disagreed on almost every crucial point, he did not resign the commission he had received under false pretenses. Instead, he accepted the platform he had duped those men into giving him—then used it for the rest of his life to attack their doctrinal convictions. "As soon as I learned what were the unambiguous teachings of the Confession of faith upon these points, I did not hesitate at all on all suitable occasions to declare my dissent from them," he boasted. "I repudiated and exposed them. Wherever I found that any class of persons were hidden behind these dogmas, I did not hesitate to demolish them, to the best of my ability" [*Memoirs*, 60]. The fact that Finney had obtained his own preaching credentials by professing adherence to the Confession did not faze him at all. "When I came to read the Confession of faith, and saw the passages that were quoted to sustain these peculiar positions, I was absolutely ashamed of it," he frankly stated. "I could not feel any respect for a document that would undertake to impose on mankind such dogmas as those" [*Memoirs*, 61].

Baggage from the Years of Unbelief

Finney's disagreements with his denomination's doctrinal standards clearly were not opinions he formed *after* his examination by the council. By his own admission, he had consciously rejected the basic theological framework of the Presbyterian confession long before he stood before those men. He writes of doctrinal debates he had provoked with his pastor, George W. Gale: "I could not receive his views on the subject of atonement, regeneration, faith, repentance, the slavery of the Will, or any of their kindred doctrines" [*Memoirs*, 46].

Even prior to his conversion, Finney had raised many of the very same issues and objected strongly to Gale's teaching on such points. He wrote,

I now think that I sometimes criticised his sermons unmercifully. I raised such objections against his positions as forced themselves upon my attention. . . . What did he mean by *repentance*? Was it a mere feeling of sorrow for sin? Was it altogether a *passive* state of mind? or did it involve a *voluntary* element? If it was a change of mind, in what respect was it a change of mind? What did he mean by the term *regeneration*? What did such language mean when spoken of as a spiritual change? What did he mean by *faith*? Was it merely an *intellectual* state? Was it merely a conviction, or persuasion, that the things stated in the Gospel were true? [*Memoirs*, 10-12.]

Finney's "conversion" does not seem to have altered his skepticism about his denomination's stance on any of these crucial evangelical doctrines. After his experiential crisis, those were the very issues on which he dissented from the Presbyterian Confession—only now with more vigor than ever. The intense emotional experience Finney regarded as his new birth seems merely to have confirmed his feeling that he was right about Christianity and Scripture—and that most of the leaders of his denomination were either stupid or deluded.

In fact, in his own account of his conversion and theological "training," Finney comes across as utterly unteachable. He meticulously recounts the issues on which he and Pastor Gale disagreed. They are for the most part the same points Finney says he objected to before his conversion. Never once does Finney acknowledge conceding any point to Gale (or to anyone else, for that matter). He obviously believed that his intuitive grasp of spiritual truth, combined with his legal training, automatically made him more doctrinally adept than all the seminary-trained Presbyterian preachers combined. He consistently portrays church leaders who adhered to the Confession of Faith as dupes and dullards. He was convinced they had nothing to teach him, and from the point of his conversion on, he casts himself in the superior role, as a reformer of their outdated and indefensible doctrines. He writes,

The fact is that Brother Gale's education for the ministry had been entirely defective. He had imbibed a set of opinions, both theological and practical, that were a strait jacket to him. He could accomplish very little or nothing if he carried out his own principles. I had the use of his library, and ransacked it thoroughly on all the questions of theology which came up for examination; and the more I examined the books, the more I was dissatisfied. [*Memoirs*, 55.]

Now convinced that his tutor (Pastor Gale) and all the Reformed and Puritan books in Gale's library were utterly worthless, Finney set out to devise a theological system more to his own liking.

At first, being no theologian, my attitude in respect to [Gale's] peculiar views was rather that of negation or denial, than that of opposing any positive view to his. I said, your

positions are not proved." I often said, "They are insusceptible of proof." *So I thought then, and so I think now.* . . . I had nowhere to go but directly to the Bible, and to the philosophy or workings of my own mind as they were revealed in consciousness. My views took on a *positive* type but slowly. I at first found myself unable to receive his peculiar views; and secondly, gradually formed views of my own in opposition to them, which appeared to me to be unequivocally taught in the Bible. [*Memoirs*, 55, emphasis added.]

In other words, Finney's earliest opinions on "the subject[s] of atonement, regeneration, faith, repentance, the slavery of the will, [and] kindred doctrines" became baggage he dragged along into his own peculiar systematic theology. Having objected to Pastor Gale's doctrinal stance on these issues since before his conversion—and especially now that Finney realized these ideas came from the Confession itself—he grew to despise "Old School" doctrinal standards. He was not about to study books that defended such doctrines.

Without any "positive view" of his own (other than his obvious contempt for Reformed doctrine), he was content for a while to rebuff Gale's tutoring with "negation or denial." But Finney soon realized he needed something more than denial to answer the doctrines of the Presbyterian Confession. So he set to work scouring the pages of Scripture in search of arguments against the doctrines he despised, while devising new doctrines more suited to "the philosophy or workings of [his] own mind." Ideas Finney had toyed with since his pre-conversion days thus became the heart of the theology he espoused until the end of his life. In other words, as a new "convert," Finney simply devised a theology that fit his already-established prejudices.

In his *Memoirs*, his *Lectures on Revival*, and his *Systematic Theology*, what comes through, frankly, is *not* a man with a high regard for Scripture, but a man with an inflated view of himself. Where Scripture does not suit him, Finney resorts to sophistry to explain it away. Whole sections of his *Systematic Theology* contain paragraph after paragraph of philosophizing and moralizing—sometimes without a single reference to Scripture for many pages. [1]

Finney vs. Hyper-Calvinism

Finney is often portrayed as a moderate who fought against hyper-Calvinist influences. It's true that hyper-Calvinism (a corruption of Calvinist doctrine that nullifies or minimizes human responsibility) was on the rise in New England, and Finney had probably been exposed to it. In fact, it is fair to say that hyper-Calvinism had a major hand in creating the cold spiritual climate in which Finney's errors flourished. The popular reception of Finney's teaching was certainly in large part an overreaction against the errors of hyper-Calvinism.

Finney regarded his own theology as a necessary antidote to hyper-Calvinism. He wrote,

I have everywhere found that the peculiarities of hyper-Calvinism have been the stumbling block both of the church and of the world. A nature sinful in itself, a total inability to accept Christ and to obey God, condemnation to eternal death for the sin of Adam and for a sinful nature,—and all the kindred and resultant dogmas of that peculiar school, have been the stumbling block of believers and the ruin of sinners." [*Memoirs*, 444].

But Finney was too much of a novice to distinguish between biblical, orthodox Calvinism and hyper-Calvinism. He lumped them together and ended up rejecting much sound doctrine along with what he thought was "hyper-Calvinism." Far from being a "moderate," Finney answered hyper-Calvinism by shifting to the opposite extreme—Pelagianism.

Notice that under the guise of condemning "hyper-Calvinism," Finney expressly attacked the idea that people are fallen and depraved because of a sinful nature inherited from Adam. That is the doctrine of original sin, not a hyper-Calvinist dogma, but a standard tenet of Christian doctrine—and recognized as such by all mainstream Christians since the Pelagian heresy of the Fifth Century. Note, too, that Finney rejected the idea that sinners are totally unable to please God (*contra* Rom. 8:7-8). Again, total inability is no hyper-Calvinist notion, but a biblical truth defended by Augustine and the Protestant Reformers alike.

Many of the doctrines Finney rejected were central to the gospel itself. Remember his comments about his own pastor's views? ("*I could not receive his views on the subject of atonement, regeneration, faith, repentance, the slavery of the Will, or any of their kindred doctrines.*") Again, not one of the issues he lists deals with any error that arises out of hyper-Calvinism. Instead, what Finney was rejecting were basic biblical doctrines and long-standing tenets of Christian orthodoxy. He jettisoned several *essential* aspects of Protestant and Reformed doctrine related to "the atonement, regeneration, faith, repentance, the slavery of the will." Many of the doctrines he argued most vehemently against are, in fact, core biblical truths.

In other words, it was not merely hyper-Calvinism—or even simple Calvinism—that Finney rejected, but the biblical essentials of *sola fide* and *sola gratia* (justification by faith alone through grace alone). In effect, Finney also abandoned *sola scriptura* (the authority and sufficiency of Scripture), as shown by his constant appeal to rationalism in support of his new theology. The movement he led therefore represents the wholesale abandonment of historic Protestant principles.

Finney vs. Justification by Faith

Specifically, what were Finney's most serious errors? At the top of the list stands his rejection of the doctrine of justification by faith. Finney denied that the righteousness of Christ is the sole ground of our justification, teaching instead that sinners must reform their own hearts in order to be acceptable to God. (His emphasis on self-reformation apart from divine enablement is again a strong echo of Pelagianism.)

Finney spends a considerable amount of time in several of his works arguing against "that theological *fiction of imputation*" [*Memoirs*, 58]. Those who have any grasp of Protestant doctrine will see immediately that his attack at this point is a blatant rejection of the doctrine of justification by faith alone (*sola fide*). It places him outside the pale of true evangelical Protestantism. The doctrine of imputed righteousness is the very heart of the historic difference between Protestantism and Roman Catholicism. The whole doctrine of justification by faith hinges on this concept. But Finney flatly rejected it. He derided the concept of imputation as unjust: "I could not but regard and treat this whole question of imputation as a theological fiction, somewhat related to our legal fiction of John Doe and Richard Roe" [*Memoirs*, 60]. Dismissing the many biblical texts that expressly say righteousness is imputed to believers for their justification, he wrote,

These and similar passages are relied upon, as teaching the doctrine of an imputed righteousness; and such as these: "The Lord our righteousness" (Phil. 3:9). . . . "Christ our righteousness" is Christ the author or procurer of our justification. But this does not imply that He procures our justification by imputing His obedience to us. . . [Charles Finney, *Systematic Theology* (Minneapolis: Bethany), 372-73].

Here Finney offers no cogent explanation of what he imagines Scripture *does* mean when it speaks repeatedly of the imputation of righteousness to believers (e.g., Gen. 15:6; Rom. 4:4-6). But throughout all his discussions of imputation Finney repeatedly insists that neither merit nor guilt can righteously be imputed from one person to another. Therefore, Finney argues, the righteousness of Christ can provide no ground for the justification of sinners. Furthermore, he continues:

[Subhead:] *Foundation of the justification of penitent believers in Christ. What is the ultimate ground or reason of their justification?*

1. It is not founded in Christ's literally suffering the exact penalty of the law for them, and in this sense literally purchasing their justification and eternal salvation [*Systematic Theology*, 373].

By employing terms such as "exact" and "literal," Finney caricatured the position he was opposing. (The immediate context of this quotation makes clear that he was arguing against the position outlined in the Westminster Confession, which accords with all major Protestant creeds and theologians on the matter of justification.) But Finney could not obscure his own position: Having decided that the doctrine of imputation was a "theological fiction," he was forced to deny not only the imputation of Christ's righteousness to believers, but also the imputation of the sinner's guilt to Christ on the cross. Under Finney's system, Christ could not have actually borne anyone else's sin or suffered sin's full penalty in their place and in their stead (*contra* Isaiah 53:6; 1 Peter 2:24; 1 John 2:2). Finney therefore rejected the doctrine of substitutionary atonement. (We shall deal with this in more detail [below](#)).

Finney's position on these matters also caused him to define justification in subjective, rather than objective, terms. Protestants have historically insisted that justification is a purely forensic declaration, giving the penitent sinner an immediate right standing before God on the merit of Christ's righteousness, not their own (cf. Rom. 10:3; Phil. 3:9). By *forensic*, we mean that it is a legal declaration, like a courtroom verdict or a marriage pronouncement ("I now pronounce you husband and wife"). It changes the person's external status rather than affecting some kind of internal change; it is a wholly *objective* reality.

The *subjective* transformation of the believer that conforms us to Christ's image is *sanctification*—a subsequent and separate reality, distinct from justification. Since the dawn of the Protestant Reformation, the virtually unanimous Protestant consensus has been that justification is in no sense grounded in or conditioned on our sanctification. Catholicism, on the other hand, mingles justification and sanctification, making sanctification a prerequisite to final justification.

Finney sided with Rome on this point. His rejection of the doctrine of imputation left him with no alternative: "Gospel justification is not to be regarded as a forensic or judicial proceeding" [*Systematic Theology*, 360].

Finney departed further from historic Protestantism by expressly denying that Christ's righteousness is the sole ground of the believer's justification, arguing instead that justification is grounded only in the benevolence of God. (This position is identical to that of Socinians and theological liberals.)

Obfuscating the issue further, Finney listed several "necessary conditions" (insisting these are not, technically, *grounds*) of justification. These "necessary conditions" included Christ's atoning death, the Christian's own faith, repentance, sanctification, and—most ominously—the believer's ongoing obedience to the law. Finney wrote,

There can be no justification in a legal or forensic sense, but upon the ground [2] of universal, perfect, and uninterrupted obedience to law. This is of course denied by those who hold that gospel justification, or the justification of penitent sinners, is of the nature of a forensic or judicial justification. They hold to the legal maxim, that what a man does by another he does by himself, and therefore the law regards Christ's obedience as ours, on the ground that He obeyed for us [*Systematic Theology*, 362].

Of course, Finney denied that Christ "obeyed for us," claiming that since Christ was Himself obligated to render full obedience to the law, His obedience could justify Himself alone. "It can never be imputed to us," Finney intoned [*Systematic Theology*, 362].

The clear implication of Finney's view is that justification ultimately hinges on the believer's own obedience, and God will not truly and finally pardon the repentant sinner until *after* that penitent one completes a lifetime of faithful obedience. Finney himself said as much, employing the undiluted language of perfectionism. He wrote, By sanctification being a condition of justification, the following things are intended:

(1.) That present, full, and entire consecration of heart and life to God and His service, is an unalterable condition of present pardon of past sin, and of present acceptance with God. (2.) That the penitent soul remains justified no longer than this full-hearted consecration continues. If he falls from his first love into the spirit of self-pleasing, he falls again into bondage to sin and to the law, is condemned, and must repent and do his "first work," must turn to Christ, and renew his faith and love, as a condition of his salvation. . . .

Perseverance in faith and obedience, or in consecration to God, is also an unalterable condition of justification, or of pardon and acceptance with God. By this language in this connection, you will of course understand me to mean, that perseverance in faith and obedience is a condition, not of present, but of final or ultimate acceptance and salvation [*Systematic Theology*, 368-69].

Thus Finney insisted that justification ultimately hinges on the believer's own performance, not Christ's. Here Finney once more turns his guns against the doctrine of imputation:

Those who hold that justification by imputed righteousness is a forensic proceeding, take a view of final or ultimate justification, according with their view of the nature of the transaction. With them, faith receives an imputed righteousness, and a judicial justification. The first act of faith, according to them, introduces the sinner into this relation, and obtains for him a perpetual justification. They maintain that after this first

act of faith it is impossible for the sinner to come into condemnation; [*Systematic Theology*, 369].

But isn't that precisely what Scripture teaches? John 3:18: "He that believeth on him is not condemned." John 5:24: "He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life." Galatians 3:13: "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us." It was immediately following his great discourse on justification by faith that the apostle Paul wrote, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1). But Charles Finney was unwilling to let Christians rest in the promise of "no condemnation," and he ridiculed the idea of security in Christ as a notion that would lead to licentious living. He continues, again caricaturing the position he opposes:

that, being once justified, he is always thereafter justified, whatever he may do; indeed that he is never justified by grace, as to sins that are past, upon condition that he ceases to sin; that Christ's righteousness is the ground, and that his own present obedience is not even a condition of his justification, so that, in fact, his own present or future obedience to the law of God is, in no case, and in no sense, a *sine qua non* of his justification, present or ultimate.

Now this is certainly another gospel from the one I am inculcating. It is not a difference merely upon some speculative or theoretic point. It is a point fundamental to the gospel and to salvation, if any one can be [*Systematic Theology*, 369.]

As the final paragraph of that excerpt makes clear, Finney himself clearly understood that what he proclaimed was a different gospel from that of historic Protestantism. By denying the forensic nature of justification, Finney was left with no option but to regard justification as a subjective thing grounded not in Christ's redemptive work but in the believer's own obedience—and therefore a matter of works, not faith alone.

Finney vs. Original Sin

As noted above, Finney rejected the notion that Adam's guilty, sinful nature is inherited by all his offspring. In doing so, he was repudiating the clear teaching of Scripture:

The judgment arose from one transgression [Adam's sin] resulting in condemnation By the transgression of the one [Adam], death reigned Through one transgression [Adam's sin] there resulted condemnation to all men Through the one man's disobedience [Adam's sin] the many were made sinners (Rom. 5:16-19).

Predictably, Finney appealed to human wisdom to justify his rejection of clear biblical teaching: "What law have we violated in inheriting this [sin] nature? What law requires us to have a different nature from that which we possess? Does reason affirm that we are deserving of the wrath and curse of God for ever, for inheriting from Adam a sinful nature?" [*Systematic Theology*, 320].

Naturally, Finney's denial of original sin also led him to reject the doctrine of human

depravity. He flatly denied that fallen humanity suffers from any "constitutional sinfulness" or sinful corruption of human nature:

"Moral depravity cannot consist in any attribute of nature or constitution, nor in any lapsed or fallen state of nature. . . . Moral depravity, as I use the term, does not consist in, nor imply a sinful nature, in the sense that the human soul is sinful in itself. It is not a constitutional sinfulness" [*Systematic Theology*, 245].

Instead, Finney insisted, "depravity" is a purely voluntary condition, and therefore, sinners have the power simply to will otherwise. In other words, Finney was insisting that all men and women have a natural ability to obey God. Sin results from wrong choices, not from a fallen nature. According to Finney, sinners can freely reform their own hearts, and must do so themselves if they are to be redeemed. Once again, this is sheer Pelagianism:

"[Sinners] are under the necessity of first changing their hearts, or their choice of an end, before they can put forth any volitions to secure any other than a selfish end. And this is plainly the everywhere assumed philosophy of the Bible. That uniformly represents the unregenerate as totally depraved, [3] and calls upon them to repent, to make themselves a new heart" [*Systematic Theology*, 249].

Finney was therefore not ashamed to take credit for his own conversion. Having rejected *sola gratia*, Finney had destroyed the gospel's safeguard against boasting (Eph. 2:9). As John MacArthur points out,

In Finney's telling of [his conversion] story, it becomes clear that he believed his own will was the determinative factor that brought about his salvation: "On a Sabbath evening [in the autumn of 1821,] *I made up my mind that I would settle the question of my soul's salvation at-once, that if it were possible I would make my peace with God*" [*Memoirs*, 16, emphasis added]. Evidently under intense conviction, Finney went into the woods, where he made a promise "that *I would give my heart to God [that day] or die in the attempt*" [*Memoirs*, 16]. [John MacArthur, *Ashamed of the Gospel*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1993), 236.]

Finney vs. Substitutionary Atonement

What seemed to chafe Finney most about evangelical Christianity was the belief that Christ's atonement is a penal satisfaction offered to God. Finney wrote, "I had read nothing on the subject [of the atonement] except my Bible, & what I had there found on the subject I had interpreted as I would have understood the same or like passages in a law book" [*Memoirs*, 42].

Thus applying nineteenth-century American legal standards to the biblical doctrine of atonement, he concluded that it would be legally unjust to impute the sinner's guilt to Christ or to impute Christ's righteousness to the sinner. As noted above, Finney labeled imputation a "theological fiction" [*Memoirs*, 58-61]. In essence, this was a denial of the core of evangelical theology, repudiating the heart of Paul's argument about justification by faith in Romans 3-5 (see especially Rom. 4:5)—in effect nullifying the whole gospel!

Further, by ruling out the imputation of guilt and righteousness, Finney was forced to argue

that Christ's death should not be regarded as an actual atonement for others' sins. Finney replaced the doctrine of substitutionary atonement with a version of Grotius's "governmental theory" (the same view being revived by those today who tout "moral government theology").

The Grotian view of the atonement is laden with strong Pelagian tendencies. By cutting the sinner off from the imputation of Christ's righteousness, this view automatically requires sinners to attain a righteousness of their own (*contra* Rom. 10:3). When he embraced such a view of the atonement, Finney had no choice but to adopt a theology that magnifies human ability and minimizes God's role in changing human hearts. He wrote, for example,

There is nothing in religion beyond the ordinary powers of nature. 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 naturally a result of the use of means as a crop is of the use of its appropriate means" [Charles Finney, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion* (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, n.d.), 4-5].

Thus Finney constantly downplayed God's work in our salvation, understated the hopelessness of the sinner's condition, and overestimated the power of sinners to change their own hearts. When those errors are traced to their source, what we find is a deficient view of the atonement. Indeed, Finney's denial of vicarious atonement underlies and explains virtually all his theological aberrations.

The Fallout from Finney's Doctrines

Predictably, most of Finney's spiritual heirs lapsed into apostasy, Socinianism, mere moralism, cultlike perfectionism, and other related errors. In short, Finney's chief legacy was confusion and doctrinal compromise. Evangelical Christianity virtually disappeared from western New York in Finney's own lifetime. Despite Finney's accounts of glorious "revivals," most of the vast region of New England where he held his revival campaigns fell into a permanent spiritual coldness during Finney's lifetime and more than a hundred years later still has not emerged from that malaise. This is directly owing to the influence of Finney and others who were simultaneously promoting similar ideas.

The Western half of New York became known as "the burnt-over district," because of the negative effects of the revivalist movement that culminated in Finney's work there. These facts are often obscured in the popular lore about Finney. But even Finney himself spoke of "a burnt district" [*Memoirs*, 78], and he lamented the absence of any lasting fruit from his evangelistic efforts. He wrote,

I was often instrumental in bringing Christians under great conviction, and into a state of temporary repentance and faith [But] falling short of urging them up to a point, where they would become so acquainted with Christ as to abide in Him, they would of course soon relapse into their former state [cited in B. B. Warfield, *Studies in Perfectionism*, 2 vols. (New York: Oxford, 1932), 2:24].

One of Finney's contemporaries registered a similar assessment, but more bluntly:

During ten years, hundreds, and perhaps thousands, were annually reported to be converted on all hands; but now it is admitted, that real converts are comparatively few. It

is declared, even by [Finney] himself, that "the great body of them are a disgrace to religion" [cited in Warfield, 2:23].

B. B. Warfield cited the testimony of Asa Mahan, one of Finney's close associates,

. . . who tells us—to put it briefly—that everyone who was concerned in these revivals suffered a sad subsequent lapse: 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," he 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."

Thus the great "Western Revivals" ran out into disaster. . . . Over and over again, when he proposed to revisit one of the churches, delegations were sent him or other means used, to prevent what was thought of as an affliction. . . . Even after a generation had passed by, these burnt children had no liking for the fire [Warfield, 2:26-28].

Finney grew discouraged with the revival campaigns and tried his hand at pastoring in New York City before accepting the presidency of Oberlin College. During those post-revivalist years, he turned his attention to devising a doctrine of Christian perfectionism. Perfectionist ideas, in vogue at the time, were a whole new playground for serious heresy on the fringes of evangelicalism—and Finney became one of the best-known advocates of perfectionism. The evil legacy of the perfectionism touted by Finney and friends in the mid-nineteenth century has been thoroughly critiqued by B. B. Warfield in his important work *Studies in Perfectionism*. Perfectionism was the logical consequence of Finney's Pelagianism, and its predictable result was spiritual disaster.

A Fire Not to Be Played With

Charles Grandison Finney was a heretic. That language is not too strong. Though he excelled at cloaking his opinions in ambiguous language and biblical-sounding expressions, his views were almost pure Pelagianism. The arguments he employed to sustain those views were nearly always rationalistic and philosophical, not biblical. To canonize this man as an evangelical hero is to ignore the facts of what he stood for.

Don't be duped by sanitized 20th-century editions of Finney's works. Read the "Complete and Newly Expanded" 1878 edition of Finney's *Systematic Theology*, recently published by Bethany house Publishers (the unabridged 1878 version with a couple of Finney's later lectures added). This volume shows the real character of Finney's doctrine. (The unabridged 1851 version is now online, and it also exposes Finney's errors in language not toned down by later redactors.) By no stretch of the imagination does Finney deserve to be regarded as an evangelical. By corrupting the doctrine of justification by faith; by denying the doctrines of original sin and total depravity; by minimizing the sovereignty of God while enthroning the power of the human will; and above all, by undermining the doctrine of substitutionary atonement, Finney filled the bloodstream of American evangelicalism with poisons that have kept the movement maimed

even to this day.

Footnotes:

1. See, for example, Lecture 16, "Moral Depravity." Finney rambles on about "physical" vs. "moral" depravity for several pages (nearly 5 in the Bethany edition) before he ever cites a single verse of Scripture. All his polemic about "physical depravity" is wasted anyway, because not one of Finney's theological opponents ever argued that human depravity is a *physical* issue. Again, in the whole of Lecture 10 ("What Constitutes Disobedience to Moral Law?") Finney cites snippets of only two verses of Scripture—a total of eleven words quoted from the Bible in the entire lecture. Many—perhaps most—pages contain no Scripture references at all. By contrast, the typical evangelical systematic theology textbook contains dozens of references per page. The whole point of "systematic theology" is to *start* with Scripture and systematize a point-by-point comprehensive theology. A sound systematic theology is therefore *biblical* to begin with. By contrast, Finney constructed a *philosophical* system based on legal and logical arguments and relying more on his own instinct and speculation than he did on the Bible.

2. Notice that Finney confused the very terms he was ostensibly keeping distinct, essentially admitting that he regarded the believer's obedience as a *ground* of justification.

3. Although Finney employs the expression *totally depraved*, he makes clear that he speaks of a purely voluntary condition, not a constitutional depravity.

THE BIBLE COMES UNDER ATTACK

A Survey of Leading Historical Critics & Theological Liberals

- **Long Before the Reformation**

- Augustine in his *Reply to Faustus*, reacts to the Manichaean heresy (which was a gnostic sect that attempted to combine Christianity with Zoroastrianism). The Manichaean's denied certain parts of the gospel records as reliable. Here is Augustine's response:

* * *

Augustine: What amazing folly, to disbelieve what Matthew records of Christ, while you believe Manichaeus! If Matthew is not to be believed because he was not present when Christ said, "I came not to destroy the law and the prophets, but to fulfill," was Manichaeus present, was he even born, when Christ appeared among men? According, then, to your rule, you should not believe anything that Manichaeus says of Christ. On the other hand, we refuse to believe what Manichaeus says of Christ; not because he was not

present as a witness of Christ's words and actions, but because he contradicts Christ's disciples, and the Gospel which rests on their authority. The apostle, speaking in the Holy Spirit, tells us that such teachers would arise. With reference to such, he says to believers: "If any man preaches to you another gospel than that ye have received, let him be accursed."

If no one can say what is true of Christ unless he has himself seen and heard Him, no one now can be trusted. But if believers can now say what is true of Christ because the truth has been handed down in word or writing by those who saw and heard, why might not Matthew have heard the truth from his fellow-disciple John, if John was present and he himself was not, as from the writings of John both we who are born so long after and those who shall be born after us can learn the truth about Christ? In this way, the Gospels of Luke and Mark, who were companions of the disciples, as well as the Gospel of Matthew, have the same authority as that of John. Besides, the Lord Himself might have told Matthew what those called before him had already been witnesses of.

Your idea is, that John should have recorded this saying of the Lord, as he was present on the occasion. As if it might not happen that, since it was impossible to write all that he heard from the Lord, he set himself to write some, omitting this among others. Does he not say at the close of his Gospel: "And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written"? This proves that he omitted many things intentionally. . . . **You ought to say plainly that you do not believe the gospel of Christ. For to believe what you please, and not to believe what you please, is to believe yourselves, and not the gospel.** (*Against Faustus*, 17.3)

- **Introduction**

- The Protestant Reformers (like Luther and Calvin) held to the inerrancy and authority of Scripture, and to its literal interpretation.

Martin Luther: "The Holy Ghost is the all-simplest writer that is in heaven or earth; therefore his words can have no more than one simplest sense, which we call the scriptural or literal meaning" (cited from F. W. Farrar, *History of Interpretation*, 329).

John Calvin: "Let us know that the true meaning of Scripture is the genuine and simple one, and let us embrace and hold it tightly. Let us . . . boldly set aside as deadly corruptions, those fictitious expositions which lead us away from the literal sense" (quoted from *Corpus Reformatorum* 50.237, by Richard C. Gamble, "Exposition and Method in Calvin," *Westminster Theological Journal* 49 (1987), 163).

- They rejected Roman Catholic tradition and the allegorical school of Origen.

John Calvin: We must...entirely reject the allegories of Origen, and of others like him, which Satan, with the deepest subtlety, has endeavored to introduce into the Church, for the purpose of rendering the doctrine of Scripture ambiguous and destitute of all certainty and firmness. (Comm. Gen. 2:8; Gen. 6:14)

- They sought to understand the authorial intent of the passage.

John Calvin: “Since it is almost the interpreter’s only task to unfold the mind of the writer whom he has undertaken to expound, he misses the mark, or at least strays outside his limits, by the extent to which he leads his students away from the meaning of author [in the Bible]. . . . It is presumptuous and almost blasphemous to turn the meaning of Scripture around without due care, as though it were some game that we were playing” (Calvin, *Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Romans and to the Thessalonians*, 1.4).

- With the Age of Enlightenment (beginning in the mid- to late-1600s), and the rise of rational skepticism, the message of the Bible began to come under attack.

Part of this included **Baruch Spinoza**’s (1632–1677) rejection of the doctrine of biblical inspiration and inerrancy. According to Spinoza, the Bible ought to be evaluated and criticized like any other literary work would be. (Spinoza was a Dutch-Jewish philosopher, who was excommunicated from his Jewish community for his radical ideas. He rejected the biblical concept of God, and taught instead that “god” was an impersonal and abstract force, similar to “nature.”)

- This skepticism would receive further definition by subsequent scholars.

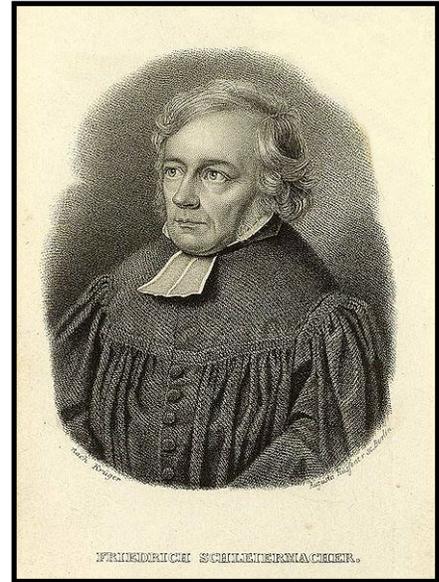
A Brief Survey of Several Leading Critics and Liberal Theologians

- **Johann Gottfried Eichhorn** (1753–1827)
 - Taught in Germany at the Universities of Jena (1775–1788) and Göttingen (1788–1827)
 - Considered the “founder of modern Old Testament Criticism;” though some of his ideas were developed from the literary analysis of Jean Astruc (1684–1766)
 - Concluded that the Hebrew Scriptures had passed through several authors or editors before coming to their final form
 - Assumed that everything supernatural recorded in the Old Testament could be explained through naturalistic means
 - Explained away miraculous events and concepts about God as being simply accommodations to an ancient way of thinking, which had no real value for modern society

- Questioned the supposed authorship of a number of biblical books
- Asserted that the synoptic gospels were based on an earlier Aramaic gospel

- **Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834)**

- Called “The Father of Liberal Theology” and the “Father of Modern Protestant Theology”
- He was born in Prussia and was the son of an army chaplain from the Reformed church; as a boy, he was influenced by Pietism, and at age 15 was sent to a Moravian boarding school
- But he had lingering doubts regarding the truthfulness of the Christian faith; and those doubts became further entrenched when he attended the University of Halle
- The University of Halle had come under rationalist influence; and it was while here that Schleiermacher was first introduced to historical criticism
- His own skepticism continued to grow during his time at Halle, and he soon rejected the orthodox Christianity of his father.



Brian A. Gerrish: In a letter to his father, Schleiermacher drops the mild hint that his teachers fail to deal with those widespread doubts that trouble so many young people of the present day. His father misses the hint. He has himself read some of the skeptical literature, he says, and can assure Schleiermacher that it is not worth wasting time on. For six whole months there is no further word from his son. Then comes the bombshell. In a moving letter of 21 January 1787, Schleiermacher admits that the doubts alluded to are his own. His father has said that faith is the "regalia of the Godhead," that is, God's royal due.

Schleiermacher confessed: "Faith is the regalia of the Godhead, you say. Alas! dearest father, if you believe that without this faith no one can attain to salvation in the next world, nor to tranquility in this - and such, I know, is your belief - oh! then pray to God to grant it to me, for to me it is now lost. I cannot believe that he who called himself the Son of Man was the true, eternal God; I cannot believe that his death was a vicarious atonement." (*A Prince of the Church* [Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1984], 25.)

- He was deeply influenced by Immanuel Kant, and also greatly enjoyed Plato and Aristotle.

- He graduated from Halle in 1794 and for the next two years worked as a tutor in an aristocratic house. Then, in 1796, he began to work as the chaplain of a hospital in Berlin; and then in 1802 as a pastor of a church.
- During this time, he was significantly influenced by Romanticism; which lead him to emphasis emotion and feeling more in his writings.
- From 1804–1807 he served as a theology professor at Halle, before moving back to Berlin. Then, in 1810, when the University of Berlin was founded, he began teaching there, and did so for more than two decades.
- His primary work, *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*, was first published in 1799. It formed the basis for his later work, *The Christian Faith*, which was published in 1821–22 and then revised and republished in 1830–31.
- In these works, Schleiermacher defended Christianity from Enlightenment critics by arguing that the basis for belief in God is not reason or ideas, nor is it a commitment to the authority of Scripture, but rather religious consciousness.
- **Thus, according to Schleiermacher, the essence of Christianity is not in historical fact or in moral ethics, but in subjective feeling (specifically, the consciousness of being absolute dependent on God).**
- This view would have a major impact on Christianity for the next two centuries.

* * * * *

***Time Magazine*, “Theology: Taste for the Infinite,” March 8, 1968**

If God is not dead, how can man prove that he lives? Rational proofs cannot convince the skeptic; the Bible alone is authority only to the convinced believer; the demythologized universe no longer points to an unseen creator. One approach to an answer that appeals more and more to modern Protestant thinkers is the undeniable evidence of religious experience—the intuition men have of their dependence upon God. The popularity of this insight, in turn, leads back to the study of Friedrich Schleiermacher, the theologian who first developed it as a basis of Christian faith. After a generation of neglect, Schleiermacher, who died in 1834, is now being reassessed as the most significant Protestant theologian since Luther and Calvin. Last week Vanderbilt University sponsored a four-day conference commemorating the bicentenary of Schleiermacher's birth.

The son of a Prussian army chaplain, Schleiermacher studied theology and philosophy at the University of Halle, was ordained a Reformed minister. After serving as a hospital chaplain, and pastor of churches in Bavaria and Pomerania, in 1810 he was named head of the University of Berlin's theology faculty, a post he held until his death. A product of

both the Enlightenment and Germany's Romantic revival, Schleiermacher saw clearly that the traditional bases for faith in God were gradually being eroded by man's intellectual advances. Rationalist historians had begun to cast doubt on the authenticity of Scripture; scientific discoveries made the hypothesis of a creator God seem less and less necessary.

Purest Religion. In his best-known work, *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers* (1799), Schleiermacher answered that faith is not based on doctrine or reason but upon man's "feeling of absolute dependence" and what he called "a sense and taste for the Infinite." Man, he argued, could never define or explain God, only his own experience of the divine. To Schleiermacher, church doctrines were primarily articulations of religious feelings, and he scandalized German Protestantism in his early writings by coolly appraising Christianity not as a faith with a unique monopoly on truth but simply as "the highest and purest" of the world's many religions. Skirting the question of Christ's divinity, he defined Jesus as "the completion of the creation of man."

Schleiermacher fell into theological disfavor after World War I, largely because of the neo-Orthodox revolt against religious liberalism led by Switzerland's Karl Barth. In Barth's view, Schleiermacher had turned theology into anthropology by starting with man's experience rather than the divine imperative of the Bible and God's objective revelation in Christ. Not all thinkers who followed in Barth's wake agreed. The late Paul Tillich argued for the existence of God as an inwardly felt "ground of being," and readily acknowledged his debt to Schleiermacher.

Passional Approach. Today an increasing number of U.S. Protestant thinkers regard Barth as somewhat old hat and Schleiermacher as much more of a living force. University of Chicago Theologian Langdon Gilkey notes that "when students come across him, they say, 'This is a guy who can help me.' Students tend to come alive with Schleiermacher." The most obvious reason for the revival of interest in his work is that the "passional" experience of religion—as Schleiermacher called it—makes more sense to modern man than a purely intellectual one.

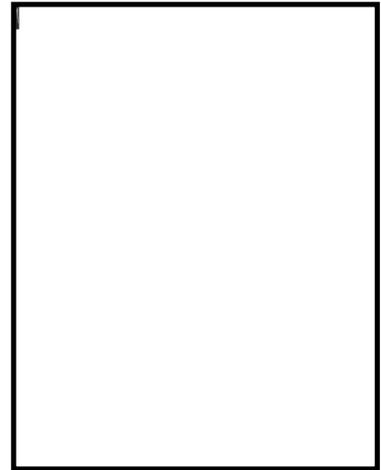
There are several other major theological questions that Schleiermacher made pioneering attempts to answer. As one of the first thinkers to study the cultural setting of Biblical writings, he was the forerunner of modern critical scholarship on Scripture. Convinced that denominationalism had outlived its usefulness, he was an embryonic ecumenist and worked to achieve a merger between Germany's Reformed and Lutheran churches. "People are learning," says Schubert Ogden of Southern Methodist University's Perkins School of Theology, "that Schleiermacher was the first great theologian to articulate a reinterpretation of Christian tradition in reference to modern life."

(Online at: <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,899985-2,00.html#ixzz0kvjR67ij>)

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- **Ferdinand Christian Baur** (1792–1860)

- He was the head of the “Tübingen School” of theology, which was named for the University of Tübingen (in Germany)
- Baur applied Hegelian Dialectics (named after **Georg W. F. Hegel**, and consisting of thesis, antithesis, synthesis) to argue that second century Christianity was a synthesis between Jewish Christianity (lead by the apostle Peter) and an opposing version of Christianity (lead by the apostle Paul)
- He taught that the reference in Acts to “Simon Magus” was actually a reference to Paul; and that the book of Acts, the Pauline epistles, and the Gospel of John were all inventions of the church in the second century
- The Roman Catholic Church combined Petrine Christianity and Pauline Christianity together, to create a hybrid
- Baur’s radical views had great influence in their day, though they have since been discredited (since the late date he ascribes to the New Testament books, and on which his theory rests, has been proven incorrect—based on new manuscripts that have been found, and ancient evidence from the church fathers)



- **David Friedrich Strauss** (1808–1874)

- Strauss was a student under both Schleiermacher and Hegel.
- His work is associated with the Tübingen School, and he taught at the University of Tübingen for several years.
- He is considered a pioneer in the “quest for the historical Jesus” – in which the “Jesus of history” is recovered and differentiated from the mythological Jesus of the Bible (or the “Jesus of faith”)
- Strauss’s most important work, *The Life of Jesus, Critically Examined*, was published in 1835, when he was only 27 years old; it caused an immediate firestorm.



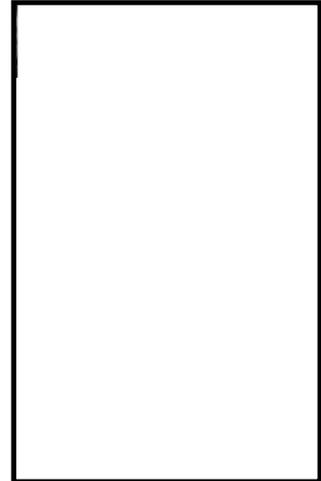
- Rather than siding with the “rationalists” who attempted to explain Jesus’ miracles in naturalistic terms, or the “supernaturalists” who defended Jesus’ miracles as truly miraculous; Strauss argued that Christ’s miracles were simply mythical accounts.
 - Strauss contended that the miracle stories in the gospels were the conception of later Christians (in the second-century), who imposed upon the “historical Jesus” their own supernatural conceptions of what the Messiah was supposed to be like. For example, he claimed that the Virgin Birth was a Roman-Christian invention intended to honor Jesus in the way that Roman heroes were sometimes honored.
 - In 1846, George Eliot (the pen name of Mary Anne Evans) published Strauss’s *The Life of Jesus* into English. A few years later, in 1854, she published another radical German work in English (the *Essence of Christianity* by Ludwig Feuerbach), which suggested that mankind had invented the concept of God.
 - As a result of this, a number of English theologians were influenced by the German higher critics. This included **Benjamin Jowett**, a Greek professor at Oxford, who in 1855 published his commentaries on *The Epistles of St. Paul*, which included liberal theological ideas—and which sparked criticism from conservative theologians in England. Thus, “Jowett is usually thought of as one of the first English scholars to take account of German criticism” (Peter B. Hinchliff, *Benjamin Jowett and the Christian Religion*, 54).
 - In 1860, Jowett and six other Anglican theologians published *Essays and Reviews*, which was essentially a manifesto of liberal theology. It undermined the authority and inerrancy of the Scriptures, and taught that the Bible is just an ordinary book and should be approached like any other book, and that it could not be trusted as a scientific or historical textbook. Even though the Church of England at this time was not liberal (such that 11,000 Anglican clergymen signed a protest to this book), the book would nonetheless have a long-term impact on the English-speaking church.
 - A year earlier (in 1859), **Charles Darwin** published his *Origin of Species*, which purported his atheistic views of naturalistic evolution. Darwin’s views on origins would have a major impact, not only on the church, but on all of society—as works previously credited to God were now credited to random chance and natural selection.
 - Though Darwin’s views were initially met with stiff resistance from conservative Christians (like Charles Hodge), evolution began to make inroads even among orthodox, evangelical believers. Even at Princeton, men like A. A. Hodge and B. B. Warfield were willing to accept certain aspects of evolutionary theory.
- **Albrecht Ritschl (1822–1889)**

- Born in Berlin; he was initially influenced by Hegel, Baur, and the Tübingen school.
- In 1846, he published a work on the Gospel of Luke in which he argued that it was actually based on the Gospel of Marcion.
- He taught theology at the Universities of Bonn and Göttingen; and was highly influenced by Immanuel Kant and Friedrich Schleiermacher.
- Ritschl's own theological system separated faith and reason, such that faith did not need to be based on historical facts, but rather on the value judgments of the believing community.
- Ritschl, like Schleiermacher, taught that the essence of Christianity is not in doctrine, creeds, or historical ideas. But, unlike Schleiermacher, he emphasized moral ethics, rather than personal feelings.
- In his work, *The Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation*, he set forth the tenets of the social gospel—the idea that Christianity is defined by what one does in society, in terms of ethical conduct. The gospel is not about personal salvation from sin but about redeeming society through social work. It is about the “fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man.”
- Ritschl's teachings would have a major impact in America especially, where it was repeated through the writings of men like Walter Rauschenbusch.
- **Julius Wellhausen (1844–1918)**
 - The son of a German Protestant pastor; he became a professor at that University of Greifswald in 1872. He would teach at several universities, finally ending up at Göttingen in 1892 and staying there until his death.
 - Wellhausen's most famous work, *Prologue to the History of Israel*, was first published in 1878. It laid out the “Documentary Hypothesis,” which gave chronological order to the supposed sources that contributed to the Pentateuch (in Source Criticism).
 - He argued that the Pentateuch was not written by Moses, but was a compilation of four different sources (J – Jahwist; E – Elohist; D – Deuteronomist; and P – Priestly) which were all written centuries after Moses.

- These various sources were then edited together by a redactor, or a series of redactors (probably put in their final form around 400 B.C.)
- Wellhausen's views were dominant until the late 20th century.

- **Adolf von Harnack (1851–1930)**

- He was born in Russia (in a town called Dorpat), where his father was a professor of pastoral theology
- In 1874, he began lecturing at the University of Leipzig, and later at Marburg and then Berlin
- He was particularly interested in the effects of Greek, Hellenistic thought on early Christian traditions (including the Scriptures)
- In spite of his emphasis on church history, Harnack rejected the early church's testimony to the authenticity of certain New Testament books (like the Gospel of John). In a series of lectures (given in 1899–1900), he said this:



“In particular, the fourth Gospel, which does not emanate or profess to emanate from the apostle John, cannot be taken as an historical authority in the ordinary meaning of the word. The author of it acted with sovereign freedom, transposed events and put them in a strange light, drew up the discourses himself, and illustrated great thoughts by imaginary situations. Although, therefore, his work is not altogether devoid of a real, if scarcely recognizable, traditional element, it can hardly make any claim to be considered an authority for Jesus' history; only little of what he says can be accepted, and that little with caution.”

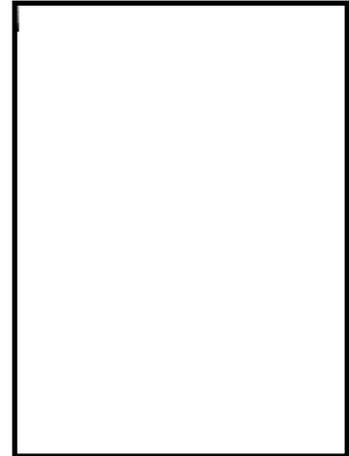
- Those lectures were published in a book entitled *What Is Christianity?* The book sought to peel back the layers of Greek influence to find the essential kernel of true Christianity.
- Harnack concluded that this kernel was Christ Himself, as portrayed in the Synoptic gospels. Yet, Harnack felt there was a great deal of added embellishments even in the Synoptics—including miracles, angels and demons, apocalyptic elements, and so on.
- Harnack's view of Jesus removed all of the controversy and all of the supernatural elements described in the Gospel:

“His words breathe peace, joy, and certainty. He lived in the continual consciousness of God's presence. His eyes rested kindly about the whole world. He ennobled it by his presence. And he recognized everywhere the hand of the living God.”

- Though the liberal views of Harnack and other Germans were very popular at this time, the chaos of World War I quickly evidenced the emptiness of the shallow, culturally-driven tenets of the powerless, liberal gospel.
- Richard Niebuhr summed up the bankruptcy of liberal theology. Liberalism taught that a “God without wrath brought men without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross” (*The Kingdom of God in America*, 193).

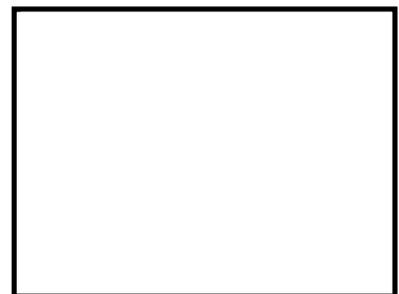
- **Hermann Gunkel (1862–1932)**

- Gunkel was also the son of a German Lutheran pastor.
- Gunkel is considered the originator of “Form Criticism.” Unlike the “Source Criticism” (which tried to identify the various sources behind a given text), form critics classified the Scripture into units based on similar literary patterns
- Form criticism assumes that the Bible is really a collection of various oral traditions; it then attempts peel back the layers of oral tradition (as things were added and embellished through repeated retellings) in order to understand how the text developed
- It also seeks to understand the historical setting or “sitz en leiben” (“situation in life”) for each layer of the oral tradition
- Though originally applied to the Pentateuch, this same type of criticism would soon be applied to the Gospels as well.



- **Rudolf Bultmann (1884–1976)**

- Like some of his predecessors, Bultmann was the son of a Lutheran minister in Germany. He was a student of Hermann Gunkel, and adopted Gunkel’s form criticism.
- In 1921 he became a professor at the University of Marburg and stayed there until 1951.
- In 1921, he published his *History of the Synoptic Tradition*, which applied form criticism to the Synoptic Gospels. He explained that, “The aim of form-criticism is to determine the original form of a piece of narrative, a dominical saying or a parable. In the process we learn to distinguish secondary additions and forms, and these in turn lead to important results for the history of the tradition.”



- In 1941, he published his work on the *Gospel of John*, in which he likewise applied form criticism to the fourth gospel—determining (from his view) that John had relied on an earlier work, which Bultmann called the “Signs Gospel.”
- In deconstructing the gospels, and “demythologizing” them, Bultmann believed he was performing an evangelical task—because he was allowing people to see the true Jesus and to hear the true gospel. In order to do that, he needed to peel back the layers of oral tradition that had been added to the gospel accounts.
- Through his radical application of form criticism, Bultmann called the historical accuracy of all four gospels into serious question.

- **FINAL THOUGHTS**

- During this time, there was a mighty battle that was taking place between orthodox theologians and liberal scholars. This conflict would lead to the great Fundamentalist/Liberal controversy of the early 20th century (where **J. Gresham Machen** stood as the foremost opponent of liberal theology).
- It was also in response to liberal theology, that **Karl Barth** (1886–1968) and **Emil Brunner** (1889–1966) introduced “neo-orthodoxy” (though Barth distanced himself from the label). Though Barth is helpful in his emphasis on God’s sovereignty and in his response to the liberals, he nonetheless has troubling views on the nature of Scripture, such that he denied the inerrancy and authority of Scripture’s propositional statements. Barth also waffled on the historical authenticity of certain events the Bible describes (including the Resurrection). Finally, his understanding of God’s transcendent grace logically leads to a form of universalism, in which *all* men are elect in Christ (because God’s electing choice overrides any human decision).
- Regarding Barth’s view of the Bible:

Stanley Grenz & Roger Olson: [For Barth,] the Bible, consequently, is not statically God’s Word. God’s Word always has the character of *event*; in a sense it is God himself repeating his being in action. The Bible *becomes* God’s Word in an event: “The Bible is God’s Word to the extent that God causes it to be His Word, to the extent that He speaks through it.”

Barth’s view of Scripture caused much controversy and criticism. Liberals accused him of elevating the Bible to a special position that nearly equaled the traditional doctrine of verbal inspiration, thus removing it from historical critical inquiry. Conservatives, on the other hand, assailed Barth’s subordination of Scripture to a nonpropositional event of revelation and his explicit denial of its inerrancy, some [such as Cornelius Van Til] going so far as to label his theology a “new modernism.”

Actually, both criticisms fall near the target, but miss the mark. On the one hand, Barth did deny Scripture the status given it in classical orthodoxy. He distinguished between the Bible and the Word of God, affirming that “what we have in the Bible

are in any case human attempts to repeat and reproduce this Word of God in human words and thoughts and in specific human situations.” On the other hand, he warned sternly against the danger of concluding that Scripture’s divine inspiration—its special status as privileged witness to Jesus Christ—is merely a human value judgment. Its inspiration, Barth said, is not a matter of our own estimation or mood or feeling. . . .

Barth’s doctrine of Scripture has been the object of considerable criticism from both liberal and conservative theologians. Liberals accuse him of ignoring the results of higher criticism and treating the Bible as if it were verbally inspired. Conservatives on the other hand accuse Barth of making too radical a distinction between “God’s Word” and the Bible and denying the Bible’s doctrinal infallibility. Both sides tend to ignore the difference between Barth’s theory of Scripture and his use of it. Liberals focus on his use of Scripture and ignore his strong statements regarding the human nature of the Bible. Conservatives focus on his theory and ignore the way in which Barth treats Scripture as if it were an absolute authority in theology.

The apparent inconsistency in Barth between theory and practice does indeed deserve criticism. Would it have been possible for Barth to spin out his magnificent modern exposition of classical Christian belief if he had held consistently to his theory of Scripture? Simply stated, his assertion of a tension between God’s Word and the doctrinal propositions of the Bible hardly lends itself to such a highly systematized propositional exposition of biblical teaching (*20th Century Theology*, 71, 76–77).

- Old-school liberal ideas continue to permeate Protestant Christianity today. The mainline denominations are largely liberal. And even within broader evangelicalism, authors like Brian McLaren continue to promote liberal ideas in a postmodern context.
- Higher critics of the Bible (like Bart Ehrman) also continue to “deconstruct” it. For the most part, they claim that none of the OT is authentic. In the NT, only 8 books are considered authentic: Rom., Gal., 1&2 Cor., Php., 1 Thess., Philem., and Rev.

- **Lessons We Can Learn from the German Liberal Theologians and Higher Critics**

1. The way to reach skeptics with the gospel is not by watering down the gospel. Many of the liberal theologians thought they could make Christianity more appealing to Enlightenment rationalists if they abandoned the historical authenticity of the text; and if they redefined the gospel as something other than salvation from sin through Christ. But, in so doing, they actually undid the very gospel they thought they were helping to preserve.
2. True religion can be lost in just one generation. Most of the German liberals were the sons of orthodox, Protestant ministers. The fact that they turned their backs on the faith of their fathers is tragic. As those training to be pastors, seminary students need to make sure they are shepherding their own families first and foremost.

3. German liberalism does not represent merely a divergent form of Christianity, but—in actuality—a completely new religion. If historical fact is removed from the gospel it is no longer the gospel. The apostle Paul makes this point clear in 1 Corinthians 15, where he asserts that if Jesus did not really rise from the dead, then we are fools and our faith is worthless.
4. The liberals honored doubt as being noble and intellectually honest. In reality, doubting God's word is a heinous sin. It is a sin that Satan has been promoting ever since the Garden of Eden (in Genesis 3). To doubt God's Word is to make God a liar. It is also to reject the true gospel for a gospel of one's own imagination (as Augustine's quote at the beginning of this lecture makes clear).
5. German liberalism teaches us that ideas have consequences, and that bad ideas have very bad consequences. Millions of people in the last few centuries were tragically led astray through the influence of the liberal theologians and higher critics. The warning of James 3:1 certainly seems apt here: "Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we shall incur a stricter judgment."
6. The social gospel of the liberals is still alive and well in many mainline Protestant churches. The skepticism of the higher critics is still very much part of biblical studies in the academic world. Future pastors need to be ready to confront these kinds of errors with biblical truth (Titus 1:9).
7. Higher criticism, in particular, is built on the notion that the wisdom of man trumps the revealed wisdom of God. This is the height of arrogance. But it is not surprising, since Paul himself noted that the wisdom of God seems like foolishness to the world (1 Cor. 1:18). We must guard ourselves against the temptation to covet worldly praise and academic accolade. To be faithful to the gospel, we will necessarily be thought out-of-vogue with many of today's leading philosophical thinkers. While we must avoid anti-intellectualism on the one hand, we must also guard ourselves against the allure of whatever is popular in the secular academic community.

Commenting on the bankruptcy of higher critical methods, Scot McKnight writes:

Historical Jesus scholarship has come to the end of the road.

Two recent scholars have read the obituary for historical Jesus studies. James D. G. Dunn, in both the hefty *Jesus Remembered* and the slender *A New Perspective on Jesus*, argues that the furthest we can get behind the Gospels is to the underlying strata of Jesus as his earliest followers remembered him. That is as far as we can go. That is the Jesus who gave rise to the Christian faith, and that is the only Jesus worth pursuing. In Dunn's view, the "remembered" Jesus contains the faith perspective of the earliest followers of Jesus, and behind that faith perspective we cannot go.

Dale Allison, whom I consider the most knowledgeable New Testament scholar in the United States, is less sanguine and more cynical than Dunn in his newest book, *The Historical Christ and the Theological Jesus*, which in my judgment plays *Taps* for the quest for the historical Jesus. After three decades of work in and around the historical Jesus, Allison sketches the variety of views about the historical Jesus and the supposed modern theory that if we put our

heads together we will arrive at firm conclusions. Allison offers this depressing conclusion: "Progress has not touched all subjects equally, and whatever consensus may exist, it remains mostly boring."

Allison admits this about one of his own books on Jesus: "I opened my eyes to the obvious: I had created a Jesus in my own image, after my own likeness." He's not done: "Professional historians are not bloodless templates passively registering the facts: we actively and imaginatively project. Our rationality cannot be extricated from our sentiments and feelings, our hopes and fears, our hunches and ambitions." So, he ponders, "Maybe we have unthinkingly reduced biography [of Jesus] to autobiography."

On top of this genuine problem is the problem of method. Allison: "The fragmentary and imperfect nature of the evidence as well as the limitations of our historical-critical abilities should move us to confess, if we are conscientious, how hard it is to recover the past." With one ringing line, Allison pronounces death: "We wield our criteria to get what we want." There is, in other words, no value-or theology-free method that will enable us to get back to Jesus. Allison is not a total skeptic; he thinks that we can get behind the Gospels to find some genuine impressions. But his book led me to conclude, "The era is over."

Two scholars, both highly devoted to the discipline of historical Jesus studies, come from two angles to relatively similar conclusions: the historical Jesus game has run its course and it cannot deliver us the original Jesus. ("The Jesus We'll Never Know" *Christianity Today*, April 2010.)

ADDENDUM: NOTES ON NEO-ORTHODOXY

(From Dr. Michael Vlach's class syllabus)

I. Introduction

A. The modernism of the late 19th and early 20th centuries was very optimistic. There was a high view of what education, science, and technology could accomplish. The view of man was also optimistic.

B. WWI and II witnessed a disillusionment with Schleiermacher's liberalism (although not a total dismissal of it)—too human centered, too much the goodness of man.

II. What is Neo-Orthodoxy?

A. Neo-orthodoxy is difficult to define with precision.

B. Sometimes referred to as "New Reformation Theology" or "Dialectical Theology."

C. Neo-orthodoxy is a middle ground theology that started because of its dissatisfaction with traditional Protestant theology and liberal Protestant theology.

D. Was also strongly dissatisfied with fundamentalism. For them the fundamentalists treated the Bible as the "paper pope" (see Olson, 570).

E. All of the Neo-orthodox theologians accepted higher-critical methods of biblical study.

F. Neo-orthodox theologians believe liberal Protestantism caved in way too much to the modernist spirit of the age, and in doing so lost the Gospel (see Olson, 570).

G. Key theologians were

1. Karl Barth
2. Emil Brunner
3. Reinhold Niebuhr
4. H. Richard Niebuhr

H. The Neo-orthodox theologians wanted to recover the traditional Protestant themes of:

1. human depravity
2. grace above nature
3. salvation by faith alone
4. transcendence of God
5. sovereignty of God (see Olson, 570).

I. Neo-orthodoxy tried to rediscover a pure theology of the Word of God that was free from philosophical influence.

1. They wanted to be different from the liberals who were under the influence of Enlightenment philosophy, Kant's critical idealism and moral objectivism, Locke's rationalism, Deism's natural religion, and Hegel's philosophy of Absolute Spirit.
2. Unlike fundamentalist and conservative theology that was said to be founded on the theology of the Princeton theologians Hodge and Warfield who looked to Thomas Reid's common sense realism.
3. (But as will be shown, Neo-orthodoxy is also influenced by philosophy—that of Soren Kierkegaard.)

J. The Neo-orthodox thinkers were strongly Christocentric. They sought to center all of their thinking in Jesus Christ. Jesus is God's Son breaking into the world of nature and history.

K. In general, they rejected natural theology.

III. The Neo-Orthodox view of the Bible

- A. God is 'wholly other' and is knowable only through His own Word, "which is not identical with the words or even the propositions of Scripture" (Olson, 570-71).
- B. "For neo-orthodox thinkers, 'God's Word' is God's speech to humanity in the history of Jesus Christ. The Bible may *become* God's Word, but it is never merely identical with it. God's Word, like God himself, is above any object or even history as a whole. It is sovereignly unpredictable and comes to humans in time and space from beyond" (Olson, 571).
- C. Neo-orthodoxy rejected liberal Protestantism's natural theology and rational and experiential approach to knowledge of God (Olson, 571).
- D. The Bible is an instrument of God's Word. "It *becomes* God's Word whenever God chooses to use it to bring humans into a saving encounter with himself. But it is not a set of divinely revealed propositions" (Olson, 571).
- E. God reveals himself specially, not in vague things such as nature or history.

IV. Liberal Protestantism's response to Neo-orthodoxy

- A. Harnack viewed Neo-orthodoxy as an irrational retreat from the modern age.
- B. Neo-orthodoxy was viewed as "fundamentalism with good manners" and "fundamentalism in a suit and tie" (Olson, 571). The Neos were thought to be fundamentalists with degrees from prestigious European universities.
- C. The Neos were traitors since they began their careers with liberal theology.

V. Fundamentalism's response to Neo-orthodoxy

- A. Suspicious of the Neos since they rejected inerrancy of Scripture and literal interpretation of Scripture.
- B. Neo-orthodoxy was a Trojan horse for liberalism.

VI. Results of Neo-orthodoxy

- A. It survived and flourished in the twentieth century.
- B. It pushed liberals to take sin, evil, and God's transcendence more seriously.
- C. It exposed liberal Protestantism's drift to modernistic humanism from historic Christianity.

D. Many liberal theologians converted to Neo-orthodoxy.

E. A large number of conservative Protestants found Neo-orthodoxy as a refuge from fundamentalism's extreme propositionalism, biblical literalism, and rejection of modernity (Olson, 572).

VII. Neo-orthodoxy's precursor—Soren Kierkegaard

A. Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855) was a Danish religious philosopher who by stressing individual freedom and the subjective nature of truth became known as the “father of existentialism.”

B. Kierkegaard was heavily influenced by events in his early life. He grew up in a strict Lutheran environment, and his mother died when he was young as did five of his six elder siblings. Racked by guilt, Kierkegaard believed that those closest to him were doomed to disaster. That is partly why he broke off his engagement with the love of his life, Regine Olsen. The breakup deeply affected him the rest of his life. When she married someone else, Kierkegaard became bitter and began to dislike all women. His life ended in isolation.

C. In regard to philosophy, Kierkegaard was interested in freedom and individual existence. He held that people have many life options to choose from, but they must decide for themselves which path to commit to. Thus, he advocated the “leap of faith” in which a person makes a passionate commitment to something without having objective certainty about it. For Kierkegaard, the “leap of faith” was a passionate choice to believe in the Christian God apart from evidence that this God existed. This concept of the “leap of faith” is akin to fideism, which is belief in something apart from reason or rational proofs.

D. Kierkegaard argued that each person can choose three lifestyles:

1. the aesthetic – the life of pleasure
2. the ethical – the life of duty, laws, and making decisions
3. the religious – the life of service to God. (Kierkegaard chose this third option)

E. The leap of faith is necessary to get from the second to the third lifestyle. To illustrate the religious lifestyle, Kierkegaard used the example of the Old Testament patriarch Abraham. According to Kierkegaard, many laud Abraham as the “father of faith” but do not seriously consider that Abraham was willing to kill his own son, Isaac. Abraham was willing to forsake the normal laws of human conduct to obey God in a radical way. The lesson, thus, is that your personal interaction with God is more important than pre-established expectations.

- F. Kierkegaard viewed himself as a prophet to cultural Christianity. For him, the current church was not Christianity at all because it had caved in to the *Zeitgeist* of modernity (see Olson, 573).
- G. He rejected Hegel's concept of God's immanence within the historical evolution of culture. Kierkegaard viewed God as transcendent.
- H. "Because God is personal, holy and transcendent, and because humans are finite, dependent and sinful, God can be known only as one leaves the objective position of observer and becomes a participant in a relationship with God through passionate inwardness. That is the 'leap of faith'—the risk—that alone can bring one into true knowledge of a relationship with God. Apart from that leap of faith, a person can have an ethical religion but not true Christianity" (Olson, 575).
- I. Kierkegaard and Neo-orthodoxy
 - 1. Neo-orthodoxy found an ally in Kierkegaard.
 - 2. Like Kierkegaard, the Neos tried to reassert the necessity of faith for authentic Christianity.
 - 3. The Neos wanted to emphasize, like Kierkegaard, God's transcendence amongst a religion of liberalism that overemphasized God's immanence.
 - 4. Kierkegaard's concept of "truth as subjectivity" provided a philosophical foundation for Neo-orthodoxy's rediscovery of a theology of God's Word that emphasizes faith (see Olson, 576).
 - 5. The Neos used Kierkegaard's belief that truth is dialectical, it is paradoxical, not simply a synthesis of opposites. God transcends human thoughts. For Kierkegaard, that Jesus was both God and human is a logical contradiction that cannot be harmonized by human thinking.
 - 6. Like Kierkegaard, the Neos wanted an 'anti-philosophy philosophy.'
 - 7. Karl Barth acknowledged Kierkegaard's influence on his thinking in 1922 with his preface to the second edition of his commentary on Romans (*Der Romerbrieff*).

VIII. Karl Barth (1886-1968) was a Swiss born professor of Theology in Bonn, Germany.

- A. He had to leave Germany in 1935 after he refused to swear allegiance to Adolf Hitler.
- B. Returned to Switzerland and taught at Basel.

- C. Barth was especially distressed that his liberal teachers supported the German war aims—including Barth’s own professor, Adolf von Harnack. It was clear that they had bought into human culture.
- D. In his commentary, *The Epistle to the Romans (Romerbrief)* (1922 2nd edition), Barth argued that the God who is revealed on the cross of Jesus overthrows any attempt to ally God with human cultures.
- E. Theologically, Barth taught that liberalism’s human centered theology should be replaced by stressing the transcendence, or the “otherness” of God, and the sinfulness of man.
- F. His theology is developed in his 13-volume work, *Church Dogmatics*. Some consider it “probably the most significant theological achievement of the twentieth century” (McGrath, *Historical Theology*, 237).
 - 1. Worked on it from 1932 to 1968.
 - 2. Addresses political issues, and includes questions raised by his students after lectures.
 - 3. A reporter once asked Barth if he could summarize what he had said in his *Church Dogmatics*. Barth thought for a moment and then said, “Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.”
- G. Two terms have been used to describe Barth’s theology:
 - 1. Dialectical theology Especially found in Barth’s 1919 commentary on Romans, of a “dialectic between time and eternity,” or “a dialectic between God and humanity.”
 - 2. Neo-orthodoxy draws attention to the affinity between Barth and Reformed orthodoxy.
- H. Barth was also influenced by the existentialism of Soren Kierkegaard.
 - 1. Kierkegaard taught that Christianity could not be rationalized, but it presents the individual with paradoxical choices.
 - 2. The decision to become a Christian is not a rational decision but a leap of faith.
 - 3. This became the foundation of Barth’s theology of crisis.
- I. A major distinctive is Barth’s “theology of the Word of God.”

1. Barth is not talking about Scripture—but Jesus Christ.
 2. Barth does not believe that the Bible is revelation, but it points to revelation.
 3. The Bible is not inerrant, and theologians such as Cornelius Van Til and Francis Schaeffer would say that Barth separated theological truth from historical truth.
 4. Scripture is written in human language, expressing human concepts. It cannot be considered as identical with God’s revelation.
 5. However, God does reveal Himself through human language and concepts.
 6. The Bible is the key place where the Word of God can be revealed to human beings.
 7. An existential leap of faith is required by the individual to hear what God has to say.
 8. So, in spite of its absurdities, contradictions, and limitations, it is made in that moment the very voice of God to us through reading, preaching, even fellowship of Christians. This is the “divine encounter” in which revelation takes place.
- J. Barth’s doctrine of election According to Barth, “The doctrine of election is the sum of the Gospel.”
1. His approach to predestination is based on two main assertions: (1) Jesus Christ is electing God; and (2) Jesus Christ is elected man.
 2. For Barth, predestination is eternal in that it precedes time. Predestination is also Christologically based. Jesus is the subject in election in that He elects others. Jesus is also the object of God’s election.
 3. Barth explains what God elected in the eternal election of Jesus Christ. “God elected or predestinated Himself” (*Church Dogmatics* II/2, 162). There are two sides to the will of God in the election of Jesus Christ. In fact, there is a “double predestination” (*CD* II/2, 162). In the election of Jesus Christ, God *positively* ascribed salvation and life to man. *Negatively*, God ascribed reprobation, perdition, and death to Himself (*CD* II/2, 163). Positively, at Calvary, God said Yes to His Son and humanity that is in Him. Negatively, God elected Himself to be man’s Partner and took upon Himself the rejection, death, and hell that man deserved. Barth’s view of predestination, then, leads only to “divine glory,” “blessedness,” and “eternal life” for man (*CD* II/2, 171). There is no foreordination to evil or damnation. To Barth, God is Creator, Reconciler and Redeemer, not the opposite.

4. As part of his view, Barth stresses Christ's headship over the human race. "Christ sits as our Representative on the right hand of God," he says (*CD II/2*, 174). Alister McGrath summarizes Barth's federal headship view when he writes: "Christ took man's place as his federal representative and substitute, so that whatever needed to be done for our salvation has been done, without man's consent or cooperation" (*Iustitia Dei*, 367).
5. Within his discussion of predestination, Barth addresses the issues of "The Election of the Community" and "The Election of the Individual." First, for Barth, the election of Jesus Christ is simultaneously the eternal election of the one community of God by the existence of which Jesus Christ is to be attested to the whole world and the whole world summoned to Jesus Christ. This one community, in its form as "Israel," serves as the representation of divine judgment. In its form as "the Church," it represents divine mercy. Second, individual election takes place in Jesus Christ. Each person is eternally loved and objectively justified and sanctified in God's Son. Even if a person does not receive the Gospel, his unbelief is overcome by Christ's election (Bruce Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 112).

IX. Another theologian was Emil Brunner (1899-1966).

- A. Taught at Zurich, Switzerland at the same time Barth taught at Basel.
- B. Initially, Brunner and Barth were comrades in the new dialectical theology but they had a falling out and did not speak to each other in a real way for decades.
 1. Brunner rejected Barth's total rejection of natural theology. Brunner believed that natural theology still had an important role.
 2. Brunner argued for a "point of contact" for the Gospel in human nature. Barth responded negatively with a treatise called *Nein!* (No!).
 3. Brunner criticized Barth's doctrine of election which must lead to universalism.
 4. Brunner emphasized a more experiential Christianity than did Barth.
 5. Brunner was more influenced by Pietism than Barth.
- C. Was a theistic evolutionist.
- D. Accepted Higher Criticism of the biblical documents.

X. Reinhold Niebuhr (1893-1971)

- A. The leading American Neo-orthodox theologian
- B. Taught at Union Theological Seminary in New York
- C. Wrote *The Nature and Destiny of Man*.
- D. Was a Christian social ethicist
- E. He countered the naïve optimism of the Social Gospel

THE GOSPEL GOES FORTH Preaching and Missions in the 19th-Century

- Protestant missionary work was limited in its scope immediately following the Reformation.
 - In part, this was due to the fact that the Protestant Church was just beginning to organize itself.
 - In part, this was due to the view that the Great Commission was given only to the Apostles; and that subsequent generations of Christians were to concentrate on living Christ-honoring lives in their original locations.
 - Much of the early “missionary” work consisted of pastors from neighboring areas traveling to the centers of Reformation theology (like Geneva), where they would be taught and sent back to their hometowns.
- The first real missionary efforts began under the Moravians; though there was also work done by the Huguenots (French Protestants). The Moravians understood the Great Commission as a command that applied to *all believers*, not just the Apostles of the early church.
- The Puritans likewise understood the need to take the gospel to the nations. This passion was especially seen in their attempts to evangelize the native American Indians. Early pioneers in this work include:
 - **John Elliot (1604–1690)**
 - Known as the “Indian Apostle” because of his work among the native Americans in Massachusetts

- In 1663, he published a translation of the Bible into the Algonquian language
 - He established a number of towns where the Christianized natives could live and practice Christianity while maintaining other aspects of their culture; they were known as “Praying Indians”
- **Thomas Mayhew (1593–1682) and his descendants**
 - The Mayhews were the first to colonize Martha’s Vineyard
 - They maintained peaceful relations with the Indians there; and through the work of John Mayhew (Thomas’s grandson) and Experience Mayhew (Thomas’s great-grandson) actively worked to evangelize them
 - Due to their fair treatment of the natives, the Mayhews did not experience any bloodshed during the Indian revolts of 1675–76 (known as “King Philip’s War”)
- **David Brainerd (1718–1747)**
 - One of the most famous of the early missionaries to the native Americans
 - He worked at first among groups in Massachusetts, and then among the Delaware Indians of Pennsylvania and New Jersey
 - His tireless and selfless efforts wore him out, and he died at the house of Jonathan Edwards when he was only 29 years old
 - After his death, Edwards published his diary, which give us rich insights into Brainerd’s passion for the people to whom he ministered
- **Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758)**
 - After leaving his church in Northampton, Edwards began missionary work among the Housatonic Indians of Stockbridge, Massachusetts for seven years
 - Through his own ministry to the native American Indians, and through his promotion of David Brainerd’s life work, Jonathan Edwards is considered by some historians to be the “grandfather of modern missions”
- But it is really when we get to the 19th century that the Protestant missionary movement really gains momentum. Modern missiologists have referred to this century as “The Great Century” of Missions. And, as a result of the missionary efforts of the 19th century, Christianity enters into a new, global phase.

Kenneth Scott Latourette: The nineteenth century witnessed contradictory trends. On the one hand, among Western European peoples denial and rejection of Christianity took place more openly and more formally than at any other time since the faith had been made the community religion of the Occident. Movements to deprive the Church of the support of the state or to create new governments among the peoples of European stocks in which the Church should have no assistance from the state increased in number. On the other hand, never had Christianity shown such vigour. . . . To the nineteenth century as so delimited we must devote as much space [regarding the expansion of Christianity] as to all the preceding eighteen centuries. This is not primarily because the material from which to construct our story is so much more abundant, although it is so mountainous as to dismay even the most stout-hearted. Nor is it because, being so much nearer our own time, we have in it the special interest which centers about those events having directly to do with ourselves. It is, rather, because Christianity was now taken to more peoples than ever before and entered as a transforming agency into more cultures than in all the preceding centuries. . . . It is now expanded to include all the globe and all peoples, nations, races, and cultures. It demands, therefore, a much larger canvass. (*A History of the Expansion of Christianity, Volume 4: The Great Century*, pp. 6–7)

- Three of the most well-known missionaries include:

- **William Carey (1761–1834)**

- Known as the “father of modern missions”; he helped found the Baptist Missionary Society (among Particular [or Calvinistic] Baptists)
- Carey was a shoemaker by trade; and taught himself Greek, Hebrew, and a number of other languages—usually by studying while working
- Though raised in the Church of England, Carey eventually joined the Dissenters, but was later convinced of Baptist doctrine and became a Particular Baptist.
- In 1781, he married his wife Dorothy, with whom he had six children. (Only three of his children survived to adulthood.)
- In that same year, Andrew Fuller—a friend of Carey’s—had written a pamphlet entitled, “The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation” which countered the anti-evangelistic attitude that some of the hyper-Calvinists in Baptist circles had adopted.

- In 1785, Carey was also influenced by Edwards' *Account of the Life of the Late Rev. David Brainerd* and was deeply affected. As a result, he became passionately concerned about taking the gospel to parts of the world that were in need of evangelization.
- In 1789, Carey became a full-time pastor—shepherding a small flock in Leceister, England.
- In 1792, he published an influential work entitled: *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathen*. In five parts, this book 1) explained that the Great Commission was intended for all believers, and not just the apostles; 2) gave a brief history of missions up to his time; 3) gave an overview of the need for the gospel around the world; 4) answered common objections to missionary work; and 5) called for the organization of a missionary society.
- That same year he preached a famous sermon from Isaiah 54:2–3 in which he said, “Expect great things from God; attempt great things for God.” That slogan would become an inspiration to generations of missionaries to come.
- The name of the missionary society that Carey helped found was: The Particular Baptist Society for the Propagation of the Gospel Amongst the Heathen. It would later be known as simply, the *Baptist Missionary Society*.
- In April, 1793, his oldest son, and his wife left for India (along with another missionary named Dr. John Thomas). Carey's wife, Dorothy, was pregnant with their fourth child. Several years later, when one of his sons died of dysentery, Dorothy suffered a nervous breakdown. (She never fully recovered from this and died in 1807.)
- For the first six years, Carey helped to manage an indigo factory, during which he was able to revise the Bengali New Testament.
- In 1800, he joined up with other missionaries who were coming from England. They set up their headquarters in the Dutch colony in Serampore (primarily because the British East India Trading Company was, at this point, hostile to missionary activity in India).
- In 1801, he became a professor of Bengali at Fort William, a training center which had been established for the purpose of educating civil servants in India. Through this position, Carey was able to revise his Bengali New Testament. He was also able to begin a Sanskrit translation.
- The year after Dorothy died (in 1807), Carey remarried to Charlotte.

- A printing press was established, which produced copies of the Bible in Bengali and Sanskrit. A fire in 1812 destroyed many valuable documents, and much work was lost. But the press itself was saved, and six months later the work resumed.
- That same year, Carey began to encourage American Baptists to support the work of Adoniram Judson in Burma. This would lead to the establishment of the General Missionary Convention of the Baptist Denomination in the United States of America for Foreign Missions, in 1814.
- Four years later, in 1818, the mission established a training school for pastors (called Serampore College). It also provided general education for anyone, regardless of their place in the caste system.
- In 1821, both his second wife, Charlotte, and his oldest son, Felix died. Two years later, in 1823, he married again—to Grace.
- In 1825, he completed work on a Bengali/English Dictionary.
- He died on June 9, 1834—having given his life to the cause of Christ in India. He had a great influence on the cause of missions in the nineteenth century.

George Smith: The historian of the Baptist Missionary Society, and Robert Hall, whom Sir James Mackintosh pronounced the greatest English orator, have both attempted an estimate of Carey's genius and influence. Dr. F. A. Cox remarks: — “Had he been born in the sixteenth century he might have been a Luther, to give Protestantism to Europe; had he turned his thought and observations merely to natural philosophy he might have been a Newton; but his faculties, consecrated by religion to a still higher end, have gained for him the sublime distinction of having been the Translator of the Scriptures and the Benefactor of Asia.” Robert Hall spoke thus of Carey in his lifetime: — “That extraordinary man who from the lowest obscurity and poverty, without assistance rose by dint of unrelenting industry to the highest honours of literature, became one of the first of Orientalists, the first of Missionaries, and the instrument of diffusing more religious knowledge among his contemporaries than has fallen to the lot of any individual since the Reformation; a man who unites with the most profound and varied attainments the fervour of an evangelist, the piety of a saint, and the simplicity of a child.” (*The Life of William Carey*, 438; published in 1885).

○ **Adoniram Judson (1788–1850)**

- The son of a pastor, Judson's conversion story is very dramatic. John Piper, in *Don't Waste Your Life*, explains the story well.

- When he was sixteen he entered Rhode Island College (later Brown University) as a sophomore and graduated at the top of his class three years later in 1807.
- In spite of his brilliance, Adoniram was lured away from his childhood faith by a fellow student named Jacob Eames who was a Deist.

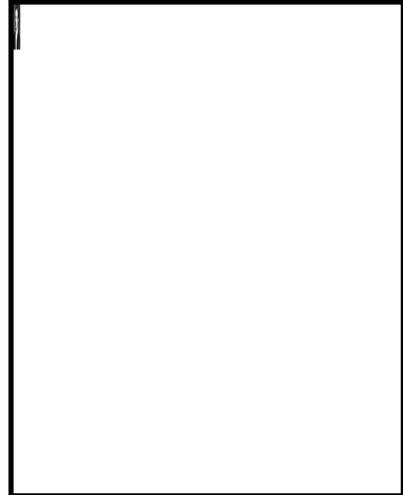
- By the time Judson's college career was finished, he had no Christian faith. On his twentieth birthday, he told his parents, which broke their hearts.
- Six days later, he left for New York to work as a playwright for the theater. But Judson's new career did not fulfill him. God was closing in on him.
- One night, as Judson was traveling, he stayed in a small village where he had never been before. As John Piper explains:

The innkeeper apologized that his sleep might be interrupted because there was a man critically ill in the next room. Through the night Judson heard comings and goings and low voices and groans and gasps. It bothered him to think that the man next to him may not be prepared to die. He wondered about himself and had terrible thoughts of his own dying. He felt foolish because good Deists weren't supposed to have these struggles.

When he was leaving in the morning he asked if the man next door was better. "He is dead," said the innkeeper. Judson was struck with the finality of it all. On his way out he asked, "Do you know who he was?" "Oh yes. Young man from the college in Providence. Name was Eames, Jacob Eames."

Judson could hardly move. The friend who had convinced him to reject Christianity was now dead. According to deism, this was a meaningless event. But Judson knew better. And God used this event to bring Adoniram Judson back to Himself.

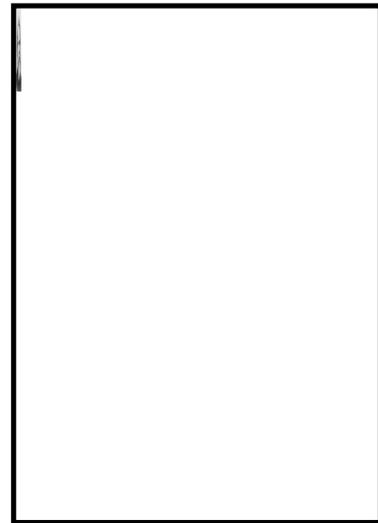
- In 1809, Judson decided to become a missionary. He was a Congregationalist at the time, but would become a Baptist (during the voyage to India) based on the fact that he could not find infant baptism in Scripture.



- He and his wife, Ann, arrived in Calcutta in 1812. They were baptized there by an associate of William Carey.
- Due to resistance from the British East India Company, they left India and settled in Burma.
- Upon arriving in Burma (in 1813), Judson gave himself immediately to study the language. It took several years of intense study due to its radical differences from Western languages.
- Though he baptized his first convert in 1819, the initial progress was very slow. The Buddhist worldview of the Burmese people made them react with relative indifference to the gospel. Also, the Burmese emperor threatened the death penalty for anyone who changed religions. Nonetheless, by 1822, there were 18 converts.
- In 1823, he completed his translation of the New Testament into the Burmese language. Several years before this (in 1817), a printing press had been sent from William Carey and the missionaries in Serampore. This allowed Judson's translation work to be printed and distributed throughout the country.
- When war broke out between the Burmese and the British (in 1824), Judson was arrested and imprisoned (on the supposition that he was a spy). For over a year, he experienced extremely harsh, torturous conditions—until he was finally released.
- Shortly thereafter, his wife Ann died (in October, 1826). Her death sent him into a year-long depression. (Her letters about their missionary work, when published in the United States, moved many to either join or support missions work around the world.)
- In 1834, he finished his translation of the Burmese Bible; and it was published in 1835. During this time, the missionary work had begun to gain some momentum, especially among some of the animistic Burmese tribal groups.
- In 1835, he also got remarried—to Sarah. She died ten years later in 1845, and Judson would remarry a third time in 1846—to Emily.
- In 1850, Judson died at the age of 61. In all, he had given 37 years of his life to the work in Burma, with only one furlough back to the United States.
- When he died, there were over 8,000 converts and 100 churches planted. His most enduring legacy was the translation of the Bible.
- In 1993, the head of the Myanmar Evangelical Fellowship stated, "Today, there are 6 million Christians in Myanmar, and every one of us trace our spiritual heritage to one man—the Reverend Adoniram Judson" (cited from Paul Borthwick, "Adoniram Judson: Endurance Personified.")

○ **James Hudson Taylor (1832–1905)**

- His father was a Methodist minister, but as a young man Hudson Taylor rejected the faith he had been taught
- It wasn't until he read an evangelistic tract, at the age of 17, that he was saved; shortly thereafter (in 1849), he determined to become a missionary to China
- In 1852, he studied medicine in London in order to be able to use those skills on the field; he had already been studying the Biblical languages in addition to Mandarin Chinese
- He arrived in Shanghai in 1854 and, after unsuccessful attempts at evangelism were made, determined to adopt the style and dress of the Chinese people; as a result, he was able to gain an audience with the people
- Before leaving for China, Taylor had made connections with some of the Plymouth Brethren; and while on the field, he was supported by men like George Mueller of Bristol
- In 1858, Taylor married Maria Jane Dyer. And in 1860, for health reasons, the Taylors came back to England on furlough.
- During this time in England, Taylor focused on Bible translation work. He completed the New Testament, and also established (in 1865) a new mission society focused on China (called "China Inland Mission").
- In 1866, the family returned to China. Their work with the newly formed CIM was difficult, and they were subject to criticism from both the Chinese and from the British back home.
- In 1870, Maria died, which had an immense impact on Taylor. He returned to England the next year when his own health began to fail.
- While in England this second time, he remarried to Jane ("Jennie"). The couple returned to China in 1872, but had to come back to England in 1874. Two years later, in 1876, Taylor went back to China without his family. Jennie would join him in 1878.



- During this time in China, Taylor set up a number of missionary outposts. By 1881, the China Inland Mission had 100 missionaries working in China. Just a few years later, that number would increase to 225. In 1887, he added recruited another 102 missionaries.
 - In 1888, he traveled to the United States—and was befriended and supported by D. L. Moody and C. I. Scofield. A number of American missionaries went to China to join the CIM.
 - The Boxer Rebellion in China (1900) hurt the missions cause there, and over 50 CIM missionaries were killed. But Taylor responded in a Christ-like way toward the Chinese people, which gained the respect of the Chinese population.
 - In 1905, Taylor took his last trip to China and died while there. His life inspired future missionaries like Eric Liddell, and Jim Elliot.
- Other famous missionaries of this same time period included **Henry Martyn** (1781–1812), **David Livingstone** (1813–1873), **C. T. Studd** (1860–1931), and **Amy Carmichael** (1867–1951)
 - Needless to say, the 19th-century resulted in an explosion of missionary activity. Here is just a quick glimpse at a few of the key events that took place:

1792 – William Carey helps establish the Baptist Missionary Society

1795 – The London Missionary Society is formed by evangelical Anglicans and non-Conformists

1796 – Scottish Missionary Society is formed

1797 – Netherlands Missionary Society established

1799 – The Church Missionary Society is formed by the Church of England

1802 – Henry Martyn is influenced by the work of William Carey and determines to go there as a missionary himself

1804 – British and Foreign Bible Society is established

1805 – London Missionary Society missionaries arrive in Namibia

1807 – Robert Morrison becomes the first Protestant missionary in China

1809 – National Bible Society of Scotland formed

- 1810 – The American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions is established
- 1812 – Adoniram Judson arrives in India (though he will soon go to Burma)
- 1813 – Wesleyan Missionary Society is formed by the Methodists
- 1814 – American Baptist Foreign Mission Society founded; Samuel Marsden leads first group of Protestant missionaries to New Zealand
- 1816 – American Bible Society established
- 1817 – A member of the British and Foreign Bible Society, James Thompson, distributes Bibles throughout Latin America
- 1824 – Berlin Mission Society formed
- 1826 – The American Bible Society begins to distribute Bibles to Mexico
- 1827 – Missionary work with the native peoples of Australia advancing through the work of Lancelot Edward Threlkeld
- 1839 – The Bible is translated into Tahitian
- 1840 – David Livingstone goes to Malawi as a missionary; Presbyterian missionaries begin work in Thailand
- 1841 – Edinburgh Medical Missionary Society established
- 1842 – Methodist missionaries arrive in Nigeria; Norwegian Missionary Society founded
- 1843 – Bible is translated into Thai
- 1844 – German missionaries begin work in Kenya
- 1845 – The mission organization for the Southern Baptist Convention is established
- 1848 – German missionaries arrive in Tanzania
- 1854 – Hudson Taylor arrives in Shanghai
- 1856 – Missionary work is begun in Colombia by the Presbyterians
- 1857 – Board of Foreign Missions of the Dutch Reformed Church established
- 1858 – Work in Sumatra begun by the Basel Evangelical Missionary Society

- 1859 – Protestant missionaries reach Japan
- 1862 – Missionary work begun in Senegal by the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society
- 1865 – China Inland Mission founded; Salvation Army also founded
- 1866 – Charles Spurgeon develops The Wordless Book (of 3 colors) to which D. L. Moody will later add the fourth color of gold
- 1867 – Methodist missionary work begins in Argentina
- 1868 – Missionary work begins in Iran through the efforts of Robert Bruce
- 1873 – Portions of the Scripture translated into one of the Filipino languages
- 1874 – Evangelical influences start an awakening in St. Petersburg, Russia; the Interior Micronesia Mission is founded
- 1877 – Protestant missionaries go to both New Guinea and Alaska
- 1881 – Missionary work begins in Pakistan; North Africa Mission established in Algeria
- 1885 – Presbyterian and Methodist missionaries arrive in Korea
- 1886 – D. L. Moody's Student Volunteer Movement begins with 100 students pledging to become foreign missionaries
- 1887 – Over 100 missionaries join the work of Hudson Taylor and the China Inland Mission
- 1889 – The first Protestant mission in Libya is founded (North Africa Mission)
- 1890 – C. I. Scofield establishes the Central American Mission
- 1891 – Protestant missionaries go to both Arabia and the Congo in Africa
- 1895 – Africa Inland Mission established; Japan Bible Society formed; Amy Carmichael begins her work in India
- 1897 – Presbyterian missionary work is begun in Venezuela
- 1899 – The Central American Mission begins work in Guatemala

Charles Spurgeon summarizes the missionary spirit of the nineteenth century with these words:

“I plead this day for those who cannot plead for themselves, namely, the great outlying masses of the heathen world. Our existing pulpits are tolerably well supplied, but we need men who will build on new foundations. Who will do this?

Are we, as a company of faithful men, clear in our consciences about the heathen? Millions have never heard the Name of Jesus. Hundreds of millions have seen a missionary only once in their lives, and know nothing of our King. Shall we let them perish?

Can we go to our beds and sleep, while China, India, Japan, and other nations are being damned? Are we clear of their blood? Have they no claim on us? We ought to put it on this footing—not, ‘Can I prove that I *ought* to go?’ but, ‘Can I prove that I ought *not* to go?’

When a man can honestly prove that he ought not to go, then he is clear, but not else. What answer do you give, my brethren? I put it to you man by man. I am not raising a question among you which I have not honestly put to myself. I have felt that, if some of our leading ministers would go forth, it would have a grand effect in stimulating the churches, and I have honestly asked myself whether I ought to go. After balancing the whole thing, I feel bound to keep my place, and I think the judgment of most Christians would confirm my decision; but I hope that I would readily, and willingly, and cheerfully go abroad if I did not feel that I ought to remain at home.

Brethren, put yourselves through the same process. We must have the heathen converted; God has myriads of His elect among them, we must go and search for them somehow or other. Many difficulties are now removed, all lands are open to us, and distance is almost annihilated. True, we have not the Pentecostal tongues; but languages are now readily acquired, while the art of printing is a full equivalent for the lost gift.

The dangers incident to missions ought not to keep any true man back, even if they were very great, but they are now reduced to a minimum. There are hundreds of places where the cross of Christ is unknown, to which we can go without risk. **Who will go?**

[. . .] Surely there is some self-sacrifice among us yet, and some among us who are willing to be exiled for Jesus. The Mission languishes for want of men. If the men were forthcoming, the liberality of the Church has provided the supply, and yet there are not men to go. I shall never feel, brethren, that we, as a band of men, have done our duty until we see our comrades fighting for Jesus in every land in the van of the conflict. I believe that, if God

moves you to go, you will be among the best of missionaries, because you will make the preaching of the gospel the great feature of your work, and that is God's sure way of power."

- Charles H. Spurgeon, "Forward!" in *An All-Around Ministry* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2000), 55–57.