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# Charles G. Finney's Doctrine of Sanctification

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CHARLES G. FINNEY'S  
DOCTRINE OF SANCTIFICATION

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A Thesis  
Presented to  
the Faculty of the Department of Church History  
Western Evangelical Seminary

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Divinity

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by  
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## CHAPTER I

### THE INTRODUCTION

#### I. THE PROBLEM

Statement of the problem. The purpose of this thesis was to investigate Charles G. Finney's doctrine of sanctification. It was necessary to study both the life and work of Finney in order to understand his teaching and the process by which he finally arrived at it.

Justification of the problem. This study was undertaken because of a personal interest in American church history. Also it was hoped that some of the underlying reasons for the spectacular success of Finney in his work might be discovered. Again, the writer is not aware of anyone who has studied the life of Finney using sanctification as a primary approach.

#### II. METHOD OF PROCEDURE

Chapter one was concerned with the statement and justification of the problem, the method of procedure, the definition of terms, and the limitations of the study.

The accomplishments of Charles G. Finney are the subject of chapter two. The historical setting is presented and then the early years of Finney. His conversion, early ministry, and later ministry are

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given places of emphasis.

Chapter three discusses the preaching of the evangelist. His homilectical training is examined. A look is taken at his sermon preparation and delivery. An investigation of his main sermon topics is also made to see what preaching he did on sanctification as well as other topics. From his revival lectures is learned some of the elements necessary for a minister to lead others into spiritual experiences.

Chapter four reveals the theology of Charles G. Finney as found in his teaching, preaching, and writing. The revivalist's doctrines of God, man, sin, Christ, and salvation are all noted, with their influence on sanctification indicated.

Chapter five is an analysis of Finney's doctrine of sanctification. His defense and definition of sanctification is shown. Conditions for receiving the experience are stated, followed by arguments overcoming possible objections to the doctrine. Some concluding remarks by Finney and a look at the Oberlin theology conclude the chapter.

The summary and conclusions are found in chapter six.

A complete bibliography giving both primary and secondary source material will be found after the main body of the thesis.

### III. DEFINITION OF TERMS

Doctrine. According to Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary, this term is interpreted as meaning a teaching, or as a position in a

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system of belief accepted as authoritative. This thesis is especially concerned with sanctification and its position in the Christian system of belief presented by Charles G. Finney.

Sanctification. This term is interpreted as meaning the state of being set apart for a sacred purpose and being made free from sin. This thesis desires to find what place Charles G. Finney gave to this teaching.

Charles G. Finney. This proper name refers to the man who lived and worked as a revivalist and theologian in frontier America from his conversion in 1821 to his death in 1875.

#### IV. LIMITATIONS OF THE PROBLEM

This thesis was a study in depth of Charles G. Finney's Doctrine of Sanctification. It was necessary to investigate his life, his preaching, and his theology in order to do this. However, much more work could be done in any one of these three areas. A chapter-length sketch is presented in each one of these areas to show its relevance to the doctrine. This study does not attempt to trace the possible influence of other ecclesiastical bodies, which held the doctrine of sanctification, upon Finney. Neither is there any claim to trace its development after the death of the evangelist.

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## CHAPTER II

## HIS LIFE

## I. THE SETTING

In the period from 1792 to 1875 the United States was in a state of social and political unrest. There was a strong sense of nationalism. The country was expanding constantly westward. The problem of slavery was beginning to cause division in the nation. Religiously, a strong denominationalism existed. Generally, the theology was strongly Calvinistic and tended to force people into a fatalistic attitude which contended that man could do nothing but wait for God to save him if He would.<sup>1</sup> During this period of time, the forerunners of a long line of professional revivalists emerged. When the people were taught to repent and seek God, revival came and thousands of converts entered the churches and a spiritual awakening seized many parts of the country. The surge of social reform which followed worked to change the destiny of the United States.

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<sup>1</sup>Fred W. Hoffman, Revival Times In America (Boston: W. A. Wilde Company, 1956), p. 85.

## II. HIS EARLY YEARS

Charles Grandison Finney was born August 29, 1792 on a farm in Connecticut near the city of Warren in Litchfield County.<sup>2</sup> His father was a veteran of the Revolutionary War. When Charles was two years old, his parents moved to Oneida County in New York. He received some schooling there before they moved again to the southern shore of Lake Ontario. His parents were not Christians, and throughout his youth he received no religious training. He once remarked that he had never seen his father pray.

He was twenty years old when the War of 1812 began, and he went to Sacket Harbor on Lake Ontario intending to join the navy. However, he was shocked by the terrible profanity he heard from the sailors, and he was further shaken when approached by a young and pretty prostitute. When he realized what she wanted, he began to weep, and then she broke down and wept. As he recalled the incident in later years, he wished that he had been a Christian at the time, and he hoped that God had somehow used this encounter to move the girl to repentance.<sup>3</sup> From 1809 to 1812, Finney was a rural school teacher, and then for two years he attended an Academy at Warren, Connecticut. He taught school near New York City from 1815 to 1817. Finney studied law under Judge Benjamin

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Basil Miller, Charles G. Finney (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1941), p. 13.

Wright in Jefferson County at Adams, New York, from 1818 to 1821. He worked his way through a reading course, passed the bar, and began his own practice.<sup>4</sup> It was at Adams that he bought a Bible and began to study the Scriptures, because,

In studying elementary law, I found the old authors frequently quoting the Scriptures, and referring especially to the Mosaic Institutes,<sup>5</sup> as authority for many of the great principles of common law.<sup>5</sup>

At Adams he had his first opportunity to sit under the preaching of an educated minister. The Rev. George W. Gale, a graduate of Princeton, pastored the Presbyterian church in the town. Gale was orthodox, but he held to a hyper-calvinism which served as a stumbling block to the intelligence of Finney.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Bernard A. Weisberger, They Gathered At The River (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1958), p. 90.

<sup>5</sup> Rev. Charles G. Finney, Memoirs (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1876), p. 7.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

## III. HIS CONVERSION

Finney was seized with the restlessness of conviction as he read his Bible, went to prayer meeting, heard the preaching of Gale, and conversed with believers.<sup>7</sup> He became convinced that the Bible is the word of God, and this forced upon him the question of whether he was going to accept Jesus Christ or live a worldly life. In the fall of 1821 on Sunday evening October 7th, Charles decided to settle the question of his soul's salvation. As he prayed, his conviction and sense of need grew. Wednesday morning while on the way to work, he saw for the first time that salvation was to be found completely in the Lord Jesus Christ. As a result,

...the question seemed to be put "Will you accept it now, today?" I replied, "Yes; I will accept it today, or I will die in the attempt."<sup>8</sup>

He then walked away from the village and went into some woods until he finally came to a dense woodfull in which he knelt down and prayed. During this walk he had said, "I will give my heart to God before I ever come down again."<sup>9</sup> However, much to his despair, he found that he could not pray, and at every strange noise he would look up to see if someone were watching him. Then came a revelation of the great pride which filled his heart. As he continued to seek God, this

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 8.    <sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 14.    <sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 15.

Scripture came to his mind,

Then shall ye go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you.  
Then shall ye seek me and find me, when ye shall search for me with  
all your heart.<sup>10</sup>

Up to this time he had had an intellectual belief in the word of God,  
but now he began a voluntary trust of faith in God's word. Other  
promises of God's word came to his mind and he claimed each one of them  
one by one. As he prayed a great release came to his soul, and he re-  
turned to town about noon. It was October 10, 1821. He had no desire  
to eat, so he went to the office and tried to play his bass-viol and  
sing, but he could only weep. That night during prayer Charles G.  
Finney saw a vision of Christ and received a baptism of the Spirit of  
God. In his own words,

...my heart seemed to be liquid within me. All my feelings  
seemed to rise and flow out; and the utterance of my heart was,  
"I want to pour my whole soul out to God." The rising of my soul  
was so great that I rushed into the room back of the front office,  
to pray.

There was no fire, and no light, in the room; nevertheless it  
appeared to me as if it were perfectly light. As I went in and  
shut the door after me, it seemed as if I met the Lord Jesus Christ  
face to face. It did not occur to me then, nor did it for some  
time afterward, that it was wholly a mental state. On the contrary  
it seemed to me that I saw him as I would see any other man. He  
said nothing, but looked at me in such a manner as to break me  
right down at his feet. I have always since regarded this as a  
most remarkable state of mind; for it seemed to me a reality, that  
he stood before me, and I fell down at his feet and poured out my  
soul to him. I wept aloud like a child, and made such confessions  
as I could with my choked utterance. It seemed to me that I bathed  
his feet with my tears; and yet I had no distinct impression that  
I touched him, that I recollect....I returned to the front office...  
as I turned and was about to take a seat by the fire, I received a

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

mighty baptism of the Holy Ghost. Without any expectation of it, without ever having the thought in my mind that there was any such thing for me, without any recollection that I had ever heard the thing mentioned by any person in the world, the Holy Spirit descended upon me in a manner that seemed to go through me, body and soul. I could feel the impression, like a wave of electricity, going through and through me, indeed it seemed to come in waves and waves of liquid love; for I could not express it in any other way. It seemed like the very breath of God. I can recollect distinctly that it seemed to fan me, like immense wings.

No words can express the wonderful love that was shed abroad in my heart. I wept aloud with joy and love; and I do not know but I should say, I literally bellowed out the unutterable gushings of my heart. These waves came over me, and over me, and over me, one after the other, until I recollect I cried out, "I shall die if these waves continue to pass over me." I said, "Lord, I cannot bear any more;" yet I had no fear of death.<sup>11</sup>

While Finney was revelling in the presence of God's Spirit that evening, one of his choir members dropped into the office and found him in this condition. The young man did not know what to think of the situation, so he left and went to get an elder of the church. When the two of them returned, Finney explained to them that he had been converted. This elder had always seemed to be very sober and serious to Charles, but at this news he began sort of a holy laughter.

That night Finney slept with the love of God filling his heart and when he awoke he received a continuation of the Spirit baptism, he had experienced the night before. It was at this time that he really understood what it meant to be justified by faith in Jesus Christ. The next morning he spoke to Benjamin Wright about the condition of his

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., pp. 19-21.

soul and some days later the judge was converted. A deacon who had hired Finney came to the office and was startled when Charles told him, "Deacon...I have a retainer from the Lord Jesus Christ to plead his cause, and I cannot plead yours."<sup>12</sup> The deacon left, was thoughtful for a minute, and then went to settle his case out of court.

Finney had promised God that if he were converted, he would preach the gospel, and he kept his vow by speaking to a number of people that day. He found that he had lost all desire to be a lawyer, and his purpose became centered in the preaching of the gospel. That night people gathered spontaneously to the church, for they had been stirred upon hearing what God had done for him. That night Finney arose and began the meeting by giving a testimony of how God had converted him. This was the beginning of a long and fruitful ministry.

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 24.



## IV. HIS EARLY MINISTRY

In the spring of 1822 Charles G. Finney placed himself before the presbytery as a candidate for the Christian ministry. The presbytery appointed Rev. Gale to tutor Charles in theological study. In March 1824 Finney was licensed and began preaching at Evan's Mills and Antwerp. When the congregation at Evan's Mills complimented him for his sermons but did not respond in conversion, he forced the issue. Finney demanded that those who would accept Christ stand, but those who would not remain seated. No one stood. He then told them they had all rejected Christ. They all arose in anger and left, but he told them he would preach once more to them the next night. In that service people were converted and revival began. It was here that "Father Nash," a Presbyterian minister who had been backslidden, joined with Finney and began to back him with much prayer.<sup>13</sup>

When Finney left Adams, people had expected him only to live a short time, because he was in poor health and coughing blood. He had been told to preach only once a week and then only for one-half an hour. But after six months of working day and night, his health was restored, his lungs were sound, and he was able to preach without fatigue for two or two and one-half hours a day.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 63.    <sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 80.

While ministering at Antwerp, an elderly man came to Finney and requested that he minister at a neighboring village. He consented and went there, preaching on the subject of Lot in Sodom. During the message, he noticed that the people became very angry, but he did not know the reason why. Before the service ended, the Spirit of God moved upon the hearts of the people and many of them were converted. It was not until afterwards that the evangelist was told that the village was nicknamed Sodom because the people were so ungodly and that they called the old man, who had invited him to come and preach, Lot.<sup>15</sup> This demonstrated once again the marvelous leading of the Spirit of God in his life.

In July of 1824 Finney was ordained to the Christian ministry, and in October of the same year he married Miss Lydia Andrews. She had been one of those who had prayed in the prayer band for his conversion at Adams.<sup>16</sup> The ceremony was performed in Whitestown in Oneida County, New York. After a day or two Finney left for Evan's Mills to get some transportation with which they could move their possessions. He intended to be back in a week, but he was separated from his new bride for six months. A revival broke out at Perch River and then one at Brownville where he spent the winter. On the way back to get his wife, he had to stop at Le Rayville to have his horse shod. While he was waiting, he was asked to hold a meeting, and when he did so, the Spirit of the Lord

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., pp. 101, 103.

<sup>16</sup> Fred W. Hoffman, op. cit. p. 96.

started a work in their lives which he could not leave. Finney had to send someone else after his wife to bring her to him.<sup>17</sup>

Beginning with the meeting in Rome, New York, in 1826 the ministry of Charles G. Finney entered a new phase in which he began to work in the larger cities. Rome seemed to be full of prayer during his work there, and the work of the Spirit was said to have been spontaneous, powerful, and overwhelming. He was very careful to prevent any outburst of feeling that would have caused people to react adversely to the revival.<sup>18</sup> At Utica he taught the people to make instant surrender of their hearts to God. Conviction did not have to be prolonged! Salvation could come quickly!<sup>19</sup>

From the very beginning, Finney had received opposition from some members of the Presbyterian ministry as well as from other sources for his revival methods. As his ministry increased, the opposition seemed to grow more threatening. This matter was settled one day while in prayer. His body began to shake and tremble violently, and he sensed the presence of God drawing very near to him. There was a period of humiliation on his part and then a lifting up by the Spirit of God. At that time he was assured by God of His presence, that no opposition would prevail, that he was to continue his work, and wait for God's salvation. After this event he was never disturbed by any opposition

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<sup>17</sup> Finney, op. cit., pp. 111-113.    <sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 170.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 189.

or sidetracked by it.<sup>20</sup>

Finney held meetings in Philadelphia, Rochester, Auburn, Buffalo, Providence, and Boston. By 1832 he had completed nine years of intensive revival effort, and at forty years of age, he was feeling fatigue.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>Richard Ellsworth Day, Man Of Like Passions (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1942), p. 195.

## V. HIS LATER MINISTRY

In April of 1832 Finney accepted the call of pastor from the Second Free Church in New York City which met in the Chatham Street Theatre. He had multiple reasons for this decision. His strength had been exhausted by constant evangelism, travel proved difficult with his three children, and New York City was a needy field.<sup>22</sup> At the start Finney told the church he wanted sinners gathered in from the world and not Christians from other churches. It was a praying and working congregation. They invited others to hear the preaching and then scattered themselves throughout the building to watch those who came under conviction and to lead them to the Lord after the service.<sup>23</sup>

In January of 1834 he took a six month sea voyage to the Mediterranean in hopes of improving his failing health, but he did not find help and it proved to be an uncomfortable journey. When he returned, Finney found that the paper, "New York Evangelist," was about to fail. The editor, Rev. Joshua Leavitt, had gone too rapidly in advocating anti-slavery, and subscriptions were rapidly falling away. After consideration they felt that the magazine could be best revived by publishing a series of lectures on revivals which Finney was going to preach to his congregation. Finney gave one lecture a week and Leavitt

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<sup>22</sup>Finney, op. cit., p. 319.    <sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 321.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 327.

took down in notes all he could and published it. This action saved the paper. The lectures were later gathered into a book called, Finney's Lectures On Revivals. In 1835 Finney shifted from Presbyterianism to the democracy of Congregationalism. In that same year he was persuaded to take the Department of Theology at Oberlin in Ohio.<sup>25</sup> He spent his summers at Oberlin. During the next three winters he still pastored the Broadway Tabernacle in New York City, but then in 1837 he gave up that pastorate and took the pastorate of the First Congregational Church in Oberlin. Later in his ministry he paid more attention to Christian perfection or entire sanctification. He believed sanctification is attainable in this life,

...sanctification in such a sense that Christians could have unbroken peace, and not come into condemnation, or have the feeling of condemnation or a consciousness of sin.<sup>26</sup>

While holding a revival in Boston, he experienced a fresh Spirit baptism of personal holiness. It was only with great difficulty that he was able to consecrate his sick wife into the hands of God. His wife, Lydia, died in 1847.<sup>27</sup>

Finney resigned his pastorate in 1872. He had labored thirty-five years in the period from 1837 to 1872 in Oberlin College, his pastorate, and in his evangelism which included trips to England and Scotland.<sup>28</sup>

He maintained his relationship to the seminary and completed his last lectures in July of 1875. Charles G. Finney died August 16, 1875 at the age of eighty-two.

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<sup>25</sup>Day, op. cit., p. 199.    <sup>26</sup>Finney, op. cit., pp. 350-51.

<sup>27</sup>Day, loc. cit.    <sup>28</sup>Ibid.

## CHAPTER III

## HIS PREACHING

## I. HIS TRAINING

Rev. George Gale was placed in charge of tutoring Finney, but there was much disagreement between them. Finney felt that the education of Gale, his pastor, was defective and could not consent to many of his views.

I have everwhere found, that the peculiarities of hyper-calvinism have been a great 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 believers and the ruin of sinners.<sup>1</sup>

As his success developed, he was convinced he had the right conceptions for soul winning. He insisted that the Spirit of God had given him these methods which proved so successful.

The evangelist held to an extemporaneous presentation in method and practically despised the current method of reading written sermons. Young preachers should be trained in this way,

The students should be encouraged to exercise, and prove, and improve, their gifts and calling of God, by going out into any places open to them, and holding Christ up to the people in earnest talks.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Rev. Charles G. Finney, Memoirs (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1876), pp. 368,369.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp. 89,90.

Finney believed one has to learn to preach by preaching. His purpose must be that of revival rather than just a development of style. This is the manner in which he would prepare his messages. He first studied the gospel and its application, and then he meditated on its truths. Learning the needs of the people, he would then think intensely and pray much. When the time came, he would pour out to the people, speaking to them very earnestly. He acknowledged that his sermons were given by the Holy Spirit.

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## II. HIS DELIVERY

The aim of the evangelist was simple. He wanted men and women converted to Christ! To accomplish this he made his address as direct as possible.

His hearers were made to feel, not that they were witnessing a sermonic performance, but that they were receiving a real message, an earnest call then and there to surrender heart and life to the truth.<sup>3</sup>

From the pulpit he presented an earnest argument with startling transitions which was dramatic in nature and possessed a great power of appeal. He spoke with ease in a colloquial style. Periodically the easy level of his address would be broken by forcible and solemn oratorical outbursts in which the delivery was very intense for a short time. The preaching of Finney has been described in this way.

"A tall, grave-looking man, dressed in an unclerical suit of gray, ascended the pulpit. Light hair covered his tall forehead; his eyes were of a sparkling blue, and his every movement dignified and graceful. I listened. It did not sound like preaching, but like a lawyer arguing a case before a court and jury...The discourse was a chain of the closest logic, brightened by felicity of illustration and enforced by urgent appeals from a voice of rare compass and melody."<sup>4</sup>

Criticism came because of the novel methods used and the departures from some of the main points of Calvinism.<sup>5</sup> Ministers opposed his

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<sup>3</sup>Henry C. Sheldon, The Modern Church, Vol. V of History of the Christian Church, Part III (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell & Co., 1894), p. 265.

<sup>4</sup>T. Harwood Pattison, The History of Christian Preaching (Philadelphia: The American Baptist Publication Society, 1903), pp. 368-369.

<sup>5</sup>Elgin S. Moyer, Who Was Who in Church History (Chicago: Moody Press, 1962), p. 144.

preaching, because he used common illustrations and language. He addressed people directly with "you." They thought he emphasized hell and blamed the people too much. He was very repetitious and acted like a lawyer. However, he did all of these things that he might be understood by the people.

The evangelist would use some novel idea or event to gain the hearing of his congregation, and then he would touch their emotions so a verdict could be won. He used techniques, but it was done in the anointing and power of the Spirit of God.

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## III. HIS SUBJECT MATTER

The strategy of Finney in holding a revival was to distract attention from the world to religion and then give a powerful presentation of Christianity.<sup>6</sup> In his preaching he made religion sensible and real. The preacher believed that the only way sound conversions would come would be by dealing directly with the conscience of man.<sup>7</sup> He pleaded for an immediate commitment to Christ. It was simple, personal, and direct, but not vulgar. Before he preached he would learn what the doctrinal and spiritual condition of those who would hear him was. He awakened their conscience through the law. God's requirements were explained. True holiness was revealed.<sup>8</sup> The pride of men was humbled and their excuses destroyed, and then he began "urging an immediate surrender to the Lord's supremacy, and an immediate acceptance of his grace."<sup>9</sup> The carnal mind's enmity against God was declared. Men were shown their lack of holiness. The certain judgment by God of all the impenitent was made clear.

The preacher proclaimed that by the Holy Spirit and through faith the human heart could be changed. Personal trust in Christ's atonement

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<sup>6</sup>Winthrop S. Hudson, The Great Tradition Of The American Churches (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1953), p. 91.

<sup>7</sup>Mendell Taylor, Exploring Evangelism (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1964), p. 457.

<sup>8</sup>Edward Norris Kirk, Lectures On Revivals (Boston: Congregational Publishing Society, 1875), p. 263.

<sup>9</sup>Frank Grenville Beardsley, A History of American Revivals (New York: American Tract Society, 1912), p. 149.

and commitment to Him in confidence was required. Regeneration came through faith and was instantaneous. The result was a change in moral character and a change in living habits. Men are sinners by choice and responsible for their own sins. The gospel calls for immediate repentance. In speaking of one man he led to a conversion experience, he said,

...God could not do for him what he required him to do. God required him to repent, and God could not repent for him; required him to believe, but God could not believe for him; God required him to submit, but could not submit for him.<sup>10</sup>

In his doctrine Finney held that the unregenerate were morally depraved by voluntary choice. Their wills are centered on desire gratification. The Holy Spirit desires to change the heart of man, but his work is a moral and persuasive one. As the word of God is preached by the anointing of the Spirit, truth comes to the unregenerate and it is his responsibility to repent, accept Christ as Saviour and take God's will for his life which includes the experience of sanctification.

Charles G. Finney declared that salvation was the beginning of religious experience and not its end as some made it.<sup>11</sup> Sin was defined as voluntary self-interest and holiness as disinterested benevolence. Conversion, then, was a turning from self-interest to disinterested benevolence. Although it came later in life, sanctification by faith

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<sup>10</sup> Finney, op. cit., p. 264.

<sup>11</sup> William Warren Sweet, The American Churches (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1947), p. 126.

was another one of his doctrinal concepts. Holiness, he saw, was the stabilizing factor needed to maintain new converts in their spiritual life. It was also only by holiness that revivals would continue.<sup>12</sup> The power of the Holy Spirit was a necessity for an effective and victorious Christian life.

The revivalist rebuked idolatry of fashions. He demanded separation from the evils of society.

To Finney's Christian conscience "dancing, gambling, drinking, card playing, and theater-going were only slightly less heinous than adultery and murder."<sup>13</sup>

Taking a stand for abolition and total abstinence, Finney opposed Freemasonry.

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<sup>12</sup>Taylor, op. cit., p. 454.   <sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 453.

## IV. HIS REVIVAL LECTURES

Lectures On Revivals of Religion is one of the most useful and best known works of Charles G. Finney. This is a series of Friday evening messages which he delivered to his own congregation. His directions were intended to bring forth an effective soul-winning church.

The effort of man brings revivals. A revival of religion is the renewing of the first love of Christians for God and the conversion of sinners.<sup>14</sup> Prevailing prayer obtains the blessing which has been requested and causes God to move his hand in revival. God will bless when men properly prepare themselves. Prayer meetings are an index to the life of a church.<sup>15</sup>

Great wisdom is required of any minister. There is opposition to face and the powers of hell and earth must be overcome. Sinners must be driven from every refuge or hiding place of lies. "Those are the best educated ministers, who win the most souls."<sup>16</sup> The purpose of his preaching is to make people act. The minister gains the attention of the congregation and then probes their conscience.

The church can help bring revival by heart searchings, repentance, and a return from backsliding. It is the will of God for every believer to grow in grace or favor.

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<sup>14</sup> Rev. Charles G. Finney, Lectures on Revivals of Religion (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1868), p. 14.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 131.    <sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 177.

## CHAPTER IV

## HIS BASIC THEOLOGY

## I. GOD AND GOVERNMENT

Charles G. Finney taught that God is self-existent and supreme. It is He who created the universe and its inhabitants. God is the supreme being of the universe possessing infinite intelligence and holiness. Because of His moral character, He imposes moral government upon the universe which He has brought into being.

The theologian infers that God is moral governor because of man's nature. He is our creator and holds man responsible for his conduct.<sup>1</sup> Man is required to be holy, since God is holy. God is qualified to govern by both His natural attributes and His moral character. Finney observes that,

His relation to the universe as creator and preserver, when considered in connection with the necessity of government, and with his nature and attributes, confers on him the right of universal government.<sup>2</sup>

He is obligated to establish and administer the government of the universe. His own happiness demands it. If He does not exercise this authority, He cannot be wise. Moral government is inferred from the moral influence exerted by the providence of God. This providence shows that the universe is governed by moral laws. If this is not true,

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<sup>1</sup> Rev. Charles G. Finney, Lectures on Systematic Theology (Whittier: Colporter Kemp, 1946), p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

all mankind has been misled, because "All nations have believed that God is a moral governor."<sup>3</sup> One must disapprove of God's character if it was learned that He created but would not or did not govern. A system of moral government is found in the Bible, which is a revelation to man from God. Finney believes that there is nothing of which man may be sure if this inference is incorrect.

Man has a moral obligation or a voluntary ultimate choice to make for God and the well-being of the universe. These possess intrinsic worth or worth in themselves for what they are. "Entire, universal, uninterrupted consecration to this end, or disinterested benevolence is the duty of all moral agents."<sup>4</sup> The ultimate end of God in activity is for His well-being and the well-being of the universe. Finney says that,

God is infinitely and equally holy in all things, because he does all things for the same ultimate reason, namely, to promote the highest good of being.<sup>5</sup>

Even the moral attributes of God are simply love or disinterested benevolence in various relations. All moral agents are obligated to make an ultimate choice for God's highest good. Man may be confident that God has wise and good reasons for His actions which conform to right principles. Finney finds,

...ground for perfect confidence, love, and submission to his divine will in all things...We may always be entirely safe in obeying all the divine requirements, and in submitting to all his dispensations, however mysterious, being assured that they are perfectly wise and good.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.    <sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 28.    <sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 29.    <sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 81.



Creation, providence, and moral government are all means which God uses to reach a good and wise end. Evil is incidental. Evil is less than the good of these means. This is the best system He could construct in His love and wisdom to meet His own purposes, although evil is present.

The obedience to the moral law which God demands of man is not impossible nor unreasonable. This obedience does not imply that man is to undergo a body change and annihilation of character traits, body appetites, natural affections, and natural resentments. The mind of the man who obeys God's moral law is not always in a state of unhealthy excitement. Finney makes this comment concerning emotion in revivals,

...when the reasons for much excitement have ceased, and the public mind begins to grow more calm, they begin immediately to say, that the revival is on the decline; when, in fact, with much less excited emotion, there may be vastly more real religion in the community. Excitement is often important and indispensable, but the vigorous actings of the will are infinitely more important. And this state of mind may exist in the absence of highly excited emotions.<sup>7</sup>

God is not always the object of thought for the man who obeys Him. The mind is not characterized by either continual calmness or sweetness. The ordinary emotional range of an individual still exists. Justice acts as a balance to compassion. One does not have to hold the same view of all men. Finney believes,

Impartiality and the law of love require us not to regard all beings and things alike, but all beings and things according to their nature, relations, circumstances, and value.<sup>8</sup>

Obedying God will not make a man omniscient or infallible. He will not be able to attain that degree of knowledge, faith, and service which would

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 126.    <sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 127.

have been possible if he had never sinned. Everyone for whom he prays will not be saved. Others will not always regard him as perfectly conformed to God's moral law! That person will not be spared mental suffering and sorrow. It will not be inconsistent for him to live in society. Moroseness will not be required. Duty is the means to the end and not the aim itself. The law will not be a constant thought object. Finally, obeying the moral law of God does not imply that a man will treat all things alike even though they be of equal value. This would be impossible! Finney explains,

...the precept, "Love thy neighbor as thyself," cannot mean that I am to take equal care of my own soul, and soul of every other human being. This were impossible. Nor does it mean that I should take the same care and oversight of my own, and of all the families of the earth. Nor that I should divide what little of property, or time, or talent I have equally among all mankind...Some interests of great value we may be under no obligation to promote, for the reason that we have no ability to promote them, while we may be under obligation to promote interests of vastly less value, for the reason, that we are able to promote them.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., pp. 134,135.

## II. MAN AND SIN

Man is governed by God's moral law, which requires him to love God with all of his heart and to love his neighbor as himself. Sin is the voluntary transgression of the moral law to Finney. All sin can be summed up in the word, selfishness. The person who is selfish has chosen self-gratification as his ultimate end with sin as the means. No person can be part saint and part sinner! "The will cannot at the same time, be opposed to sin and commit sin."<sup>10</sup> Sin is a self-seeking spirit and is displayed in a carnal state of mind. Disobedience to the moral law "...is seeking to gratify the desire of personal good, in a manner prohibited by the law of God."<sup>11</sup> It is voluntary, and the person who does it is impenitent. Charles Finney also defined sin as "...selfish willing..." which is never able to co-exist with benevolence which is disinterested.<sup>12</sup> Finney stated that, "Sin is the supreme preference of self-gratification. Holiness is the supreme preference of the good of being."<sup>13</sup> The holy person is not guilty of sin, because he is tempted to self-gratification. The soul is not responsible for the existence of emotions which exist against the will through temptation. No sin has been committed if the emotions are banished from the mind as soon as possible by diverting the mind from the objects which are producing the temptations. The believer ceases to be holy when he yields to

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<sup>10</sup>Rev. Charles G. Finney, Ibid., p. 151. <sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 181.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 123. <sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 96.

temptation and sins in disobedience. Finney took the view that,

The Christian...is justified no longer than he obeys, and must be condemned when he disobeys; or Antinomianism is true.<sup>14</sup>

God punishes His children who are disobedient.

Selfishness or sin has definite attributes. It is voluntary! Man submits his will in disobedience. He has liberty, which is the freedom to choose what he will do. There is a knowledge of the moral character of his choice, and so intelligence is present. Sin is unreasonable, because,

It is a denial of that divine attribute that allies man to God, makes him capable of virtue, and is sinking him to the level of a brute.<sup>15</sup>

It is a choice of self-good, and so man is interested rather than disinterested. Partiality is present. This is a preference to self-interest. Efficiency is an attribute of every sin, for it produces action. Resistance to benevolence is called opposition. Cruelty should not be overlooked, because it finds pleasure in the misery of others. Injustice is the inequitable treatment of others. Falsehood "...is the will in the attitude of resisting truth, and embracing error and lies."<sup>16</sup> Exalting oneself above others is pride. Finney sees selfishness as the foundation of sin when he states,

Selfishness is the root, or stock, in which every form of sin inheres...My object is fully to develop the great truth that where selfishness is, there must be, in a state either of development or undevelopment, every form of sin that exists in earth or hell; that all sin is a unit, and consists of some form of selfishness; and that where this is, all sin virtually is and must be.<sup>17</sup>

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14 Ibid., p. 110. 15 Ibid., p. 184. 16 Ibid., p. 196. 17 Ibid., p. 198.

Other attributes of selfishness are enmity, which is hatred against God, and intemperance, which is self-indulgence.

According to Finney's theology, moral depravity is not constitutional or involuntary sinfulness. "Moral depravity, as I use the term, consists in selfishness; in a state of voluntary committal of the will to self-gratification."<sup>18</sup> He believes that it is total in that "...every selfish being is at every moment as wicked and as blameworthy as with his knowledge he can be."<sup>19</sup> It is a self-seeking spirit. Consecration is made to self-gratification. The aim and intention is wrong. It is a violation of the moral law. Moral depravity is a commitment to self-indulgence by the will of man.<sup>20</sup>

Impenitence and unbelief are both phenomena of the will of man in his rebellion against God. The will is active and obstinate in impenitence. Finney defines impenitence as,

...the will's pertinacious adherence to the gratification of self, in despite of all the light with which the sinner is surrounded.<sup>21</sup>

Impenitence is the strengthening of self in sin! Unbelief is a voluntary state in which the truth is rejected by the will. The unbelieving man withholds his confidence from God and His truth and rejects the evidence. He places his will in opposition to both evidence and truth. The light God gives to him is rejected!

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 231.    <sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 202.    <sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 231.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 368.    <sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 378.

### III. CHRIST AND SALVATION

Charles Finney did not see the atonement for the sins of mankind made up merely of the obedience of Jesus Christ to the moral law.<sup>23</sup> As both God and man in nature, He was obligated to fulfill the moral law. If He had obeyed the law for man, it would not have been necessary for Him to suffer for man. If He had acted as a substitute in obeying the law, it would not have been necessary for man to obey the law. If this theory of the atonement were true, the suffering and obedience of Christ plus the repentance and obedience of man would have paid the debt of his sins several times!

The atonement was not a commercial transaction in which there was an exact repayment for the amount of wrong done. Finney declared that,

...retributive justice can never be satisfied, in the sense that the guilty can be punished as much and as long as he deserves; for this would imply that he was punished until he ceased to be guilty, or became innocent. When law is once violated, the sinner can make no satisfaction.<sup>24</sup>

If this theory of the atonement were true, then the Lord Jesus Christ would have to suffer the punishment of eternal death multiplied by the number of the elect!

The atonement was the satisfaction of public justice. The theologian defined it in this way,

...the atonement is the governmental substitution of the sufferings of Christ for the punishment of sinners. It is a covering of their sins by his sufferings.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 270.    <sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 271.    <sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 261.

Since the moral law is founded in the self-existent and immutable nature of God, its precepts and sanctions cannot be repealed. Romans 3:24-26 speaks of redemption through faith in the propitiation of Christ. Finney asserts that,

This passage assigns the reason, or declares the design, of the atonement, to have been to justify God in the pardon of sin, or in dispensing with the execution of law.<sup>26</sup>

God chose the atonement for His own satisfaction and the benefit of the universe. All the inhabitants of the world have been indirectly blessed by the atonement. It has been directly offered to all. If it were not, God would be insincere. A direct revelation from God would be needed by every man before he knew if it applied to him. A minister could not preach in assurance without it.

There are many reasons why God preferred the atonement of Christ to the suffering of all sinners. It was a revelation of the love of God for sinners and for the universe. This work of grace was performed to prevent the suffering of many. A revelation of the mercy of God is seen in the atonement. The evil of sin presented God an opportunity to reveal His true character and heart. God showed,

...forbearance, mercy, self-denial, and suffering for enemies that were within his own power, and for those from whom he could expect no equivalent in return.<sup>27</sup>

God did it for His own happiness and glory. Such a work of love and

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 271.    <sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 272.

and mercy gives sinners high motives for turning to God and living lives of virtue. Circumstances made the atonement necessary, because annihilation was not the purpose of God's government. Holy beings could be confirmed through it. God provided the atonement because,

Nothing could be more highly calculated to establish and confirm the confidence, love, and obedience of holy beings, than this disinterested manifestation of love to sinners and rebels.<sup>28</sup>

This love would confound the enemies of God. Something had to be done, for the law did not have the power to prevent rebellion. The atonement revealed the compassion and love of God to those who had only been able to see the justice of the law.

Regeneration is a moral character change or "...the making of a sinner holy..."<sup>29</sup> The new birth, to be born again, a new heart, to be a new creature, and passing from death to life all refer to the same experience. Finney said, "...to be born again is to have a new moral character, to become holy. To regenerate is to make holy."<sup>30</sup> Regeneration is a change in the attitude of the will. The ultimate choice of a man is revised. A consecration is made from selfishness to benevolence and from self-gratification to well-being. The Divine moral influence works by the Holy Spirit using truth. Finney uses regeneration and conversion as synonymous terms. "...both terms imply the simultaneous exercise of both human and Divine agency."<sup>31</sup> The unregenerate person is characterized

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 273.    <sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 283.    <sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 284.



by selfishness. He is governed by impulse, feeling, and desire. Condemnation fills his heart, and he is the slave of sin. Self-indulgence is the rule of his life. Such a person is never a reformer in the proper sense of the word. The man who has been regenerated by the power of Christ is governed by the moral law of God and finds justification and its accompanying peace of mind. Self-denial is practiced and sin is overcome! Consecration is to God.

Repentance was the message of both John the Baptist and the Lord Jesus Christ. Evangelical or saving repentance is a phenomenon of the will. It consists in a change of ultimate intention. There is a turning from selfishness to disinterested benevolence. Finney says it in this way,

A turning from sin to holiness, or more strictly, from a state of consecration to self to a state of consecration to God, is and must be the turning, the change of mind, or the repentance that is required of all sinners.<sup>32</sup>

Repentance implies a reconsideration of the past and a sorrow for sin. Peace of mind comes with confession of sin, restitution, and reformation. Confidence is in God.

Evangelical or saving faith is trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is a state of mind in which truth is embraced and the soul is committed to Christ. Faith implies intellectual perception of truth and its appropriation. An evangelicallife must follow. With faith must be repentance. There is a turning to disinterested benevolence. Peace of

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<sup>32</sup>  
Ibid., p. 365.

mind comes, and every virtue exists in the soul, although perhaps undeveloped. Present sinlessness is implied by faith. Finney has this view of faith.

Faith may be contemplated either as a distinct form of virtue, and as an attribute of love, or as an attribute of love, or as comprehensive of all virtue. When contemplated as an attribute of love, it is only a branch of sanctification. When contemplated in the wider sense of universal conformity of will to the will of God, it is then synonymous with entire present sanctification.<sup>33</sup>

The one who is walking in faith practices all of the truth he knows.

Justification is the governmental treatment of a sinner by God as if he were just. There are a number of conditions to justification. One is the atonement of Christ in which His sufferings are substituted for the punishment of sinners. Another is repentance of sin. Faith in Christ as Saviour from sin is necessary. There must be a present sanctification or full consecration to God. No one can be justified any longer than he is consecrated or sanctified!<sup>34</sup> The last condition of justification is perseverance in faith and obedience.

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 377.      <sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 283.

## CHAPTER V

## HIS THEOLOGY OF SANCTIFICATION

## I. THE INTRODUCTION

One is not able to understand Charles G. Finney's doctrine of sanctification apart from the life of Finney himself. This is a doctrine at which he arrived after years in the Christian ministry. He testified that he had received a mighty baptism of the Holy Spirit at the time of his conversion which had thrust him forth as mighty reaper on the evangelistic field. Yet after fifteen years of ministry, he recognized that he had a great spiritual need. It seemed that his faith was not completely stable and there was a weakness revealed in times of temptation. He had a problem of retaining the divine strength which was his portion.<sup>1</sup> It was in 1837, while he was ministering in New York City, that he received the first notable refreshing from the Lord. Finney did much studying and praying during the winter of 1843 while he was ministering in Boston. His wife was in poor health, and he was having a hard time surrendering her completely into the hands of the Lord. The Lord overhauled his soul during that time and at last he came to victory.

"My mind settled into a perfect stillness. My confidence in God was perfect, my acceptance of His will was perfect, and my mind was

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p. 75. <sup>1</sup> James Mudge, The Perfect Life (New York: Eaton and Mains, 1911),

as calm as heaven. At times I could not realize that I had ever before been truly in communion with God."<sup>2</sup>

The result of this was a new freedom, a greater dimension in his understanding of the word of God, a stability in faith, and a refilling of the word of God, a stability in faith, and a refilling of the love of God. When his wife died a few years later, a great sorrow covered his soul for a time, but the Lord turned that sorrow into joy and he was able to rest confidently in the will of God. He considered these times of refreshing as special empowerments by the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

The old Calvinism was disturbed by the Oberlin Theology which "...stressed the freedom of the will and the duty of a watchful and constant obedience to God, in which lies sanctification."<sup>3</sup> At this time American Methodism was neglecting the doctrine of Christian perfection. Finney and Asa Mahan, the president of Oberlin College, became the champions of the doctrine to many Methodist groups.<sup>4</sup> Some see Finney moving gradually to the Wesleyan concept of Christian perfection as the years passed. The Wesleyans believed that there was a second blessing for the believer after conversion in which the propensities for sin were destroyed. This resulted in a perfection of heart by the baptism of the Holy Spirit and a perfection of character through growth in grace. In

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 76.

<sup>3</sup> John T. McNeill, The History and Character of Calvinism, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1954), p. 408.

<sup>4</sup> John Leland Peters, Christian Perfection And American Methodism (New York: Abingdon Press, 1956), p. 116.

speaking of Asa Mahan, one writer states,

Shortly after coming to Oberlin both he and Charles G. Finney received as a 'second work of grace' the experience of 'sanctification by faith' and perfection in love.<sup>5</sup>

Apparently this is implied from the evidence, because the author of this paper has not found such a clear-cut claim made by Finney himself, although he preached the doctrine. Finney moved from Calvinism toward Methodism.

His theology moved away from the Presbyterian-Congregationalist brand of Calvinism and approximated a middle course between Arminius and Calvin, between a Methodist and a Baptist viewpoint. Later in life, Finney developed a strong doctrine of Perfection.<sup>6</sup>

From the beginning of his ministry, he had encountered opposition from the Presbyterians, because of his methods and his rejection of some of the primary Calvinistic doctrines. This criticism continued and grew as he continued to move further away theologically. The Presbyterians would not endorse the theology and methods at Oberlin College and for some time refused to recognize her graduates. They were not admitted to the presbyteries or congregational associations. This prejudice against Oberlin graduates continued until the revival of 1858.

The idealism of the Oberlin Theology had its roots in the Methodist doctrine of sanctification. It emphasized the dependence of man upon God for the gift of sanctification. Finney, as professor of theology at Oberlin, taught that man was able to attain stability in his spiritual

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<sup>5</sup>George Allen Turner, The Vision Which Transforms (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1964), p. 301.

<sup>6</sup>James Edwin Orr, The Light of the Nations (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1965), p. 59.

life. One could overcome weakness and gain perfection. William Warren Sweet, the well-known American church historian, has concluded that Finney never openly professed to have attained sanctification.<sup>7</sup> When the doctrine was revived in the 1840's, divine intervention was a pre-dominate factor with an instantaneous work eclipsing a gradual growth. Evidently he changed or modified his view later in life for,

...the two of Finney's Lectures On Revivals which were rewritten for the edition of 1868, while making the doctrine of sanctification more prominent, stressed growth more than a crisis of experience.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>William Warren Sweet, Religion in the Development of American Culture (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1952), p. 229.

<sup>8</sup>Timothy L. Smith, Revivalism And Social Reform (New York: Abingdon Press, 1957), p. 112.

## II. SANCTIFICATION DEFINED AND DEFENDED

Charles G. Finney in his Systematic Theology on the topic of sanctification opens discussion by a summary statement of some of his doctrinal views. It is here that he gives a short definition of holiness. Holiness operates in the dimension of the will or heart of man. It is the obedience of one's will to God's law as revealed in his intellect. The expression of this obedience is love, which Finney calls "disinterested benevolence" or the consecration of one's entire being to God's glory and the universe's well-being.<sup>9</sup>

Finney then makes a definition of sanctification. It is a state consisting of consecration to God. "To sanctify is to set apart to a holy use--to consecrate a thing to the service of God."<sup>10</sup> The word translated sanctify from the Greek New Testament is hagiaze. The word means to sanctify, consecrate, devote a person or a thing to some sacred use. The Hebrew word kaudash signifies to "...consecrate, devote, set apart, sanctify, purify, make clean or pure." The Greek hagiasmos is translated "...sanctification, devotion, consecration, purity, holiness."<sup>11</sup>

Sanctification is not a constitutional change in man's body or soul, but rather it is a consecration of the powers of body and soul to God. It is not a state of the intellect. Its primary function is not

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<sup>9</sup> Charles G. Finney, Lectures on Systematic Theology (Whittier: Colporter Kemp, 1946), p. 403.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 404.    <sup>11</sup> Ibid.

in the realm of conscience, understanding or reason. Sanctification is not a feeling or an emotion. Neither is an involuntary state or attitude of mind.<sup>12</sup>

Finney sees sanctification as a phenomenon of the will. Sanctification is a voluntary, not passive, state of mind in which personal consecration is made to God and the ultimate well-being of His universe. He also said that it is an ultimate act or choice. Sanctification is synonymous with loving both God and one's neighbor. It is a state of voluntary consecration to God for the present and a consecration which continues as time passes.<sup>13</sup> A state of choice and a standing preference of mind are other terms which are used in description. Finney declares this definition,

Sanctification consists in the will's devoting or consecrating itself and the whole being, all we are and have, so far as powers, susceptibilities, possessions are under the control of the will, to the service of God, or, which is the same thing, to the highest interests of God and of being.<sup>14</sup>

It is entire or complete obedience to the moral law of God as revealed in the Scriptures.

Entire sanctification consists of two elements--the present and the continued or abiding. This definition of Finney says,

Entire sanctification...consists in being established, confirmed, preserved, continued in a state of sanctification or of entire consecration to God.<sup>15</sup>

The doctrine is qualified further by telling what it does not mean. An

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., pp. 404,405. <sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 405. <sup>14</sup>Ibid. <sup>15</sup>Ibid.



entirely sanctified person could sin, but he does not and will not sin! This does not eliminate further needs of God's grace to prevent sinning. The doctrine does not mean to imply that there will be no further struggles with the forces of evil or warfare with the temptations of life. Further progress in Christian holiness is possible even after this experience. Entire sanctification does not mean that one no longer needs the grace of Christ and His Spirit to preserve himself from sin and to enable him to continue in consecration to God.<sup>16</sup>

The real question, according to Finney, is whether entire sanctification is attainable in this life. He contends that it is on the ground of natural ability. It is possible for one to be entirely obedient to the law of God. He believes that God's moral law makes a demand only on the strength and ability that we have and not on what we do not possess. The provisions of God's grace made for the entire sanctification of man make it a reasonable pursuit in this life.<sup>17</sup>

The Bible indicates that entire sanctification is possible in this life. Ephesians 4:10-16 shows that abundant means are provided for this work.

He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things. And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ; till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God,

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 406.    <sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 407.

unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ; that we henceforth be no more children tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; but speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ; from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body, unto the edifying of itself in love.<sup>18</sup>

In this passage of Scripture abundant means are provided for the sanctification of the church, and by implication, the individual in this life. Prominent among the many promises of the Bible which Finney used to prove his doctrine are Deuteronomy 10:12; Jeremiah 33:31-34; and Ezekiel 36:25-27. I Thessalonians 5:23,24 says,

And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit, and soul, and body, be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it.<sup>19</sup>

Another reason for believing that entire sanctification is possible in this life is because the apostles expected Christians to attain it.<sup>20</sup>

Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always laboring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. Colossians 3:12.

Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God. II Corinthians 7:1.

The end, which is sanctification, can be reached because all the intermediate steps can be taken. There is no point in the progress toward this goal at which it can be said that one can go no further. God has also made provision for the believer to stand successfully against the

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 408.    <sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 414.    <sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 415.

occasions of sin, that is, temptation by the devil, the world, and the flesh. If it is possible to escape the power of sin, then entire sanctification can be attained. The Bible teaches that God is able to perform the work of sanctification in the believer according to Ephesians 3:14-19. The Scriptures do not present death as the time of termination of sin in the believer. Therefore it must be within this life. This experience is a standard which ministers must have to hold before their people. Apathy and sin comes into the church when the doctrine is denied. Denial also causes ministers themselves to have a light view of sin. Finney contends that if entire sanctification is not attainable in this life, then it is profane and blasphemous of the evangelical churches to hold this covenant, "...to abstain from all ungodliness and every worldly lust, to live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world."<sup>21</sup> Yet he does not require one to hold his terminology in order to be a partaker of the experience, for he says,

A man may believe in what is really a state of entire sanctification, and aim at attaining it, although he may not call it by that name....I care not what this state is called, if the thing be fully explained and insisted upon, together with the conditions of attaining it. Call it what you please, Christian perfection, heavenly mindedness, the full assurance of faith or hope, or a state of entire consecration; by all these I understand the same thing.<sup>22</sup>

Experience has proven the doctrine correct, because the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ has often given individuals victory over every form of sin. Furthermore, what is true if this teaching is not? Every

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 418.      <sup>22</sup> Ibid., pp. 419,420.

believer needs definite instruction. If there is a better way, let it be produced! Finney closes this portion of his argument for entire sanctification by pointing out the fact that the tendency to deny the doctrine indicates its truth.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 420.

### III. THE SANCTIFICATION OF PAUL

The Apostle Paul is used as an example by Finney to show a Bible character who was entirely sanctified. This is done to prove that the experience is possible in this life. Paul's character was such that whatever he said, he meant. He made many statements which can indicate nothing less than a possession of entire sanctification. In I Thessalonians 2:10 Paul says, "Ye are witnesses, and God also, how holily, and justly, and unblamably, we behaved ourselves among you that believe."<sup>24</sup> Finney sees this as a clear declaration of possession of the experience. What else could it indicate? Paul would not have claimed holiness if it were not true. In no other way would he have been able to make the claims for himself which are found in II Corinthians 4:3-7; 1:12 and Galatians 2:20; 4:14. The apostle claimed to have a pure conscience according to II Timothy 1:3 and also Acts 24:16 which reads, "And herein do I exercise myself to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men."<sup>25</sup> Without a sanctification experience his conscience could not have been pure! In I Corinthians 2:16,17 and Philippians 3:17,20, Paul called the churches to follow the example he had set for them. He said, "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ," in I Corinthians 11:1, and in Philippians 3:9 he said, "Those things which ye have both learned and received, and heard, and seen in me, do; and the God of peace shall be with you." In order to make statements like

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<sup>24</sup>Charles G. Finney, Ibid., p. 425. <sup>25</sup>Ibid.

these, he must have been practicing what he taught and been living without sin.<sup>26</sup>

In the second part of this discussion, Charles G. Finney takes five portions of scriptures which are used by some to indicate Paul was not entirely sanctified and attempts to answer the charges.<sup>27</sup> He finds no evidence in Acts 15:36-40 which shows that Paul sinned or conducted himself improperly when he had his disagreement with Barnabas over John Mark. The same is true of Acts 23:1-5 when he rebuked the high priest for having him struck without a just cause. He did not know he was addressing the high priest. This was not sinful anger. Many argue that Paul was not sanctified because of his statements in Romans 7:14-25.

For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin. For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. Vs. 14,15.

For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Vs. 19.

Finney does not believe that Paul is speaking of himself in these verses. He thinks Paul is giving an illustration and in so doing he uses the first person and the present tense. Chapter seven shows the influence of the law on the carnal mind. The person of whom this is speaking is backslidden or convicted of sin in his life. Sin has dominion over him. Here law is contrasted with the gospel as presented in chapter eight. Chapter eight is the picture of an entirely sanctified person.

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 427.    <sup>27</sup>Ibid., pp. 427-433.

I remark finally upon this passage, that if Paul was speaking of himself in the seventh chapter of Romans, and really giving a history of his own experience, it proves nothing at all in regard to his subsequent sanctification; for the eighth chapter shows conclusively, that it was not his experience at the time he wrote the epistle.<sup>28</sup>

Philippians 3:10-15 cannot be used to prove Paul was not sanctified.

When Paul spoke of not having attained, he meant the perfection of the glorified state. He was not living in sin. Indirectly he said he was perfect, and he claimed to have already attained in one sense. The last verse used for consideration is Philippians 4:11-13. Among other things, Paul says, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." This statement could not be true if he were walking in sin.

Finney was struck with wonder at two things--first, that Christians think God is honored by their extending law and yet denying gospel grace, and secondly, that so many people have a self-righteous view of sanctification and do not comprehend that it comes by the grace and the Spirit of Christ.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 429,430.      <sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 431.

## IV. THE CONDITIONS OF SANCTIFICATION

Sanctification does not come by an indifferent waiting for God's time. One must shake himself and do what God has already commanded now! Independent of God's grace there are no works which are pleasing to Him. It does not come by efforts of emotion or sensation to feel right. Sanctification will not come if one attempts to receive grace through the works of the law. Faith is the condition of abiding holiness in Christians. Hearts must be purified by faith! The fundamental sin is unbelief.<sup>30</sup>

Copying the experiences of others will not bring sanctification, for as Finney notes, "Human experiences differ as human countenances differ."<sup>31</sup> It is not emotion, but it is entire consecration. The corresponding emotions will result when the will is correctly set towards God. It will not help to wait in order to make preparations. Finney declares, "The true difficulty is voluntary selfishness, or voluntary consecration to self-interest and self-gratification."<sup>32</sup> Sanctification will not come through means such as meetings or prayers. These tend to divert. A particular view of Christ will not bring it. A person will not be sanctified because he holds the same opinion of Christ that a sanctified person does. The proper view will come after an individual has properly placed his faith in the promises of God. The manner, time, place, and circumstance of the experience should not be stressed. Disappointment comes when one attempts to arrange these.

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 437.    <sup>31</sup> Ibid.    <sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 438.



This state can be attained only by faith. Faith is the instrument or condition of the work, while its agent is the Spirit of Christ. Entire sanctification to God is settled by the crucifixion of sensibility to the world and a revelation of Christ by the Holy Spirit.<sup>33</sup> The light of the Holy Spirit desires to reveal Christ to every believer as king, mediator, advocate, redeemer, propitiation of our sins, risen for our justification, bearing our griefs and carrying our sorrows, sin for us, and as head of the church.<sup>34</sup>

It is one thing to have thoughts, and ideas, and opinions concerning Christ, and an entirely different thing to know Christ, as he is revealed by the Holy Spirit. All the relations of Christ imply corresponding necessities in us.<sup>35</sup>

To Finney, sanctification may be defined as the full revelation of Christ to the soul and the soul's consequent renunciation of self and appropriation of Christ in His fulness. Temptation only overcomes the believer because of his ignorance of Christ in His fulness. It may be a blessing for,

The temptation is the occasion of revealing the necessity, and the Holy Spirit is always ready to reveal Christ in the particular relation suited to the newly developed necessity. The perception and appropriation of him in this relation under these circumstances of trial, is the sine qua non of our remaining in the state of entire consecration.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 441.    <sup>34</sup> Ibid., pp. 442-444.    <sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 444.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 446.

## V. ANSWERS TO OBJECTIONS

Although many objections are raised against entire sanctification, Finney with his keen power of logic showed that none of them are powerful enough to destroy the doctrine. In answer to the charge that it tends to lead into the errors of modern perfectionism, it is said that these errors never developed in the Wesleyan Methodists who held the same doctrine. Some say that if one were entirely sanctified, he would not be able to live in this world. Finney replied that this is not true! Holiness simply does not break the physical moral laws of the universe. Others think if one received the experience, he would not be able to know or profess it. This is not as important as just confessing and professing the sufficient grace of Christ to do the work.<sup>37</sup> Entire sanctification does not lead to spiritual pride. Instead it indicates humility of spirit which comes by the grace of God. A charge of pride cannot be leveled justly at a confession which merely tells what God has done. The doctrine cannot be condemned because some tend to be censorious. This accusation often comes when sin is rebuked effectively. Some object that the holiness standard lowers the law of God to a level of individual experience. The moral law requires just one thing, which is disinterested benevolence or the love of God and of neighbor. It is incorrect to say that the grace of God is not sufficient for the entire sanctification of the saints in this life. The experience of the church as

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<sup>37</sup>Charles G. Finney, Ibid., p. 458.

an institution does not measure the full meaning of God's promises and the extent of His grace.<sup>38</sup>

The great church leaders did not hold this view, but it must be remembered that their views were not always correct. The same people who raise this problem, also themselves reject other views held by the same church leaders. Contrary to belief, it is possible to know before the final judgment that one has attained entire sanctification. Conscience is the testimony of God.<sup>39</sup> By it a man knows what his ultimate choice is and whether he loves God or not. Sanctification does not end probation for a man. Probation consists in repentance, believing the gospel, and living in holiness to the end of life. God will do what He has promised in His word. Although entire sanctification depends on the sovereignty of God, this does not eliminate the need of stressing the doctrine anymore than it eliminates the need of stressing conversion.

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 463.    <sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 466.

## VI. FINNEY'S REMARKS ON SANCTIFICATION

Sanctification of the body is important, because the body influences the mind. Its appetites and powers must be consecrated to God. Unless they are properly managed, they will lead one into sin. Therefore every believer should study and learn all that he possibly can about the structure and laws of the body and the mind.<sup>40</sup> The reason more people in the church have not been sanctified is because they have not believed that it was attainable. This has been an error. Sanctification is the high privilege and duty of the church as seen by Finney. It is not a dangerous doctrine. It should be preached, using scriptural phraseology to call attention to the Bible doctrine.

Young converts have not been taught they could live without sin, and so they have not. This important relation of Christ as indwelling and reigning Saviour to men has been lost. The institutional church has been orthodox, but often it has not known Christ. Many are not satisfied, and they feel their need to know Him as He is presented in the Scriptures. It is important to preach strong doctrine in revivals of religion. New converts will backslide unless they have a very strong relationship to the Saviour.

A person cannot understand this doctrine unless he has a willingness to do God's will.<sup>41</sup> Much damage is often done by those who accept

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<sup>40</sup>Charles G. Finney, Ibid., p. 472. <sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 478.

the teaching in theory but deny it in actual practice. However, for the most part, the true spirit of Christ is shown by those who possess entire sanctification. This teaching is needed by both the church and the ministry, because,

...instead of sinking down into antinomianism, they are eminently more benevolent, active, holy and useful than ever before; that they are eminently more prayerful, watchful, diligent, meek, soberminded, and heavenly in all their lives.<sup>42</sup>

Those who oppose have not shown a better way than this. They have no right to pronounce what is wrong unless they are also able to show what is right. The present duty of Christians is to exercise their will in consecration to God and to hold His promises of blessing, one of which is I Thessalonians 5:23,24.

Let them wait on the Lord in faith, for that cleansing of the whole being which they need, to confirm, strengthen, settle them.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 480.    <sup>43</sup>Ibid.

## VII. THE OBERLIN VIEW

The Oberlin theology was a blow to orthodox Calvinism. At Oberlin they concluded that there was a higher and more stable spiritual life for every Christian believer.

The attainment of this goal did not involve emancipation from wrong choices or sinful thoughts; rather, it implied complete trust and dedication and the experience of Christ's love in all its fullness.<sup>44</sup>

"Perfection" meant perfect trust and consecration, the experience of "the fullness of the love of Christ," not freedom from troublesome physical and mental appetites or from error and prejudice.<sup>45</sup>

The Oberlin doctrine of perfectionism was Wesleyan in nature and had as its purpose the going on to perfection. It reached beyond ordinary living to a second blessing in the Christian life.<sup>46</sup> The ability of an individual regulated the service which was required of him. Everyone is commanded to obey the law,

But that law demands nothing more and nothing less than what every man in his inward state and outward circumstance is able to render.<sup>47</sup>

There are no distinctions between moral, natural, and gracious abilities

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<sup>44</sup>Clifton E. Olmstead, History of Religion in the United States (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1960), p. 310.

<sup>45</sup>Timothy L. Smith, Revivalism And Social Reform (New York: Abingdon Press, 1957), p. 104.

<sup>46</sup>William Warren Sweet, Religion in the Development of American Culture (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1952), p. 303.

<sup>47</sup>Charles Hodge, Systematic Theology (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1940), III, 255.

as some have suggested. Holiness is disinterested benevolence. Perfection is willingness.<sup>48</sup> Holiness is entire obedience. Sin is complete disobedience. Voluntary transgression of the known law is sin. It is within the ability of everyone to fulfill their obligations. By the Spirit of God it is possible to live in continuous obedience. Asa Mahan summarized the Oberlin doctrine of perfection when he wrote,

"It is a full and perfect discharge of our entire duty, of all existing obligations to God, and all other beings. It is perfect obedience to the moral law."<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 256.

<sup>49</sup> Archibald Alexander Hodge, Outlines of Theology (New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, Paternoster Row, 1880), p. 533.

## CHAPTER VI

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

## I. SUMMARY

Chapter one served as an introduction to the problem, which was to investigate Charles G. Finney's doctrine of sanctification. The method of procedure was to consider his life, his preaching, and his theology in order that as clear as a perspective as possible might be gained. It was hoped that each of these areas would yield definite information concerning his view of that state of being set apart for a sacred purpose and being made free from sin which is known as sanctification. This study was undertaken out of a personal interest in American church history by the author.

Chapter two described the dramatic conversion of Charles Finney October 10, 1821, at Adams, New York, and his subsequent baptism in the Holy Spirit the same night. It was shown he was called first into a successful evangelistic ministry in small towns and then he became a well-known revivalist in the larger cities of New York. The secret of this was that first initial experience plus a continuing walk in the Spirit. In his later pastoral and teaching ministry, Finney began to pay more attention to sanctification. This chapter indicated that the experience is attainable in the sense of unbroken peace and the lack of a consciousness of sin according to Finney's view.

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The preaching of Finney was explored in chapter three. It was found he lacked formal training in this area. The man would pray and meditate before speaking extemporaneously to the people. He claimed that the Holy Spirit had taught him this method of ministry. The study revealed that he spoke with such power that a response was drawn from his hearers. Finney preached that men should repent of sin and be converted. Sanctification by faith would stabilize new converts and make possible the continuence of revivals. It seemed to be implied that revivals would come through the efforts of sanctified men.

Chapter four indicated that Finney saw God as the creator and governor of the universe. God governs man and requires him to be holy since He is holy. Man is to make an ultimate choice for the well-being of God and the universe. Sin is selfishness or self-gratification. This study revealed that Finney believed the atonement of Christ was a covering of sins by His sufferings. In this way God revealed His mercy and love for mankind. To be born again is to become holy.

- Chapter five shows that Finney developed a strong doctrine of sanctification. He turned from a stress of crisis experience to that of growth. Finney defined sanctification as a voluntary consecration of oneself to God. Entire sanctification is a continuence in that state. God would not require it if it were not attainable. The chapter showed he argued to show the Apostle Paul was sanctified.

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One can know if he is sanctified by examining his own conscience. Finney claimed that more people would receive the experience if they knew it was attainable. The Oberlin view was a reach for perfection and a second blessing in the Christian life. Holiness was defined as disinterested benevolence and entire obedience.

## II. CONCLUSIONS

From this study of Charles G. Finney's Doctrine of Sanctification it may be concluded that:

1. He developed the doctrine later in his ministry.
2. Its basis was found in his theology of God as moral governor of the universe.
3. It was a volitional state of consecration of oneself to God.
4. Sin, defined as selfishness or self-gratification, would never be able to co-exist with it.
5. According to Finney, entire sanctification is a permanent state.
6. On the basis of the evidence, Finney was sanctified.

## III. SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

Related studies might be made in these areas:

1. A comparison of Finney's doctrine of sanctification with the Wesleyan-Arminian view.
  2. The influence of Methodism upon the formulation of Finney's doctrine.
  3. The development of the doctrine after the death of Finney.
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