

**Co-op 5**  
**Weeks 10-11**  
**October 28, 2021**

Consider these questions:

How does your church/how should the church evangelize people? How do people come to Christ?

What is more important in worship - everything done in line with truth/correctly OR warm emotion?

Read the following excerpts from the teacher notes on the 2nd Great Awakening. Especially consider Finney's "New Heart" sermon.

**Church History:**

Charles Finney - ministry during the 1830's and 1840's profoundly influenced the theology and expression of American Christianity.

KEY TERMS:

**Sectarian** - The narrowly defined views of a particular group, especially a religious one.

**Polity** - A system of government; here, the structure of Church government.

**Evangelical** - Messages or churches that are focused on the gospel message of salvation.

**Pietism** - "Pietism, in its sectarian form, emphasizes the priesthood of all believers and, by elevating the laity [laymen] at the expense of the clergy [pastors], it favors the congregational polity [church rule by the votes of a congregation] over the episcopalian [hierarchic rule of the church by priests]. In its liturgy [form of public worship] and theology [study of God] it stresses the emotional, devotional, and ascetic [self denial for the purpose of holy living] qualities of religion in preference to the intellectual, the ritualistic [of rituals], and the ethical [matters of right and wrong]" (McLoughlin, p. 8).

**Neo-Calvinism** - George Whitefield's expression of Calvinistic doctrines during the First Great Awakening. Whitefield was the catalyst for the immigrant churches throughout the English colonies in America to separate from their sending or oversight churches in Europe. Whitefield's preaching "brought into being a new system of religion for a New World, a religion that was sectarian [as opposed to unified] and (comparatively) democratic in polity, puritanical [of the Puritans] in morality, and pietistically evangelical in theology" (McLoughlin, p. 9).

**Congregationalism** - Independent churches who are ruled by a democratic church polity. In New England, where the American movement started, only male householders could vote on church matters. Such church congregations elected (called) and dismissed their pastors. Unlike Presbyterian, Anglican, Roman Catholic, or Episcopalian bodies, each Congregational church determines its own affairs without reference to any higher human authority.

**Hopkinsianism** - Beliefs of Samuel Hopkins (disciple of Jonathan Edwards) as he interpreted Calvinism and the Westminster Confession. His views were adopted by the conservative element of the

New England Calvinistic Congregational churches especially, and these were what Finney openly combated.

**Presbyterianism** - A system of Church government whereby congregations are: ...governed and directed by assemblies of officeholders, pastors, and elders chosen to provide just representation for the church as a whole.... In the Presbyterian churches of British–American background, there are usually four categories of church government. On the congregational level there are the session, the deacons, and the trustees. The session is made up of the elders and the pastor, who is also the moderator, or chairman. The session cares for all the religious or strictly churchly matters. It supervises the calling and election of pastors, receives and dismisses members, determines the order of the services, and exercises church discipline. A presbytery is formed by all ministers, in pastorates or not, of a given area, together with one or more elders appointed by each of the congregations of the area. The presbytery is responsible for ordaining, installing, removing, or transferring ministers.... A synod is made up of several presbyteries.... It is a court of appeal in judicial matters, and it has a certain coordinating role in church program matters among the presbyteries. A synod usually meets annually and its moderator is elected annually. The General Assembly is an annual meeting of commissioners, ministers, and elders, elected by all the presbyteries (not by the synods) according to their total church membership. This body elects its own officers, the moderator for one year only, the stated clerk for a longer term. It has charge of all the general concerns of the church's faith, order, property, missions, education, and the like.

**Old School Presbyterians** - Generally speaking, Presbyterians during Finney's time were Calvinists. Those who adopted the most Calvinistic branch of the Presbyterian denomination were called "Old School Presbyterians."

**Deism** - Belief that God, though the Supreme Creator, is not actively involved with the affairs of men. God is represented as the great Clockmaker, who makes an intricate clock, winds it once, and then lets it go without any more guidance.

### **Thoughts on Defining Revival:**

- Some think of revivals as divinely appointed miracles from above, others as human-centered outbreaks of hysteria and emotion that have little to no eternal significance. McLoughlin says that both these views are wrong.
- McLoughlin makes the distinction between national revivals and the term as it is commonly used today to mean a meeting in one, or ten, or even a hundred churches that is held for the purpose of making converts. "Revivals and revivalism," McLoughlin asserts, "are a part of all great awakenings, but not all revivals constitute great awakenings" (McLoughlin 7-8).
- McLoughlin says that there have been but four great awakenings (or national revivals) in American history, and that each one has included the confluence of four general circumstances:
  - A grave theological reorientation within the churches
  - An ecclesiastical [church] conflict associated with this reorientation, in which individual people form an important part
  - A particularly grave sense of social and spiritual cleavage (within churches and between them and the greater world) which flows from a pietistic dissatisfaction with the prevailing order
  - A feeling among those outside of the churches that Christianity has relevance to their contemporary situation

**Remember the First Great Awakening:**

Remember Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield, John Wesley, and the fruits of the First Great Awakening? If you did not study the First Great Awakening in the past, see if you can find out a little about it and the main people involved in it. If you only have time for one person, look at George Whitefield.

One pertinent point - there were camp meetings between the 1780's and the early 1800's on the frontier. It was the excesses and poor theology of preachers at these meetings that led established, educated, clerical and social leaders in the east to think ill of revival meetings. That was not the complete picture.

**The conversion experience of Charles Finney:**

In 1821, Finney was 29 years old and a practicing lawyer in Adams, New York. Finney was a regular churchgoer from his youth, but was unsaved. His fiancée, pastor, and friends urged him, he said, to “settle the question of my soul’s salvation at once” (McLoughlin, p. 16). Finney sought God in earnest prayer for three days and had a mystical experience. He felt both emotional and physical manifestations during his conversion. The day after his experience, he left the practice of law for the life of an evangelist.

**By 1820 - Common belief in the American Congregational and Presbyterian churches about what Calvinism taught:**

Most ministers understood Calvin better than did the laity, but they were not good at explaining the finer points to their parishioners. Most difficult and confusing were the Calvinist doctrines concerning the process by which one was saved, especially regarding man’s role in salvation. Many people characterized Calvinism (or its Hopkinsian expression) as Finney did in his memoirs: “that man ought to be willing to be damned for the glory of God and that God was the author of sin.” This is not what Calvin wrote or said; it is how the common man understood him in the 1820’s. It seemed to them that Calvinism taught that God commanded obedience to His laws, but that they—because of their utterly depraved, sinful natures—were utterly unable to take any steps towards either obedience or their own conversions. Though their souls were in danger of eternal death, they must wait for God to act upon them before they could.

This is so sadly wrong!! That is not what scripture teaches. Even “calvinists” would say - The word of grace is - don’t say I might not be chosen, rather say, since all God’s choosing is by grace alone, there is absolutely no reason to think I am excluded! Therefore I will embrace the Savior - who says come to me all who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. (Desiring God ministries)

Have a discussion with your family about these things - your church’s understanding of terms like “calvinism” and “arminianism” and what labels you would give yourselves (if any). Consider whether you are being fair to a side you disagree with - are you representing their ideas well? WE DO NOT WANT TO HAVE THIS DISCUSSION IN CLASS :)

What we want to do in class is talk about what happened in the 1800’s and consider why. We want to think about practices we have in our churches today and why we do them. We want to consider Christian “celebrities” and movements and the rock solid foundation of the unchanging Word of God.

ADDITIONAL READING: pages 57-59 of Week 10 in the curriculum (teacher notes Church History background)

**Details of Finney's Ministry:**

Finney's messages while in Boston, Philadelphia, and New York were the catalyst for a decisive break in the unity between the conservative Calvinist (Hopkinsianism) believers in both the Congregational churches of New England and the Presbyterian churches of Philadelphia and New York.

Finney's "new divinity" forever wrecked Beecher's plans to unify all Protestants into one denomination. %  
Finney effectively changed the role of pastor from preacher to soul winner. (However, Finney's preaching did not seem to result in a multitude of lasting conversions.)

Finney's revivalism laid the groundwork for all succeeding modern revival campaigns. Calvinism ceased to be the dominant theology; instead, Arminianism and liberal Protestantism developed and were widely adopted and preached.

He trusted in the Scripture as being God's inspired and authoritative Word, and he felt that he should use his God-given mind to reason out the truths of salvation from the Bible.

Finney's rhetoric was sharp and his emotionalism evident. His preaching was purposefully intense in word and deed, and he challenged his listeners to instant action. Finney and his friends did not scruple at "sheep stealing." They "thought it their duty to invade parishes where local ministers opposed them and to denounce such men as 'cold,' 'dead,' 'lukewarm,' or 'enemies of God and revivals'" (McLoughlin, p. 30).

Contemporaries faulted Finney for crossing the lines of propriety: having men and women pray together and inciting lower classes against their "betters." In challenging tenets of Calvinism (and Hopkinsianism), Finney's revivals threatened educated clergymen in upper New York and also the tenuous unity between Congregationalists and Presbyterians that leaders in New England, like Lyman Beecher, were seeking to forge.

Finney's manner became more polished during these years. Contemporaries said that revivalism became his trade, not his passion. Supporters said that his manner became more like a lawyer in front of a jury than like a preacher saving souls from hell.

McLoughlin portrays Lyman Beecher (father of author Harriet Beecher Stowe) in a negative light. He sees him as somewhat of a grandstander, a self-appointed authority on moral issues of the nation who was vocal about issues like Catholicism, temperance, the dangers of deism, and abolitionism. Beecher was a Presbyterian minister in Boston and at the height of his influence when Finney began to preach. He had plans to slowly join the Congregationalists and Presbyterians (and all other Protestant sects) into one unified body by blurring the lines between them and by softening the doctrines of Calvinism bit by bit.

Nettleton was a revivalist in the Hopkinsian tradition. He, like Edwards, believed that revivals (and the saving of souls) were miracles from God. He had conducted small but successful and sedate revivals in western Connecticut and took Finney's crusades as a personal affront to his efforts and beliefs. When Finney and his supporters began to openly challenge pastors who did not welcome them, Nettleton implored Beecher to use his influence to discipline Finney. Finney's challenge to orthodox Calvinism and his outlandish early preaching earned him open opposition from both Nettleton and Beecher, the latter most directly in 1827 at a conference in New Lebanon, New York. There, Beecher vowed that Finney would never preach in Boston. Yet, in 1831, Finney had become so famous and had orchestrated events such that Beecher could not effect his goals for

Christian unity without him. He and other leaders reluctantly invited Finney to Boston, where he preached for nine months.

Charles Finney published two volumes of lectures and sermons in 1831. American theologians were able to finally examine Finney's theology in print. "Finney considered himself to be orthodox according to the standards of reason and experience and he did not feel that any other standards were necessary or valid" (McLoughlin, p. 66). Why might these standards form shaky foundations for theology? What standards might be better ones?

### **Finney's "New Heart" Sermon:**

Finney based his "New Heart" sermon on Ezekiel 18:31.

*Ezekiel 18:30-32 (NASB) "Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, each according to his conduct," declares the Lord God. "Repent and turn away from all your transgressions, so that iniquity may not become a stumbling block to you. Cast away from you all your transgressions which you have committed and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! For why will you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies," declares the Lord God. "Therefore, repent and live."*

Finney's theology was most clearly expressed in his "New Heart" sermon. Note whether or not you agree with Finney. What Biblical passages are your opinions based on?

Finney took this change of heart to mean not a physical change, but more like a change of mind; we might say today a new attitude. In biblical language, the correct term would be "repent," which means, "to turn" from one course to another. Finney represented God as here commanding men, on pain of eternal death, to repent and change their hearts themselves, without divine assistance (which is his interpretation of the verse taken out of context). From this faulty premise, he then reasons that God, who is just and righteous, would not command men to do that which they could not. He thus reduces all of Calvinism and the Westminster Confession to one yes or no question: is it reasonable and just of God to require a man to do that which he cannot do? The only reasonable answer is "no." Note: This is not the real question of Ezekiel 18:31, as our background notes explain. Finney asserted that the heart or soul of a man is not utterly depraved, as Calvin (and the Bible) teach, but "prejudiced by self interest and ignorance." Finney believed that to "alter the heart the preacher merely had to jar it out of its prejudice for evil" (McLoughlin, p. 69).

Finney taught that wickedness was not a struggle to which weak Christians succumbed; rather, it was "an obstinate choice of sin" (p. 70). "Is it not as easy to choose right as wrong?" Finney would ask (p. 70). Indeed, Finney "exalted man's free will to virtual omnipotence" (p. 70). He insisted that to resist choosing right when "the Son of God approaches you, gathering motives from heaven, earth, and hell, and pours them in a focal blaze upon' the mind" is to exert the strength of near omnipotence. "Contrary to Calvinism, grace was not only resistible, but the depraved exerted omnipotence in refusing to transform themselves" (p. 70).

Finney used the American political situation as a metaphor for the salvation experience in his sermon. Conversion represented a man's decision to vote for Jehovah, and support His administration. "In this metaphor, God proposed and man disposed. [This is the opposite of what Proverbs 16:9 and 19:21 teach!] Instead of his electing men to heaven, they elected him to rule the world. Revival preaching, therefore, amounted to a kind of campaign oratory for Jehovah's party" (p. 70).

Finney spent much of this sermon describing the agents in the process of salvation, using an illustration of the daydreamer walking along the bank of Niagara Falls. Acting upon the careless sinner on his way to hell who teetered on the bank were: 1) the revival preacher or soul-winning Christian (who calls, "Stop!"), 2) the Holy Spirit of God, who both places the preacher in that place and time by His Providence and quickens the word of the preacher to the heart of the sinner, forcing "the truth home upon him with such tremendous power as to induce him to turn" (p. 72). The preacher's living voice and the Holy Spirit's provision of the preacher and the unction to hear him work together to arrest the sinner's dreaming walk and wake him to his eternal danger.

Later in the "New Heart" sermon, Finney likens the Holy Spirit to a lawyer, who argues effectively with the jury (the sinner), thus convincing him to turn to God. The Spirit, said Finney, could argue most effectively with the secret objections and resisting mind of the sinner. This was as much mystery as Finney allowed. (The Bible gives more: see John 3:8 and Isaiah 55:8-9.)

Finney insisted that, since the mind could be understood by "modern" science, the process of salvation could as well. In the end, he laid much greater emphasis on the preacher who was "skilled in the workings of the human mind" and "can 'adapt his manner and his matter to the state and circumstances' of each new situation" (p. 72). Finney said that it was a lack of understanding of the human mind in olden days that led the Reformers (Calvin foremost) to insist that men must wait on the Lord for a new heart. Finney said, to the contrary, that salvation was fully within a man's grasp; he needed only to become aroused enough to reach out and grasp it.

The sermon ended with an urgent call for sinners to make their own hearts new immediately, for "Another moment's delay and it may be too late forever" (p. 73).