

CHAPTER FIVE

A FALSE PROPHET

"And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many."

- Matthew 24:11.

"The atonement did not consist in the literal payment of the debt of sinners."

- Charles G. Finney

"For sinners to be forensically (legally) pronounced just, is impossible and absurd."

- Charles G. Finney

"Christ could not have died for anyone else's sins than his own."

- Charles G. Finney,
paraphrased by Dr. Michael S. Horton.

"This system is in many ways of its elements simply a reproduction of the Romish errors against which our fathers bore testimony in the days of the Reformation."

- H. E. Jacobs,
nineteenth century author.

We have shown in several ways how decisionism has harmed evangelical Christianity and filled our churches with lost people. We have shown how unconverted church members cause church splits and do great harm to the work of Christ. We believe that decisionism has also stopped revival, so that a real revival is very rare today. But where did decisionism come from? Where did the idea of making a decision instead of being converted begin?

We have become convinced that Charles G. Finney started this trend. After studying the subject for several years, we think that the finger of guilt is pointed directly at Finney.

When you take on Finney, many good people may think that you are speaking against revival. This is largely due to the impression, which has been almost universal since 1900, that Finney actually *introduced* revivals in the nineteenth century.¹ Finney's *Memoirs* helped to promote this idea. But these memoirs were written long after the events, and were published to prove his theories concerning decisionism.² The memoirs have been in print ever since the first edition in 1876. The influence of this book has been so great that it has led many people to think that Finney brought revival to America.

This belief has been repeated so often that many people regard it as a fact. For instance, Billy Graham wrote of Finney, "Through his Spirit-filled ministry, uncounted thousands came to know Christ in the nineteenth century, resulting in one of the greatest periods of revival in the history of America."³

When the facts are examined, however, they reveal that Dr. Graham's statement is faulty. Finney began preaching toward the end of the Second Great Awakening. America had been through its greatest revival in the First Great Awakening (1734-1740) and most of the Second Great Awakening (1800-1830). Finney's most important years were 1821 to 1829. So we see that Dr. Graham's evaluation is not true to the facts. The First Great Awakening occurred nearly a hundred years before Finney appeared on the scene. The Second Great Awakening had already been going on for twenty-one years. Finney only held a prominent place in the last ten years. He held no important leadership position in the Third Great Awakening, beginning in 1858. By that time he was an elderly man whose ministry was largely confined to the presidency of Oberlin College. Also, Finney's techniques were not used at all in the introduction or carrying out of the 1858 awakening. This revival was the product of prayer, without the use of the methods he gave in *Revival Lectures* and elsewhere.⁴

Vernon J. Charlesworth, who was the head of Spurgeon's orphanage, wrote this in the May, 1876 edition of Spurgeon's paper, *The Sword and the Trowel*:

We gravely question whether the supposed benefit of Mr. Finney's labours has not been greatly overestimated. Discount, very large discount, must be made, ere the truth is reached.⁵

A careful study of history reveals that Charles G. Finney did *not* introduce revival to America in any sense, and that his methods have not been used to *produce* revival in any notable way. In fact, no national or regional revival has occurred since Finney's ideas became prominent, except for the

1905 Welsh revival and the 1949 Isle of Lewis revival. Mr. Finney's methods were not conspicuous in either of these awakenings.

Finney has been a great promoter of his own methods of decisionism, however. He has become the best known preacher from the past century through his own self-aggrandizing writings. In fact, Finney was so successful in promoting himself that he alone is remembered by most people when they think of the revivals in the nineteenth century. Many people, however, do not look carefully at what Finney believed and taught. And most do not see how Finney's ideas changed mainstream evangelicalism from seeking conversions to promoting decisions, and most have not seen how his ideas harm us and have brought about the apostasy of our time.

Christ gave us a simple test for discerning the difference between false prophets and true prophets:

"Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them." (Matthew 7:15-20)

Jesus made these points on false prophets:

1. You can tell false prophets by their fruits, Matthew 7:15-16.
2. Good trees bring forth good fruit; corrupt trees bring forth evil fruit, Matthew 7:17-18.
3. Therefore, the test of true and false prophets is the fruits they produce, Matthew 7:20.

According to this test, Charles G. Finney was a false prophet. His ministry brought forth these evil fruits: (1) False doctrine, (2) decisionism which has ruined evangelism, and (3) the movement which is drawing new-evangelicals ever closer to reunion with the Catholic church. There can be no question that Finney is revealed as a false prophet by the test Christ gave us in Matthew 7:15-20.

Finney's False Doctrine

Let us focus on three of Finney's doctrines and show how they have hurt the churches and promoted decisionism:

- (1) Finney believed that a converted person could lose his salvation.
- (2) Finney denied the atonement of Christ and the imputation of Christ's righteousness.
- (3) Finney taught that conversion is based on a choice, not on the work of the Holy Spirit within the soul.

When these views of Finney are laid out in modern English, they are exposed as unscriptural, and seem strange to us. Yet the result of these teachings is the evangelical decisionism so prevalent in the churches around us.

First, Finney believed that a converted person could lose his salvation. He wrote, "If real Christians do backslide, they lose for the time being their evidence of acceptance with God; and withal they know that in their present state they cannot be saved. This objection is leveled rather against that view of perseverance that says, 'once in grace, always in grace.'"⁶ Finney railed against the doctrine of "once saved, always saved," saying there is "no ground of hope to a backslider, except on condition of return and perseverance to the end."⁷ Thus, Finney held that a saved person could lose his salvation. He strongly protested against "perpetual justification upon condition of one act of faith."⁸ He clearly taught that the new birth does not come through a one-time act of faith in Christ. It is often surprising, when listening to the testimonies of evangelicals, how many of them believe that you can move in and out of salvation. This is largely a result of Finney's ideas filtering down to the common man.

Finney Leads to Rome

Furthermore, Finney taught that salvation can be lost and regained repeatedly. This is not Baptist or Protestant doctrine. It is not Bible doctrine. It is a return to the Roman Catholic doctrine of salvation by good works, confessions, restitutions, and the whole Roman system of self-salvation. A person who talks to Roman Catholics and listens to them will discover that their view of salvation is nearly identical to that of Charles G. Finney. Like Finney, Catholics believe that one act of faith in Jesus does not save. Like Finney, they believe that one can lose and regain his salvation repeatedly.

This idea of moving in and out of salvation again and again has become quite common among evangelicals in our time. That is probably the main reason that "rededications" have become so prominent in the last hundred years.

No wonder Finney's "decisionism" has ended with evangelicals in the late twentieth century coming into full cooperation with the Roman Catholic church. Leading evangelicals and Catholics have issued a major document titled "Evangelicals and Catholics Together." This document was signed by Charles Colson, Pat Robertson, J. I. Packer, Bill Bright, and Roman Catholics like Cardinal O'Connor, Archbishop Francis Stafford, Father Richard John Neuhaus, and Father Avery Dulles, plus Mark Noll of Wheaton College, Richard Land of the SBC Christian Life Commission and Larry Lewis of the SBC Home Mission Board (Lewis and Land later withdrew their signatures after it caused trouble for them, but continued to express strong personal support for the document).

Here are selections from "Evangelicals and Catholics Together":

We together, Evangelicals and Catholics, confess our sins against the unity that Christ intends...The two communities in world Christianity that are the most evangelistically assertive are Evangelicals and Catholics...***Evangelicals and Catholics are brothers and sisters in Christ***...However difficult the way, we recognize that we are called by God to a fuller recognition of our unity...greater visible unity for which we hope...***Those converted - whether understood as having received the new birth for the first time or as having experienced the reawakening of the new birth originally bestowed in the Sacrament of baptism*** - must be given full freedom and respect...It (conversion) is a continuing process.⁹

These brief excerpts from "Evangelicals and Catholics Together" illustrate the great confusion over conversion brought on by Finney's methods, decisionist confusion which is bringing evangelicals into full unity with Rome.

This close cooperation of Roman Catholics with "decisionist" Protestants is an on-going phenomenon. It is illustrated, for instance, in the Sacramento, California Billy Graham Crusade of 1995, in which 303 Protestant and 38 Roman Catholic churches worked together for five days. Henry G. Wells, senior pastor of Fair Oaks Presbyterian Church, said, "There is a renewed openness among Catholics... We've had quite a few Catholic

counselors who know the Lord."¹⁰

If a Roman Catholic truly "knows the Lord," **he is no longer a Roman Catholic**, for the Roman Catholic church teaches salvation by a series of decisions, rather than salvation by a one-time trust in Jesus. But it should not surprise us that an evangelical like Dr. Wells thinks that these Catholics are saved. This is a result of Finney's decisionism, where Protestants move in and out of salvation like Roman Catholics did before the Reformation. Finney's decisionism is the road back to Rome.

Writing of Finney's methods in the nineteenth century, H. E. Jacobs said:

This system (of Finney's decisionist methods) is in many of its elements simply a reproduction of the Romish errors against which our fathers bore testimony in the days of the Reformation. Wide as is the apparent difference, we find in both the same corruption of the doctrine of justification by faith alone without works, the same ignorance of the depths of natural depravity, the same exaltation of human strength and merit, the same indifference to sound doctrine, and the same substitution of subjective frames of mind and forms of experience for the great objective facts of Christianity, as the grounds of God's favor.¹¹

Jacobs was right when he said this in the nineteenth century. Today, Finney's decisionism has so permeated evangelicalism that there is little difference between an evangelical and a Catholic. As a result, there is an ever-growing closeness between decisionists and Romanists.

David W. Cloud has a four-volume set of booklets which trace evangelicalism's journey back to Rome. These books are thoroughly documented. They deal with the connection between Catholicism and Billy Graham, Campus Crusade, James Dobson, Chuck Colson, Jerry Falwell, InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, D. James Kennedy, J. I. Packer, Luis Palau, Youth for Christ, the Southern Baptist Convention, and the Charismatic Movement. Write to Way of Life Literature concerning these four books: 1701 Harns Rd., Oak Harbor, WA 98277.

The Sword of the Lord reports that Promise Keepers is also joining with Roman Catholics. The editor writes, "The Promise Keepers' front office has apparently had in mind from the outset to give Catholics full participation in their program."¹² Promise Keepers seems to be fading now, but it could remain a threat to our churches.

Promise Keepers Drop Reformation Faith

Promise Keepers is an ecumenical men's movement which began in the U.S. It has expanded into Canada, New Zealand, Australia, South Africa, and elsewhere. Millions of men have joined it. In October, 1996 the Promise Keepers' statement of faith regarding salvation was changed from "faith alone" to "only through faith."

The Roman Catholic paper, "Our Sunday Visitor," reported that this change was made by Promise Keepers to accommodate Roman Catholics who wanted to join but couldn't,

Because to embrace "faith alone" would force them to reject their Catholic faith.¹³

Rev. Robert Looper, a pastor in St. Louis, writes:

Now according to PK, it is not faith alone in Christ that saves; it is faith in Christ alone that saves. The latter is the classic teaching of the Roman Catholic Church, that faith is a necessary but insufficient condition of salvation; trust in Christ merely begins the process of salvation, which is "completed" as Christ enables us by grace to participate in works of righteousness.¹⁴

Rev. Looper goes on to say that this may sound like nit-picking today, but it is the very doctrine which led Martin Luther to choose a life of conflict rather than accommodation; it was the very doctrinal distinction which brought about the Reformation.

This is another instance of evangelicalism giving up its Protestant and Baptist distinctives and moving toward Rome, as a direct result of the decisionist principles inculcated from the Finney movement in the nineteenth century.

Decisionism at first blurred and finally removed the important distinctions between Catholics and Protestants through a return to Rome-like doctrines of salvation by saying sinner's prayers, rededications, confessions of sin, restitutions, and the whole Romish system of self-salvation. That is why new-evangelicalism is going back to Rome today. It is a direct result of Finney's methods and ideas.

You Can Fall Out of Heaven!

Finney was so extreme in his belief that a Christian can lose his salvation that he actually said a Christian could fall out of Heaven and lose it after he dies! Here is the exact quote: "Saints in heaven can by natural possibility apostatize and fall, and be lost. Were not this naturally possible, there would be no virtue in perseverance."¹⁵ Yes, you really read that! Finney actually said that saints in Heaven can fall and be lost! He actually taught that people could fall out of Heaven into Hell!

This idea is a return to the beliefs of the early Catholic theologian Origen. Roman Catholics do not believe this today, however. Thus, Finney was worse than a modern Roman Catholic in his belief that man saves himself by a series of decisions. At least modern Roman Catholics say that once a man gets to Heaven he can't fall out!

This means that Finney believed a man is saved by repeated acts of rededication - even after he gets to Heaven! It means that he rejected salvation as a one-time experience.

The Reformation Rejected

Finney also denied the Blood atonement and imputation of Christ's righteousness. He wrote:

The atonement did not consist in the literal payment of the debt of sinners. It was not true that Christ suffered just what those for whom He died deserved to suffer...not that which cancelled sin in the sense of literally paying the indebtedness of sinners.¹⁶

Finney believed in what is called the governmental theory of atonement, which holds that Christ died "simply to remove an insurmountable obstacle out of the way of God's forgiveness of sinners."¹⁷ ***Finney did not believe that Christ died to pay for our sins.*** Read the last indented quotation (footnote 16) again carefully and you will see that this is true.

Here are several quotations from Finney which prove that he did not believe that Christ died to pay the debt for our sins:

Justification is not found in Christ's literally suffering the exact penalty of the law for them (sinners), and in this sense literally purchasing their justification and eternal salvation.¹⁸

You cannot find in your heart to demand "exact justice" at the hand of God, on the ground that Christ has literally paid your debt.¹⁹

For sinners to be forensically (legally) pronounced just, is impossible and absurd.²⁰

Michael S. Horton is correct when he paraphrases Finney's view:

Christ could not have died for anyone else's sins than his own.²¹

Remember that Finney said:

The atonement did not consist in the literal payment of the debt of sinners...which cancelled sin in the sense of literally paying the indebtedness of sinners.²²

Finney makes statements like these repeatedly in *Revival Lectures*, the *Autobiography*, and his *Systematic Theology*. Of course, the Bible teaches the opposite:

"Christ died for our sins" (I Corinthians 15:3).

Finney horribly misrepresented the atonement of Christ for our sins, and attacked the very foundation of the gospel.

Is It a "Wonderful Theological Fiction"?

Closely connected with the Blood Atonement is the imputation of Christ's righteousness. Historically, Protestants and Baptists have believed that Christ's righteousness is given or "imputed" to men and women when they are converted. But Finney called the imputation of Christ's righteousness a "wonderful theological fiction."²³ He taught that Christ's righteousness is not given or imputed to sinners. He so strongly disagreed with imputation that he wrote, "I could not but regard and treat this whole question of imputation as a theological fiction."²⁴ Again, Finney wrote:

His (Christ's) obedience could no more than justify Himself. It can never be imputed to us.²⁵

He maintained the view that man saves himself by a series of decisions rather than through the imputed righteousness of Christ. Of course, the Bible teaches the opposite. Christ's righteousness is imputed to us when we are saved (Romans 4:5, 8).

Here Finney struck a blow at the very foundation of Protestant and Baptist beliefs. Justification by faith through the imputed righteousness of Christ was the *very* doctrine which separated the Reformers from the Catholics (whose beliefs were similar to those of Finney).

The correct Biblical view of justification, and imputation (which Finney rejected) was given by A. A. Hodge:

The doctrine that justification is forensic (legal), and that it is based upon imputed righteousness was the watchword of the glorious Reformation - the one word of power which dissolved the venerable power of the Papacy.²⁶

Luther agreed. He made the doctrine of the imputation of Christ's righteousness crystal clear:

Righteousness, then, is such a faith and is called "God's righteousness," or "the righteousness that avails before God," because God gives it and counts it (imputes it) as righteousness for the sake of Christ, our Mediator.²⁷

John Wesley was in full agreement with Hodge and Luther on this point:

We are justified by faith, not by works. The meaning is, God justifies the believer for the sake of Christ's righteousness, and not for any righteousness of his own. So Calvin (Institutes 1, 2, c. 17) 'Christ is our righteousness, that, upon our believing, we should be accounted righteous (have Christ's righteousness imputed to us) by him.' St. Paul affirms this over and over; therefore I affirm it too. Faith is imputed for righteousness to every believer.²⁸

This quotation shows that John Wesley was in complete agreement with John Calvin on the imputation of Christ's righteousness and justification through faith in Jesus. Protestants and Baptists agreed on imputation before Finney.

John Bunyan, our Baptist theologian, author and preacher, gave the same view as Hodge, Luther, Wesley, and Calvin:

I believe, we are sinful creatures in ourselves, that no good thing done by us, can procure of God the imputation of the righteousness of Christ. But the imputation thereof is an act of grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. I believe that the offer of this (imputed) righteousness, as tendered in the gospel, is to be received by faith.²⁹

Finney declared the imputation of Christ's righteousness "wonderful theological fiction."³⁰ He wrote, "I could not but regard and treat this whole question of imputation as a theological fiction."³¹ Thus, Finney set himself against John Calvin, John Bunyan, John Wesley, A. A. Hodge, and the entire spectrum of Protestant and Baptist thought for over four hundred years. In fact, Finney had the arrogance to say, "Very little of the gospel has come out upon the world, for these hundreds of years, without being clogged and obscured by false theology."³²

How Could All of Them Be Wrong?

How could Luther, Calvin, Bunyan, Wesley and Hodge *have all been wrong* on justification by faith through the imputed righteousness of Christ? How could *all* the Protestants and Baptists have been wrong on this fundamental doctrine, and *only* Finney correct? *How can we agree that every Baptist and Protestant was wrong, waiting long centuries for Finney to come and correct them?*

The Bible itself proves that *Finney* was the one who was wrong (Romans 4:3-24):

"But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted (imputed) for righteousness" (Romans 4:5).

"But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus from the dead" (Romans 4:24).

It was not Luther, Calvin, Bunyan, Wesley or Hodge who "clogged and obscured" Biblical teaching concerning imputation and justification. It was

Charles G. Finney who rejected the foundational Protestant and Baptist doctrine of justification by faith alone through the imputed righteousness of Christ. It was Charles G. Finney who called the views of the Reformation "theological fiction," and substituted for correct Bible doctrine his own false idea that sinners save themselves by "a change of choice." It was Finney who has led Protestants and Baptists back to Rome.

I have heard several thoughtful men say that Methodism is the root-source of decisionism. I believe this to be a false thesis. The Methodists, though off on other points, stuck to the basic teachings of the Reformation regarding the pivotal doctrines of justification and imputation. It was Finney who changed these doctrines. As Iain H. Murray points out, "Finney differed from the Methodists in at least one major respect...They attempted no major reformulation of Christian doctrine."³³ No, it was Finney and his followers who paved the way toward the union with Rome that is unfolding in our time.

Finney Taught Catholics How to Get "Converts"

I have in my hand a book titled, *Catholic Revivalism: The American Experience 1830-1900*, by Jay P. Dolan, associate professor of history at the University of Notre Dame. It was published by the University of Notre Dame Press in 1978.

This book proves that Charles G. Finney taught a leading Catholic priest how to bring people into the Catholic Church. On page fifteen of the Introduction, Professor Dolan quotes a letter written by Finney, which the evangelist included in his memoirs:

Several of the lawyers that were present at this time converted in Rochester, gave up their profession and went into the ministry. Among these was one of Chancellor W (Walworth's) sons, at that time a young lawyer in Rochester, and who appeared at this time to be soundly converted. For some reason, with which I am not acquainted, he went to Europe and then to Rome, and finally became a Roman Catholic priest. He has been for many years laboring zealously to promote revivals of religion among them, holding protracted meetings; and, as he told me himself...trying to accomplish in the Roman Catholic Church what I was endeavoring to accomplish in the Protestant Church...He said he was laboring among the Roman Catholics to promote revivals of religion.³⁴

Professor Dolan writes, "The person to whom Finney referred was Clarence Walworth, lawyer, convert (of Finney's), Roman Catholic priest and one of the foremost parish mission preachers in nineteenth-century Catholic America."³⁵

The book goes on to show how Father Walworth brought Finney's techniques into Catholicism and used them to gain tens of thousands of Americans for the Catholic church.

The connection between Walworth's apostolate as a parish minister and Finney's revival ministry very poignantly illustrates the main thesis of this study. The religion of revivalism was not exclusively a Protestant enterprise, but it also swept through Catholic America in the second half of the nineteenth century.³⁶

Here are the methods Father Walworth learned from Finney:

Most Catholics are familiar with the parish mission. It was a time when a religious order preacher was invited to the parish to revive the religious vitality of the people. For a week or more the preacher would hammer home the saving truths of Christianity, urging people to repent and do penance for their sins. Groups of religious order preachers toured Catholic America conducting parish missions in an effort to revive the religion of the people.³⁷

Catholic "Revivals"

Let us note several things:

1. The "parish mission" was the Catholic equivalent to a week's "revival" meetings, as conducted by Finney and his followers.

Professor Dolan writes,

In this study "parish mission" and "Catholic revival meeting" are used interchangeably. The reasons for this are twofold. Nineteenth-century observers, Finney included, were quick to see

the similarity between the two phenomena and described the parish mission as a revival. In addition, the parish mission fostered a type of religion, evangelicalism, that has long been associated with the techniques of mass evangelism known as revivalism.³⁸

2. These Catholic "revival meetings" were started by a man who was "converted" in Finney's 1842 "Revival," held in Rochester, N.Y., a man named Father Clarence Walworth. This man continued to learn "revival" techniques from Finney for a number of years.
3. Father Walworth succeeded in making Finney's type of meetings an integral part of the Catholic Church, and tens of thousands were "converted" to Catholicism as a result.
4. The themes preached on in these Catholic "revivals" were similar to those of Finney: "repentance" as "penance."
5. The great Protestant and Baptist themes (which had been rejected by Finney) were never preached, such as
 - (1) Total human depravity (Ephesians 4:18-19; Colossians 1:21).
 - (2) Justification through a one-time trust in Jesus, i.e., conversion (Galatians 2:16).
 - (3) The imputation of Christ's righteousness changing the sinner's standing before a Holy God, rather than merely changing his life on earth (Romans 5:1, 9).
 - (4) Jesus as the mediator, the loving Son of God, who can be personally known as the only needed intercessor: This was not preached (I Timothy 2:5-6; I Timothy 1:15; John 14:6).

In place of these great Protestant and Baptist themes, Finney and his Roman Catholic admirers preached

- (1) The need for a human decision, rather than a conversion accomplished by God.
- (2) They also preached a system of good works, and repentance as penance, rather than the once-for-all washing of regeneration through the Blood of Jesus.

There never was a real revival among Roman Catholics in the nineteenth or twentieth century, such as those recorded time after time in Protestant and Baptist history. Why? Simply because true revival does *not* come by "urging people to repent and do penance for their sins."³⁹

Dr. Lloyd-Jones pointed out that there can be no real revival where total depravity, the centrality of Jesus, the Blood of Jesus, justification by faith and regeneration, rather than a decision, are not central.⁴⁰ Since all of those are exclusively Protestant doctrines, they cannot appear in Catholic preaching even today, and *did* not appear in the preaching of Father Walworth, Finney's convert and disciple.

What Father Walworth and his helpers *did* do, by directly copying Finney, was to build a machine that mass-produced people for the Catholic church. "Catholic revivals reached the working class more successfully than did their Protestant counterparts."⁴¹

It should not surprise us, knowing this material, that Billy Graham was embraced by the Catholic church in the late twentieth century. One hundred years of preparation, started by Finney's decisionist methods, and carried forth by Father Walworth and his helpers, lay behind Graham's inclusion of Catholics in his meeting. Catholics made up sixty percent or more of Graham's audiences. When he called them to come and "reconfirm their confirmation" or "repent," he was saying words they had heard for over a hundred years from Finney and his fellow decisionists like Father Clarence Walworth. Graham carefully avoided preaching on the great Protestant themes of total depravity, justification by a one-time trust in Christ, and the imputation of Christ's righteousness as strictly a change of standing before God, rather than merely a change of the individual. Thus, through Finney's influence, Graham preached subjects acceptable to Roman Catholics and avoided the great Protestant themes of the Reformation and the historic Baptists like the plague! In essence, Graham brought Finney's message to our

generation: save yourself by a decision and dedicate yourself repeatedly. This is a far cry from the helpless state of the lost proclaimed by Baptists and Protestants in the glory days of real revival in the past.

What we hear today from Promise Keepers, Bill Bright, Chuck Colson, TBN, and almost all other prominent new-evangelicals, is the message of decisionism, the message of Finney, perfectly acceptable to Roman Catholics, leading evangelicalism back to union with Rome.

Pollster George Barna shows how widely the Finney/Graham view of salvation by a decision is accepted among Roman Catholics today. An article in *Word* magazine is titled, "A Rise in Born-Again Catholics." Here is what Barna discovered:

A growing number of U.S. Roman Catholics say they are born-again, according to pollster George Barna. In just two years, there has been a 41 percent increase...The study involved a scientific sample of 1,007 adults nationwide.⁴²

Finney and Graham's decisionist form of salvation is sweeping through the Roman Catholic church and uniting the Catholics with decisionist Protestants. It is decisionism which is bringing about this union.

Salvation by a Decision

We have seen that Finney believed in repeated decisions, rather than a one-time conversion. He denied that Christ died for our sins. He denied the imputation of Christ's righteousness to the Christian. His teachings were so compatible to the Roman Catholic church that they have fully embraced his methods and his message. Now, here is the next major doctrine Finney changed. ***He preached salvation by human choice rather than conversion accomplished by God.*** For the effect it has had on evangelicalism, this is ***by far*** the most serious error he taught. It has literally ruined the spiritual life of our nation, and brought us to a point where Billy Graham could say, "We are a society poised on the brink of self destruction."⁴³

Finney wrote:

Regeneration consists in the sinner changing his ultimate choice...in other words, a turning from the supreme choice of self-gratification to the supreme love of God...the work accomplished is a change of choice.⁴⁴

Iain H. Murray said:

For Finney a **public action** had become an essential part of evangelism. He believed that all that was needed for conversion was a resolution signified by standing, kneeling, or coming forward, and because the Holy Spirit always acts when a sinner acts, the public resolution could be treated as 'identical with the miraculous inward change of sudden conversion.'⁴⁵

That is not Protestant or Baptist teaching. It is similar to what the heretic Pelagius taught in the fifth century, the heresy of Pelagianism.

H. C. Thiessen gives a far more Scriptural definition of regeneration, "We may define regeneration as the communication of divine life to the soul."⁴⁶ That is orthodox, Scriptural teaching regarding the new birth.

Before Finney, all Protestants and Baptists believed this. They believed that conversion was something **God** did to you. Finney changed this to something that **you** do out of obedience to God.

The old gospel taught that man was lost and needed to be saved, because he couldn't save himself. Finney's "new" gospel taught that man could save **himself** because he wasn't really lost. Man could save himself by a "choice" or decision. He did not need Jesus to die for his sins. And because man was strong enough to save himself, he could also lose his salvation, repeatedly, even after he got to Heaven!

Thus, Finney taught that man did not need Jesus at all, in any real, ontological sense. Man could obey God and save himself. This is not Christ-centered theology. It is Pelagianism. C. H. Spurgeon said, "We do not often agree with Mr. Finney's theology."⁴⁷ Spurgeon's assistant, V. J. Charlesworth, said, "It would need a lengthy paper to combat the Pelagian heresy which is so conspicuous in these quotations" (from Finney).⁴⁸

Some have called Finney a semi-Pelagianist, but this is an error. A careful study of his work reveals he is a thoroughgoing Pelagian heretic, as Rev. Charlesworth indicated. This heresy has permeated much of evangelicalism in our day. Although most evangelicals would reject several of Finney's ideas, yet many of these same people embrace his false theory of decisionism. They should see **where** these doctrines of decisionism came from, and where they lead - into the arms of the Catholic church.

It was Finney who rejected the great doctrines of the Reformation and opened the door for evangelicals to take his decisionist road back to Rome.

By chopping out the imputation of Christ's righteousness, the total depravity of man, and justification solely by faith in Jesus, Finney cut away the foundational teachings of all basic Protestant and Baptist thought. That is why so many evangelical preachers themselves are lost. They have tried one form or another of the Catholic/Finney plan of salvation, the Pelagian plan of decisionism.

Finney wrote, "Men are to be converted, not by a change wrought in their nature or constitution by creative power, but by the truth made effectual by the Holy Ghost."⁴⁹ He asked, "What is regeneration? What is it but the beginning of obedience to God?"⁵⁰ "When an individual actually chooses to obey God, he is a Christian."⁵¹ ***A Muslim could say that. A Jehovah's Witness could say that. And many modern evangelicals do say that!*** Finney says, "What is regeneration? What is it but a new beginning of obedience to God?" Thiessen said, "We may define regeneration as the communication of divine life to the soul." ***These are two opposite ideas. Things that are different are not the same!***

Several elements are missing in Finney's decisionist view of conversion:

- (1) No mention of the mediatorial work of Jesus Christ, I Timothy 2:5; John 14:6.
- (2) No mention of sin, I Timothy 1:15.
- (3) No mention of the Blood of Jesus washing sins away, away, I John 1:7.
- (4) No mention of the gospel of Christ, I Corinthians 15:1-4.

Perhaps a person could trust Jesus and not mention those four points in his testimony. However, it seems to me that Finney should have put much more emphasis on what Jesus does ***for*** us. The great evangelist Asahel Nettleton, the man who opposed Finney, said this:

We see why it is that sinners say so little about the Saviour. They do not feel that they are lost. They that are whole, need not a physician, but they that are sick.⁵²

Finney himself was quite aware that he was changing what Baptists and Protestants had always believed about conversion. Iain H. Murray writes:

Finney himself was deeply conscious of the radical contrast between his own preaching and the orthodoxy of

his day. By 1835 he was ready to tell his hearers that he was presenting what was virtually a new theology of conversion: 'The truth is that very little of the Gospel has come out upon the world, for these hundreds of years, without being clogged and obscured by false theology.' And he made clear the very point that Nettleton had been one of the first to suspect, that the new measures* were to be defended on the basis of a new theology.⁵³

Murray is correct. Finney changed evangelicalism. The old belief of conversion, that brought with it three great periods of revival, was changed by Finney into the decisionism that is common throughout the Western world today.

Satan Attacks Conversion Through Finney and His Followers

I believe that Satan used Charles G. Finney to destroy the old religion of revival and bring in the new religion of decisionism - the road back to Rome. I am not alone in my belief that Satan used Finney. Bennet Tyler wrote a biography of Asahel Nettleton, which was published in 1854. In it, Tyler wrote:

Revivals have never been permitted by Satan to continue long without some direct effort on his part to counterwork them. And so it was to be now. The form of this attack was crafty; it was made by assuming the form of an angel of light...occasioned principally by the Rev. Charles G. Finney.⁵⁴

Satan used Finney as "an angel of light" to bring decisionism to our churches and lead us to ruin and to Catholicism.

With Finney's new religion of decisionism, everyone who has made *any sort* of decision is now accepted as a Christian and as a member of the "universal church" in the eyes of new-evangelicals. No wonder Charles Colson, Bill Bright, Pat Robertson, and J. I. Packer have issued a document called "Evangelicals and Catholics Together," which declares that all active Catholics are our "brothers and sisters in Christ."⁵⁵ They have been brought to this position by the decisionism of Charles G. Finney. Mr. Colson and Dr.

*Coming forward to make a public profession, etc.

Packer say they hold Reformation doctrine, but *in practice* they are decisionists. Thus, decisionism has become the road back to Catholicism in our time.

But the old way of conversion is the only way to Heaven. Jesus said:

"Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3)

"Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again" (John 3:7)

"Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:3).

A friend of mine read the manuscript of this book and then said that he always wondered how the churches moved so quickly from revival to apostasy, "from Philadelphia to Laodicea," as he put it. After reading this book, *he now believes Satan used Charles Finney to bring in the end-time apostasy*. That is an interesting position, worthy of far more attention than is possible to devote to it now. Jesus said, "Many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many" (Matthew 24:11).

Needed: A Converted Church Membership

In 1903 the American Baptist Publication Society published a book titled, *The Great Awakening of 1740*, by Rev. F. L. Chapell. This book was issued by the old Northern Baptist Convention (later called the American Baptist Convention), and Rev. Chapell was a mainstream Northern Baptist in 1903. Chapell's book reveals that the situation before the First Great Awakening was similar to our day in many ways:

The voice of the few and scattered Baptists was raised from time to time in favor of a converted church-membership, but with little general effect since they had no legal or influential standing...The churches themselves were in a very low state of spiritual life and power, since a large portion of their members knew nothing of that heart experience which constitutes the essence of true

religion...Thus it came to pass that there were not only unconverted and unspiritual men in the ministry, but there were found leading and prominent divines to argue that such a state of things was perfectly proper, that it was not necessary to have an experimental knowledge of religion (i.e. conversion) in order to preach it...People heard scarcely anything in many cases from the pulpit that was at all searching, for a dead ministry must, of course, preach dead sermons. But if the truth did sometimes fall upon the people, it had but little effect, when they remembered that they...had fulfilled the requirements of the church. They considered that they were Christians already, in some sense...The general result was, of course, that the need of conversion was practically denied. Such was the state of the best, or at least the most influential portion of Protestantism in the earlier years of the eighteenth century...You will see that to human view Christianity was clean gone forever. The floods of ungodly men were sweeping on, and a corrupt and enervated church (was the result). Numbers of them held at this time, that it was quite difficult, in fact impossible, to discover from the affections whether regeneration had taken place or not...A conscious experience of the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit was not insisted upon...The cornerstone of the Baptist faith is a professedly converted church-membership. Before the Great Awakening, none except Baptists acknowledged this principle...The dark days that preceded the Great Awakening will come again unless somebody stands firmly and clearly and decidedly by the doctrine of a converted church-membership.⁵⁶

The words that Rev. Chapell wrote in 1903 have come true. We need to stand for the old Baptist doctrine of conversion:

The dark days that preceded the Great Awakening will come again unless somebody stands firmly and clearly and decidedly by the doctrine of a converted church-membership.⁵⁷

These terrible days are characterized by literally millions of lost church members. Did you know that one half of the nation's fifteen million Southern Baptists give less than one dollar a year in church? Did you know that one half of these fifteen million Baptists did not attend church even one time last year?⁵⁸ Thomas Ascol, an SBC pastor and author, blames the "modern evangelistic technique, geared toward getting a sinner to agree with some facts and recite a prayer."⁵⁹ He claims that decisionist methods have produced the Southern Baptist Convention, with a full fifteen million members, many of whom never attend church, and many of whom give less than a dollar apiece each year.

The situation in the Southern Baptist Convention reveals problems which exist in all evangelical churches. The SBC is the mirror-image of evangelicalism in general. When you see a major error in the SBC, you can be quite sure it also exists in evangelicalism at large.

Jesus gave this prophetic warning:

"And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax (grow) cold" (Matthew 24:11-12).

Verse eleven tells us that "false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many." Verse twelve shows us that "iniquity" (Greek: anomian = lawlessness) will "abound" and that this will cause the love (Greek: agapé = Christian love) of Christians to grow cold. The "iniquity" of the last days is a direct product of the deceptions of the false prophets in the previous verse. ***The coldness of real Christians is a result of the chaotic lawlessness of the unconverted members of the churches to which they belong.***

Churches fill up with those who practice fornication, covetousness, railing, drunkenness, extortion, etc. (I Corinthians 5:11). Most churches today refuse to obey I Corinthians 5:13 and "Put away from among yourselves that wicked person." Since this is not done very often in our day, the local churches have become literal hot-beds of iniquity, and bring great discouragement to the few members, the small remnant, who are truly converted. "And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold."

Southern Baptist Chaos

A study conducted by the Home Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention reveals that more than sixty percent of adults baptized in Southern

