

## CHAPTER SIX

### THE SOURCE OF THE CESSPOOL

"But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them"

- II Peter 2:1

"In Finney's theology, God is not sovereign; man is not a sinner by nature; the atonement is not a true payment for sin; justification by imputation is insulting to reason and morality; the new birth is simply the result of successful techniques, and revival is a natural result of clever campaigns."

- Dr. Michael S. Horton

"He is not only an enemy of evangelical Protestantism, but of historic Christianity."

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Michael S. Horton is the president of Christians United for Reformation. He is a graduate of Biola University and has a Ph.D. from Oxford University. He is the author of eight books, including *The Agony of Deceit*, an exposé of the charismatic "faith" teachers, Kenneth Copeland, Kenneth Hagin, and Frederick K. Price. Here is a synopsis of an article on Charles G. Finney by Dr. Horton:

Jerry Falwell calls him "one of my heroes and a hero to many evangelicals, including Billy Graham." I recall wandering through the Billy Graham Center some years ago, observing the place of honor given to Finney in the evangelical tradition, reinforced by the first class I had in theology at a Christian college, where Finney's work was required reading. The New York revivalist was the oft-quoted and celebrated champion of the Christian singer Keith Green and the Youth With a Mission organization.

Finney is particularly esteemed among the leaders of the Christian Right and the Christian Left, by both Jerry Falwell and Jim Wallis (Sojourners' magazine), and his imprint can be seen in movements that appear to be diverse, but in reality are merely heirs to Finney's legacy. From the Vineyard movement and the church growth movement to the political and social crusades, televangelism, and the Promise-Keepers movement, as a former Wheaton College president rather glowingly cheered, "Finney lives on!"

Evangelists pitched their American gospel in terms of its practical usefulness to the individual and the nation. That is why Finney is so popular. He is the tallest marker in the shift from Reformation orthodoxy, evident in the Great Awakening (under Edwards and Whitefield) to...Pelagian revivalism. To demonstrate the debt of modern evangelicalism to Finney, we must first notice his theological departures. ***From these departures, Finney became the father of the antecedents to some of today's greatest challenges within the evangelical churches themselves: namely, the church growth movement, pentecostalism and political revivalism.***

Who was Finney? Reacting against the (Protestant theology) of the Great Awakening, (Finney) turned from God to humans, from the preaching of objective content (namely, Christ and him crucified) to the emphasis on getting a person to "make a decision."

Finney began conducting revivals in upstate New York. ***One of his most popular sermons was, "Sinners Bound to Change Their Own Hearts."***

His "New Measures" included the "anxious bench" (precursor to today's altar call), emotional tactics that led to fainting and weeping, and other "excitements," as Finney and his followers called them.

What's So Wrong With Finney's Theology?

First, one need go no further than the table of contents of his "Systematic Theology" to learn that Finney's entire theology revolved around human morality. Finney did not really write a Systematic Theology, but a collection of

essays on ethics. But that is not to say that Finney's Systematic Theology does not contain some significant theological statements.

In answer to the question, "Does a Christian cease to be a Christian, whenever he commits a sin?", Finney answers: "Whenever he sins, he must, for the time being, cease to be holy. This is self-evident. Whenever he sins, he must be condemned; he must incur the penalty of the law of God" (p. 46).

Finney declares of the Reformation's formula "simultaneously justified and sinful," "This error has slain more souls, I fear, than all the universalism that ever cursed the world." For, "***Whenever a Christian sins he comes under condemnation, and must repent and do his first works, or be lost***" (p. 60).

We will return to Finney's doctrine of justification, but it must be noted that it rests upon a denial of the doctrine of original sin. This Biblical teaching insists that we are all born into this world inheriting Adam's guilt and corruption. But Finney followed Pelagius, the 5th-century heretic, in denying this doctrine.

Instead, Finney believed that human beings were capable of choosing whether they would be corrupt by nature or redeemed, referring to original sin as an "anti-scriptural and nonsensical dogma" (p. 179). In clear terms, Finney denied the notion that human beings possess a sinful nature (ibid.). Therefore, if Adam leads us into sin, not by our inheriting his guilt and corruption, but by following his poor example, this leads logically to the view of Christ, the Second Adam, as saving by example. This is precisely where Finney takes it, in his explanation of the atonement.\*

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\*It is clear from the above material by Dr. Horton that Finney was a complete Pelagian. He did not believe that human nature was ruined by the Fall. He believed that man's will is free at all times. This is a denial of the Protestant and Baptist doctrine of original sin, and its fruit (i.e. total depravity).

The first thing we must note about the atonement, Finney says, is that *Christ could not have died for anyone else's sins than his own.*\* Finney did believe that Christ died for something - not for someone, but for something. In other words, he died for a purpose, but not for people. *The purpose of that death was to reassert God's moral government and to lead us to eternal life by example*, as Adam's example excited us to sin.

*Having nothing to do with original sin, a substitutionary atonement, and the supernatural character of the new birth, Finney proceeds to attack "the article by which the church stands or falls" - justification by grace alone through faith alone.*

The Protestant Reformers insisted, on the basis of clear biblical texts, that justification (in the Greek, "to declare righteous," rather than "to make righteous") was a forensic (i.e., "legal") verdict. In other words, whereas Rome maintained that justification was a process of making a bad person better, the Reformers argued that it was a declaration or pronouncement that had someone else's righteousness (i.e., Christ's) as its basis. Therefore, it was a perfect, once-for-all verdict of right-standing at the beginning of the Christian life, not in the middle or at the end.

To this, Finney replied, "The doctrine of an imputed righteousness, or that Christ's obedience to the law was accounted as our obedience, is founded on a most false and nonsensical assumption." After all, Christ's righteousness "could do no more than justify himself. It can never be imputed to us..." (pp. 320-2).

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\*Dr. Horton paraphrases Finney from pp. 219, 362 and 363 of *Finney's Systematic Theology* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Bethany House Publishers, 1994). For instance, Finney said, "His (Christ's) obedience could no more than justify Himself" (*Systematic Theology*, p. 363). Finney said, "Justification is not founded in Christ's literally suffering the exact penalty of the law and purchasing eternal salvation" (*Systematic Theology*, p. 373). "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. To represent the work and death of Christ as the ground of justification in this sense is a snare and a stumbling-block" (*Systematic Theology*, p. 375).

The view that faith is the sole condition of justification is "the antinomian view," Finney asserts. "We shall see that perseverance in obedience to the end of life is also a condition of justification" (pp. 326-7). Each act of sin requires "a fresh justification" (p. 331).

His "New Measures," like today's church growth movement, made human choices and emotions the center of the church's ministry, (and) ridiculed theology. When the leaders of the church growth movement claim that theology gets in the way of growth and insist that it does not matter what a particular church believes, they are displaying their debt to Finney. *When leaders of the Vineyard movement praise this sub-Christian enterprise and the barking, roaring, screaming, laughing, and other strange phenomena on the basis that "it works" and one must judge the truth by its fruit, they are following Finney.*

Thus, in Finney's theology, *God is not sovereign; man is not a sinner by nature; the atonement is not a true payment for sin; justification by imputation is insulting to reason and morality; the new birth is simply the result of successful techniques, and revival is a natural result of clever campaigns.*

The influence he exercised and continues to exercise to this day is pervasive. Not only did the revivalist abandon the material principle of the Reformation (justification), he repudiated doctrines, such as original sin and the substitutionary atonement. *Therefore, Finney is not merely an Arminian, but a Pelagian. He is not only an enemy of evangelical Protestantism, but of historic Christianity.* (All quotes are from Charles G. Finney, *Finney's Systematic Theology*, Bethany, 1976).<sup>1\*</sup>

Finney believed that a person loses his salvation when he sins. Finney denied the doctrine of original sin, following the fifth-century heretic Pelagius. Thus, Finney did not believe that man has a sinful nature. Finney did not believe that Christ died for our sins. He believed that Christ's death merely saves us by example. He did not believe Christ died for our sins in any real

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\*Emphasis and explanation in this quotation by Dr. Horton was given by the authors.

sense. Finney did not believe that the new birth is brought about by the Holy Spirit. Finney did not believe in justification by faith in Jesus alone. Finney did not believe in the imputed righteousness of Christ. Finney believed that justification comes only by "obedience to the end of life." For Finney, "man is not a sinner by nature; the atonement is not a payment for sin; justification by imputation is false; the new birth is simply the result of successful techniques, and revival is the natural result of clever campaigns."<sup>2</sup>

### **Finney's Testimony**

Now we will examine the "salvation" testimony of the man who held so many false, unscriptural doctrines. Here is Finney's printed "conversion" experience, given in his own words:

But after this distinct revelation had stood for some little time before my mind, the question seemed to be put, "Will you accept it, now, to-day?" I replied, "Yes, I will accept it to-day, or I will die in the attempt."...As I turned to go up into the woods, I recollect to have said, "I will give my heart to God, or I will never come down from there." I recollect repeating this as I went up - "I will give my heart to God before I ever come down again."...Just at that point this passage of Scripture seemed to drop into my mind with a flood of light: "Then shall ye go and pray unto me, and I will harken unto you. Then shall ye seek me and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart." I instantly seized hold of this with my heart. I had intellectually believed the Bible before; but never had the truth been in my mind that faith was a voluntary trust instead of an intellectual state. I was as conscious as I was of my existence, of trusting at that moment in God's veracity. Somehow I knew that that was a passage of Scripture, though I do not think I had ever read it. I knew that it was God's word, and God's voice, as it were, that spoke to me. I cried to Him, "Lord, I take thee at thy word. Now thou knowest that I do search for thee with all my heart, and that I have come here to pray to thee; and thou hast promised to hear me." That seemed to settle the question that I could, then that day, perform my vow. The Spirit seemed to lay stress upon that idea in the text, "When

you search for me with all your heart." The question of when, that is of the present time, seemed to fall heavily into my heart. I told the Lord that I should take him at his word; that he could not lie; and that therefore I was sure that he heard my prayer, and that he would be found of me.<sup>3</sup>

Notice several things about this testimony. On the day he claims salvation, a number of things are missing from Finney's testimony. First, there is no clear word about Jesus Christ in his account. He never mentions the mediatorial work of Christ. In fact, he never mentions Jesus at all! Second, there is no mention of sin. Third, there is no mention of the Blood of Jesus. Fourth, there is no mention of the gospel of Christ (cf. I Corinthians 15:1-4).

Perhaps a person could trust Jesus and not mention the four points above in his testimony. However, it seems to me that he would say at least a *little* more about what Jesus did for him. ***Surely Finney should have mentioned that Jesus forgave his sins in his testimony.***

Writing for Spurgeon in the May, 1876 *Sword and the Trowel*, V. J. Charlesworth said:

***We are not surprised that, holding the views he did, Mr. Finney should write his life story with so little reference to the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ; and that love to a personal Saviour as the constraining motive of Christian obedience should be so conspicuous by its absence.***<sup>4</sup>

Charlesworth makes an astute observation here. One of the things you will notice, as you read Finney's memoirs, is how little he speaks of Jesus' forgiveness, and ***how little he speaks of Jesus at all!***

Dr. J. Stanley Mattson has written this regarding Finney's "conversion":

What was wholly new in terms of late eighteenth and nineteenth century New England experience, however, was the idea of salvation as "an offer of something to be accepted"...which required nothing more than a willing receiver...***At the moment of his conversion young Finney began forging the outlines of a theology of conversion and revivalism which would endure to the present day.***<sup>5</sup>

Finney's "conversion" contained wrong ideas, and so, his theology was also wrong. As Mattson says, his false ideas continue "to the present day."<sup>6</sup>

Thus, Charles Finney's "testimony" has four missing elements:

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

Astounding, isn't it? Could this be the reason so many of our churches are morally and spiritually bankrupt today? Could our low spiritual condition be at least partly due to the fact that so much of our religion is rooted in the teachings of a man with such a questionable testimony, a man who believed so many wrong ideas about salvation?

We believe that many problems in evangelicalism today can be traced to the apparently unconverted heart of Charles G. Finney, the man who denied the Blood atonement of Christ, did not believe that man has a sinful nature, and taught that the new birth is a product of man's own choice, rather than the work of the Holy Spirit.

This apparently unconverted man has poisoned evangelical religion. His false doctrines have not helped preachers add real converts to their churches. We think that his false doctrine of decisionism has so angered a holy God that He has not sent a major regional revival for over ninety years.

***It is our view that unless Finney's idea that man is saved by a decision is given up, there will never be another great classical and Biblical revival.*** The perfidious, Hell-inspired, demonic doctrine that a man is saved by making a decision must, in our judgment, be repudiated, banned, and blasted before a holy God will ever again bless the churches in our land with true revival.

Now let us examine Finney's alleged conversion. First, he says, "The question seemed to be put, 'Will you accept it now, to-day?' I replied, 'Yes, I will accept it to-day, or I will die in the attempt.'" Notice that he said, "I will accept 'it'" instead of "I will accept Jesus" or "I will accept Him." This is doctrinal belief, the idea that you accept a doctrine ("it") rather than accepting the person, Jesus Christ. This is the form of Finneyism into which Zane Hodges and Charles Ryrie seem to fall. The idea that man is saved by believing doctrines (i.e. Charles Ryrie,<sup>7</sup> Zane Hodges,<sup>8</sup>) is exemplified in this

early part of Finney's false "testimony." But no one is saved by believing a doctrine, even if it is a true doctrine. We are only saved by believing in Jesus, **Himself**, not by believing things **about** Jesus. A man who has merely believed things **about** Jesus is still a lost man on his way to Hell.

Second, Finney says, "Lord, I take thee at thy word. Thou knowest that I do search for thee with all my heart...That seemed to settle the question that I could then, that day, perform my vow." So Finney adds making a "vow" to doctrinal belief. But no one is saved by making a vow. This is similar to Roman Catholicism. This is Lordship salvation, similar to what John MacArthur teaches. That is why one leading evangelical called MacArthur's Lordship Salvation "the road back to Rome." He said this because the Roman Catholic church has always preached salvation through Lordship decisions and "vows," rather than through personal faith, which takes the lost sinner directly to Jesus for cleansing in His Blood. That is our glorious, Biblical, Protestant and Baptist gospel of grace! MacArthur's "Lordship salvation" is not salvation by grace through Jesus. It is indeed the road back to Rome! That is where decisionism in all its forms takes us, as Chuck Colson and J. I. Packer illustrate in their document, "Evangelicals and Catholics Together."

#### **Decisionism Instead of Conversion**

Finney's view of salvation by a decision has been embraced by much of evangelicalism. As Michael Horton pointed out:

Jerry Falwell calls him "one of my heroes and a hero to many evangelicals, including Billy Graham." I recall wandering through the Billy Graham Center some years ago, observing the place of honor given to Finney in the evangelical tradition...as a former Wheaton College president rather glowingly cheered, "Finney lives on!"<sup>9</sup>

The older Biblical view of conversion has been largely forgotten. This is the reason so many are now religious but lost. This is the reason that there is so little revival.

Dr. Asahel Nettleton (1783-1843) was the last major evangelical figure to fully oppose the decisionist measures of Charles G. Finney. Nettleton wrote:

His (Finney's) friends are certainly labouring to introduce those very measures, which I have ever regarded as ultimately working ruin to our churches, and

against which I have always guarded as ruinous to the character of revivals.

The friends of brother Finney are afraid to interfere to correct anything, lest they should do mischief, or be denounced as enemies of revivals. And so the bad must all be defended with the good. This sentiment adopted, ***will certainly ruin revivals.\****

These evils are destined to be propagated from generation to generation, waxing worse and worse. A generation will arise not knowing that a revival ever did or can exist without all those evils.<sup>10</sup>

Nettleton's words foretold, with piercing accuracy, what the future would hold. Finney's decisionist measures brought about a condition where revival has become nearly impossible because we have quenched the Spirit through the use of his methods and false theology. Today, classical revival is almost unheard of in the Western world as a result.

In our time, as in Dr. Nettleton's day, friends of Finney's decisionism "are afraid to interfere to correct anything, lest they should...be denounced as enemies of revivals." Even today, men don't want to stir the pot, or re-evaluate Finney's ideas, which are still so much a part of evangelism. Nettleton said that such fear and unwillingness to correct Finney's decisionism "will certainly ruin revivals."

I must repeat here Nettleton's prediction concerning the growth of Finney's methods, which has continued until the present:

These evils are destined to be propagated from generation to generation, waxing worse and worse.<sup>11</sup>

This prediction, given over one hundred and fifty years ago, has come true. ***Finney's decisionist methods changed evangelism, short circuited real conversions, and ultimately stopped revival.*** Today we live in the burned out aftermath, our churches either liberal, charismatic, or dead; our people claiming to be born again while missing church, divorcing, dancing, committing adultery, holding false doctrine, and aborting their children. An increasing number of pastors commit adultery, while our youth go wild. All of this is the sordid result of that terrible transition from conversion to decisionism which Asahel Nettleton foretold.

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\*Emphasis by Dr. Nettleton.

## APPLICATION

How do we overturn the horrible effects of Finneyism? As a Baptist, I am convinced that the local church is the vehicle through which God promotes His work in the world. Therefore it is within the local church that decisionism must be replaced by true conversions. To clarify true and false conversion, we present this application in outline form.

### I. Conversion - the false and the true.

#### 1. False ideas concerning conversion

- (1) Conversion is not baptism or church membership.  
These are human works, something a human being can do.

"For by grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9)

- (2) Conversion is not a "feeling" or emotion. Feelings and emotions are deceptive and can change. Conversion is permanent and cannot be changed.

"I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish" (John 10:28)

"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature" (II Corinthians 5:17).

It is foolish to base salvation on the feelings and emotions of a "desperately wicked" heart.

"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" (Jeremiah 17:9).

"For from within, out of the heart of man, proceed evil thoughts" (Mark 7:21)

Man's heart and its "feelings" and emotions are not trustworthy in this matter of conversion.

- (3) Conversion is not saying "the sinner's prayer," or "asking for forgiveness." These are human works, something that humans can do. **Conversion is something God does for us.** I, myself was saved without saying any prayer. So were John Wesley and Charles Spurgeon. We simply believed on Jesus. Wesley, Spurgeon, and I all believed in "the finished work of Jesus" years before we were converted. At conversion, we believed in Jesus, **Himself!** This is the only decision or "work" God will accept.

"This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent" (John 6:29).

"Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost" (Titus 3:5).

- (4) Conversion is not making Christ Lord of every area of your life. Lost sinners are spiritually dead, and cannot make Jesus Lord of **any** area of their lives, much less **every** area.

"Dead in trespasses and sins" (Ephesians 2:1)

"By nature the children of wrath" (Ephesians 2:3)

"Dead in sins" (Ephesians 2:5).

- (5) Conversion is not believing certain doctrines about Jesus. Romans 10:9-10 is often misapplied to mean that a person is converted by believing the doctrine that Jesus rose from the dead, or the doctrine that He died for our sins. But verse 11 indicates that conversion itself comes by "believing on him," not things **about** Him. Verse 14 shows that calling on Him without believing on Him does not bring conversion. Roman Catholics believe **that** He died for us and rose from the dead.

But they do not believe "on Him." Instead, they believe on their own works for salvation, much like modern decisionists. No wonder we now have Chuck Colson and J. I. Packer proclaiming "Evangelicals and Catholics Together." Charles H. Spurgeon said, "Alas! he was resting in the *plan*, but he had not believed in the *person*. The plan of salvation is most blessed, but it can avail us nothing unless we personally believe in the Lord Jesus Christ Himself."<sup>12</sup>

- (6) Conversion is not what is commonly called a decision. Probably the clearest verse on this is John 1:13:

"Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."

- (7) Conversion is not refuted or disproved by the verses most often used to support decisionism. Actually, *decisionists have very few verses to support their position*. Here are a few popular ones answered.

1. Joel 3:14

"Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision: for the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision"

This refers to people in the army of the Antichrist. They are in this valley to be destroyed by God. The decision to destroy them is God's. It is totally false, and a horrible use of hermeneutics,\* to apply this to decisions today.

2. Romans 10:9-14

"That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and

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\*Bible interpretation.

with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed. For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?"

Dr. John R. Rice answers the wrong use of the use of the passage in his famous tract, *What Must I Do To Be Saved?*, written in 1945. This 1945 statement clears up the decisionist use of Romans 10:9-14. Dr. Rice wrote, "Many people believe that a sinner cannot be saved without a period of prayer, without consciously calling on God. However, the Bible does not say that a sinner must pray in order to be saved. In fact, immediately following the verse in Romans 10:13 is an explanation which shows that calling on God is *an evidence of faith in the heart and that it is really faith which settles the matter*...no matter how long one prays, if he does not trust in Christ, he can never be saved. If he trusts in Christ without conscious prayer, then he is saved already. There is just one plan of salvation and just one step a sinner must take to secure it. That step is to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ."<sup>13</sup>

Though Dr. Rice was not always consistent (who is?), we think his 1945 comment, given above, is the correct interpretation of Romans 10:9-14. I myself

was saved without praying at all. I simply believed on Jesus. Calling on Jesus (v. 13) does not save unless there is also union with Him (v. 14). It is the union with Him that saves, not the prayer (Acts 16:31).

3. Matthew 10:32

"Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven."

The context of this verse is persecution (see Matthew 10:28-39). This verse declares that converted people will confess Jesus while **b e i n g** persecuted, but the religious lost will deny Him under persecution, as they did in Nazi Germany, the former USSR, Red China, and Cuba. The verse does not in any way apply to the act of "coming forward," "making a decision," or "confessing Jesus with your mouth" in the comfort of an evangelistic meeting. It just isn't in this verse.

2. True ideas concerning conversion

(1) Conversion is a miracle. Since it is a miracle, it is something **God does** for us, not something **we do** by baptism, church membership, a feeling, Lordship commitment, a sinner's prayer, doctrinal belief, or any other work except believing **on** Jesus.

"This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent" (John 6:29).

"But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God" (John 1:12).

"Whose heart the Lord opened" (Acts 16:14).

"Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ (by grace ye are saved;)" (Ephesians 2:5).

"And you, being dead in your sins, and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven all trespasses" (Colossians 2:13).

(2) Conversion is instantaneous. It does not occur through a process or over a period of time. There is usually a period (sometimes long, sometimes short) in which a person hears the gospel and thinks about it, but conversion *itself* always happens instantly, in a short period of time. This is true of *every* conversion reported in the Bible, from the conversion of the thief on the cross (Luke 23:39-43) to the conversion of the Apostle Paul (Acts 26:9-18). All conversions in the Bible happened in a few moments of time, such as those converted at Pentecost (Acts 2:37-41).

(3) Conversion comes by believing "into" and "on" Jesus.

"That whosoever believeth *in* him should not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:15).

The Greek word for "in" is "eis." Zodhiates says of this word, "The primary idea of motion *into* any place or thing...meaning 'into.'"<sup>14</sup>

"Believe *on* the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved" (Acts 16:31).

Here the Greek word for "on" is "epi." Zodhiates gives us the meaning: "On or upon - to rest upon."<sup>15</sup> So, Biblical conversion comes in only one way: by believing "into" Jesus, in other words, to believe "on" Jesus. These concepts are given repeatedly in our old

hymns by major hymn-writers like William Cowper, Charlotte Elliott, Charles Wesley, and countless others.

"Rock of ages, cleft for me,  
Let me hide myself *in Thee*."

"Just as I am, without one plea,  
But that Thy blood was shed for me,  
And that Thou biddst me come *to Thee*,  
O Lamb of God, I come, I come."

"Out of my bondage, sorrow, and night,  
Jesus, I come *to Thee*."

A person must actually come *to* the resurrected Jesus and trust in *Him alone* to be saved (Acts 16:31). Nothing else will result in the salvation of a human being:

"We have heard the joyful sound,  
Jesus saves! Jesus saves!  
Spread the tidings all around,  
Jesus saves! Jesus saves!"

Baptism, church membership, a feeling, Lordship commitment, a sinner's prayer, belief in doctrines or a decision (other than a decision to believe *on* Jesus, Himself) will *not* save. Lordship commitment only makes the problem greater.

"Salvation is of the Lord" (Jonah 2:9).

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

As C. H. Spurgeon said, "Jesus invites all those who labour and are heavy laden to come to Him,

and He will give them rest. He does not promise this to their merely dreaming about Him. They must **come**; and they must come **to Him**, and not merely to the church, to baptism, or to the orthodox faith, or to anything short of His divine person."<sup>16</sup>

## II. Remedies for decisionism - incorrect and correct.

### 1. Incorrect remedies for decisionism

(1) Some have felt that fully embracing Reformed theology will of itself cure decisionism. This notion has been proven false by the fact that many Reformed churches are filled with people who base their salvation on some form of decisionism, usually doctrinal belief or Lordship salvation. The very fact that many Reformed churches are all full of decisionists of these forms proves that shifting one's doctrine **alone** does **not** cure decisionism.

(2) Giving up the public invitation. Some have felt that doing away with the invitation will cure decisionism. But most often it has not cured this problem in their own churches, where many of their people cling to various decisionist ideas, even though no public invitation is given. Several large churches in the Los Angeles area are all full of decisionism, though a public invitation is never given.

It is not the form of the invitation alone that nurtures decisionism, but rather what is said in private to the inquiring soul.

***What is done and said during the invitation, and especially afterwards, either leads to decisionism or to Jesus.***

(3) Lordship salvation. Adding a 'Lordship' commitment to the gospel (I Corinthians 15:1-4) has been seen as a cure for decisionism. But adding another human work to the gospel only makes the problem of decisionism worse. ***This error cannot be overcome by adding even more human***

**works!** Lordship commitment can only come **after** the moment of conversion, as a result of it, otherwise salvation is by works rather than solely and completely by believing on Jesus (Acts 16:31).

- (4) Giving up the sinner's prayer. Merely giving up this prayer does not cure decisionism. But, when using this prayer, the pastor must make sure that the inquirer is trusting Jesus, not the prayer itself, for salvation. A form of this prayer is used with every inquirer in our church. We have them pray, "Jesus, I come to you. Wash away my sins with your Blood. Amen." That's **all** we have them pray.

## 2. Correct remedies for decisionism.

- (1) Reinstating close personal work. Spurgeon, following the old Baptist method, spent many hours every week alone, dealing personally with the lost. He interviewed each and every applicant for baptism, and dealt further with those who were not converted. (See p. 96 in this book for an outline of Spurgeon's method.) This is a wise practice, done by Jesus Himself (John 4:6-30; note verse 30 especially). Paul also practiced this kind of personal method (Acts 16:32). ***How can pastors today do the work of Jesus or Paul without following the example of Jesus and Paul? Pastors themselves must spend much time personally with the lost.***
- (2) Point the unconverted person to Jesus Himself. Make sure that he understands that Jesus is **not** a spirit, but has a resurrected flesh and bone body (Luke 24:36-40). This is crucial in our time of new age and charismatic confusion. Explain exactly **where** Jesus is - at the right hand of God in Heaven, not here on here on earth (Mark 16:19; Colossians 3:1; I Peter 3:22; Romans 8:34). People will not be

saved by "trusting" a ghostly charismatic or new-age spirit-Christ who lives in the backyard or in their unconverted heart.

Point the lost person to the *real* Jesus where He really *is*! I myself remained in a lost state for seven years after being baptized in a Southern Baptist church simply because no one ever pointed me to the resurrected Jesus, at the right hand of God, whose Blood could wash me, and who could save me.

"Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

E'er since by faith I saw the stream  
Thy flowing wounds supply,  
Redeeming love has been my theme,  
And shall be till I die.

#### FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Michael S. Horton, "The Legacy of Charles Finney," from *Modern Reformation* magazine, computer net posting, April 1, 1996.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Charles G. Finney, *Autobiography*, pp. 14-17.

<sup>4</sup>Vernon J. Charlesworth, *The Sword and the Trowel*, May, 1876, p. 218.

<sup>5</sup>J. Stanley Mattson, "Charles Grandison Finney and the Emerging Tradition of 'New Measure' Revivalism." Ph.D. dissertation, University of North Carolina (Chapel Hill, 1970), p. 191.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 192.

<sup>7</sup>Charles C. Ryrie writes, "To believe in Christ for salvation means to have confidence *that* He can remove the guilt of sin and give eternal life. It means to believe *that* He can solve the problem of sin." The word "that"

reveals doctrine as the object of faith, not Jesus *Himself*; Charles C. Ryrie, *So Great Salvation* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1989), p. 119. Dr. Ryrie declares that faith is not merely "assent to facts" (p. 118), but he then spends three pages proving that faith *is* merely assent to, or belief in, certain facts, using different wording and various evasions (Mark 3:11; James 2:19).

<sup>8</sup>Zane Hodges, *Grace in Eclipse* (Dallas: Redencion Viva, 1985), pp. 7-8. Dr. Hodges takes the same basic approach as Dr. Ryrie, that saving faith comes by believing things *about* Jesus, rather than the union with the resurrected Christ in Heaven, a supernatural union, resulting in conversion. Hodges declares "to believe in," and "believe that" "refers to the same act" (p. 7). He says, "To believe in Jesus is to believe something about Him" (p. 8). This is "salvation by doctrinal belief" rather than salvation by coming to, and resting on, Jesus Himself - i.e. union with Christ Himself (cf. John 5:40; John 6:44; Matthew 11:28).

<sup>9</sup>Horton, "The Legacy of Charles Finney" (see footnote 1).

<sup>10</sup>Asahel Nettleton, quoted in Bennett Tyler and Andrew Bonar, *The Life and Labours of Asahel Nettleton* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1975, reprinted from the 1854 edition), pp. 347-349.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>Charles H. Spurgeon, *Around the Wicket Gate* (Pilgrim Publications, Pasadena, Texas, 1992 reprint), p. 27.

<sup>13</sup>John R. Rice, *What Must I Do To Be Saved?* (Sword of the Lord, 1945), pp. 16-17.

<sup>14</sup>Spiros Zodhiates, Th.D., *The Complete Word Study Dictionary of the New Testament* (Chattanooga: AMG Publishers, 1992), p. 521.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid, p. 618.

<sup>16</sup>Spurgeon, *Around the Wicket Gate*, pp. 29-30.