Charles G. Finney—colorful and controversial nineteenth century “father of modern evangelism.” Most responses to Finney fall into one of two categories—the highly critical and the highly complimentary.¹ Unfavorable works usually attack Finney’s unorthodox doctrine and methods; the favorable defend him as a godly soul winner who is misunderstood or unjustly vilified by those who disagree with his “successful” methods.² My contention is that a critical evaluation of Finney’s own writings will reveal that he is in substantial disagreement with the cardinal doctrines of Christianity, and that his revivalist methodology, when examined in that context, is a defective paradigm for evangelism and revival. I would also suggest that Finney’s teachings and methods have generally been harmful to evangelical Christianity.

Fundamentalism was born out of intense opposition to theological liberalism, and so it would appear a mega-contradiction to even suggest that fundamentalists could ever be “taken in” by rationalism in any form. Yet, interestingly, George Marsden has suggested that one of the formative features of early fundamentalism was Scottish Common Sense philosophy, a moralistic rationalism which contributed to the evidentialist epistemology of early fundamentalist apologetics.³ One version of Common Sense, rooted in Princeton, did play a significant role in fundamentalism, as Ernest Sandeen and later Mark Noll sought to prove.⁴ But Finney’s “new


²Amazon.com lists several mostly favorable reviews of Finney’s Systematic Theology: “This book ultimately transformed my walk and understanding of the Bible.” “I highly recommend this book...because it will truly cause a person to ’make their calling and election sure’.... history is proving Finney less of a heretic year after year.” “The most authoritative discussion I have ever seen.... I wonder if any of you have truly read his works with an open mind (if at all), and whether you have the spiritual insight to realize that what you are preaching is NOT WORKING.” “If one perseveres [sic] [in reading this book] they [sic] will discover an incredible depth of theological thought and argument which has been the inspiration of several revivals of faith around the globe.”


measures” theology, a derivative of New Haven’s brand of New Divinity, commonly called Taylorism, provided another source of rationalistic thought. It was in several respects contradictory to the Princeton brand of Common Sense in that it took up arms against traditional Reformed Calvinism by replacing God’s sovereignty with man’s. Princeton’s epistemological starting point began with God who freely decrees all things; Yale’s began with free man who determines his own destiny. Finney’s brand of Taylorism represented a new humanism dressed up in pietistic garb.

There was also a definite strain of empiricism in Finney as reflected in his dogmatic views on sanctification. If the vehicle for Finney’s rationalism was revivalism, empirical mysticism drove his perfectionism, achieved dramatically by the “baptism with the Holy Spirit.” To Finney, man can be revived by the sheer power of his will. When this happens, he can and should experience moral perfection through the “second blessing” of Spirit baptism. Revival and Spirit baptism came to be inseparably linked in fundamentalist revivalism.

One reason fundamentalists have been accepting of Finney’s methodology is because it sounds so reasonable, and at times down right spiritual. Finney uses many of the appropriate evangelical terms with apparent sincerity. A second reason they have been lured into Finneyism is pragmatism. “Just look at the results; how can you argue with success?” Estimates run as high as five hundred thousand converts to Christ during Finney’s evangelistic career. “Now that’s revival, and that’s what I want,” they say. Finney’s success has provided a perennial (and seasonal!) incentive for revival. His forthright confident manner is compelling; his logic irresistible to many. But the arguments of the Gibeonites also proved reasonable to Joshua and the elders of Israel. However, consider Joshua 9:14—“So the men of Israel took some of their provisions, and did not ask for the counsel of the Lord.” This, I believe, is the reason that fundamentalists have been taken in by Finney. They have sincerely wanted the benefits he promised, but have not investigated carefully his theology nor his methods in light of God’s Word. Success came to be measured quantitatively by numbers of converts, not by the quality of perseverance in sound doctrine. And this is just the problem: fundamentalists, beginning with Moody and Torrey and continuing with John R. Rice, wanted the “second blessing” they believed essential for revival and soul winning, and this irrespective of the theological confusion it entails.

Finney’s evangelism can be euphemistically remembered for the western district of New York state where it flourished for a time, where revivals spread like wild fire, leaving the area “burned over” as a religious wasteland. If we present an erroneous theology with a likewise flawed methodology are we not in danger of creating a similar wasteland?

I. Finney and Revivalism.

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A. The nineteenth century witnessed a new kind of revival.

1. Iain Murray, in a critique of revivalism, laments what he considers a new view of revival that came into vogue during the latter half of the nineteenth century—a view which displaced the old with a distinctly different understanding of the subject. A shift in vocabulary marked the change. He writes,

   Seasons of revival became “revival meetings.” Instead of being “surprising” they might now be even announced in advance, and whereas no one in the previous [eighteenth] century had known of ways to secure a revival, a system was now popularized by “revivalists” which came near to guaranteeing results.6

2. One may note this in the shift of revival emphasis after the Great Awakenings from submission to God to pragmatic results, i.e., numbers of decisions. This was due to a shift in theology away from the doctrinal content of faith to the subjective experience, paving the way for existentialism and rationalism. The Enlightenment on the one hand and Arminianism on the other combined to upgrade man from a totally depraved sinner to a totally free moral agent. As Michael Horton reminds us, “In the former, people were taught to trust in their reason, and in the latter, their emotions, but in both the individual was enshrined.”7 Bernard A. Weisberger identifies one cause of the problem: “As theology grew simpler, technique became predominant.”8

3. Gardiner Spring (1785–1873), an Old School Presbyterian minister of the Old Brick Church in New York City and a contemporary of Finney, advocated genuine revival against superficial revivalism.

   With the obvious signs of the times in view, who does not see that this artful foe [Satan] would enjoy his malignant triumph, if he could prejudice the minds of good men against all revivals of religion? This he does, not so much by opposing them, as by counterfeiting the genuine coin, and by getting up revivals that are spurious and to his liking. Revivals are always spurious when they

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are got up by man’s device, and not brought down by the Spirit of God.⁹

**B. New Haven theology and Jacksonian democracy combined to produce the change.**

1. We may note a theological change with the New Haven theology of Nathaniel Taylor (1786–1858), professor of didactic theology at Yale beginning in 1822. He revised Edwards’s Calvinistic theology to make it compatible with his rationalism.

   a. Taylor denied the imputation of Adam’s sin to all men, thereby denying original sin. Sin was only in the sinning. He taught a governmental view of Christ’s atonement,¹⁰ instead of a substitutionary penal death. Sin was an offense against the moral government of the universe. The Son died as a public example of God’s hatred of sin and as an incentive for man to exercise his moral freedom by choosing not to sin and begin living righteously. Man as a free moral agent was perfectly capable of choosing his own destiny. Horace Bushnell’s *Christian Nurture* (1847) was born out of this theology.¹¹

   b. New Haven Theology provided the garden in which Arminianism would bloom, and the Social Gospel would take root and eventually bear the fruit of liberalism. A biographer of Taylor stated that many of the 768 graduates from Taylor’s classes “became the leaders in the great surge of liberal thought that dominated Congregationalism during the next generation.”¹² It was the New Haven theology that provided the impetus for much of nineteenth century revivalism, including Finney’s preaching. As one writer put it, referring to an 1831 Finney sermon: “The voice was Finney’s, the thinking Taylor’s.”¹³ Another historian noted that Finney was “Taylor’s true successor.”¹⁴

2. Theology appeared to take on the characteristics of the political and cultural climate.

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¹⁰The view made popular by Dutch jurist and Arminian, Hugo Grotius (1583–1645). “Christ did not bear our punishment but suffered as a penal example whereby the law was honored while sinners were pardoned.... The death of Christ was a public example of the depth of sin and the lengths to which God would go to uphold the moral order of the universe” (*Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, s.v. “Atonement, Theories of,” by Leon Morris, p. 102).

¹¹Bushnell taught that the child is to grow up a Christian and never know himself as being otherwise.


a. In the context of Jacksonian democracy, Americans seemed to emulate the character of their president. Self-determination and a euphoric belief in self-worth and prosperity displaced the old Puritan view of man’s innate moral corruption and absolute dependence on a sovereign God. “Optimism was the order of the day with an emphasis on the ultimate perfection of society through progressive improvement in mankind.”\(^{15}\)

b. Andrew Jackson provided an incentive for unlimited human achievement.

I believe man can be elevated; man can become more and more endowed with divinity; and as he does he becomes more God-like in his character and capable of governing himself. Let us go on elevating our people, perfecting our institutions, until democracy shall reach such a point of perfection that we can acclaim with truth that the voice of the people is the voice of God.\(^{16}\)

3. The product of these two phenomena: Charles G. Finney (1792–1875), whose moral theology asserted that revival may be and should be generated by human means. As a result pragmatism ruled and theology became anthropocentric and manipulative. The Holy Spirit became an agent at man’s disposal. Revival was reduced to methodology or certain calculated measures to produce moral results. These are the characteristics of revivalism.\(^{17}\) Charles G. Finney provides us a paradigm for it. Finney spread the democratic gospel of the New Haven theology along the eastern seaboard, and mainly across New York state prominently from 1825 to 1835.

II. Features of the Finneyan Formula for Revival.

A. Finney was a popular revivalist and dynamic pulpiteer.

1. Finney was America’s religious Andrew Jackson.\(^{18}\) If Jackson was America’s political folk-hero, Finney was its religious folk-hero. Finney was a spirited preacher with a magnetic personality, booming voice, and deep-set piercing eyes. For Finney’s stare to fall on you while he preached was to be lifted up and turned slowly over the fire. When Finney said hell, you could smell the smoke. In democratic fashion, he called upon the common folk to come in, scrape off

\(\text{\(\text{\footnotesize{References}}\)}}\)


their boots, and cast their own votes for heaven or hell. They were perfectly free to choose either.

2. Finney is often credited with the conversion of 500,000 people to the gospel, using evangelistic methods that are still popular with many preachers. Yet Finney himself, toward the end of his ministry, doubted the genuineness of many of those conversions.19

B. Finney was a master of measures. Revivals could be and should be promoted by natural means, he believed.

1. His use of publicity and protracted meetings sensationalized evangelism and interfered with the regular services of local churches.

2. He believed that revival was not a miracle, but “the result of the right use of the appropriate means.”20 He based his controversial Lectures on Revivals of Religion on this premise.

3. His democratic gospel permitted and encouraged women to pray and preach in public.

4. His use of the anxious bench at the front of the meeting house was designed to draw attention to the drama of a struggling soul which in turn would generate revivalistic momentum.

5. His singling out of persons during the message—sometimes by name—for special censure antagonized many.

6. He and his fellow revivalists invaded towns without invitation from local pastors, which often resulted in the mutiny of parishioners against their “unconverted” ministers.21

Finney’s theology was adapted to fit his new measures.

III. Finney’s Doctrinal Direction (read “defection”).

Finney consciously sought to develop a theology which would be “patterned to fit his career as a revivalist.... Since his theological system was designed to complement his career as a positivist, his theology often assumed strange shapes in order to accommodate the revivalist milieu.”22

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Basic to everything Finney taught was his emphatic belief that God would never command 
men to do anything they could not do. 23 Finney helped prepare America’s religious climate for 
Norman Vincent Peale’s power of positive thinking, Robert Schuller’s self-esteemism, the tele-
evangelists’ popular “Health and Wealth” message, and a host of other trendy gospels.

A. Finney was a rationalist.

Finney’s “great talent was to make the complicated doctrines of Nathaniel W. Taylor’s ‘New 
Divinity’ as clear and as sensible as the multiplication table.”24

1. Finney refused to accept anything that contradicted his understanding. For example, in 
defending his view that God would never command anything beyond our ability, he writes,

   A gracious ability to do our duty is absurd. It is a dictate of reason, of conscience, of common 
   sense, and of our natural sense of justice, that if God require of us the performance of any duty or 
   act, he is bound in justice to give us power to obey; i.e., he must give us the faculties and strength 
   to perform the act.25

   He [George Gale, Finney’s early pastor] held all those doctrines that logically flow from the fact 
   of a nature sinful of itself. These doctrines I could not receive. I could not receive his views on 
   the subject of Atonement, regeneration, faith, repentance, the slavery of the will, or any of their 
   kindred doctrines.... When I came to the [Westminster] Confession of faith, and saw the passages 
   that were quoted to sustain these peculiar positions, I was absolutely ashamed of it. I could not 
   feel any respect for a document that would undertake to impose on mankind such dogmas as 
   those, sustained, for the most part, by passages of Scripture that were totally irrelevant; and not 
   in a single instance sustained by passages that a court of law would have been considered 
   conclusive.26

2. In reality, his own logic preempted the authority of Scripture. Charles Hodge, in 
refuting Finney’s doctrine of benevolence as the only absolute good, states,

   The system of Professor Finney is a remarkable product of relentless logic. It is valuable 
   as a warning. It shows to what extremes the human mind may be carried when abandoned to its 
   own guidance. He begins with certain axioms, or, as he calls them, truths of reason, and from

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23 Finney wrote, “For it is a law of reason, that no being has a right to do what he has no power to do.” True
and False Repentance: Evangelistic Messages (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1966), 55.

24 Winthrop Hudson, Religion in America: An Historical Account of the Development of American


Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), pp. 36, 47.
these he draws conclusions which are indeed logical deductions, but which shock the moral sense, and prove nothing but that his premises are false.\textsuperscript{27}

In a review of Finney’s \textit{Systematic Theology}, Hodge remonstrated that “a very slight modification in the form of statement, would bring the doctrine of Mr. Finney into exact conformity to the doctrine of the modern German school [of rationalism], which makes God but a name for the moral law or order of the universe.”\textsuperscript{28}

\textbf{B. Finney was a Pelagianist.}\textsuperscript{29}

1. He denied original sin and man’s total depravity.

Finney denied constitutional depravity because he said total depravity was unreasonable. Finney pronounced Jonathan Edwards’s \textit{Freedom of the Will} “an injurious monstrosity and misnomer.”\textsuperscript{30} Nothing is sinful but voluntary action. “All sin is actual, and...no other than actual transgression can justly be called sin.”\textsuperscript{31}

We deny that the human constitution is morally depraved, 1. Because there is not proof of it. 2. Because it is impossible that sin should be an attribute of the substance of soul or body. It is and must be an attribute of choice or intention and not of substance. 3. To make sin an attribute or quality of substance is contrary to God’s definition of sin. “Sin,” says the apostle, “is anomia,” a “transgression of, or a want of conformity to the moral law.”\textsuperscript{32}

How can your nature be sinful? What is sin? Sin is a transgression of the law. There is no other sin but this.... The truth is man’s nature is all right, and is as well fitted to love and obey God as to hate and disobey him. Do you inquire what influence Adam’s sin has then had in producing the sin of his posterity? I answer, it has subjected them to aggravated temptation, but has by no means rendered their nature in itself sinful.\textsuperscript{33}

2. Moral depravity consists only in selfishness—a state of voluntary committal of the will


\textsuperscript{31}Ibid., p. 478.

\textsuperscript{32}Ibid., p. 473.

\textsuperscript{33}Charles Finney, \textit{True and False Repentance}, pp. 54–55.
to self-gratification. Finney accounts for universal depravity by persistent temptation, a physically depraved constitution, and the habit of self-indulgence, formed in childhood.

Moral disorder...is not this, that the will has become enslaved, and has lost its inherent power of free moral action. This is not the difficulty; but the thing is, that the sensibility has been enormously developed, and the mind accustoms itself to yield to the demands it makes for indulgence.

C. Finney was a moralist.

1. He rejected regeneration in favor of a moral change in man.

Regeneration is a change of natural moral condition, and not the supernatural impartation of spiritual life to a spiritually dead person by the Holy Spirit.

It is not a change in the substance of soul or body. If it were, sinners could not be required to effect it. Such a change would not constitute a change of moral character. No such change is needed, as the sinner has all the faculties and natural abilities requisite to render perfect obedience to God. All he needs is to be induced to use these powers and attributes as he ought. The words conversion and regeneration do not imply any change of substance but only a change of moral state or of moral character. The terms are not used to express a physical, but a moral change. Regeneration does not express or imply the creation of any new faculties or attributes of nature, nor any change whatever in the constitution of body or mind.

Moral means [must be used] to convert sinners, to gain their voluntary consent in this great change from sin to holiness, from disobeying to obeying God. And hence the need that this change be wrought...by moral means alone.

Finney goes to great lengths to deprecate views of regeneration as “false and pernicious,” “the greatest and most abominable and ruinous of falsehoods,” “subversive of the gospel and repulsive to human intelligence,” and aberrations that “should be laid aside as relics of a most unreasonable and confused philosophy.”

2. He rejected the vicarious atonement of Christ in favor of a moral influence as the

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means of man’s atonement.

In the atonement God has given us the influence of his own example, has exhibited his own love, his own compassion, his own self-denial, his own patience, his own long-suffering, under abuse from enemies.... This is the highest possible moral influence.... The influence of the Atonement, when apprehended by the mind, will accomplish whatever is an object of moral power.... To suppose...that Christ suffered in amount all that was due to the elect, is to suppose that he suffered an eternal punishment multiplied by the whole number of the elect.\(^{40}\)

Finney failed to see that the value of Christ’s suffering was not its amount or quantity but its quality—a perfectly righteous substitution which propitiated the wrath of God.

3. He replaced justification with amnesty.

a. Justification is not “a forensic or judicial proceeding,” but “a governmental decree or amnesty based upon the infinite love of God.” Finney wrote,

Christ died simply to remove an insurmountable obstacle out of the way of God’s forgiving sinners;... That instead of Christ’s having satisfied retributive justice, and borne just what sinners deserve, he had only satisfied public justice, by honoring the law.... I maintained that Christ in his Atonement merely did that which was necessary as a condition of the forgiveness of sin; and not that which cancelled sin, in the sense of literally paying the indebtedness of sinners.\(^{41}\)

Gospel justification is not the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ. Under the gospel, sinners are not justified by having the obedience of Jesus Christ set down to their account, as if he had obeyed the law for them, or in their stead.... This idea is absurd and impossible.... Jesus Christ was bound to obey the law for himself.... Nor does justification by faith imply that a sinner is justified by faith without good works, or personal holiness.... He [Paul] does not mean that good works are unnecessary to justification but that works of law are not good works, because they spring from legal considerations.\(^{42}\)

“For sinners to be forensically pronounced just is impossible and absurd.”\(^{43}\) In fact, it was Nathaniel Taylor’s aim to overthrow forensic justification, and Finney was the self-appointed agent to carry out the mission.

b. The ground of justification, then, is not the vicarious sacrifice of Christ for us but


divine benevolence.  

4. He denied the imputation of Christ’s righteousness to believers.

The doctrine of an imputed righteousness...is founded on a most false and nonsensical assumption.... [Christ’s obedience] can never be imputed to us. He was bound to love God with all his heart, and soul, and mind, and strength, and his neighbor as Himself. He did no more than this. He could do no more. It was naturally impossible, then, for Him to obey in our behalf.

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5. Conversion was man’s initiative.

Finney insisted “that the actual turning, or change, is the sinner’s own act.” “Don’t wait for God to change your heart. Why should you wait for Him to do what He has commanded you to do?”

Benjamin B. Warfield’s response to Finney’s theology of moral determinism that “all holiness [consists in] the right exercises of our own will or agency” (Finney):

It is quite clear that what Finney gives us is less a theology than a system of morals. God might be eliminated from it entirely without essentially changing its character. All virtue, all holiness, is made to consist in an ethical determination of will.

Warfield compares Finney’s theology with Jesuit “intentionalism.” “The point of the comparison lies in the principle common to both Jesuit ‘intentionalism’ and Finney’s teleological ethics that ‘whatever proceeds from right intention is right.’”

NOTE: Since man’s liability before God is the result of his choices rather than his nature, he only needs something to motivate him to make them. “The sinner has all the faculties and natural attributes requisite to render perfect obedience to God. All he needs is to be induced to use these powers and attributes as he ought.” That inducement is revival. The work of the Holy Spirit is

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46Charles Finney, Sermons on Important Subjects, p. 20.


49Ibid., p. 200.

50Charles Finney, Systematic Theology, p. 221.
not regeneration, since man does not need it. The Holy Spirit’s efforts are confined to persuasion. “Finney believed that the Holy Spirit’s function was to persuade individuals to make right choices.”\(^{51}\) When the sinner decides to change, the result is “conversion.”

D. Finney was a pragmatist.

Finney argued repeatedly that results were the infallible proof that his doctrines were correct.

1. In volitional intention. “Ultimate intention alone is right or wrong in itself.”\(^{52}\)

2. In methodology. “The results justify my methods.”\(^{53}\)

3. In “new measures” (protracted meetings, praying and preaching women, pulpit sensationalism, the anxious seat, promotionalism). “But when the blessing evidently follows the introduction of the measure itself, the proof is unanswerable that the measure is wise.”\(^{54}\)

It is evident that much fault has been found with measures which have been *pre-eminently and continually* blessed of God for the promotion of revivals. If a measure is *continually or unusually* blessed, let the man who thinks he is wiser than God, call it in question.\(^{55}\)

NOTE: What may we conclude from Scripture and church history about Finney’s revivalist theology? It was heretical! Perhaps more than any other man, with the possible exception of Horace Bushnell, Finney paved the way for the social gospel and liberalism in America, and yet ironically, many evangelicals and fundamentalists have continued to endorse and practice his teachings.

IV. Finney and Oberlin Perfectionism.

Some historians have suggested that Finney’s perfectionism marked a departure from Taylorism. “His assertions that humans were truly capable of perfect obedience to God’s law marked a definite departure from the New Haven theology. Finney and the other Oberlin perfectionists were now clearly distinguished from the New Haven theologians” (Leo P. Hirrel). Others suggest that “Perfectionism was the logical consequence of Finney’s [and Taylor’s] Pelagianism” (Phil


\(^{54}\)Idem, *Lectures on Revivals*, p. 211.

\(^{55}\)Ibid., p. 212; emphasis Finney’s.
Johnson). The latter interpretation is the preferable.

A. Definitions.


The NT *teleios* (derived from *telos*) reflects the idea of design, purpose, goal. It could be better translated “mature” rather than “perfect,” for the Bible nowhere teaches the idea of entire sanctification in this life. The Christian can develop into a mature disciple morally and spiritually, a responsible person of godly behavior which reflects the image of Christ (Col 1:28; 4:12; Eph 4:13–14; James 1:3–4). But such perfection is by degree and is relative, not absolute, as with deity. Such perfection is “responsible, spiritual, intellectual, and moral development which conforms to the desired pattern.”\(^{56}\) Other Greek synonyms connote the idea of completeness with regard to moral or spiritual integrity before God. Obedience is always the condition for such perfection. The Christian this side of Heaven is always a work in progress, never arriving and never able to arrive at perfection in this life (Phil 3:12–16; Rom 7:24–25).

2. Theoretical.

“The teaching that moral or religious perfection (in some cases sinlessness) is not only an ideal toward which to strive, but a goal attainable in this life.”\(^{57}\)

B. Historical development.

1. Various systems of perfectionism have existed in church history: e.g., gnostic, monastic, quietistic, pietistic, ethical. What they invariably have in common is the ability of man to reach a level of freedom from sinning through personal achievement.

2. Nineteenth Century American Perfectionism. The Wesleyan view predominated.\(^{58}\)

a. Wesley taught a type of “Christian perfection,” or “perfect love” sometimes known as entire sanctification. This was the result usually of a crisis experience subsequent to salvation, or a “second work of grace,” wrought instantaneously in the heart and confirmed by the Holy Spirit.


b. Perfection is not sinlessness but freedom from voluntary transgression of a known law and resulting in unbroken fellowship with Christ.

c. Perfectionism could be extended to and manifested in society through revival and reform.

d. Although Wesley did not deny original sin as Finney, he did view sin as more of a perverted relationship rather than a pervasive constitutional condition. Sin is relational or attitudinal. One great problem with the Wesleyan view of sin is that it is attenuated: sinning is limited to conscious will and intent. Therefore, while the Christian has weaknesses and involuntarily sins, he may still be able to achieve entire sanctification (freedom from willful sinning), but not absolute Christ-likeness.

e. Wesley always stressed that perfection was the result of divine grace transforming the life. But several holiness groups in America took perfectionism much further, e.g., eradication of the sin nature, experiential sign gifts.

f. Wesleyan “perfect love” is quite similar to the New Divinity’s “disinterested benevolence” doctrine.59

C. Oberlin Perfectionism. One of the most popular expressions of perfectionism.60

1. Originator: Asa Mahan (1799–1889), first president of Oberlin College (Ohio). Congregationalist background, graduate of Andover Seminary. Pastor of Sixth Presbyterian Church in Cincinnati and trustee of Lane Theological Seminary. Supported the “Lane Rebels” (several Finney converts) in their opposition to slavery. Students came to Oberlin under condition they could select president. Emphasis at the very beginning on social reform. School integrated; also coed. Supported by Tappan brothers (Arthur and Lewis, social reformers). Later, Mahan became president of Cleveland University and then Adrian (Michigan) College. In 1871, joined the Wesleyan Methodist Church (abolitionist). His important book Scripture Doctrine of Perfection (1839), along with Finney’s lectures, is the definitive work on Oberlin Theology. Mahan was a popular speaker at Keswick conferences and one of the promoters of the so-called Deeper (or Higher) Christian Life Movement.

At Oberlin, Mahan and Finney trained professional evangelists and stimulated zeal for social reform. Many of the early peace, feminist, and abolitionist movements in America emanated from Oberlin. Today it is one of the most liberal schools in the country.

59For similarities of Wesleyan and Oberlin Perfectionism see Timothy Smith, Revivalism and Social Reform, pp. 141–42.

60For an interesting and historically accurate account of Oberlin perfectionism see Keith Hardman, Charles Grandison Finney 1792–1875: Revivalist and Reformer (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), pp. 324–49.
2. Promoter: Charles G. Finney (1792–1875) became professor of theology at Oberlin in 1835 and its second president from 1851 to 1866. It was here that he developed his theology of sanctification. Finney’s view.

I gave myself earnestly to search the Scriptures, and to read whatever came to hand upon the subject, until my mind was satisfied that an altogether higher and more stable form of Christian life was attainable, and was the privilege of all Christians.... I was satisfied that the doctrine of sanctification in this life, and entire sanctification, in the sense that it was the privilege of Christians to live without known sin, was a doctrine taught in the Bible, and that abundant means were provided for the securing of that attainment.61


   a. Entire sanctification can be attained immediately.

      (1) Based on Asa Mahan’s own experience as expressed in his *Scripture Doctrine of Christian Perfection*, in which he equates perfectionism with Spirit baptism.

      While thus employed [in prayer], my heart leaped up in ecstasy indescribable, with the explanation, “I have found it”.... The highway of holiness was now, for the first time rendered perfectly distinct to my mind....a second conversion.62

      (2) Based on Finney’s own experience of being “baptized” with the Holy Spirit —the second blessing.

      I received a mighty baptism of the Holy Ghost. Without any expectation of it, without ever having the thought in my mind that there was any such thing for me,...the Holy Spirit descended upon me in a manner that seemed to go through me, body and soul. I could feel the impression, like a wave of electricity, going through me. Indeed it seemed to come in waves and waves of liquid love.... It seemed like the very breath of God....it seemed to fan me, like immense wings.63

   b. Holiness is perfection of the will. “That we be in a perfectly sanctified and blameless state in regard to our wills, implies that the action of all our voluntary powers be in entire conformity to the will of God.”64

   c. It is the duty of every Christian to achieve perfection in this life. Since God wills

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sanctification of the Christian, he should be and he can be entirely sanctified.

d. Perfectionism can be extended to society via individual conversion and social reform as expressed in abolition, pacifism, and abstinence.

**D. Benjamin B. Warfield’s response in Perfectionism.**

1. Perfectionism is impossible in this life because of the profound sense of sin. The Higher Life Movement, Perfectionism, etc., ignore that the “fact of sin consists of any lack of conformity unto the law of God as well as transgression of that law.”

2. Warfield’s response to Finney’s perfectionist argument that failure to attain sanctification due to either want of motives or want of the Spirit’s power.

   Such dilemmas could be applied equally to every evil with which man is afflicted—disease, death, the uncompleted salvation of the world. If it is not a practicable thing to be perfectly well in this world, then Jesus Christ has been vanquished by the Devil and has no way to make His people well except by taking them out of the world. If freedom from death is not attainable in this world, then it must be due to want of sufficient power in the Spirit of God. If the world does not become at once the pure Kingdom of God in which only righteousness dwells, then we must infer either a want of sufficient motives in the Gospel or a want of sufficient power in the Son of God.

**V. The Influence of Finneyism on Fundamentalism.**

**A. In the area of doctrine.**

1. The prevalence of Arminianism and deep-seated antipathy toward Calvinism as attested by the popularity of such books at Dave Hunt’s *What Love Is This?* (2002), Clark Pinnock’s works (e.g., *Grace Unlimited* [1975] and *The Grace of God and the Will of Man* [1989]), and popular sermons, such as John R. Rice’s “Hyper-Calvinism, A False Doctrine” (Sword of the Lord pamphlet, 1970), evangelist Ron Comfort’s “Fruits of Calvinism” (Ambassador Baptist College chapel, October 1, 2002) and David Cloud’s “I Reject Tulip Theology” (first published July 27, 1999; updated September 24, 2000).

   The usual approach is to condemn the five doctrines of Calvinism (TULIP) as hyper-Calvinistic

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66 Ibid., p. 59. See also Warfield’s comparison of Finney’s sanctification with the New Divinity view (ibid., 206–08). Warfield says that there is only “a distinction without a difference.”

67 Even as Finney did, Cloud attacks the Westminster Confession as erroneous.
and unscriptural. While some criticisms are credible, most are based on misunderstanding or willful ignorance.

a. The false logic of dichotomizing total depravity and total inability. While affirming the former, some fundamentalists deny the latter. Evangelist Ron Comfort makes such a case:

They [Calvinists] make the analogy, Ephesians 2:1: *And you hath he quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins*; and they say that *dead* means “total inability.” In other words, if a man is spiritually dead, he is unable to accept Christ. However, if you follow that analogy to its logical conclusion, then you would have to say that a dead man cannot receive nor can he reject. He cannot sin. Their analogy falls apart if you follow it to its logical conclusion.

Rice states that all men have the ability to repent by suggesting the Arminian doctrine of prevenient grace.

Now the doctrine that all are sinful, incapable of being saved or doing good without God's help, is true. But it is certainly not true that some never could repent, that God leaves some intentionally without light or calling.... So every lost sinner is in some sense lighted by Jesus who “lighteth every man that cometh into the world” (John 1:9), is somewhat moved by his conscience, is preached to by the creation about him, and when he hears the Word of God he is called by that. Then the fact of the depravity of every lost sinner does not mean there are some sinners who cannot be saved.

b. Salvation is based on divine foreknowledge, not unconditional election. Rice states,

But it is wrong to make this election a whim of God whereby He saves some, compels them to be saved, and dams some whom He has decided He does not wish to save. No, election is not “unconditional.” It is simply that God knows who will trust Him when they hear the Gospel and chooses them to be carried through till they be ”conformed to the image of his Son.”

c. The denial of irresistible grace. Even as Finney, many fundamentalists deny this doctrine. Comfort argues,

Then you have I, which is *Irresistible Grace*. How can “grace” be irresistible? Anything imposed upon someone by a grace that is “irresistible” is not a gift received. If something is imposed upon you, without your desire to have it, I ask you, is that grace? That is a fallacious definition of grace to me: irresistibly imposed.

d. The suggestion that perseverance in the faith is salvation by works, not grace. Again, Comfort states,

Here’s what [B. G.]Armstrong says: “Perseverance is a necessary attribute of justification. God justifies, but man must have faith and obey.” [John] Piper says, “We must also own up to the fact that our final salvation is made contingent upon the subsequent obedience which comes by faith.” And I say what they are doing is mingling grace and works. Romans 11:6, “And if by grace, then it is no more works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then it is
no more grace: otherwise work is no more work. So here’s what you’ve got to conclude: it’s either all of grace, or all of works. You cannot mingle the two. “‘Tis grace that brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home.”

2. The embrace of a misunderstood doctrine of Baptism with the Spirit as a second work of sanctification.

   a. Enduement for holiness as promoted by Wesleyanism and Keswick. The so-called second blessing of entire sanctification came by way of Oberlin theology to several early fundamentalists who spoke at Keswick conferences and promoted its brand of victorious living. Asa Mahan himself was a frequent speaker in the early days of Keswick. Dwight L. Moody began promoting its teachings at his Northfield Conference after his personal experience of “baptism” with the Holy Spirit. While denying eradication, Keswick types affirmed counteraction of the old nature by the new. But the means were the same: a crisis experience subsequent to justification. For the advocates of this view, there are two types of Christians: the “carnal,” the typical believer, and the “spiritual,” the one who has been filled or baptized by the Holy Spirit. The transformation takes place in a single dramatic act of faith. We see this frequently displayed in camp meeting revivals where young people are suddenly “broken” and “surrender” to Christ’s lordship. Several early fundamentalists identified with this type of sanctification: A. T. Pierson, W. H. Griffith Thomas, C. I. Scofield, J. Robertson McQuilkin, and Lewis Sperry Chafer.

   Chafer’s Keswick views can be seen in the distinctive traits of the Dallas Theology. “What Dallas Theology shares with Keswick and all second-blessing theologies...is a distinction between justification and sanctification as separate works of grace.” Essential to the Christian life is dedication subsequent to conversion. Submission to Christ’s lordship and complete repentance comes at the time of dedication. Thus, there are two types of Christians: the carnal who has accepted Christ as Savior and the spiritual who has accepted Him as Lord. It is only after the dedication to lordship that the life of sanctification begins. But the truth is sanctification begins at justification and every Christian is both spiritual and carnal at the same time to some degree throughout his earthly life. This is the whole point of Romans 6 and 7. This is the spiritual battle of the Christian which begins at the time of justification and continues through a life of ongoing sanctification.


few. Most adherents of this view desire the Holy Spirit’s enduement for evangelism, soul-winning, and revival campaigns. The principal concern is anointing for service. Taking their lead from Finney, representatives of this view often describe the enduement as a “baptism with the Holy Spirit.”

Finney’s crisis experience has been recounted countless times in publications and sermons and still continues to influence fundamentalism.

“As I returned and was about to take a seat by the fire, I received a mighty baptism of the Holy Ghost....the Holy Spirit descended upon me in a manner that seemed to go through me, body and soul. No words can express the wonderful love that was shed abroad in my heart. I wept aloud with joy.”

Finney thereafter universalized his experience and made it normative for all Christian workers in his Memoirs and his Lectures on Revival. Richard Lovelace reminds us that, “from these sources it passed into the teaching of D. L. Moody, R. A. Torrey, and a host of Evangelicals both in America and Europe.”

In keeping with his Pelagian theology, Finney taught that the securing of divine power for service must be initiated by man. The Christian must first consecrate himself before he can expect the baptism of the Holy Spirit and consequent success in ministry. The passage he cites for support, as do all second blessing advocates, is Luke 11:13: “If ye, then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him.” Yet there is no indication that Jesus meant this as a second

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While encouraging a reliance on the power of the Spirit, most fundamentalists repudiated or at least down-played the miraculous sign gifts of the Spirit associated with Pentecostalism. Yet some of them inadvertently provided theological fodder for the Pentecostal movement. For example, Pentecostals have often appealed to R. A. Torrey for their doctrine of the baptism of the Spirit. His own son, R. A. Torrey, Jr., wrote, “While Dr. Torrey had no connection with the Pentecostal movements of his day and had many reservations and questions regarding their position, teaching and conduct, the fact remains that many leaders in the movement have drawn on his writings and teachings and held him in respect (letter of April 7, 1965 cited in Roger Edward Martin, “The Theology of R. A. Torrey” [Ph.D. dissertation, Bob Jones University, 1975], p. 157). See also, Frederick Dale Bruner, A Theology of the Holy Spirit (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), pp. 61–61 and Donald Gee, The Pentecostal Movement: Including the Story of the War Years (1940–47) (London: Elim Publishing, 1949), pp. 4–5. Interestingly, Reuben A. Torrey, III (Torrey’s grandson) was a charismatic Anglican priest.


blessing experience for power. Nevertheless, Finney presents “the certainty that we shall receive the promised enduement of power from on high, and be successful in winning souls, if we ask in faith and fulfill the plainly revealed conditions of prevailing prayer.” According to Finney, the reason that Christians need the second blessing for power after conversion is the fact that “the disciples were Christians before the day of Pentecost,... but yet they had not the enduement of power necessary to the accomplishment of the work assigned them.” Once the early disciples received the enduement of power at Pentecost, they set a precedent for all believers, according to Finney. The promise of enduement, therefore, is for all Christians. It is a gift available for all, but not all have it because they do not meet the criteria for receiving it. Yet the “possession of this enduement [is] an essential qualification for usefulness in the world.” The implication is clear: without the enduement of the Spirit a believer is useless. Therefore, one must persist in prayer until he gets it.

Finney’s terminology, the descriptions, the very phrasing, are identical to the writings of those who advocate the second blessing of enduement for service. They may and often do utilize Scripture to support their claims, but the unseen guide giving direction is not the Holy Spirit, it is Finney. This is especially true in the works of Reuben A. Torrey (1856–1928) and John R. Rice (1895–1980).

**Torrey**

Early in his ministry, after reading Finney’s *Memoirs* and his *Revival Addresses*, Torrey concluded “that the normal state of a church was revival, so I started out on that line.” As Torrey’s biographer put it, “Finney’s logic appealed to Torrey.... If a revival is needed, then it

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75 Larry Pettegrew has an excellent discussion of various interpretations of this passage and offers the suggestion that Jesus is using synecdoche when referring to the Holy Spirit: “The Lord uses a part (Holy Spirit) for the whole (good things [referenced in Matt 7]). He means literally that when we pray, the Father is willing to give us any or all spiritual blessings (i.e., good things). But the Lord uses the Holy Spirit as the best and highest” example of what is good. *The New Covenant Ministry of the Holy Spirit* (2nd ed., Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2001), pp. 58–64, esp. p. 63.


77 Ibid., p. 175.

78 Ibid., p. 185.

79 Torrey’s most popular works on the subject are: *Baptism with the Holy Spirit* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1972); *The Person and Work of the Holy Spirit* (reprint of 1910 ed., Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974); *Why God Used D. L. Moody* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1923); and *The Person and Work of the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1910). Amazon.com lists 48 works by Torrey, attesting to their continuing popularity. Those dealing with the Holy Spirit have been republished within the last five years.

should be expected. If it is a duty, then it is possible. He decided, ‘We shall have a revival.’

This was the beginning of the Torrey city-wide union meetings. For Torrey, revival was the inevitable result of “the baptism with the Holy Spirit [which] is the Spirit of God coming upon the believer, filling his mind with a real apprehension of truth, especially of Christ, taking possession of his faculties, imparting to him gifts not otherwise his but which qualify him for service to which God has called him.” The baptism with the Spirit is only for service, not holiness. Torrey maintained that “it is indeed the work of the Holy Spirit to cleanse from sin,” but this was not the “Baptism with the Holy Spirit.” The means of baptism was a logical seven-step process. Torrey concluded that “it is absolutely certain that any one who takes these steps will be ‘baptized with the Holy Spirit.”

Rice

Rice promoted the enduement of the Spirit’s power for soul-winning in the pages of his paper, the Sword of the Lord, in pamphlets, and in sermons he preached. In a small pamphlet published in 1949, Rice disclaimed any “experience” that would lead to perfect holiness or eradication of sin, but described the experiences of prominent Christian leaders who had received “power from God for soul-winning work.” While he did not insist on the terminology preferred by Torrey, “baptism with the Spirit,” Rice did completely accept Torrey’s definition of it as a “special enduement of power from on high.” Rice considered the terms used in Acts—baptism, filling, reception, pouring, etc.—as “referring to the special enduement of power in soul

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Dayton goes on to say that Torrey was probably refuting the position of A. M. Hills, Torrey’s former classmate at Yale, who countered that Spirit baptism was not “empowering for service” but the bestowing of “holiness and power,” pp. 103–04.


85Perhaps his most popular works are: *The Power of Pentecost or The Fulness of the Spirit* (Murffreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord, 1949); *We Can Have Revival Now: Annual Lectures on Revival at Bob Jones University* (Murffreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord, 1950); and *How Great Soul Winners Were Filled with the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1949). The Sword of the Lord web site lists twenty-one books under the topic of the Holy Spirit; most of them are written by Rice, Curtis Hutson (Rice’s successor), and Jack Hyles. Many of them are “how to” soul winning books.

86John R. Rice, *How Great Soul Winners Were Filled with the Holy Spirit*, p. 3.
In other words, exegetical and contextual distinctions were not important; what was important was the experience of receiving power for soul-winning. His purpose was to challenge Christians to have the same experience as Torrey and other Christian leaders so that they, too, would be properly equipped to win souls. His conclusion bemoans the current “apostasy” from Pentecostal power:

“Those who have gone away from the doctrine of the fulness of the Spirit, the power of Pentecost, as a special enduement of power for soul winning possible for every Christian and to be sought with prevailing prayer, have departed from the position of the great soul winners. This falling away in doctrine came with the falling away from revival! Men do not believe in the power of Pentecost simply because they do not themselves have the power of Pentecost.”

According to Rice’s own testimony, of the four books that had the greatest impact on his ministry, Finney’s Autobiography was “most helpful.” Rice counseled, “For a pungent and powerful revelation of how God works in soul winning and revival, few if any books ever written can exceed” this work.

Over the years articles appearing in the Sword of the Lord by notable evangelists have kept the Finneyan emphasis on enduement of the Spirit for power in soul winning.

B. In the area of methods.

1. The formula method of revivalism—“the seven step approach to sure-fire revival.”

2. The crusade model of evangelism ala Billy Graham—“the bigger the better.”

3. The manipulative invitation system—“I see that hand.”

3. The user-friendly models of ministry—“whatever it takes to win them.”

These methods are based on the humanistic view that the natural man is fully capable of effectually responding to a persuasive gospel message. God’s sovereignty in salvation goes a begging while technique rules the day.

VI. Summary Critique of Perfectionist Theologies.


88 Idem, How Great Soul Winners Were Filled with the Holy Spirit, p. 23.

89 Ibid., p. 16.
1. Making disinterested benevolence the supreme moral attribute of God obligated him to make possible happiness as man’s chief pursuit, rather than God’s glory. This made God dependent on man for sanctification, making it the equivalent of personal satisfaction. In effect, it is saying, “God you made me and redeemed me; now, you owe me happiness.” This perversion actually turned selfless love into self-love. Eudaemonism (personal well-being) is an important underpinning of perfectionism. It allows one to be eminently pietistic but actually selfish.

2. Perfectionist theologies invariably give higher place to experience than to doctrine. Indeed, experience becomes their doctrine. Feeling, whether inner-light mysticism, quietism, or pietism, becomes the criterion for evaluating spirituality. Experience should always be tested by biblical doctrine.

3. Perfectionism has a defective view of soteriology—particularly with

   Justification—it denies judicial imputation.

   Sanctification—it becomes a subsequent crisis to conversion.

   Glorification—it grants a perfect immediate moral victory over sin.

4. Perfectionism has an unrealistic view of sin. Sin should not be reduced to only what is known. David makes very clear that sin includes not only presumptuous sins, but hidden faults (Ps 19:12–13).

5. Perfectionism considers incremental progressive sanctification as insufficient; it must be immediate for one to live “victoriously.” It locates sanctification in crisis instead of continuance. What we have been saved from is the dominion of sin, not the presence of sin.

6. Perfectionism adds an unscriptural third category of persons—the carnal Christian.

7. Perfectionism offers a “guaranteed” but superficial formula for the higher life. The implication is, if you follow certain steps, you will achieve victory. Sanctification does not work that way.

8. Perfectionism creates a division between the “haves and the “have nots” which contributes to a spiritual elitism on the one hand and an attitude of disillusionment and frustration on the other.

VII. Lessons.

A. We should allow a sound biblical theology to inform our experience, not vice versa. Consider the contrast:
Comment by a New Measures revivalist, Horatio Foote: “That man’s hope ain’t worth a groat [piece of grain] that isn’t founded on obedience.”

Comment by an advocate of biblical revival, Joseph Brockway: “That man’s hope is good for nothing that is not founded on the merits of Christ, and evinced by obedience.”

B. We should avoid rationalism but through the illumination of the Holy Spirit draw from Scripture passages their intended meaning (1 Cor 2:10–16). We should provide a defensive biblical instruction in sound doctrine, especially those doctrines essential to salvation: man is totally depraved (Jer17:9; Eph 2:1-3), his nature completely vitiated by sinfulness (Ps 58:3; 51:5; Rom 3:23) and an imputed wicked status rendering all men condemned before a Holy God (Rom 5:12, Eph 2:3); being totally depraved, man is incapable or unable to respond effectually unto salvation, but must be efficaciously called by God. There is absolutely no intrinsic righteousness within us meriting salvation; God’s salvation of the lost is based solely on His unconditional love and graciousness toward His elect (Eph 1:4–5, 11; 2:8–9). The penal vicarious atonement of Christ is illimitable in its provision (John 3:16; 1 John 2:2), but limited only to those whom God effectually draws to Himself, regenerates, and enables to willingly receive the gospel through faith and repentance (John 6:37–40; Eph 2:4–7; 1 Thess 1:4–9; Acts 11:18; Eph 2:8); the elect are justified by the imputed righteousness of Christ, since they have no inherent goodness; and although free from the dominion of sin, nevertheless retain a defiled and sinful nature until glorified by God at the resurrection (Rom 5:15 3:22; 4:3, 5; 6:6–7, 11, 21–25; 8:18–25; 1 Cor 15:53). The true believer not only will but must persevere unto the end in his personal faith (John 8:31; 1 John 5:4), sound doctrine (Col 1:22–23), and good works (Eph 2:10).

C. We should be intensely evangelistic and invitational. Christ was and so were the Apostles. But high pressure tactics and emotional manipulation can virtually undermine the work of the Holy Spirit.

If C. G. Finney’s evangelism rode the waves of confidence in man’s abilities, Asahel Nettleton [a Calvinistic theologian and preacher] clung tenaciously to the rock of the older view that man is totally corrupt and cannot save himself. The symbol of one type of evangelism is the anxious seat, to which men were publicly pressured to repair. The symbol of the other is an inquiry meeting, where trembling sinners were pointed to Christ.

D. The Pentecost revival in Acts 2 gives us marks by which other revivals may be tested. It appears that a revival must have at least the following evidences to be genuine.

a. It must include the simple and direct doctrinal preaching of the Word of God (vv. 14–36). Peter’s gospel included the doctrines of predestination (v. 23), human depravity (vv. 23, 36, 40), the crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension of Christ (vv. 23–36), repentance of sin and
forgiveness (v. 38).

b. It must be an activity of the Spirit of God (v. 33).

c. It will produce a people of God (vv. 37–47), who will be convicted, repent, and be converted (v. 37–41); who will persevere in the faith (vv. 42–46); and who will properly worship God in fellowship one with another (vv. 46–47).

E. We should never approach the possibility of revival by trying to work it up. Let us fervently hope and pray, let us preach sound doctrine, let us utilize scripturally-tested methods, and let us wait upon the Lord that He may be glorified through the marvelous work He will accomplish.

That’s why the concern for revival, it’s [sic] central burden and most impassioned obsession is the restoration of God’s name to the exalted position which it deserves in our lives and culture. In revival there is no room for self-centered motivations, only hunger for divine exaltation!91

The use of carnal and manipulative methods only serve to undermine the integrity of the gospel message.

F. Proper instruction on the baptism of the Spirit is necessary to avoid confusion.

1. The baptism of the Spirit is no longer experiential, only judicial, and occurs at the time of conversion (1 Cor 12:13) as an initial, non-repeatable, non-experiential event. Those instances of experiential baptism with the Spirit in Acts were unusual not normative for the church.92 Spirit baptism in Acts was the divine means of incorporating diverse groups into one body—the church of Jesus Christ.93

2. There is no mention in Acts nor anywhere in the NT where believers are admonished to seek the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Yet we are exhorted to be filled with Spirit, that is, under the control or dominant influence of the Spirit, but this is not a second crisis experience; it is the ongoing experience of the believer as he continually submits himself to the rule of Christ (Eph 5:1–2, 18).

3. Advocates of the special second blessing enduement of the Spirit suggest that the power to live the Christian life from the time of conversion is inadequate, yet the Scripture


92There are many instances of the temporary in Acts: Jewish temple worship (2:46; 3:1); selling everything to support the poor (4:32–37); being killed for lying (5:1–11); prison doors opened miraculously (5:19); direct revelation (9:1–19); prophesying and speaking in tongues (13:1–2; 19:6).

indicates that when we are saved we are filled with the Spirit (Rom 8:9–17; Gal 5:25; Col 2:9–10, 12) and therefore spiritually equipped to serve Christ.

NOTE: John Stott reminds us of an excellent hermeneutical principle: “What is described in Scripture as having happened to others is not necessarily intended for us, whereas what is promised to us we are to appropriate, and what is commanded to us we are to obey.”94 I would add only that what is forbidden us we should avoid.

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