

Was Charles Finney a good Christian leader?

Charles Grandison Finney (1792-1875) is the darling of many groups of Christians [esp. Charismatics] who uphold him as the champion revivalist of the last 150 years. He was noted for leading powerful and emotional rallies in eastern America in the early-mid 1800s, which often had massive social effects in towns for a time. Many of the unbiblical features of modern evangelism owe a debt to Finney. His calling sinners out to an 'anxious bench' was the start of the 'invitation system' common today in making people stand, come to the platform or raise a hand to be converted, whereupon someone dictates a prayer for them. He later became a professor at the new Oberlin College, assuming the presidency of it from 1851 to 1866. This became the centre of perfectionism and the New Divinity heresy [New School Calvinism; see 'New Divinity'].

The truth is that Finney was a heretic and manipulator. He held heterodox beliefs contrary to his oath even while ministering as a Presbyterian preacher, which he was ordained as in 1824 after abandoning law. He left this church after 1832. Finney was such an extreme Arminian that his beliefs verge upon Pelagianism. Note the comparison: Pelagius wrote: [God] has not willed to command anything impossible ... and he will not condemn a man for what he could not help. ... It is possible for a man to be without sin. [Bettenson, *Documents of the Christian Church*, Oxford University Press, (1963), p 52, 53.] Finney wrote: That which the precept demands must be possible to the subject. That which demands a natural impossibility is not, and cannot be, moral law. ... To talk of inability to obey moral law is to talk nonsense ... The moral government of God everywhere assumes and implies the liberty of the human will and the natural ability of men to obey God. [*Lectures on Systematic Theology*, pp. 2, 3, 325.] He thus denied man's spiritual inability and stated plainly that man regenerates himself. [See 'New Divinity' for more details.]

Even his lofty claims of success in revivals must be reconsidered. He conducted his rallies in a period in that area when there was revival fever. There were all sorts of revivals breaking out with powerful exuberance from 1804 onwards; Finney, merely tapped into this local expectation and excitement with force of character. The stories of his thousands of converts are also wildly exaggerated as he himself confessed at the end of his life when he admitted that most of his converts fell away.

His systematic theology is a shocking and complex argument for the elevation of man's powers and a diminution of Christ's work and glory. Though still popular it is exceedingly damaging. He was certainly not a good Christian leader.

Was Charles Finney a good Christian leader?

Charles Grandison Finney (1792-1875) is the darling of many groups of Christians [esp. Charismatics] who uphold him as the champion revivalist of the last 150 years. He was noted for leading powerful and emotional rallies in eastern America in the early-mid 1800s, which often had massive social effects in towns for a time. Many of the unbiblical features of modern evangelism owe a debt to Finney. His calling sinners out to an 'anxious bench' was the start of the 'invitation system' common today in making people stand, come to the platform or raise a hand to be converted, whereupon someone dictates a prayer for them. He later became a professor at the new Oberlin College, assuming the presidency of it from 1851 to 1866. This became the centre of perfectionism and the New Divinity heresy [New School Calvinism; see 'New Divinity'].

The truth is that Finney was a heretic and manipulator. He held heterodox beliefs contrary to his oath even while ministering as a Presbyterian preacher, which he was ordained as in 1824 after abandoning law. He left this church after 1832. Finney was such an extreme Arminian that his beliefs verge upon Pelagianism. Note the comparison: Pelagius wrote: [God] has not willed to command anything impossible ... and he will not condemn a man for what he could not help. ... It is possible for a man to be without sin. [Bettenson, *Documents of the Christian Church*, Oxford University Press, (1963), p 52, 53.] Finney wrote: That which the precept demands must be possible to the subject. That which demands a natural impossibility is not, and cannot be, moral law. ... To talk of inability to obey moral law is to talk nonsense ... The moral government of God everywhere assumes and implies the liberty of the human will and the natural ability of men to obey God. [*Lectures on Systematic Theology*, pp. 2, 3, 325.] He thus denied man's spiritual inability and stated plainly that man regenerates himself. [See 'New Divinity' for more details.]

Even his lofty claims of success in revivals must be reconsidered. He conducted his rallies in a period in that area when there was revival fever. There were all sorts of revivals breaking out with powerful exuberance from 1804 onwards; Finney, merely tapped into this local expectation and excitement with force of character. The stories of his thousands of converts are also wildly exaggerated as he himself confessed at the end of his life when he admitted that most of his converts fell away.

His systematic theology is a shocking and complex argument for the elevation of man's powers and a diminution of Christ's work and glory. Though still popular it is exceedingly damaging. He was certainly not a good Christian leader.