

Investigating Charles Finney's Teaching Concerning the Perseverance of the Saints

The spirit of error has been hard at work for many centuries twisting and polluting God's word. Much of this deception has come through means anyone would least expect. Pastors, teachers, theologians and expositors piece together Scripture to prove their doctrinal position and this translates into the books, study material and training manuals disseminated in the churches and then preached to you!

Let us investigate the example of Charles Finney, an 1800's famous Revival Evangelist who rejected the doctrine of Original Sin, preached repentance and obedience to the faith. Thundered against unrighteousness and shocked the church system of his day to its core, many today still consider him a heretic for rejecting original sin, but many others who despise the cheap and easy Gospel of modern times refer to him with great regard and are convinced he preached a holiness message based on conditional Security. Yet such is NOT the case.

If you examine the record and search his entire lecture series on Systematic theology, you will find that he contended for Election, Predestination and the Perseverance of the Saints! Theologically he would be numbered among those who hold to Calvinistic Doctrine, although he discarded the absolutes and the notion of original sin. The great difficulty in exposing Mr. Finney is the perception he was able to convey over the church and his seeming success as a revivalist. Trained in law, he had a very analytical mind and sharp intellect. He was able to confound his opponents with his impressive oratory and imposing persona.

As a speaker able to move his audience into fits of deep emotional distress, he was unparalleled in his time. Given that the professing Christian world of his day feared God, believed in hell fire and knew that sinning would send you there; he was much a product of his particular generation rather than an incarnation of John the Baptist. In many respects Finney is not too far off the reservation with our modern version of Calvinistic proponents. Although they would mostly deny association with him, because of the original sin issue, they would be forced to agree with his stance on Election, Predestination and Perseverance, because his Lectures reveal that he held to the following doctrines:

1. Only the Elect will be Saved
2. That none of the elect will be lost, (eternal security, called Perseverance by Finney)
3. God only calls the elect, with an 'Effectual Call of Grace' (it's His choice alone)
4. And man's final destiny was decided from the foundation of the world!

How Finney could reject original sin and insist on Election is confounding for a person of his intellect. That he was not able to see the fallacy of his own reasoning proves that he never really abandon his Presbyterian roots. How could a he believe on one hand that man is born innocent, with total free will to choose between right and wrong, and at the same time hold that the outcome of his salvation is predestined by election? That once he has been 'effectively' called and chosen by God, there was no possibility of him EVER shipwrecking his faith, turning back, going reprobate or forfeiting his birthright!

Finney Said:

“God has from eternity resolved upon the salvation of all the elect. This we have seen. No one of this number will ever be lost. These are given to Christ from eternity as a seed to serve him. The conversion, perseverance, and final salvation of the elect, we have seen to be secured. Their conversion, perseverance, and salvation, are secured by means of the grace of God in Christ Jesus, prevailing through the gospel, so to influence their free-will as to bring about this result.”

He arrived at this conclusion by piecing together portions of Scripture from the Gospel of John, where Jesus says that none the Father has given Him will ever be lost. (Jh. 6:39) This, to Finney, proves the doctrine of Election in the sense that God chooses who will be saved, how they are saved and whether or not they will persevere to the end. (He also sites: Jh.10; Rom. 8; 1Pet.1; 1Tim.1 and more. All strongholds of modern eternal security teaching!)

If it is true that none truly saved will ever be lost, as Finney asserted, WHY did the apostles constantly WARN the chosen and elect of the possibility of deception, reprobation or disqualification from the Kingdom?

Within this divine plan, God can CHANGE His mind according to the choices men make in relationship to His decrees. God is not bound to an absolute outcome with any given individual. If a person, like Paul or Peter, is predestine according to the foreknowledge of God, there final salvation is still contingent on obedience and endurance to the end. (1Pet. 1:2) It's NOT a foregone conclusion, otherwise WHY would Paul and Peter both warn themselves and others of the possibility of 'going reprobate' (1Cor. 9:27) and 'falling into the error of the wicked'? (2Pet. 3:17)

That you have passed from death unto life (Jh. 5:24) because you have believed, does not mean, as Finney suggests, 'You are there already!' But is given within the parameters of time in the present tense and shown clearly in other passages such as Titus 3:7, "That having been justified by His grace, we MIGHT become heirs according to the HOPE of eternal life!" Jesus spoke to us in this manner throughout the Gospels saying, "...he who is NOW believing has eternal life!" (Jh. 6:24) The Greek tense denotes a **'continued and repeated action.'** God is not addressing us from the eternal now (or outside of time). This teaching has lead men like Finney and others to offer false hope to people who have professed merely a nominal faith in Christ.

The prophet Jeremiah shows clearly that God acts within the parameters of time, not outside of it. When the people of Israel were sacrificing their children in the fires of Baal, God proclaimed: "I did not command them nor did it come into My mind that they should do this abomination!" (Jer. 32:35) Now whether you want to argue that God foreknew this event or not, makes no difference against the fact that it shows clearly that He acts in accordance to man's decisions and the outcome can vary.

Again in Exodus 32:31-35, after the people had fashioned the golden god to worship it, Moses pleaded with God to spare them as a nation, praying that he be blotted out of the Book of life instead. God relented, curbed His fierce wrath and punished only the evil doers. There are

several more instances of God acting in this manner throughout the Old Testament. Dealing with man within the parameters of time and showing that He is not bound to any particular outcome concerning him, but acts on contingency of their choices.

Finney Said:

“This grace I regard as vouchsafed to me in the covenant of grace or as a reward of Christ's obedience unto death. It is pledged to secure the salvation of those whom the Father has from eternity given to the Son. The Holy Spirit is given to them to secure their salvation, and I have no expectation that any others will ever be saved. But these, every one of them, will surely be saved. There is, there can be no hope for any others. Others are able to repent, but they will not. Others might be saved if they would believe and comply with the conditions of salvation. but they will not.”

By Necessity Finney Must Defend the Following:

1. That the truly Elect can never be lost
2. That no New Testament passage teaches that a true saint can fall into eternal ruin.

Thus this doctrine becomes the perfect cop out. If you endure in obedience and holiness to the end, you were among the elect and your Salvation was secured from the foundation of the world. If you go reprobate or shipwreck, fall away, turn aside, etc, you were not Elect and could have never been saved to begin with! No matter how you try to include free choice in the mix, as Finney did, you end up back to square one with John Calvin. God decides who is and who is NOT saved!

With Finney, your election meant that you would indeed persevere in holiness, obey God, live above sin and endure to the end. Your choice to do so was worked into the structure of your election. It is all predetermined. You respond only to the degree that God's effectual calling is exerted on your will to bring about the obedience, endurance and faith necessary to work out your salvation. Observe the follow doublespeak where he argues for voluntary obedience but shows God bringing it about.

Finney Said:

The saints convert themselves in the sense that they turn or yield when drawn, until over persuaded by the Holy Spirit. God converts them in the sense that he effectually draws or persuades them. They turn themselves in the sense that their turning is their own act. God turns them in the sense that he induces or products their turning. The same is true of their whole course of obedience in this life. The saints keep themselves in the sense that all obedience is their own, all their piety consists in their own voluntary obedience; but God keeps them in the sense that in every instance and at every moment of obedience, he persuades and enlightens and draws them in so much that he secures their voluntary obedience; that is, he draws and they follow. He persuades and they yield to his persuasions. He works in them to will and to do, and they will and do. God always anticipates all their holy exercises, and persuades the saints to put them forth. This is so

abundantly taught in the bible that to quote Scripture to prove it were but to waste your time. The saints are not only said to be converted, but also sanctified and kept by the power of God."

In other words, you do not and cannot OBEY from your heart (Rom. 6:17), expect that God persuade you in some manner to do so. Obedience follows faith rather than the obedience itself being the principle of the faith. Surly he is saying that the result is action, but since God is doing it, has ordained it, elected and predetermined the whole thing, it is NON-ESSENTIAL to the outcome of Salvation! Argue until you run out of breath. It boils down to the same thing. If God brings about the outcome and His election cannot be altered, man's choice is irrelevant. God made the choice. What man does or does not do makes no difference in respect to reaching a conclusion.

This is why Finney had to go to great length to explain away the Scriptures and prove that no true saint had or ever could fall away into eternal ruin. Here he shows his true colors as a closet Calvinist. Remember as we proceed that many of these arguments have been presented before on the issue of eternal security. The purpose of showing these is not to debate a doctrine, but to show that Finney was willing to manipulate the Scriptures to teach a lie.

Concerning 2Pet. 2:12-22, Finney Said:

"Now observe, the apostle calls the persons of whom he speaks "wells without water: clouds that are carried with a tempest;" that is, without rain. His whole description of them shows that he is speaking of false professors or hypocrites. But it is inferred that they are fallen saints, because it is said they have "forsaken the right way, and are gone astray after the error of Balaam, &c." But this does not necessarily imply that they were in heart ever in the right way, but that they have forsaken the right way so far as the outward life is concerned, in which respect they had doubtless been in the right way or they would not have been admitted to membership in the church.

But it is said of these false professors that "they allure through lust and much wantonness those who were clean escaped from those who live in error." But neither does this necessitate the conclusion that they had escaped in heart from those that lived in error, but merely that they had for the time being outwardly abandoned their idolatrous practices and companions and had made a profession and put on the form of Christianity.

But it is also said, verses 20--22, For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world, through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are entangled therein and overcome, the latter end is worse than the beginning. 21. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. 22. But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and, The sow that was washed, to her wallowing in the mire.

Neither does this necessitate the conclusion that they had in heart escaped from the pollutions that are in the world, but merely that they had outwardly reformed. What is said in the last verse seems to favor this construction. Verse 22, "But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire. That is, the dog has returned to his vomit, because he remains a dog and is not changed, and the sow that is washed to her wallowing in the mire, because she is still a sow, and her washing has not changed her nature. So, the apostle would say. by returning to their former ways do the persons in question show they have experienced no radical change, but on the contrary that they are only like a washed sow, sinners still who have been only outwardly cleansed, while within they are same as ever. This appears to me to be all that can fairly be made out of this passage.

The standard argument of every eternal security preacher on the planet! They were all hypocrites and never saved to begin with. The same argument used for Hebrews 6 and 10. Even though in the Greek Heb. 6:4-6 affirms that the people in question had 'fallen away' and were indeed PARTAKERS of the Holy Spirit! Same holds in Hebrew 10, the people in question had a full knowledge of the truth and were illuminated (enlightened) by truth! These words speak of those genuinely saved elsewhere in Scripture and Finney knows it! He is purposely making misleading claims to support his notions.

Finney does the same thing with 2Pet. 2, he suggests that the apostle is addressing this to hypocrites. But WHY would he do that? To what purpose are warnings issued to someone who is commended already in their sins? If they had merely conformed outwardly, as he says, to the Christian life, why does Peter say that they had 'escaped indeed' in Verse 20? This is the exact same expression the Lord used in John 8:31, "Who the Son sets free is FREE INDEED!" Again, Finney knows this and what it means. The apostle is speaking to people who had made shipwreck of their faith. (As Paul said in 1Tim. 1:18-20)

Each of these passages is showing clearly that genuine saints can and DID fall into eternal ruin through neglect and sin. Although many passages can be quoted or pieced together as to imply the Elect can never be lost, they MUST be compared with the unmistakable assertion made here! Man has a choice and that choice will determine the ultimate destination of his soul.

Concerning 1Cor. 10:1-13, Finney Said:

"It is said of this passage that the history of the Israelites is here introduced as a warning to real christians; consequently the apostle must have assumed that those of the Israelites who fell were real saints, or there would have been no pertinency or force in his allusion. To this I reply that the pertinency and force of the allusion appear to me to have been as follows. The Israelites composed the visible church of God. At the time he mentioned, they were all professors of religion. All possessed great light and privileges compared with the rest of the world; they therefore felt confident of their acceptance with God, and of their consequent safety and salvation. But with many of them, it turned out, that God was not well pleased. Some of them turned out to be idolaters and were destroyed. Now,

says the apostle, let this be a warning to you. You are in like manner professors of religion. You are all members of the visible church of God, to which the promises are made. You have great light and privileges when compared with the world at large. You may think yourselves to be altogether safe, and sure of final salvation. But remember that the history of the ancient church is written for your benefit; and the destruction of those just alluded to, is recorded for your admonition. Be not high minded, but fear. Do not be presumptuous because you are members in good standing in the visible church and possess great light and privileges, but remember that many before you, who were like you in these respects, have lost their souls; "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest He fall."

But it may be said that the apostle speaks of those as falling who had eaten of the spiritual meat, and drank of the rock Christ, and therefore must have been real saints. To this I reply that the apostle does indeed use universal language and speak of all the Israelites as doing these things; but who will soberly contend that he intended really to be understood as affirming that all the Israelites that passed through the sea &c., were true saints? What he says does not necessitate the conclusion that any of them were truly regenerated saints. They were all baptized unto Moses; that is, were all introduced into the covenant of which he was the mediator. They all ate of the same spiritual bread, that is, the manna on which the Lord fed them. They all drank of the spiritual rock; that is, of the water that gushed from the rock when Moses smote it with his rod, and which rock was a type of Christ, as was also the manna. Now, does the apostle mean to say that all the Israelites understood the typical meaning of these waters and this manna, and that they were all truly spiritual or regenerate persons? I think not. All that he intended, appears to me to have been that all the church of the Jews at the time were so far partakers of the grace of Christ as to receive this baptism and as to have this spiritual or typical bread and water, and also to enjoy great light and much miraculous instruction, but that nevertheless with many of them God was displeased. Their being baptized in their passage through the Red Sea, did not imply that they so understood and consented to it at the time, nor does the assertion that they ate the spiritual food, and drank of the spiritual rock, imply any thing more than that they enjoyed these great and high privileges, and counted themselves as very secure in consequence of them. It is certainly straining the sense to make the apostle affirm that all the Israelites were real saints who passed through the sea. Indeed it is doubtful whether he intended to affirm the real piety of any of them. It was not essential"

Again, the same arguments used by all the teachers of this doctrine to assert the Hebrews were not real Christians, nor were the people of Israel coming out of Egypt. Then why warn them at all? Why not preach repentance to them instead! Nowhere in the New Testament is this taken up as an issue by the apostles. They did not concern themselves with the 'never saved to begin with'. Even the man in gross fornication of 1Cor. 5:1-5 is not numbered among the 'never saved'. Paul never suggests anywhere that this man was a hypocrite, never saved to begin with. He simply exposes his sin and issues appropriate punishment.

Finney would have to say that such passages as 1Cor. 6:9-10, Gal. 5:19-21, are also not directed toward real Christians, since none (really saved) can ever be disqualified from the Kingdom for

committing any of the sins listed. Observe what he says about the 1Cor. 10 passage, they were baptized into Moses, but only 'introduced' to the covenant. They partook of the Spiritual bread and water, but didn't understand what it means! Does the apostle affirm any of this? NO. By CONJECTURE Finney suggests this is the case.

The fact that the Lord was displeased with many of them is the warning! NOT to show they were never saved. What good is an example to us (as genuine believers) if these people were Non-Elect, with no possibility of ever being saved from sin? The illustration in this passage is that EVERY soul is given the same opportunity to endure or not. It was never intended for us to decide between who was truly saved and who was never saved to begin with. That is pure conjecture!

It could be suggested that Rom. 11:17-23 is an illusion to these same people spoken of in 1Cor. 10. Paul warns believers that branches were broken off that others might be grafted in. But not to boast. Because if God DID NOT spare the natural branches he will not spare you either. Note His goodness and His severity. On those who fell (the people in the wilderness with Moses!) severity, but toward you goodness, IF YOU CONTINUE in His goodness, OTHERWISE you ALSO will be CUT OFF!

Again, to what purpose is the warning if the elect can never be cut off or a vast number of the people spoken of in Scripture were never saved to begin with? None whatsoever. Finney would indeed explain his way out of this passage as well, like he did all the others. But to no avail, the truth speaks for itself.

Finney is in perfect line with all the eternal security teachers of present day. Had he not rejected their beloved doctrine of original sin, he would be numbered among their heroes of the faith. His arguments and assertions are in exact agreement with theirs. The teachers Paul said had made shipwreck of their faith in 1Tim.1:18-20, were never saved. (Never on the ship!) Those who fell into reproach and the snare of the devil (1Tim, 2:6-7), were phonies. Anyone who turned aside after Satan (1Tim, 5:12, 15), never followed Christ to begin with. Judas was never saved despite his calling and sending out with the twelve, endued with powers from on high. King David was not in a state of reprobation the nine months after he committed the sins of adultery and murder. Even though it is repeatedly said in Scriptures that people who DO such things will not inherit the Kingdom.

All this is Cast out the Window by such passages as Rom. 8:31-39.

Finney said:

"The eighth chapter of Romans seems to settle the question, or rather is of itself a clear proof of the doctrine we are examining.

If Paul in the eighth of Romans does not settle the question that all true saints will be saved how could it be settled? Let us in few words sum up the argument as he here presents it:

We are saved already in anticipation or in hope, and only by hope, for as yet we have not received our crown.

The grounds of this hope are that we are in Christ Jesus, have the spirit of Christ, spirit of adoption. We walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. This Spirit witnesses that we are children and heirs of God. He makes intercession for us according to the will of God. We also know that all things work together for good to them who love God, for they are the called according to his purpose. They who are called, that is, effectually called, are called in conformity with their predestination to be conformed to the image of the Son of God. Hence those who are thus predestinated are called and justified and glorified. Therefore no one can lay any thing to the charge of God's elect. God justifies, and who shall condemn them? Christ died for them, yea, rather, has risen and makes intercession for them. God withheld not his Son, and of course will withhold from Christians nothing that is essential to secure their salvation. Wherefore he concludes that nothing shall be able to separate us from the love of God.

I know that to this it has been replied, that although nothing else can separate us from the love of God, yet we may separate ourselves from his love.

To this I answer, true we may or can do so, but the question is, shall we or will any of the elected and called do so? No, indeed; for this is the thing which the apostle intended to affirm, namely, the certainty of the salvation of all true saints. The apostle manifestly in this passage assumes or affirms that all who ever truly love God are elect or are chosen to be conformed to the image of his Son; and are called and sanctified, and justified, in conformity with such predestination.

If this is not his meaning, what is? If this is not his meaning, what ground of hope do we, after all, find in what he says?"

Here the question is settled in his mind. Because Paul makes these assertions in Rom. 8, nothing else in all of Scripture could possibly mean that a real saint could be cut off, cast away, gone reprobate or shipwreck their faith. Thus his error in understanding WHO was being addressed here and why, necessitates a whole system of error to defend and taints his image as sound teacher of the Gospel.

WHO are the called and chosen? Those who believe and obey Christ! Was he not propitiation concerning our sins, and not concerning ours only, but also concerning the sins of all the world? (1John 2:2) John says nothing about the elect in this passage. That He foreknew and predestines them to be conformed to the image of His Son is **conditional** on their obedience and endurance. So those who have entered into this relationship through real repentance and faith have a strong reason to hope for final salvation and that nothing can separate them from God! The basis of their hope is Christ and if their faithfulness remains steadfast to the end, they will be saved.

"For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end," Heb. 3:14

In this manner Rom. 8 conforms to the rest of Scripture and releases us from the burden of explaining away all the warnings. Although Finney would not condone the manner in which these doctrine are being preached today in that they promote such lawless behavior in the churches. He is guilty of the inevitable outcome of this teaching on the whole of Christendom. Instead of refuting these awful doctrines he stands in agreement with men like Charles Spurgeon, DL Moody, Arthur Pink and others. They together laid the foundation for the 'Come in your sins' message of our day. The cheap and easy salvation of *confess and receive*, instead of ***repent and obey***. All these men stressed obedience and holiness, but with everything predetermined and the souls of men elected, obeying God is of no consequence.

Because the elect will obey, otherwise they are not the elect! Therefore Finney believed that you will endure 'IF' you are saved, not 'IF' you endure you will be saved. (The reverse of Scripture!)

To satisfy any curiosity you have remaining about Mr. Finney, be sure to read all four of his Lectures on Perseverance and the others on Election. They should remove all doubt that he taught his own special version of eternal security. Which places him directly in the camp today with the come in your sins Gospel.