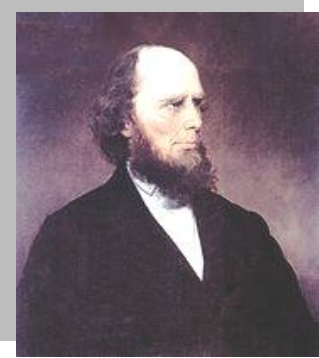


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CONVERSION TO CHRIST.

“I am now (1867-68) seventy-five years old.” (P.3)



ON a Sabbath evening in the autumn of 1821, I made up my mind that I would settle the question of my soul's salvation at once, that if it were possible I would make my peace with God. But as I was very busy in the affairs of the office, I knew that without great firmness of purpose, I should never effectually attend to the subject. I therefore, then and there resolved, as far as possible, to avoid all business, and everything that would divert my attention, and to give myself wholly to the work of securing the salvation of my soul. I carried this resolution into execution as sternly and thoroughly as I could. I was, however, obliged to be a good deal in the office. But as the providence of God would have it, I was not much occupied either on Monday or Tuesday; and had opportunity to read my Bible and engage in prayer most of the time.

But I was very proud without knowing it. I had supposed that I had not much regard for the opinions of others, whether they thought this or that in regard to myself; and I had in fact been quite singular in attending prayer meetings, and in the degree of attention that I had paid to religion, while in Adams. In this respect I had been so singular as to lead the church at times to think that I must be an anxious inquirer. But I found, when I came to face the question, that I was very unwilling to have any one know that I was seeking the salvation of my soul. When I prayed I would only whisper my prayer, after having stopped the key-hole to the door, lest someone should discover that I was engaged in prayer. Before that time I had my Bible lying on the table with the law-books; and it never had occurred to me to be ashamed of being found reading it, any more than I should be ashamed of being found reading any of my other books.

But after I had addressed myself in earnest to the subject of my own salvation, I kept my Bible, as much as I could, out of sight. If I was reading it when anybody came in, I would throw my law-books upon it, to create the impression that I had not had it in my hand. Instead of being outspoken and willing to talk with anybody and everybody on the subject as before, I found myself unwilling to converse with anybody. I did not want to see my minister, because I did not want to let him know how I felt, and I had no confidence that he would understand my case, and give me the direction that I needed. For the same reasons I avoided conversation with the elders of the church, or with any of the Christian people. I was ashamed to let them know how I felt, on the one hand; and on the other, I was afraid they would misdirect me. I felt myself shut up to the Bible.

During Monday and Tuesday my convictions increased; but still it seemed as if my heart grew harder. I could not shed a tear; I could not pray. I had no opportunity to pray above my breath; and frequently I felt, that if I could be alone where I could use my voice and let myself out, I should find relief in prayer. I was shy, and avoided, as much as I could, speaking to anybody on any subject. I endeavored, however, to do this in a way that would excite no suspicion, in any mind, that I was seeking the salvation of my soul.

Tuesday night I had become very nervous; and in the night a strange feeling came over me as if I was about to die. I knew that if I did I should sink down to hell; but I quieted myself as best I could until morning.

At an early hour I started for the office. But just before I arrived at the office, something seemed to confront me with questions like these: indeed, it seemed as if the inquiry was within myself, as if an inward voice said to me, "What are you waiting for? Did you not promise to give your heart to God? And what are you trying to do? Are you endeavoring to work out a righteousness of your own?"

Just at this point the whole question of Gospel salvation opened to my mind in a manner most marvellous to me at the time. I think I then saw, as clearly as I ever have in my life, the reality and fullness of the atonement of Christ. I saw that his work was a finished work; and that instead of having, or needing, any righteousness of my own to recommend me to God, I had to submit myself to the righteousness of God through Christ. Gospel salvation seemed to me to be an offer of something to be accepted; and that it was full and complete; and that all that was necessary on my part, was to get my own consent to give up my sin, and accept Christ. Salvation, it seemed to me, instead of being a thing to be wrought out, by my own works, was a thing to be found entirely in the Lord Jesus Christ, who presented himself before me as my God and my Saviour.

Without being distinctly aware of it, I had stopped in the street right where the inward voice seemed to arrest me. How long I remained in that position I cannot say. But after this distinct revelation had stood for some little time before my mind, the question seemed to be put, "Will you accept it now, to-day?" I replied, "Yes; I will accept it to-day, or I will die in the attempt."

North of the village, and over a hill, lay a piece of woods, in which I was in the almost daily habit of walking, more or less, when it was pleasant weather. It was now October, and the time was past for my frequent walks there. Nevertheless, instead of going to the office, I turned and bent my course toward the woods, feeling that I must be alone, and away from all human eyes and ears, so that I could pour out my prayer to God.

But still my pride must show itself. As I went over the hill, it occurred to me that someone might see me and suppose that I was going away to pray. Yet probably there was not a person on earth that would have suspected such a thing, had he seen me going. But so great was my pride, and so much was I possessed with the fear of man, that I recollect that I skulked along under the fence, till I got so far out of sight that no one from the village could see me. I then penetrated into the woods, I should think, a quarter of a mile, went over on the other side of the hill, and found a place where some large trees had fallen across each other, leaving an open place between. There I saw I could make a kind of closet. I crept into this place and knelt down for prayer. As I turned to go up into the woods, I recollect to have said, "I will give my heart to God, or I never will come down from there." I recollect repeating this as I went up—"I will give my heart to God before I ever come down again."

But when I attempted to pray I found that my heart would not pray. I had supposed that if I could only be where I could speak aloud, without being overheard, I could pray freely. But lo! when I came to try, I was dumb; that is, I had nothing to say to God; or at least I could say but a few words, and those without heart. In attempting to pray I would hear a rustling in the leaves, as I thought, and would stop and look up to see if somebody were not coming. This I did several times.

Finally I found myself verging fast to despair. I said to myself, "I cannot pray. My heart is dead to God, and will not pray." I then reproached myself for having promised to give my heart to God before I left the woods. When I came to try, I found I could not give my heart to God. My inward soul hung back, and there was no going out of my heart to God. I began to feel deeply that it was too late; that it must be that I was given up of God and was past hope.

The thought was pressing me of the rashness of my promise, that I would give my heart to God that day or die in the attempt. It seemed to me as if that was binding upon my soul; and yet I was going to break my vow. A great sinking and discouragement came over me, and I felt almost too weak to stand upon my knees.

Just at this moment I again thought I heard someone approach me, and I opened my eyes to see whether it were so. But right there the revelation of my pride of heart, as the great difficulty that stood in the way, was distinctly shown to me. An overwhelming sense of my wickedness in being ashamed to have a human being see me on my knees before God, took such powerful possession of me, that I cried at the top of my voice, and exclaimed that I would not leave that place if all the men on earth and all the devils in hell surrounded me." What!" I said, "such a degraded sinner as I am, on my knees confessing my sins to the great and holy God; and ashamed to have any human being, and a sinner like myself, find me on my knees endeavoring to make my peace with my offended God!" The sin appeared awful, infinite. It broke me down before the Lord.

Just at that point this passage of Scripture seemed to drop into my mind with a flood of light: "Then shall ye go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you. Then shall ye seek me and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart." I instantly seized hold of this with my heart. I had intellectually believed the Bible before; but never had the truth been in my mind that faith was a voluntary trust instead of an intellectual state. I was as conscious as I was of my existence, of trusting at that moment in God's veracity. Somehow I knew that that was a passage of Scripture, though I do not think I had ever read it. I knew that it was God's word, and God's voice, as it were, that spoke to me. I cried to Him, "Lord, I take thee at thy word. Now thou knowest that I do search for thee with all my heart and that I have come here to pray to thee; and thou hast promised to hear me."

That seemed to settle the question that I could then, that day, perform my Vow. The Spirit seemed to lay stress upon that idea in the text, "When you search for me with all your heart." The question of when, that is of the present time, seemed to fall heavily into my heart. I told the Lord that I should take him at his word; that he could not lie, and that therefore I was sure that he heard my prayer, and that he would be found of me.

He then gave me many other promises, both from the Old and the New Testament, especially some most precious promises respecting our Lord Jesus Christ. I never can, in words, make any human being understand how precious and true those promises appeared to me. I took them one after the other as infallible truth, the assertions of God who could not lie. They did not seem so much to fall into my intellect as into my heart, to be put within the grasp of the voluntary powers of my mind; and I seized hold of them, appropriated them, and fastened upon them with the grasp of a drowning man.

I continued thus to pray, and to receive and appropriate promises for a long time, I know not how long. I prayed till my mind became so full that, before I was aware of it, I was on my feet and tripping up the ascent toward the road. The question of my being converted, had not so much as arisen to my thought; but as I went up, brushing through the leaves and bushes, I recollect saying with great emphasis, "If I am ever converted, I will preach the Gospel."

I soon reached the road that led to the village, and began to reflect upon what had passed; and I found that my mind had become most wonderfully quiet and peaceful. I said to myself. "What is this? I must have grieved the Holy Ghost entirely away. I have lost all my conviction. I have not a particle of concern about my soul; and it must be that the Spirit has left me." "Why!" thought I, "I never was so far from being concerned about my own salvation in my life."

Then I remembered what I had said to God while I was on my knees—that I had said I would take him at his word; and indeed I recollected a good many things that I had said, and concluded that it was no wonder that the Spirit had left me; that for such a sinner as I was to take hold of God's word in that way, was presumption if not blasphemy. I concluded that in my excitement I had grieved the Holy Spirit, and perhaps committed the unpardonable sin.

I walked quietly toward the village; and so perfectly quiet was my mind that it seemed as if all nature listened. It was on the 10th of October, and a very pleasant day. I had gone into the woods immediately after an early breakfast; and when I returned to the village I found it was dinner time. Yet I had been wholly unconscious of the time that had passed; it appeared to me that I had been gone from the village but a short time.

But how was I to account for the quiet of my mind? I tried to recall my convictions, to get back again the load of sin under which I had been laboring. But all sense of sin, all consciousness of present sin or guilt, had departed from me. I said to myself, "What is this, that I cannot arouse any sense of guilt in my soul, as great a sinner as I am?" I tried in vain to make myself anxious about my present state. I was so quiet and peaceful that I tried to feel concerned about that, lest it should be a result of my having grieved the Spirit away. But take any view of it I would, I could not be anxious at all about my soul, and about my spiritual state. The repose of my mind was unspeakably great. I never can describe it in words. The thought of God was sweet to my mind, and the most profound spiritual tranquility had taken full possession of me. This was a great mystery; but it did not distress or perplex me.

I went to my dinner, and found I had no appetite to eat. I then went to the office, and found that Squire W— had gone to dinner. I took down my bass-viol,[cello] and, as I was accustomed to do, began to play and sing some pieces of sacred music. But as soon as I began to sing those sacred words, I began to weep. It seemed as if my heart was all liquid; and my feelings were in such a state that I could not hear my own voice in singing without causing my sensibility to overflow. I wondered at this, and tried to suppress my tears, but could not. After trying in vain to suppress my tears, I put up my instrument and stopped singing.

After dinner we were engaged in removing our books and furniture to another office. We were very busy in this, and had but little conversation all the afternoon. My mind, however, remained in that profoundly tranquil state. There was a great sweetness and tenderness in my thoughts and feelings. Everything appeared to be going right, and nothing seemed to ruffle or disturb me in the least.

Just before evening the thought took possession of my mind, that as soon as I was left alone in the new office, I would try to pray again—that I was not going to abandon the subject of religion and give it up, at any rate; and therefore, although I no longer had any concern about my soul, still I would continue to pray.

By evening we got the books and furniture adjusted; and I made up, in an open fireplace, a good fire, hoping to spend the evening alone. Just at dark Squire W—, seeing that everything was adjusted, bade me good-night and went to his home. I had accompanied him to the door; and as I closed the door and turned around, my heart seemed to be liquid within me. All my feelings seemed to rise and flow out; and the utterance of my heart was, "I want to pour my whole soul out to God." The rising of my soul was so great that I rushed into the room back of the front office, to pray.

There was no fire, and no light, in the room; nevertheless it appeared to me as if it were perfectly light. As I went in and shut the door after me, it seemed as if I met the Lord Jesus Christ face to face. It did not occur to me then, nor did it for some time afterward, that it was wholly a mental state. On the contrary it seemed to me that I saw him as I would see any other man. He said nothing, but looked at me in such a manner as to break me right down at his feet. I have always since regarded this *as* a most remarkable state of mind; for it seemed to me a reality, that he stood before me, and I fell down at his feet and poured out my soul to him. I wept aloud like a child, and made such confessions as I could with my choked utterance. It seemed to me that I bathed his feet with my tears; and yet I had no distinct impression that I touched him, that I recollect.

I must have continued in this state for a good while; but my mind was too much absorbed with the interview to recollect anything that I said. But I know, as soon as my mind became calm enough to break off from the interview, I returned to the front office, and found that the fire that I had made of large wood was nearly burned out. But as I turned and was about to take a seat by the fire, 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, without any recollection that I had ever heard the thing mentioned by any person in the world, 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 and through me. Indeed it seemed to come in waves and waves of liquid love; for I could not express it in any other way. It seemed like the very breath of God. I can recollect distinctly that it seemed to fan me, like immense wings.

No words can express the wonderful love that was shed abroad in my heart. I wept aloud with joy and love; and I do not know but I should say, I literally bellowed out the unutterable gushings of my heart. These waves came over me, and over me, and over me, one after the other, until I recollect I cried out, "I shall die if these waves continue to pass over me." I said, "Lord, I cannot bear any more;" yet I had no fear of death.

How long I continued in this state, with this baptism continuing to roll over me and go through me, I do not know. But I know it was late in the evening when a member of my choir—for I was the leader of the choir—came into the office to see me. He was a member of the church. He found me in this state of loud weeping, and said to me, "Mr. Finney, what ails you?" I could make him no answer for some time. He then said, "Are you in pain?" I gathered myself up as best I could, and replied, "No, but \so happy that I cannot live"

He turned and left the office, and in a few minutes returned with one of the elders of the church, whose shop was nearly across the way from our office. This elder was a very serious man; and in my presence had been very watchful, and I had scarcely ever seen him laugh. When he came in, I was very much in the state in which I was when the young man went out to call him. He asked me how I felt, and I began to tell him. Instead of saying anything, he fell into a most spasmodic laughter. It seemed as if it was impossible for him to keep from laughing from the very bottom of his heart.

There was a young man in the neighborhood who was preparing for college, with whom I had been very intimate. Our minister, as I afterward learned, had repeatedly talked with him on the subject of religion, and warned him against being misled by me. He informed him that I was a very careless young man about religion; and he thought that if he associated much with me his mind would be diverted, and he would not be converted.

After I was converted, and this young man was converted, he told me that he had said to Mr. Gale several times, when he had admonished him about associating so much with me, that my conversations had often affected him more, religiously, than his preaching. I had, indeed, let out my feelings a good deal to this young man.

But just at the time when I was giving ail account of my feelings to this elder of the church, and to the other member who was with him, this young man came into the office. I was sitting with my back toward the door, and barely observed that he came in. He listened with astonishment to what I was saying, and the first I knew he partly fell upon the floor, and cried out in the greatest agony of mind, "Do pray for me!" The elder of the church and the other member knelt down and began to pray for him; and when they had prayed, I prayed for him myself. Soon after this they all retired and left me alone.

The question then arose in my mind, "Why did Elder B— laugh so? Did he not think that I was under a delusion, or crazy?" This suggestion brought a kind of darkness over my mind; and I began to query with myself whether it was proper for me—such a sinner as I had been—to pray for that young man. A cloud seemed to shut in over me; I had no hold upon anything in which I could rest; and after a little while I retired to bed, not distressed in mind, but still at a loss to know what to make of my present state. Notwithstanding the baptism I had received, this temptation so obscured my view that I went to bed without feeling sure that my peace was made with God.

I soon fell asleep, but almost as soon awoke again on account of the great flow of the love of God that was in my heart. I was so filled with love that I could not sleep. Soon I fell asleep again, and awoke in the same manner. When I awoke, this temptation would return upon me, and the love that seemed to be in my heart would abate; but as soon as I was asleep, it was so warm within me that I would immediately awake. Thus I continued till, late at night, I obtained some sound repose.

When I awoke in the morning the sun had risen, and was pouring a clear light into my room. Words cannot express the impression that this sunlight made upon me. Instantly the baptism that I had received the night before, returned upon me in the same manner. I arose upon my knees in the bed and wept aloud with joy, and remained for some time too much overwhelmed with the baptism of the Spirit to do anything but pour out my soul to God. It seemed as if this morning's baptism was accompanied with a gentle reproof, and the Spirit seemed to say to me, "Will you doubt?" "Will you doubt?" I cried, "No! I will not doubt; I cannot doubt." He then cleared the subject up so much to my mind that it was in fact impossible for me to doubt that the Spirit of God had taken possession of my soul.

In this state I was taught the doctrine of justification by faith, as a present experience. That doctrine had never taken any such possession of my mind, that I had ever viewed it distinctly as a fundamental doctrine of the Gospel. Indeed, I did not know at all what it meant in the proper sense. But I could now see and understand what was meant by the passage, "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." I could see that the moment I believed, while up in the woods all sense of condemnation had entirely

dropped out of my mind; and that from that moment I could not feel a sense of guilt or condemnation by any effort that I could make. My sense of guilt was gone; my sins were gone; and I do not think I felt any more sense of guilt than if I never had sinned.

This was just the revelation that I needed. I felt myself justified by faith; and, so far as I could see, I was in a state in which I did not sin. Instead of feeling that I was sinning all the time, my heart was so full of love that it overflowed. My cup ran over with blessing and with love; and I could not feel that I was sinning against God. Nor could I recover the least sense of guilt for my past sins. Of this experience I said nothing that I recollect, at the time, to anybody; that is, of this experience of justification.

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BEGINNING OF HIS WORK.

THIS morning, of which I have just spoken, I went down into the office, and there I was having the renewal of these mighty waves of love and salvation flowing over me, when Squire W— came into the office. I said a few words to him on the subject of his salvation. He looked at me with astonishment, but made no reply whatever, that I recollect. He dropped his head, and after standing a few minutes left the office. I thought no more of it then, but afterward found that the remark I made pierced him like a sword; and he did not recover from it till he was converted.

Soon after Mr. W— had left the office, Deacon B— came into the office and said to me, "Mr. Finney, do you recollect that my cause is to be tried at ten o'clock this morning? I suppose you are ready? "I had been retained to attend this suit as his attorney. I replied to him, " Deacon B—, I have a retainer from the Lord Jesus Christ to plead his cause, and I cannot plead yours." He looked at me with astonishment, and said, "What do you mean ? " I told him, in a few words, that I had enlisted in the cause of Christ; and then repeated that I had a retainer from the Lord Jesus Christ to plead his cause, and that he must go and get somebody else to attend his law-suit; I could not do it. He dropped his head, and without making any reply, went out. A few moments later, in passing the window, I observed that Deacon B— was standing in the road, seemingly lost in deep meditation. He went away, as I afterward learned, and immediately settled his suit. He then betook himself to prayer and soon got into a much higher religious state than he had ever been in before.

I soon sallied forth from the office to converse with those whom I should meet about their souls. I had the impression, which has never left my mind, that God wanted me to preach the Gospel, and that I must begin immediately. I somehow seemed to know it. If you ask me how I knew it, I cannot tell how I knew it, any more than I can tell how I knew that that was the love of God and the baptism of the Holy Ghost which I had received. I did somehow know it with a certainty that was past all possibility of doubt. And so I seemed to know that the Lord commissioned me to preach the Gospel.

When I was first convicted, the thought had occurred to my mind that if I was ever converted I should be obliged to leave my profession, of which I was very fond, and go to preaching the Gospel. This at first stumbled me. I thought I had taken too much pains, and spent too much time and study in my profession to think now of becoming a Christian, if by doing so I should be obliged to preach the Gospel. However, I at last came to the conclusion that I must submit that question to God; that I had never commenced the study of law from any regard to God, and that I had no right to make any conditions with him; and I therefore had laid aside the thought of becoming a minister, until it was sprung in my mind, as I have related, on my way from my place of prayer in the woods.

But now after receiving these baptisms of the Spirit I was quite willing to preach the Gospel. Nay, I found that I was unwilling to do anything else. I had no longer any desire to practise law. Everything in that direction was shut up, and had no longer any attractions for me at all I had no disposition to make money. I had no hungering and thirsting after worldly pleasures and amusements in any direction. My whole mind was taken up with Jesus and his salvation; and the world seemed to me of very little consequence. Nothing, it seemed to me, could be put in competition with the worth of souls; and no labor, I thought, could be so sweet, and no employment so exalted, as that of holding up Christ to a dying world.

With this impression, as I said, I sallied forth to converse with any with whom I might meet. I first dropped in at the shop of a shoemaker, who was a pious man, and one of the most praying Christians, as I thought, in the church. I found him in conversation with a son of one of the elders of the church; and this young man was defending Universal-ism. Mr. W—, the shoemaker, turned to me and said,

"Mr. Finney, what do you think of the argument of this young man;" and he then stated what he had been saying in defence of Universalism. The answer appeared to me so ready that in a moment I was enabled to blow his argument to the wind. The young man saw at once that his argument was gone; and he rose up without making any reply, and went suddenly out. But soon I observed, as I stood in the middle of the room, that the young man, instead of going along the street, had passed around the shop, had climbed over the fence, and was steering straight across the fields toward the woods. I thought no more of it until evening, when the young man

came out, and appeared to be a bright convert, giving a relation of his experience. He went into the woods, and there, as he said, gave his heart to God.

I spoke with many persons that day, and I believe the Spirit of God made lasting impressions upon every one of them. I cannot remember one whom I spoke with, who was not soon after converted. Just at evening I called at the house of a friend, where a young man lived who was employed in distilling whiskey. The family had heard that I had become a Christian; and as they were about to sit down to tea, they urged me to sit down and take tea with them. The man of the house and his wife were both professors of religion. But a sister of the lady, who was present, was an unconverted girl; and this young man of whom I have spoken, a distant relative of the family, was a professed Universalist. He was rather an outspoken and talkative Universalist, and a young man of a good deal of energy of character.

I sat down with them to tea, and they requested me to ask a blessing. It was what I had never done; but I did not hesitate a moment, but commenced to ask the blessing of God as we sat around the table. I had scarcely more than begun before the state of these young people rose before my mind, and excited so much compassion that I burst into weeping, and was unable to proceed. Everyone around the table sat speechless for a short time, while I continued to weep. Directly, the young man moved back from the table and rushed out of the room. He fled to his room and locked himself in, and was not seen again till the next morning, when he came out expressing a blessed hope in Christ. He has been for many years an able minister of the Gospel.

In the course of the day, a good deal of excitement was created in the village by its being reported what the Lord had done for my soul. Some thought one thing, and some another. At evening, without any appointment having been made that I could learn, I observed that the people were going to the place where they usually held their conference and prayer meetings. My conversion had created a good deal of astonishment in the village. I afterward learned that some time before this some members of the church had proposed, in a church meeting, to make me a particular subject of prayer, and that Mr. Gale had discouraged them, saying that he did not believe I would ever be converted; that from conversing with me he had found that I was very much enlightened upon the subject of religion, and very much hardened. And furthermore, he said he was almost discouraged; that I led the choir, and taught the young people sacred music; and that they were so much under my influence that he did not believe that, while I remained in Adams, they would ever be converted.

I found after I was converted, that some of the wicked men in the place had hid behind me. One man in particular, a Mr. C—, who had a pious wife, had repeatedly said to her, "If religion is true, why don't you convert Finney? If you Christians can convert Finney, I will believe in religion."

An old lawyer by the name of M—, living in Adams, when he heard it rumored that day that I was converted, said that it was all a hoax; that I was simply trying to see what I could make Christian people believe.

However, with one consent the people seemed to rush to the place of worship. I went there myself. The minister was there, and nearly all the principal people in the village. No one seemed ready to open the meeting; but the house was packed to its utmost capacity. I did not wait for anybody, but arose and began by saying that I then knew that religion was from God. I went on and told such parts of my experience as it seemed important for me to tell. This Mr. C—, who had promised his wife that if I was converted he would believe in religion, was present. Mr. M—, the old lawyer, was also present. What the Lord enabled me to say seemed to take a wonderful hold upon the people.

Mr. C— got up, pressed through the crowd, and went home, leaving his hat. Mr. M— also left and went home, saying I was crazy. "He is in earnest," said he, "there is no mistake; but he is deranged, that is clear."

As soon as I had done speaking, Mr. Gale, the minister, rose and made a confession. He said he believed he had been in the way of the church; and then confessed that he had discouraged the church when they had proposed to pray for me. He said also that when he had heard that day that I was converted, he had promptly said that he did not believe it. He said he had no faith. He spoke in a very humble manner.

I had never made a prayer in public. But soon after Mr. Gale was through speaking, he called on me to pray. I did so, and think I had a good deal of enlargement and liberty in prayer. We had a wonderful meeting that evening; and, from that day, we had a meeting every evening for a long time. The work spread on every side.

As I had been a leader among the young people, I immediately appointed a meeting for them, which they all attended—that is, all of the class with which I was acquainted. I gave up my time to labor for their conversion; and the Lord blessed every effort that was made, in a very wonderful manner. They were converted one after another, with great rapidity; and the work continued among them until but one of their number was left unconverted.

The work spread among all classes; and extended itself, not only through the village, but out of the village in every direction. My heart was so full that, for more than a week, I did not feel at all inclined to sleep or eat. I seemed literally to have meat to eat that the world knew nothing of. I did not feel the need of food, or of sleep.

My mind was full of the love of God to overflowing. I went on in this way for a good many days, until I found that I must rest and sleep, or I should become insane. From that point I was more cautious in my labors; and ate regularly, and slept as much as I could.

The word of God had wonderful power; and I was every day surprised to find that a few words, spoken to an individual, would stick in his heart like an arrow.

After a short time I went down to Henderson, where my father lived, and visited him. He was an unconverted man; and only one of the family, my youngest brother, had ever made a profession of religion. My father met me at the gate and said, "How do you do, Charles?" I replied, "I am well, father, body and soul. But, father, you are an old man; all your children are grown up and have left your house; and I never heard a prayer in my father's house." Father dropped his head, and burst into tears, and replied, "I know it, Charles; come in and pray yourself."

We went in and engaged in prayer. My father and mother were greatly moved; and in a very short time thereafter they were both hopefully converted. I do not know but my mother had had a secret hope before; but if so, none of the family, I believe, ever knew it.

I remained in that neighborhood, I think, for two or three days, and conversed more or less with such people as I could meet with. I believe it was the next Monday night, they had a monthly concert of prayer in that town. There were there a Baptist church that had a minister, and a small Congregational church without a minister. The town was very much of a moral waste, however; and at this time religion was at a very low ebb.

My youngest brother attended this monthly concert of which I have spoken, and afterward gave me an account of it. The Baptists and Congregationalists were in the habit of holding a union monthly concert. But few attended, and therefore it was held at a private house. On this occasion they met, as usual, in the parlor of a private house. A few of the members of the Baptist church, and a few Congregationalists, were present.

The deacon of the Congregational church was a spare, feeble old man, by the name of M—. He was quiet in his ways, and had a good reputation for piety; but seldom said much upon the subject. He was a good specimen of a New England deacon. He was present, and they called upon him to lead the meeting. He read a passage of Scripture according to their custom. They then sung a hymn, and Deacon M— stood up behind his chair, and led in prayer. The other persons present, all of them professors of religion, and younger people, knelt down around the room.

My brother said that Deacon M began as usual in his prayer, in a low, feeble voice; but soon began to wax warm and to raise his voice, which became tremulous with emotion. He proceeded to pray with more and more earnestness, till soon he began to rise upon his toes and come down upon his heels; and then to rise upon his toes and drop upon his heels again, so that they could feel the jar in the room. He continued to raise his voice, and to rise upon his toes, and come down upon his heels more emphatically. And as the spirit of prayer led him onward he began to raise his chair together with his heels, and bring that down upon the floor; and soon he raised it a little higher, and brought it down with still more emphasis. He continued to do this, and grew more and more engaged, till he would bring the chair down as if he would break it to pieces.

In the meantime the brethren and sisters that were on their knees began to groan, and sigh, and weep, and agonize in prayer. The deacon continued to straggle until he was about exhausted; and when he ceased, my brother said that no one in the room could get off from his knees. They could only weep and confess, and all melt down before the Lord. From this meeting the work of the Lord spread forth in every direction all over the town. And thus it spread at that time from Adams as a centre, throughout nearly all the towns in the county.

I have spoken of the conviction of Squire W—, in whose office I studied law. I have also said that when I was converted, it was in a grove where I went to pray. Very soon after my conversion, several other cases of conversion occurred that were reported to have taken place under similar circumstances; that is, persons went up into the grove to pray, and there made their peace with God.

When Squire W— heard them tell their experience, one after the other, in our meetings, he thought that he had a parlor to pray in; and that he was not going up into the woods, to have the same story to tell that had been so often told. To this, it appeared, he strongly committed himself. Although this was a thing entirely immaterial in itself; yet it was a point on which his pride had become committed, and therefore he could not get into the kingdom of God.

I have found in my ministerial experience a great many cases of this kind; where upon some question, perhaps immaterial in itself, a sinner's pride of heart would commit him. In all such cases the dispute must be yielded, or the sinner never will get into the kingdom of God. I have known persons to remain, for weeks in great tribulation of mind, pressed by the Spirit; but they could make no progress till the point upon which they were committed was yielded. Mr. W— was the first case of the kind that had ever come to my notice.

After he was converted, he said the question had frequently come up when he was in prayer; and that he had been made to see that it was pride that made him take that stand, and that kept him out of the kingdom of God. But still he was not willing to admit this, even to himself. He tried in every way to make himself believe, and to make God believe, that he was not proud. One night, he said, he prayed all night in his parlor that God would have mercy on him; but in the morning he felt more distressed than ever. He finally became enraged that God did not hear his prayer, and was tempted to kill himself. He was so tempted to use his pen-knife for that purpose that he actually threw it as far as he could, that it might be lost, so that this temptation should not prevail. He said that, one night, on returning from meeting, he was so pressed with a sense of his pride, and with the fact that it prevented his going up into the woods to pray, that he was determined to make himself believe, and make God believe, that he was not proud; and he sought around for a mud puddle in which to kneel down, that he might demonstrate that it was not pride which kept him from going into the woods. Thus he continued to struggle for several weeks.

But one afternoon I was sitting in our office, and two of the elders of the church with me; when the young man that I had met at the shoemaker's shop, came hastily into the office, and exclaimed as he came, "Squire W— is converted!" and proceeded to say: "I went up into the woods to pray, and heard someone over in the valley shouting very loud. I went up to the brow of the hill, where I could look down, and I saw Squire W— pacing to and fro, and singing as loud as he could sing; and every few moments he would stop and clap his hands with his full strength, and shout, 'I will rejoice in the God of my salvation!' Then he would march and sing again; and then stop, and shout, and clap his hands." While the young man was telling us this, behold, Squire W— appeared in sight, coming over the hill. As he came down to the foot of the hill we observed that he met Father T—, as we all called him, an aged Methodist brother.

He rushed up to him, and took him right up in his arms. After setting him down, and conversing a moment, he came rapidly toward the office. When he came in, he was in a profuse perspiration—he was a heavy man, and he cried out, "I've got it!" "I've got it!" clapped his hands with all his might, and fell upon his knees and began to give thanks to God. He then gave us an account of what had been passing in his mind, and why he had not obtained a hope before. He said as soon as he gave up that point and went into the woods, his mind was relieved; and when he knelt down to pray, the Spirit of God came upon him and filled him with such unspeakable joy that it resulted in the scene which the young man witnessed. Of course from that time Squire W— took a decided stand for God.

Toward spring the older members of the church began to abate in their zeal. I had been in the habit of rising early in the morning, and spending a season of prayer alone in the meeting-house; and I finally succeeded in interesting a considerable number of brethren to meet me there in the morning for a prayer-meeting. This was at a very early hour; and we were generally together long before it was light enough to see to read. I persuaded my minister to attend these morning meetings.

But soon they began to be remiss; whereupon I would get up in time to go around to their houses and wake them up. Many times I went round and round, and called the brethren that I thought would be most likely to attend, and we would have a precious season of prayer. But still the brethren, I found, attended with more and more reluctance; which fact greatly tried me.

One morning I had been around and called the brethren up, and when I returned to the meeting-house but few of them had got there. Mr. Gale, my minister, was standing at the door of the church, and as I came up, all at once the glory of God shone upon and round about me, in a manner most marvellous. The day was just beginning to dawn. But all at once a light perfectly ineffable shone in my soul, that almost prostrated me to the ground. In this light it seemed as if I could see that all nature praised and worshipped God except man. This light seemed to be like the brightness of the sun in every direction. It was too intense for the eyes. I recollect casting my eyes down and breaking into a flood of tears, in view of the fact that mankind did not praise God. I think I knew something then, by actual experience, of that light that prostrated Paul on his way to Damascus. It was surely a light such as I could not have endured long.

When I burst out in such loud weeping, Mr. Gale said "What is the matter brother Finney?" I could not tell him. I found that he had seen no light; and that he saw no reason why I should be in such a state of mind. I therefore said but little. I believe I merely replied, that I saw the glory of God; and that I could not endure to think of the manner in which he was treated by men. Indeed, it did not seem to me at the time that the vision of his glory which I had, was to be described in words. I wept it out; (P.35) and the vision, if it may be so called, passed away and left my mind calm.

I used to have, when I was a young Christian, many seasons of communing with God which cannot be described in words. And not unfrequently those seasons would end in an impression on my mind like this: "Go, see that thou tell no man." I did not understand this at the time, and several times I paid no attention to this injunction; but tried to tell my Christian brethren what communications the Lord had made to me, or rather what seasons of communion I had with him. But I soon found that it would not do to tell my brethren what was passing between the Lord and my soul. They could not understand it. They would look surprised, and

sometimes, I thought, incredulous; and I soon learned to keep quiet in regard to those divine manifestations, and say but little about them.

I used to spend a great deal of time in prayer; sometimes, I thought, literally praying "without ceasing." I also found it very profitable, and felt very much inclined to hold frequent days of private fasting. On those days I would seek to be entirely alone with God, and would generally wander off into the woods, or get into the meeting house, or somewhere away entirely by myself.

Sometimes I would pursue a wrong course in fasting, and attempt to examine myself according to the ideas of self-examination then entertained by my minister and the church. I would try to look into my own heart, in the sense of examining my feelings; and would turn my attention particularly to my motives, and the state of my mind. When I pursued this course, I found invariably that the day would close without any perceptible advance being made. Afterwards I saw clearly why this was so. Turning my attention, as I did, from the Lord Jesus Christ, and looking into myself, examining my motives and feelings, my feelings all subsided of course. But whenever I fasted, and let the Spirit take his own course with me, and gave myself up to (P.36) let him lead and instruct me, I universally found it in the highest degree useful. I found I could not live without enjoying the presence of God; and if at any time a cloud came over me, I could not rest, I could not study, I could not attend to anything with the least satisfaction or benefit, until the medium was again cleared between my soul and God.

I had been very fond of my profession. But as I have said, when I was converted all was dark in that direction, and I had, no more, any pleasure in attending to law business. I had many very pressing invitations to conduct lawsuits, but I uniformly refused. I did not dare to trust myself in the excitement of a contested lawsuit; and furthermore, the business itself of conducting other people's controversies, appeared odious and offensive to me.

The Lord taught me, in those early days of my Christian experience, many very important truths in regard to the spirit of prayer. Not long after I was converted, a woman with whom I had boarded—though I did not board with her at this time, was taken very sick. She was not a Christian, but her husband was a professor of religion. He came into our office one evening, being a brother of Squire W—, and said to me, "My wife cannot live through the night." This seemed to plant an arrow, as it were, in my heart. It came upon me in the sense of a burden that crushed me, the nature of which I could not at all understand; but with it came an intense desire to pray for that woman. The burden was so great that I left the office almost immediately, and went up to the meeting house, to pray for her. There I struggled, but could not say much. I could only groan with groanings loud and deep.

I stayed a considerable time in the church, in this state of mind, but got no relief. I returned to the office; but I could not sit still. I could only walk the room and agonize. I returned to the meeting house again, and went through the same process of struggling. For a long time I (P.37) tried to get my prayer before the Lord; but somehow words could not express it. I could only groan and weep, without being able to express what I wanted in words. I returned to the office again, and still found I was unable to rest; and I returned a third time to the meeting house. At this time the Lord gave me power to prevail. I was enabled to roll the burden upon him; and I obtained the assurance in my own mind that the woman would not die, and indeed that she would never die in her sins.

I returned to the office. My mind was perfectly quiet; and I soon left and retired to rest. Early the next morning the husband of this woman came into the office. I enquired how his wife was. He, smiling said, "She's alive, and to all appearance better this morning." I replied, "Brother W—, she will not die with this sickness; you may rely upon it. And she will never die in her sins." I do not know how I was made sure of this; but it was in some way made plain to me, so that I had no doubt that she would recover. She did recover, and soon after obtained a hope in Christ.

At first I did not understand what this exercise of mind that I had passed through, was. But shortly after in relating it to a Christian brother he said to me, "Why, that was the travail of your soul." A few minutes' conversation, and pointing me to certain scriptures, gave me to understand what it was.

Another experience which I had soon after this, illustrates the same truth. I have spoken of one young woman as belonging to the class of young people of my acquaintance, who remained unconverted. This attracted a good deal of attention; and there was considerable conversation among Christians about her case. She was naturally a charming girl, and very much enlightened on the subject of religion, but she remained in her sins.

One of the elders of the church and myself agreed to make her a daily subject of prayer, to continue to present (P.38) her case at the throne of grace, morning, noon, and evening, until she was either converted, or should die, or we should be unable to keep our covenant. I found my mind greatly exercised about her; and more and more, as I continued to pray for her. I soon found, however, that the elder who had entered into this arrangement with me, was losing his spirit of prayer for her. But this did not discourage me. I continued to hold on with increasing importunity. I also availed myself of every opportunity to converse plainly and searchingly with her on the subject of her salvation.

After I had continued in this way for sometime, one evening I called to see her just as the sun was setting. As I came up to the door I heard a shriek from a female voice, and a scuffling and confusion inside the door; and stood and waited for the confusion to be over. The lady of the house soon came and opened the door, and held in her hand a portion of a book, which had evidently been torn in two. She was pale and very much agitated. She held out that portion of the book which she had in her hand, and said, "Mr. Finney, don't you think my sister has become a Universalist?" The book was a defense of Universalism. Her sister had detected her reading it in a private way, and tried to get it away from her; and it was the struggle to obtain that book which I had heard.

I received this information at the door; whereupon I declined to go in. It struck me very much in the same way as had the announcement that the sick woman, already mentioned, was about to die. It loaded me down with great agony. As I returned to my room, at some distance from that house, I felt almost as if I should stagger under the burden that was on my mind; and I struggled, and groaned, and agonized, but could not frame to present the case before God in words, but only in groans and tears.

It seemed to me that the discovery that that young woman, instead of being converted, was becoming a Universalist, so astounded me that I could not break through with **(P.39)** my faith, and get hold of God in reference to her case. There seemed to be a darkness hanging over the question, as if a cloud had risen up between me and God, in regard to prevailing for her salvation. But still the Spirit struggled within me with groanings that could not be uttered.

However, I was obliged to retire that night without having prevailed. But as soon as it was light I awoke; and the first thought that I had was to beseech the God of grace again for that young woman. I immediately arose and fell upon my knees. No sooner was I upon my knees than the darkness gave way, and the whole subject opened to my mind; and as soon as I plead for her God said to me, "Yes ! yes!" If he had spoken with an audible voice, it would not have been more distinctly understood than was this word spoken within my soul. It instantly relieved all my solicitude. My mind became filled with the greatest peace and joy; and I felt a complete certainty that her salvation was secure.

I drew a false inference, however, in regard to the time which indeed was not a thing particularly impressed upon my mind at the time of my prayer. Still I expected her to be converted immediately; but she was not. She remained in her sins for several months. In its proper place I shall have occasion to speak of her conversion. I felt disappointed, at the time, that she was not converted at once; and was somewhat staggered upon the question whether I had really prevailed with God in her behalf.

Soon after I was converted, the man with whom I had been boarding for some time, who was a magistrate, and one of the principal men in the place, was deeply convicted of sin He had been elected a member of the legislature of the state. I was praying daily for him, and urging him to give his heart to God. His conviction became very deep; but still, from day to day, he deferred submission, and did not obtain a hope. My solicitude for him increased.

One afternoon several of his political friends had a pro-**(P.40)**-tracted interview with him. On the evening of the same day I attempted again to carry his case to God; as the urgency in my mind for his conversion had become very great. In my prayer I had drawn very near to God. I do not remember ever to have been in more intimate communion with the Lord Jesus Christ than I was at that time. Indeed his presence was so real that I was bathed in tears of joy, and gratitude, and love; and in this state of mind I attempted to pray for this friend. But the moment I did so, my mouth was shut. I found it impossible to pray a word for him. The Lord seemed to say to me, "No; I will not hear." An anguish seized upon me; I thought at first it was a temptation. But the door was shut in my face. It seemed as if the Lord said to me, "Speak no more to me of that matter." It pained me beyond expression. I did not know what to make of it.

The next morning I saw him; and as soon as I brought up the question of submission to God, he said to me, "Mr. Finney, I shall have nothing more to do with it until I return from the legislature. I stand committed to my political friends to carry out certain measures in the legislature, that are incompatible with my first becoming a Christian; and I have promised that I will not attend to the subject until after I have returned from Albany."

From the moment of that exercise the evening before, I had no spirit of prayer for him at all. As soon as he told me what he had done, I understood it. I could see that his convictions were all gone, and that the Spirit of God had left him. From that time he grew more careless and hardened than ever.

When the time arrived he went to the legislature; and in the Spring he returned an almost insane Universalist. I say almost insane, because, instead of having formed his opinions from any evidence or course of argument, he told me this: he said, "I have come to that conclusion, not because I have found it taught in the Bible, but because such **(P.41)** a doctrine is so opposed to the carnal mind. It is a doctrine so generally rejected and spoken against, as to prove that it is distasteful to the carnal, or unconverted mind." This was astonishing to me. But everything else that I could get out of him was as wild and absurd as this. He remained in his sins, finally fell

into decay, and died at last, as I have been told, a dilapidated man, and in the full faith of *his* Universalism.
(End of page 41)

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Possible Other Sources of information on Charles G. Finney AND other books.

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Another fine book on Finney is FINNEY ON REVIVAL by V. Raymond Edman former president of Wheaton College. He was there in 1950 when a powerful revival fell on the Wheaton campus. The "conversion" chapter from the Finney Memoirs is included in his book. Copyright 2000 by Bethany House Publishers. Edman's book uses the King James Bible. Good reading. Printed copy. We have not found a download version of this book.

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Encyclopedia Britannica 2008 Reference Suite (computer version) – Good one-page review. Only subscribers can access. Britannica is a highly secular organization and therefore censors out much information.

Wikipedia Encyclopedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Grandison_Finney. An excellent article on Charles Grandison Finney, his times and his opponents. Complaints are directed at Wikipedia for a lack of accuracy from loose standards of scholarship. However, its system of writing and review provides a much wider view of knowledge than is found in Britannica. I use both.