

## American Presbyterian History

Week 7 – Revivalism

Trinity Presbyterian Church

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1. What is revivalism?
  - a. Revival is a spread of the Word across the land as God brings his people back to himself.
  - b. Revivalism is a movement which generally includes intense emotional experience and religious fervor less grounded in churches and the ordinary ministry of the Word.
2. The Second Great Awakening (c. 1780-1850)
  - a. Another revivalist movement spread across the young United States, marked by intense religious experience and moralism. It also had a much greater lasting effect.
    - i. Ex: the Cane Ridge Revival (KY, 1801)...an example of proto-Pentecostalism.
    - ii. Most of the revivals took on a less-emotional character than some of the extremes, but with a great concern for the morals of public society.
  - b. The Second Great Awakening arose in a time with religion on a decline.
    - i. After the American Revolution, the interest in religion began to wane and attendance faded.
    - ii. However, there was still a widespread connection to religion that it awakened.
  - c. The revivalism took on a moralist persona...less focus on gospel, more on social reform.
    - i. It crossed denominational bounds as voluntary societies began to form.
    - ii. The concern was about bringing morality back to America and getting the people to fall in line with proper living.
3. Moralism and Societies
  - a. Parachurch societies began to arise, many of whom supported the revivalism.
    - i. They were not affiliated with any particular denomination. Church unity began to be expressed less through denominations or interchurch ecumenism.
    - ii. These societies were seen as a way for Protestants to Christianize and civilize America (especially the west) and to spread their influence.
  - b. Most were Bible societies, tract printing, Sunday schools, and temperance movements.
    - i. Many started out with reforming on the frontier, whether it be missions or bringing renewal to society.
    - ii. Many were strongly moralist and most concerned with reforming society.
    - iii. Example: the call for alcohol moderation gave way to all alcohol abstinence.
  - c. Points of reflection:
    - i. Should moralism be equated with Christianity?
    - ii. How are morals and the gospel related to one another?

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### 4. Charles Finney (1792-1875)

#### a. Issues with his theology.

- i. Denied human depravity and that Adam's sin was imputed to the human race.
- ii. Affirmed a universal atonement and that Christ's death was not specifically vicarious.
- iii. He believed that the ground of justification was God's love, so Christ's death was therefore only one of several conditions of justification.
- iv. He referred to the Westminster Confession as a "Presbyterian pope."



#### b. Issues with his practices.

- i. Finney instituted what was known as his "new measures" for revival.
- ii. They included such things as the anxious bench, visiting towns without invitation, and calling people out by name who were present. It revolved around bringing the people into a state of excitement.
- iii. He saw the beginning of a revival as a scientific enterprise. Since there was no need for sinners to be regenerated, then certain steps needed to be taken in order to awaken and convince people to come forward.
- iv. Finney's techniques were really just consistent with his theological ideas.

#### c. Ordained as a Presbyterian, but received mixed reviews from the Presbyterian church

- i. During his examination, he agreed to the Westminster Confession, though he admitted he hadn't studied them much.
- ii. The revivalism and social reforms were greeted at first, but soon the Presbyterian church began to shift their stance.
- iii. Led to an awakening of "old school Presbyterians" to the sense of theological dangers slipping into the church. (ex. Charles Hodge [see left], Ashbel Green)



### 5. The influence and lasting effect of Finney and the Second Great Awakening

- a. How has modern American evangelicalism been shaped by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Great Awakening?
- b. How do our theological convictions affect how we approach ministry in our churches?
- c. Finney's new measures shifted the emphasis in conversion from God to man. It became less dependent on God's work and more on the charisma of the preacher.
- d. What we win people with is what we win people to. So what are we using?

Next week...*The Old School-New School Controversy*