

Cooke, Tony

Miracles and the Supernatural Throughout Church History

20. Great Awakenings in America (Edwards and Finney)

This chapter traces two leaders of American revival. Jonathan Edwards, a brilliant pastor-theologian, oversaw waves of the Great Awakening in Northampton and worked hard to discern genuine works of the Spirit from counterfeits. Charles Finney, a lawyer turned evangelist, saw dramatic conversions across New York and became known as the 'Father of Modern Revivalism.'

Key takeaways

- Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) led revival in Northampton starting 1733; conversions came 'by flocks,' with 300+ saved in six months, and a second wave (1740-1742) intensified when George Whitefield preached.
- Edwards saw dramatic physical responses (weeping, trembling, fainting, trances) and refused to dismiss them all as fake or accept them all as real — 'don't throw out the baby with the bathwater.'
- In Distinguishing Marks, Edwards gives five tests of a true work of God: it exalts Jesus, works against Satan and sin, honors Scripture, promotes truth over error, and produces humble love for God and people.

- Charles Finney (1792-1875) was converted in 1821, then received a 'mighty baptism of the Holy Ghost' that came in 'waves of liquid love,' launching a powerful evangelistic ministry.
- Finney saw whole congregations fall under conviction (Sodom and Rome, NY), but he distrusted manufactured emotion — he wanted only enough excitement to fix attention on the truth, never hype.
- The Rochester Revival (1830) was his high point, reportedly sparking revival in 1,500 towns and 100,000 church additions; it was undergirded by intercessors like Abel Clary and Father Nash. Finney pioneered extended meetings, the 'anxious bench,' and altar calls.

Passages worth keeping

“The devil's sowing such tares is no proof that a true work of the Spirit of God is not gloriously carried on.”

Edwards' core stance: counterfeits and excess don't invalidate the genuine work.

“It seemed to come in waves and waves of liquid love... I said, 'Lord, I cannot bear any more.'”

Finney's baptism of the Spirit that empowered his ministry.

How it connects

Both men insist the substance of revival is Christ proclaimed and lives transformed, not the outward manifestations — a useful filter for weighing any claimed move of the Spirit against 1 John 4.

Scripture referenced

- **1 John 4:1** -- Foundation of Edwards' 'test the spirits' — his five marks of a true work.
- **1 John 4:4** -- The Spirit gives victory over the world; Edwards' second test.
- **1 Corinthians 13:4-5** -- True divine love is humble love — Edwards' fifth and surest test.
- **Acts 16:29-30** -- Philippian jailer trembling — Edwards' biblical example of bodily response under conviction.