

# Letters on Revivals--No. 26.

by Charles Finney

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of Evangelists in promoting revivals, while also highlighting the qualifications and responsibilities of Evangelists in order to avoid disturbance and distraction in the church.*

**Scripture:** Ephesians 4:11

**Topics:** "Church Unity", "Role of Evangelists"

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## Description

Charles Finney emphasizes the vital role of evangelists in promoting revivals, highlighting their unique qualifications and the importance of their relationship with local pastors. He warns against the dangers of ambition, lack of meekness, and rashness in evangelists, which can lead to division and hinder the work of the church. Finney encourages evangelists to respect the pastoral relationship and to labor in fields where they are welcomed, rather than forcing their way into unprepared congregations. He asserts that a truly effective evangelist will find ample opportunities for ministry by following God's leading and maintaining harmony with local churches. Ultimately, he calls for a cooperative spirit between evangelists and pastors to foster genuine revival.

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## Transcript

### THE EMPLOYMENT AND QUALIFICATIONS OF EVANGELISTS

To All The Friends And Especially All The Ministers Of Our Lord Jesus Christ:

Dear Brethren:

In connection with this subject I wish to say to my brethren several things in regard to employing Evangelists in promoting revivals.

And here I suppose I need not say that such a class of minister is distinctly recognized in the Bible, and that they are manifestly in some sense itinerating ministers of the gospel, and distinguished from pastors particularly in this--that they had no stated charge or particular church or congregation over which they presided. They seem to have been employed by the Holy Ghost to travel among the churches and perform that kind of labor to which they were adapted, and which their relations rendered it peculiarly proper for them to perform. I design to say more in detail upon this subject hereafter.

And further I suppose I need not attempt to show that in every age of the Christian church,--to say nothing of the older dispensation, whenever religion has been extensively revived, the employment of Evangelists,

or what has been equivalent to this, has uniformly been resorted to by the Holy Spirit in promoting the work. I am not aware that any extensive revival has ever existed without the use of this particular means in connection with other means for its promotion. Sometimes evangelists, properly so called, have been employed; at other times lay-men and pastors have gone abroad, visiting and laboring with the churches. I think it cannot be denied that one of the most efficient influences ever used by the Holy Spirit in promoting revivals is some form of itinerant labor either of ministers or of lay-men.

The things however which I wish to say do not so much respect the validity and importance of the office and labors of Evangelists as the mistakes into which the churches have fallen respecting them--mistakes which have led to extensive prejudices against their labors.

And first I should observe that plainly there are comparatively few men well qualified for Evangelists. An Evangelist needs very peculiar characteristics, without which they will almost inevitably work mischief in the churches. Without these peculiar qualifications, they may indeed do some and even much good; but they will be apt to disturb the relation of the pastors so seriously and get up such a state of things in the churches as will tend ultimately and necessarily to their own expulsion from those churches.

Some of the things which I wish to say upon the subject are the following.

1. An Evangelist should be an unambitious man. If he is ambitious, he will inevitably not only grieve the Spirit of God, but will aim to gather about himself an influence and a power, and if in the providence of God he should acquire it, he will use it in such a manner as to embarrass and distract rather than edify the church of God.
2. He should be a man of meekness. It is natural that he should meet with very much opposition. Unless he is a man of good temper, and of great meekness, bearing with patience and without retort the many things that may be said and written against him, he will inevitably excite angry disputes and divisions rather than promote godly edification.
3. He should be a man of discretion, so as not to be guilty of rashness in any of his movements. He should especially avoid any such rashness as might justly array the influence of pastors against himself.
4. He should be very careful not to break open the door and enter fields of labor which the Lord has not prepared for him. When Evangelists are abroad and revivals occur under their labors, there is in almost every church more or less men and women who are perhaps really pious people, but withal a little headstrong and indiscreet, who are for crowding their measures and insisting upon having Evangelists come and labor in their churches, before either their pastors or the body of the church are at all prepared for such a movement.

I said it is almost inevitable that an Evangelist should have many things said against him. Many reports will be circulated, prejudicial to his influence and labors. These will come to the ears of pastors and churches, who may not have the means, and possibly not the heart to search into and find out the truth upon these points. Consequently they are by no means prepared to receive the Evangelist. Yet if he be a discreet and holy man--if his labors are truly useful, this will be known, and the knowledge will extend fast enough to open the eyes and the hearts of ministers and people to receive him into different fields as fast as he is able to occupy them.

Now the thing I wish to say right here is this;--that if a man has not discretion enough to refrain from pushing his labors into places, congregations and neighborhoods, where Christian churches exist and where the ministers are good men and yet by no means prepared to receive him;--he will soon hedge himself in round about and be generally resisted by the pastors and churches. If he will patiently labor from field to field as God throws the door wide open before him, it appears to me certain that prejudice will give way quite as fast as he is able to go forward and occupy the opening fields of labor. But if on account of the importance of particular places he listens to the invitation of a few who are urgent to have him come, while the ministry and churches in general, and especially the minister and many of the very church to which he is invited are through prejudice or misapprehension entirely unprepared to receive him, there may in such a case be some revival, but there will be much distraction and ultimately a powerful reaction. Indeed few things are a more sore trial to pastors than to have a few zealous men in their churches overrule their own judgments and call in to labor in the congregation an Evangelist of whose labors they sincerely stand in doubt. They sometimes yield to this as the least of two evils.

But I would most seriously advise Evangelists to let it be understood by serious and good ministers that they sympathize with them and have no disposition whatever to disturb their relation or hinder them in their work, or crowd into their pulpits or among their people at the hazard of alienation and distraction rather than with the prospect of union and of gospel love. No other course can so readily secure the confidence of pastors. If pastors find that there is no danger that Evangelists will break in upon their labors and disturb their relations they will invite them the more readily and cordially to come. If they find that an Evangelist duly appreciates the pastoral relation, its difficulties and the danger of disturbing it;--in short if they find that the Evangelist most sincerely aims at promoting a healthful and stable pastoral influence--if they become satisfied that he truly aims at the glory of God and has correct views of the best means of securing this end, they will of course give him their confidence. If they love revivals and love the cause he loves, alienation will cease, and confidence be established.

I suppose it true however that under some circumstances it may be the duty of Evangelists or other ministers to go into a region and there labor in the gospel, entirely regardless of the nominal ministry of that region. Where ministers are manifestly unconverted and churches apostate from God and spiritual desolation reigning, it may be and doubtless often is the duty of ministers to go and preach the gospel regardless of the nominal ministry there. But when the ministry are manifestly pious men and not opposed to revivals, their relation to the churches should be respected. If they have difficulties in respect to Evangelists growing out of prejudice or misapprehension, let Evangelists labor on where they have access to the churches until prejudice gives way and misapprehensions are corrected. Then a door may be opened to those fields where before only a small minority desired his labors.

Cases of this kind sometimes occur. A few zealous and perhaps furious men will insist upon the Evangelist coming forthwith, and will write to him to this effect more or less fully representing to him perhaps, that their minister and the mass of the church are opposed to revivals. Now if he listens to such men, gets his own prejudices enlisted, till he becomes excited, breaks in and goes to preaching before the way is prepared for him, the Lord will almost certainly rebuke him, and five year's time will show that his labors there resulted in more harm than good.

An able Evangelist--one who is really discreet, simple-hearted and useful, will always find fields enough fully open for his labors. If he will be satisfied to follow the order of God and not suffer himself to be pulled or thrust in, before the way is prepared in the view of the pastor and church for him to come, he cannot fail ultimately to secure not only the co-operation of a pious ministry and church, but also to find access to as

many pulpits as he can possibly occupy.

I have many things to say respecting the errors of Evangelists, pastors, and churches on this subject, but let this suffice for the present.

Your brother,

C.G. FINNEY

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