

Letters on Revivals--No. 27.

by Charles Finney

Charles Finney argues that churches should not rely too heavily on Evangelists, but rather take personal responsibility and get into deep sympathy with God to promote revivals.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 3:6

Topics: "Role of Evangelists", "Church Responsibility"

Description

Charles Finney addresses the role of Evangelists in promoting revivals, cautioning that churches often mistakenly believe they cannot have a revival without them. He emphasizes that this reliance on Evangelists can lead to a lack of personal responsibility among church members and a diminished trust in God. Finney argues that churches should focus on their own spiritual preparation and the leadership of their pastors, rather than depending solely on Evangelists. He warns that this misplaced trust can ultimately harm the church and weaken the pastor's influence. Finney encourages churches to engage deeply in prayer and personal commitment to foster genuine revivals.

Transcript

ON EVANGELISTS

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

Dear Brethren:

Although the employment of Evangelists to promote revivals is manifestly in accordance with the order of God, and is of great service to the churches yet I have observed that the churches are liable to fall, and in some instances have fallen into injurious errors in respect to their labors which have greatly hindered their usefulness, disheartened their pastors, and led them almost to the conclusion that upon the whole the labors of Evangelists though in many cases immediately serviceable are ultimately the greater of two evils, or perhaps more strictly the less of two goods. Some of these evils which I have observed are the following:

The churches are liable to fall, and sometimes have fallen into the belief that they can have no revival at all without the labors of an Evangelist, and they have had no faith or courage to make the requisite efforts unless they could get some celebrated Evangelist to aid their pastor. This belief wherever it prevails has a pernicious influence in a great many respects.

It leads the church in reality away from God to trust in man. Churches are not aware of this; but I have often seen so great evidence of it that I could not doubt it. During my own labors as an Evangelist I have in several instances found the chief obstacles to success in the fact that the church were expecting that if I came they should have a revival of course. I have sometimes found it more difficult to convince the church of sin on this point than upon almost any other; and yet it has been impossible to promote a revival until they are convicted upon this point and deeply humbled and brought to see that they had been trusting in man rather than in God. When they had repented and put away this sin and looked alone to God in faith to pour out his Spirit, the work would revive and go on; but not before.

This is a much more common error than churches are aware of, and it is apt to prevail precisely in proportion to the known success that attends the labors of an Evangelist. If his success has been uniform and great, the churches fall into the mistake of expecting as a matter of course that if they secure his labors they shall have a revival, and thus they dishonor God and seriously embarrass the Evangelist.

But another aspect of this error is that church members throw aside personal responsibility in a great measure, and instead of feeling that they themselves must do a great part of the labor, under God, they often expect the Evangelist and the pastor to do the labor, while they take a kind of passive attitude or at the utmost go into a kind of superficial excitement and bluster about to get people out to meeting and warn sinners as they express it, without breaking up their own fallow ground and getting into such deep sympathy with God as to be able to prevail daily and hourly with God in prayer.

The more I have seen of revivals, the more I am satisfied that one of the principle errors into which ministers and churches have fallen is that ministers attempt to do too much of the labor themselves and do not throw enough personal responsibility upon each member of the church. Whenever an attempt is made to promote a revival without securing in the outset a thorough reformation in the church, a deep and thorough breaking up of the fallow ground and a mighty taking hold of God in prayer, it will be found in the end that the revival if there should seem to be one, will be very superficial, and will leave the church more hardened than ever.

It is exceedingly injurious to churches to send off and get an Evangelist to labor among them unless they intend to lay themselves individually upon the altar, to consecrate their whole being to God, and to enter so deeply into sympathy with Christ as to travail in birth for souls, until Christ be formed within them. Ordinarily, if the right course be taken, churches may have revivals of religion and powerful revivals too without any ministers at all. There are comparatively few churches in this country that do not comprise men of sufficient intelligence to teach the essential things of the gospel, to instruct enquirers, and lead them to Christ, if they were only in the right state of mind themselves.

If the churches would only get a revival spirit themselves, they could hardly help having revivals among the impenitent, even though they have no preacher at all. I could relate several instances in which powerful revivals have been promoted altogether by intelligent laymen and women, where no minister could be had, or at least where no minister had been employed. But where a church has a pious pastor, one who fears God and loves souls, if they will do their duty they will find that as a general thing, they can have revivals and even powerful revivals without employing Evangelists.

When they can secure this result under their own efforts and those of their pastor, it is in general more healthful for the church, does more to strengthen the influence and promote the usefulness of the pastor and more closely cement together the pastor and his flock in mutual sympathy and confidence. It better

promotes the growth in grace of both pastor and people. It gives the pastor greater influence in training the converts and in leading and edifying the church. In short in almost every way, where a powerful revival of religion can be secured by the church and their pastor, this is by far the most desirable course.

Where Evangelists are employed it should rather be to strengthen and encourage the pastor in his work than to throw him into the back ground, impair the confidence of his people in him, and cast discouragements in his way. If I mistake not in most instances where Evangelists have promoted revivals in such a way as to weaken the influence of pious and faithful pastors and impair the confidence their people had in them, where the people have almost worshipped the Evangelist, and have consequently thought less of their pastor than before, it will be found ultimately that the revival has very much unsettled the congregation and unhinged the most desirable influences that should promote religion among them. In many such instances the revival seems to produce more harm than good.

Now this result is often owing to the very injudicious conduct of the church. They do not take right views of the subject. They ascribe too much to Evangelists and far too little to their pastor. By this I do not mean that so far as the pastor himself is concerned, he would care or need to care how little is ascribed to him, But the evil lies farther back. If the church take a wrong view of the subject the mischief that results falls on themselves. Losing their confidence in their pastor renders it impossible for him afterwards to do them the good it is in his heart to do, and which he otherwise might do. The pastor has been perhaps for several months preparing the way for a revival, and already the spirit of prayer breathes in many hearts, and a spirit of supplication is poured upon the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem. As soon as these appearances betoken the approach of a revival, instead of thanking God in mighty prayer, each member of the church taking his place, man, woman and child--instead of holding prayer meetings and moving in a body to promote a genuine revival, depending under God upon their pastor to do the preaching, they often just at this crises take a course that is highly injurious. They make a move to get an Evangelist; the pastor sees that they have not confidence that he can preach so as to promote a revival. He feels distressed. As things are situated he does not like to refuse lest they should fail to have a revival. The very fact of his refusing might prevent a revival, even though they might have had a powerful one if they had said nothing about an Evangelist. He therefore consents; they send and get an Evangelist and have a revival.

Now the church are very apt right here to grieve the Spirit of God by failing to give the glory to God and failing to ascribe to the ordinary means of grace that which really belongs to them. They do not seem to see that they grieve the heart of God by undervaluing the pastoral relations and pastoral labors.

But if, where the way is thoroughly prepared for a revival, the church and pastor with right views and motives can agree in calling in the labors of a judicious Evangelist, and will take throughout a judicious course, great numbers may be induced to attend meeting, and in many cases vastly more good can be secured through his labors than without them.

If the Lord permit I will endeavor in a future number to show what I regard as a judicious course on the part of the church, the pastor, and the Evangelist.

Your brother,

C.G. FINNEY

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