

Letters on Revivals--No. 28.

by Charles Finney

Laymen should be actively employed in promoting revivals to promote the health of the church and encourage personal and individual effort.

Scripture: Matthew 28:19

Topics: "Revival", "Lay Ministry"

Description

Charles Finney emphasizes the critical role of lay labor in promoting revivals, arguing that the church must not delegate its responsibility to ministers alone. He asserts that active participation from lay members is essential for the health of the church and the spread of the Gospel, as seen in the early church where believers preached amidst persecution. Finney encourages ministers to empower laypeople by involving them in prayer meetings and personal evangelism, rather than taking on all responsibilities themselves. He believes that true humility and holiness in Christians come from their active engagement in the work of salvation. Ultimately, he calls for a collaborative effort where both ministers and lay members work together to foster spiritual growth and revival.

Transcript

ON THE IMPORTANCE OF LAY LABOR IN THE PROMOTION OF REVIVALS

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

Dear Brethren:

In my last letter I dwelt on the errors into which the churches fall in regard to the employment of evangelists, and said that, the Lord willing, in a future number I would state what I regard as a judicious course to be pursued by a church, a pastor, and an evangelist.

In the first place I observe that nothing should be done that shall in any way relieve the church from a sense of their own personal and individual responsibility. I have always observed that where several ministers were present, employed in the promotion of revivals, so much ministerial labor is apt to do much more hurt than good. And I had much rather be entirely alone as a minister in the promotion of revivals, than to have so many ministers present as to take nearly all the active labor out of the hands of the church. When ministers are present, they are expected to take the lead in all the meetings; and if a sufficient number of them are present, they of course occupy all the time, lead in prayer and in

conversation, and, in short, take the work so completely out of the hands of the laymen as to throw them very much into a passive attitude.

Now no person can read the Gospel with his eye on this fact, without perceiving that the primitive apostles and ministers, together with the Holy Ghost, threw a great portion of the labor of diffusing the Gospel and spreading religion, on the great mass of christian men and women. We find that while all the apostles remained at Jerusalem, the lay members were dispersed all abroad through the persecutions that arose about Stephen, and went every where preaching the Gospel. Now for the health of the church it is indispensable that they should be actively and individually employed in promoting the cause of religion. The more labor can be thrown on them the better. The more they are put forward in holding prayer meetings, in personal conversation from house to house, and in every way except in public preaching, the more it is for the health of the church, and for the real interests of piety in any community.

I know that some have been afraid that in this way, laymen would get out of their place, become proud and interfere with the office of the ministry. But I beg leave to say to my brethren, that I do not think it best for ministers to attempt to be the keepers of the humility of the laymen. The true way to make christians humble is to make them holy. The true way to make them holy, is to push them forward in doing all they can by their own active exertions to promote religion; and especially to press them into positions where they will be constrained to sympathize deeply with Christ in regard to the salvation of sinners. For this purpose, nothing is like personal, individual effort to save the souls of men. This work, in order to promote a healthful piety, must be thrown as much as possible into the hands of the church at large; leaving for the minister the over-sight and superintendance of the whole movement, together with the work of publicly preaching the Gospel. Work the laymen as much as possible into conducting the anxious meeting, into conducting and managing the prayer meeting, the conference meeting, and indeed throw every thing upon the laymen that they can do. I am convinced that this is altogether the best policy; and indeed the only wise policy in promoting revivals of religion. If the laymen are ignorant, let the minister instruct them. If he is afraid to trust them in the anxious room to give directions to the inquiring sinners, let him hold one or more meetings if need be, with the laymen of his church for the very purpose of teaching them how to proceed in conducting an inquiry meeting, and how to assist in its labors. Let the minister take pains at all times, both in and out of seasons of revivals, to give the laymen and women in his church, such instruction, that they will know what to do to promote a revival; and then in the name of the Lord, throw the responsibility on them. If he attempts to do all the labor, first his health will soon fail, and he will break down; and secondly, the work cannot be done in this way; for the Lord has said, "I will be inquired of by the house of Israel, (and not merely by ministers,) to do these things for them."

Then, in short, if the question of employing an evangelist comes up, it is wise in the church to raise the question and have it distinctly understood, that whether an evangelist is employed or not, the work is not to be taken out of their hands, nor any thing done, that will in the least degree, relieve them from a personal, and individual responsibility. Nay, if they employ an evangelist, one of their principal objects should be, that through his experience they may be set to work to the best advantage, and have the greatest possible amount of labor thrown on them. The experience of an able evangelist in respect to the employment of the lay members in the promotion of the work may be of very great service to the church. An evangelist that does not employ the laymen and women in the promotion of revivals, will by no means promote to any considerable extent their growth in grace. It is naturally impossible that they should grow in grace only as they are drawn into so deep a sympathy with Christ, as to engage in such personal and individual labors in the promotion of revivals, as shall make them strong in the Lord and in the power of his

might.

Your brother,

C.G. FINNEY

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