

Letters on Revivals--No. 32.

by Charles Finney

The labors of evangelists can reveal the shortcomings of pastors and cause churches to doubt the importance of the pastoral relation, but this does not justify refusing evangelists.

Scripture: Ephesians 4:11, 1 Timothy 5:17, Hebrews 13:17

Topics: "Evangelism", "Pastoral Relationships"

Description

Charles Finney addresses the potential dangers that evangelists pose to pastoral relationships, emphasizing that the effectiveness of evangelists can inadvertently lead congregations to undervalue their pastors. He argues that the lack of spiritual vitality in some pastors may prompt the need for evangelists, which can create a rift in the church's perception of pastoral authority. Finney stresses the importance of recognizing faults on both sides--pastors and evangelists--and the necessity of maintaining a strong pastoral relationship for the health of the church. He calls for vigilance, prayer, and a commitment to spiritual integrity among both pastors and evangelists to avoid these pitfalls.

Transcript

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

Dear Brethren:

One of the particular dangers of evangelists is that their labors may disturb the pastoral relations. This is not necessarily so, but such are the infirmities of human nature, and so many are the mistakes into which pastors, evangelists, and churches are liable to fall, that as a matter of fact the labors of evangelists have often tended strongly to this result; insomuch that churches have very often come to doubt the expediency, or to say the least, to feel very little of the necessity and importance of the pastoral relation. And this is a great evil. It has resulted in a great measure if I am not mistaken, from a fault in pastors and churches themselves, and doubtless in some instances from the faults of the evangelists. If pastors were really what they ought to be, it would be very difficult for the churches to be so beguiled by Satan as to come to think lightly of the importance of the pastoral relation. But where a pastor has been settled for years, and very little unction and effect have attended his preaching, few additions have been made to the church—all have slept and been quiet, until an evangelist comes forward anointed with the Holy Ghost and with power, and a great revival occurs under his preaching. In cases like this if churches are not strongly on their guard, these facts will lead them to take a superficial and even a totally erroneous view of the pastoral relation.

Now it is by no means justifiable in pastors to refuse evangelists because of the tendency of their labors to unsettle pastors in cases similar to that which I have just mentioned. They ought to be sensible that the fault may be and probably is in a great measure their own. The manifest barrenness and want of unction in their own minister is so strongly contrasted with the unction and power of the evangelist, that the inference is inevitable that their pastor is not such a minister as he ought to be.

And when they look abroad and see nearly all the pastors and their acquaintance in about the same state with their own pastor, they very naturally and almost inevitably infer that there is something in the relation of pastors which lead them to take matters easily, to live on their salaries, keep things quiet and build up their congregations, rather in worldliness than in the Holy Ghost and in faith.

And here I must remark again that in many instances it is the case that the labors of an evangelist are called for from the want of unction in a pastor. Now when this is the case, it tends greatly of necessity to injure the influence of the pastor and to cause the expectations of the people to set loosely upon him, and oftentimes results in destroying their confidence in him as a useful minister of the gospel.

Again it often happens that the evangelist himself will perceive and cannot but perceive that the difficulty is with the pastor—that he is worldly-minded and temporizing—that he has adopted a carnal policy—is seeking to promote his popularity, and many such things over which the evangelist cannot but secretly and deeply sorrow. In such cases he is often greatly at a loss—first, to know whether under the circumstances it is worse for him to go to labor with such a pastor;—secondly, when he is with him, to know what course to take. He sees that the church have no confidence in their pastor and that they have no right to have. Perhaps the most spiritual members of the church venture to breath to him their misgivings and trials of mind with respect to the spiritual state and influence of the pastor. In such cases it is extremely difficult often for the evangelist to approach the minister and read his heart on the subject of his spiritual state without giving offence. Indeed it is very difficult for an evangelist to labor extensively among those churches and pastors who are settled on their lees, without finding himself surrounded with accumulated difficulties. In spite of himself his labors if successful will naturally tend to make the churches see how far their pastors have been out of the way, and where the pastors do not come into such a state as to confess to their churches and reform their ministerial character and influence, the churches will in a great measure lose their confidence in the efficiency and usefulness of their pastor without any fault on the part of the evangelist, and secondly be led to undervalue the pastoral relation in general.

Here are many dangers and faults on all hands that ought to be looked at, realized, repented of and put away in order to secure the highest influence of both pastors and evangelists. The pastoral relation is certainly of priceless value. It is no less certain that the labors of evangelists are extensively owned and blessed of God, and it is just as evident that much wakefulness, prayer, and attention will be requisite to guard effectually against the dangers in which Satan is wont to involve churches, pastors and evangelists. A volume might be written upon this subject, but I can only suggest a few things in these brief letters.

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