

Letters on Revivals--No. 29.

by Charles Finney

The sermon emphasizes the importance of preserving the pastoral relation and avoiding actions that might grieve the Spirit of God when employing an evangelist.

Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 5:12

Topics: "Unity in the Church", "Pastoral Care"

Description

Charles Finney emphasizes the importance of maintaining the pastoral relationship while engaging evangelists in church revivals. He warns against undervaluing pastors in favor of evangelists, as this can grieve the Spirit of God and create division within the church. Finney advocates for a cooperative relationship between pastors and evangelists, urging churches to support their pastors and ensure they remain central to the ministry. He highlights the need for unity and mutual respect to foster a healthy church environment conducive to revival. Ultimately, the goal is to work together for the salvation of souls without undermining the pastor's role.

Transcript

ON THE RELATIVE POSITION OF EVANGELISTS AND PASTORS

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

Dear Brethren:

Another thing which should be avoided in attempting to promote a revival of religion by calling in the labors of an evangelist is the disturbing of the pastoral relation, or doing anything to weaken pastoral influence. I have already intimated in a former letter that churches are apt to err on this subject, and to under-value the labors of a pastor, and greatly to over-value the labors of an evangelist. Thus they wrong their pastor, grieve the Spirit of God, and render it difficult or impossible for the pastor afterwards to do them the good that is in his heart, and which he might otherwise do them. If the pastor is a pious man--and if he is not he should not be a pastor--and indeed let the pastor be what he will, great pains should be taken not to bring the pastoral relation into contempt, or in any way to lower in the estimation of the church its high and sacred importance. Therefore the church in employing an evangelist should not think of setting aside the labors of their pastor for the time being, but simply to call in one who has experience, and is filled with the Spirit of God to aid him and them in their efforts to save souls.

Again they should never suffer themselves to institute comparisons between evangelists and their pastor that shall lead them to undervalue their pastor, and to almost worship the evangelist; for if they do this they will surely grieve the Spirit of God.

The great thing to be observed is, to do nothing that shall grieve the tender Spirit of the blessed God. It very often happens when evangelists are employed, that some members of the church will have so little confidence in the pastor, and such an unreasonable degree of confidence in the evangelist, as to say and do things that will greatly distress, grieve and ultimately offend the more considerate part of the church. Such individuals become enthusiastic in their admiration of the evangelist, and just in proportion, cold and almost contemptuous in their opinions and sayings in regard to their pastor. This always works a great evil. They are ready to go the whole length of every thing the evangelist says and does, and if their pastor and the more considerate members of the church see anything in the evangelist, the tendency of which they deem injurious, and which they attempt to correct, that class of the church to which I have just alluded, become offended, accuse the pastor of being envious or jealous of the influence of the evangelist, and their brethren who think with their pastor, of being opposed to the work, &c. There are a great many dangers in this neighborhood that need to be guarded against. Such members are not considerate as they ought to be. Through the influence of such persons great odium has been brought on the labors of the evangelists; and in many instances it has rendered it very difficult for pastors to see their way clear in inviting evangelists to labor with them. The indiscretion of the churches has been in many instances so great as to lead them to form an entirely wrong estimate of the comparative value of the labors of pastors and evangelists.

Churches should consider that the pastoral relation is one of the most important relations on the earth; and the more permanent it is, if the pastor be a man of God, and what a pastor should be, the better it is for the people. By this I do not mean that circumstances may not occur that will render it very beneficial for churches to change their pastors, and for pastors to change their field of labors; for such cases in fact often do occur; but this I mean, that so long as a pastor can maintain his hold on the great mass of his hearers, keep their attention, secure their attendance at meetings, and their confidence in him as a pastor, the longer he remains with them the better. The longer he remains, the better he knows their wants, their habits, their temperament and every thing that a pastor needs to know, to be in the highest degree useful to them. But however judicious and able a pastor may be, the novelty of calling in an evangelist, his method of presenting truth, the new trains of thought that he may start, and multitudes of such like things may arise, and fix the attention of the congregation; and if in all respect a judicious course be pursued, immense good may be the result. But let the churches remember that the labors of the evangelist are to be enjoyed but for a little season; and that if they intend to secure the permanent influence of pastoral labor, they must as far as possible encourage and strengthen the hands of the pastor in taking a leading part in the work. They should not desire to have him thrown into the back ground, but have him preach, and, so far as his health and circumstances will admit, go forward and take a leading part in all the meetings. He should give out the appointments, and indeed should be encouraged by the church and by the evangelist to do all in every way that he can, to promote the work and secure the confidence and sympathy of all classes of the people. If this is not done, there is great danger of grieving at least a part of the church, of creating a party in the congregation who will think that the pastor is superseded in his labors, and rather held in contempt--and then the Spirit of God will be grieved. The church should be very careful not to complain to the evangelist of their pastor, and thus lay a temptation before him to undervalue the character or labors of the pastor--lest he should grieve the Spirit, and himself say things that will work great mischief. It is of great importance that the evangelist and pastor should be as nearly one as possible,

and that the church should so regard them; that the pastor should manifest and have confidence in the evangelist, and the evangelist should have and manifest confidence in the pastor, that they should thoroughly sympathize and co-operate together. If this cannot be done, it is extremely difficult to secure a good result.

Again, the evangelist should not suffer himself to listen to the complaints of church members about their pastor. And if anything does come to his ears that is of sufficient importance to require attention, he should candidly converse with the pastor alone, and get his version of the subject, and never suffer his ears to be filled with complaints about the pastor without communing in a most fraternal manner with the pastor himself in relation to those things. They must preserve the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace; and if they cannot do this, evil instead of good will result in their attempt to co-operate.

Your brother,

C.G. FINNEY

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