

Letters on Revivals--No. 30.

by Charles Finney

The church should rally to a man and sustain their pastor after the evangelist leaves to prevent a disastrous re-action and ensure the continuation of the work.

Scripture: Isaiah 40:31

Topics: "Spiritual Warfare", "Strongholds"

Description

In this sermon on fortresses, the preacher delves into the concept of strongholds in the Bible, highlighting how they represent areas where human confidence is placed, often hindering spiritual growth and understanding. The preacher draws parallels between the literal fortresses mentioned in the Old Testament and the metaphorical strongholds in the New Testament, emphasizing the need to rely on divinely powerful weapons to demolish these barriers. Various Bible commentators and theologians are referenced to provide insights on how to identify and overcome these strongholds, stressing the importance of using spiritual weapons such as prayer, the Word of God, faith, and the power of the Holy Spirit to combat the enemy's attacks on the mind and heart.

Transcript

REMARKS ON THE DANGERS AND DUTIES INCIDENT TO THE PERIOD OF AN EVANGELIST'S CLOSING HIS LABORS IN A REVIVAL.

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

Dear Brethren:

If I am not mistaken, the churches have fallen into an error in many cases, in respect to the course which it is incumbent on them to take when an evangelist leaves the ground. When one has been employed, and his labors have been greatly blessed, and the time comes for him to leave and take another field, it is then peculiarly important that the church should rally to a man, sustain their pastor, sustain all the meetings, and make more vigorous exertions than ever to push forward the work. But it happens in some instances, instead of taking this course, they seem to regard the leaving of the evangelist as a signal for them to indulge unbelief, retire from the work, cease to labor and visit and pray, neglect meetings, and in short to take the very course that is in the highest degree calculated to discourage the pastor, to grieve the Spirit of God, and to bring on a reaction inevitably, and most dangerous results in various ways.

Again, the churches have often fallen into an error in respect to what was to be expected of the pastor, and in respect to the state of things when the evangelist leaves the ground. It often happens that the evangelist remains on the ground as long as the excitability of the congregation continues in such strength that the work can be pushed with unabated power. He remains until perhaps the church, especially those members who have labored most efficiently together with the pastor--and indeed, until the mass of mind is brought into a state so nearly bordering on exhaustion, that from the very laws of mind, there must necessarily be a pause, or at least a temporary suspension of the power of the excitement.

Now when the evangelist leaves the ground, especially if he has remained until the circumstances are such as I have just supposed, it is generally to be expected that the work will take on a somewhat and oftentimes a materially different type--that the power of the excitement will more or less abate, and perhaps many persons who have attended the meetings more from curiosity than from any heart-interest in them, will relinquish their attendance; there will naturally be a falling off of numbers, of excitement, and many of the circumstances will tend to discourage both the pastor and the church.

Now just in these circumstances churches should be very considerate, and not suffer unbelief on the one hand to prevail, or a censorious, fault-finding spirit to come in on the other. This change of appearance ought not to discourage the expectation of christians that the work will go on, although under a modified type.

But right here an evil of this kind is sometimes observable. The evangelist has left the ground; there has more or less of a change come over the community--and the church often suffer their hearts to go off with the evangelist, their faith to fail with respect to the continuance of the work among them, and soon it begins to be thought, and of course to be spoken of among the brethren that the pastor cannot sustain the work; they begin to find fault with him, instead of sustaining him by prayer and every means of encouragement within their reach. Instead of putting forth their utmost exertions to help him just at this critical point, they cruelly abandon him and the work, and gradually give themselves up to fault-finding, until finally the pastor is discouraged, the Holy Spirit is grieved--the pastor's feelings are thrown into such an attitude that he has not courage and strength to feed and lead forward the converts--a disastrous re-action comes over the community, and shortly it is agreed on all hands that it is best to have a change of ministers. Now somewhat in this way, if I am not mistaken, not a few pastors have been induced to leave their flocks soon after most powerful and glorious revivals.

Now in these cases there is utterly a fault some where. Both the church and the pastor may be to blame. And sometimes it is to be found that the evangelist himself has not taken pains enough before his leaving, to guard the church against such a course and such results. It is of the utmost importance that the evangelist himself should understand and fully appreciate the frailty of Christians in this respect, their great liability to err, the circumstances of temptation under which they will be placed, and the evil that will inevitably result if those things should accrue of which I have spoken. The evangelist ought deeply to feel that if his influence disturbs the pastoral relation--nay if it does not strengthen and establish pastoral influence; if he does not encourage instead of discourage the pastor, if he does not do him good instead of evil, his labors are not what they ought to be as an evangelist, and what they must be to be long sustained and desired by the churches. Notwithstanding all these dangers, if the church are but instructed and on their guard, do they but know and feel what they ought to know and feel in respect to their relations and duties to each other, to their pastor, to the evangelist, and to the great work in which they are engaged--do but the evangelist and the pastor know and do their duty, understand their relations to each other, to the church, and to their great work, glorious results may most reasonably be expected from the employment of

evangelists in the promotion of revivals.

But from what has been said, it is very easy to see that an evangelist needs to be pre-eminently a wise man to manage wisely and prudently under the ever-varying circumstances in which he will find himself placed. So to demean himself as to leave a healthful influence in the churches where he labors, requires an uncommon degree of wisdom. Few men comparatively are qualified for this office. I have repeatedly known young men to get the impression that it was their duty to be evangelists, who would labor in that capacity but a short time, and for want of wisdom and those peculiar characteristics that are indispensable to the success of an evangelist, would find themselves hedged in as evangelists, and in such odor in the churches as to find it not easy to procure such a settlement as otherwise they might have procured.

By these remarks I do not design to discourage young men from becoming evangelists if they are qualified for this arduous and peculiar work.

Your brother,

C.G. FINNEY

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