

Church Fighters and Preacher Fighters

REV. ALBERT H. LONG, D. D.

One of the most serious setbacks to the expression of practical christianity among us, is the preacher-fighting-tendency that we find in so many of our churches.

It is interesting to check up the people who make these fights from time to time and who thus intentionally sow discord in so many places. Again and again, we hear of churches being locked against ministers against whom no charges have been proven. And, as we face the group who are leaders in this movement, we find the same gang at their tricks. One of the reasons among others for this trouble, grows out of the fact, that we, because of their financial standing, have put unconverted men at the head of many of our churches. The men in question do not understand the program of Jesus Christ. They have no vital interest in it. They like to parade their unchristian importance before the people so as to be called big men. Other than for selfish reasons, they have no spiritual interest in the church whatever. Then, too, we discover another preacher-fighting man who is immoral. His relation in his church will not bear investigation. It is his business to watch the preacher and the sisters. He is never without fear that the preacher is going to make a mistake of a moral nature. In his prayers, he especially prays that the preacher may be kept straight. Now, the fact of the matter is, the type of man in question is one of the biggest hypocrites that ever lived. He is the first man to find something wrong in the preacher and the last man to find anything wrong with himself. If you hold a spiritual meeting he is the first to get happy and he has the longest story to tell. He is ready to cry at the dropping of a hat, and one of the first to tell a lie just as soon as he gets on the outside. Whenever a petition is gotten up against the preacher, his name is the first to go on it. He is great in having the preachers changed, but it seems never to occur to him that he needs a change.

One other reason why we have so much preacher-fighting in our churches, is because we keep one set of men in office too long. Stewards, trustees and others should be changed just like the pastors are changed. The bunch that fights the out-going pastor are right on the job to fight the incoming one. As a rule, the same complaints they find against the one, they find against the other. When there are so many good men in a given church, I see no reason why one set of men should hold office for ten, fifteen and twenty years, just to be in a position to fight the ministers who come and go. And yet, such is the ease in hundreds of our churches. During the many years that I have been in the ministry, I have visited a number of church trials in which preachers were involved. I have never visited one in which I did not see spite work and unchristian tricks played on the preacher. Usually, a group of men and women wanted him changed because he would not do their bidding. In this, often the preacher's hand has been against the preacher in these unchristian tricks. The locking of church doors against ministers is becoming too common amongst us. I hold no brief for an immoral preacher. I hold no brief for a drunken preacher. However, in all such cases, direct a charge against the man and have him tried by fair means and then let him go. But, if the conditions uncover dirty laymen or any one else who are not what they ought to be, then dispose of them also.

Quite a deal of the energy that should be spent in putting over a program for God and suffering humanity in this world is spent in dealing with the troublesome people in question. Then, too, some of our preachers are to be blamed for the nefarious acts of the people. The "favoritism" business has given a mighty lift to this preacher-fighting program in our churches. One preacher will go to a place and he will form a ring. As a rule, that ring is good enough for anything except singing, praying and living right. They buy up the other preacher and misdirect him, then they stay on the job of doing the same for the next preacher that goes to that church. As a rule, they care nothing for the law of the church. All that they want to do is to boss the preacher and the church and stay in a position to put a few dollars into their pockets now and then. If the preacher submits to this, they call him a good preacher and they measure all others by him. Thus, the weak, inefficient preacher is a direct contributing cause to this trouble that is now afflicting so many of our churches today.

There are thousands of christian

laymen and women in our churches who have nothing to do with these programs of preacher-fighting that are put over in so many of our churches. But for them, many preachers could not function at all. The devilment of the group in question is as great an affliction to the devout christian people in our churches as it is to the ministers. The gang in question often go into our secret orders and get the rings in them and bring them into our churches so as to put over their program of tearing up our churches. These unholy rings are not to be found in any one of our denominational churches, but they are found in all of them. One often hears them say, "We control this church. It is ours and the preacher who expects to serve here, must do as we say do. His bread and meat are in our hands. The fellow who thinks that he can stay here and not obey us, will either move or we will move him. If he displeases us and fails to go, we will starve him out."

Thus the humble christian minister whose ministerial rating waits upon the dollars and cents he can raise rather than upon his character and capacity for definite service, must submit to a program that actually is at war with the program of Jesus Christ so as to please a gang that cares nothing for Christ nor His cause. When all fails, then they select a weak woman to get up a charge against him and the effort is made to crucify him as the Jews crucified Jesus Christ. It is well to note that a church of the character in question cannot carry out the program of Jesus Christ. No minister can really preach the gospel in such a place. However, if it is known that he will preach one thing and do another, he may stay there for a while and then the bunch of hypocrites in control of the situation will strip him of his moral garments and send him on in tears to some other place.

If it were said that there are hundreds of ministers in this condition today, the truth would be told.

Well, what remedy have we for this condition that has well nigh destroyed the program of Jesus Christ in our churches? The first thing to face is, that unconverted men and women can not run the church of God. It matters not how much money they may have, the unsaved man or woman, cannot direct the program of Jesus Christ. It is being tried in hundreds of places and it is a failure. It has nothing to offer in the future but a failure. The minister that creates such a machine in any church, gives birth to a plan that ultimately ends in his own death and a number of his brother ministers' who must, in the course of time, succeed. Thus we find men failing today for whom the failure was planned long before they reached the fields to which they were sent. They are often responsible for a condition with which they have had nothing more to do than the man in the moon. The fellow who built the float for his brother minister's failure, sets back an annual conference or an association and laughs while his brother minister is suffering for the mistakes that he is conscious of having made.

The second suggestion we offer as a remedy for this terrible condition that afflicts so many of our churches, is that we change our stewards, trustees and others occasionally, and thus break up the unholy rings that often control our churches. There are officers in some of our churches who have been in office so long that they believe that they own the church to which they belong. One man who does his duty and stands fair in character and capacity, is just as good as any other man, and any honors that any one in that church has received, should be shared with him. There would be fewer splits in our churches if we did this. There will be more splits in them than we now have if we do not do this.

The law of succession in the pastorate of our churches will have to be studied in the future more carefully than it has been studied in the past.

To send a type of man to a given church who really has a program for the field to which he was sent, and who really contributed something worth while to that field, and then change him and send another type of man to that field with no program at all, is really responsible for a deal of the trouble that we have in our churches today.

No, the preacher-fighting church is a failure as a christian church. The church that is governed by rings rather than by the Spirit of God, has lost its commission if it ever had one. There is no use for the unsaved to look to such a place for salvation. The program of Jesus Christ is not to

be found there. A spiritual drouth stays at such places. The only program to be found in such places is lying, backbiting and preacher-fighting. In such places a man will pray for you tonight and take the advantage of you tomorrow. He will invite you to come to Christ today, and then attempt to lead some member of your family astray tonight. He will get happy and get so full of it that it takes four men to hold him tonight, and curse and swear and black your eyes for you tomorrow. It matters not what the financial yield may be from all such efforts, it is well to note that this is not the christianity of Jesus Christ.

All such places are a menace to the cause of Christ. They give our children a wrong conception of what a christian church is, and they are the greatest contributing cause to the godless conditions which surround hundreds of our churches today.

The christian leaders of our group must look into these matters or their best efforts will become a mockery in the immediate future.

Charleston District, S. C. Conference

Maryville, Aug. 5-6—A most interesting and enthusiastic convention was that of the Charleston District held on August 5-6, at Emanuel A. M. E. Church, Rev. J. O. Johnson pastor. There reigned true democracy. Each one did with all their might what their hands found to do, especially where it was hard and dangerous, and have in the spirit of the Christ, matched the work to which they were called.

Every thinking and struggling individual must admit that our standard of progress is measured by our religion in this world.

Our meeting was graced with the following pastors and visitors: Revs. Chavis and Murph of Charleston, Presiding Elder M. A. Hollings and Rev. W. R. A. Felder of the Edisto District. Very effective and interesting were the remarks by each.

We were also favored with the presence of Mrs. Murph, who is a wonderful worker for the cause. Mrs. D. S. Green of the Edisto District was also introduced.

The Annual Sermon was delivered by the Rev. J. M. Jackson of Eutawville. Welcome Address by Miss Carr of Maryville. Response by Mrs. E. A. Mance, Conference Sect.; Our Conference Branch President, Mrs. L. K. Nelso was present but her stay was short. She stated that the State Convention would not convene until sometime in October, since

Bishop Hurst, presiding Bishop would Election resulted as follows:— Mrs. A. C. Maces, District President; Mrs. S. A. Whitfield, Vice-President; Mrs. E. A. Mance, Conference Sect.; Miss L. B. Ford, Corresponding Sect.; Mrs. A. E. Hampton, Treasurer; Mrs. H. Frasier Juvenile Organizer; Executive Committee—Mrs. A. H. Hamilton, Mrs. Sarah Williams, Mrs. E. L. Ball

The following resolutions were read to the Convention:—

Resolved that: We, the members of the South Carolina Conference of the Charleston District in session at the above named place, Resolve, 1 To give hearty thanks to the pastor and congregation for their kind hospitality given us, 2 Whereupon The Rev. Robert W. Mance, P. E. of the Charleston District, South Carolina Conference, is eminently, intellectually, morally and spiritually qualified, possessing in

abundance, an amount of experience and being greatly loved by the people of the Charleston District and especially by the people of Mt. Zion A. M. E. Church. We most heartily endorse his candidacy to the Bishopric and pledge our loyal support, for such a character will awaken loyalty to the Kingdom.

—Miss Lorcen B. Ford, Reporter.

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