

PFI - LOOKING AT THE WAY AHEAD

Giving thanks for the past. We have been spending a little time recently reflecting on the path that the Lord has led PFI over 40 years and rightly thanking Him for raising up this ministry in the way He has. But as we briefly look back in appreciation, we can't help but realise how important it is that we hear what God is saying to us in order to address the enormous work that still needs to be done. What is the way ahead for PFI ?

Since the early days, when everyone knew each other, the numbers of believers and congregations has risen to a point where it is difficult to keep up with the growth. PFI had involvement with about two fellowships in 1969. Today we are aware of the needs in over 160 different congregations and individual ministries not just in Israel but in other related regions of the world – especially Ethiopia.

The PFI bulletin, instead of a folded A3 sheet is now 32 pages with a central prayer section bursting with regular contributions from 30 or more different groups in need of our support to hold up their hands in prayer. Some needs are urgent and passionate as they battle to see people released from the grip of Satan whilst others reflect the difficulty of daily struggle to stand against organised opposition or to triumph through the burden of sufferings in the home and work.

Take off the Rose tinted glasses. Just as in NT times, as the Church grows in the fertile soil, we also see the growth of tares to choke and weaken the true harvest. We

should not be surprised by this but it is a disappointment when such things take place. Sometimes, I think we have 'rose-tinted' spectacles on in respect to the growing Messianic movement. Perhaps we think that these things could not happen amongst those who constitute the Church in the Land. Surely, The Lord wouldn't let deception, immorality; antagonism and dispute come in amongst people WE have prayed so much for ?

Paul told Timothy to "Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine" 1 Tim 4:16 This was no idle comment but spoken at a time when there was serious danger of the work begun through his ministry foundering on the rocks of spiritual apostasy and practical immorality. How could it have come to this point so soon? Many might well have said at the time, "Lets not speak out about these things. They will all work out in the end. Its just immaturity and in the process of time things will improve. Let's not be hasty and judgmental lest we upset people and damage their 'self-esteem'. People will learn in time to reject the false and accept the true because it's the natural tendency to want to do things right." !?!

Dangers of being too casual. There are serious flaws in this argument. For one, it's not the reality in NT Christianity. This argument springs from the 'evolution of religion' idea that presumes that we are all in a changing process of upward development that will produce in time a church that is spotless and pure by our own efforts. It proposes that the good teaching and practise will eventually rise to the top and one shouldn't interfere with the natural process of development. (!) In that case why do we have a Bible that tells us that our natural tendency is downward towards sin and destruction Ps 14:3 "There is

none that doeth good – no, not one” Also Ps 53:3. Without the intervention of God in the world, its natural destiny is destruction. And without God raising up prophetic spokesmen and teachers, the inclination of His own people Israel and all those He has mercifully grafted into the covenants and promises made to Israel is towards sin, rebellion and self destruction. The Bible is packed with the sound of God’s cry to His people to turn back to Him and live – why? Because the natural tendency is to reject His voice, to live according to the desires and plans of our own hearts and worship the imaginations of our own minds. It’s a serious thing. That’s why the good news of the gospel is such good news – because the bad news of our own hearts inclination to evil of all kind, is such bad news. We are inclined to end up in hell but for the mercy and grace of God.

So that is why it’s crucially important to acknowledge error when it is real error. It’s vital that false teaching is dealt with amongst the brethren and exposed for what it is. It is not just an academic issue. It affects people’s lives. When sin abounds, people get hurt –not least in the Church among Gods people. If sin, deception, spiritual aberration are allowed to take their natural course, the consequences can be devastating for people and last for years - if not generations. All because we mistakenly believed we should not interfere rather than try and take the right action that would put things right.

True Discipleship. But how to do or say the right thing is the big question? To the Thessalonians, Paul says, “Stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught” 2 Thess 2:15 But I thought we were through with all that tradition stuff when we left Judaism? Apparently not! These are not the traditions of men – but the traditions of God.

The unchanging ways of God that are handed down unchanged and apply to every man in every generation. These are not fashion accessories that adapt to the whims of men but are Gods laws that ensure we don’t come off the rails, intellectually, physically and spiritually. They are communicated not by some transcendental experience in some ecstatic worship frenzy, not by some membership of an elite and exclusive ascetic order of ‘monastics.’ They are taught every day, every week by fathers to children, by Pastors to gathered disciples, in groups or one to one.

Immaturity takes time to fix. Growing up is sometimes a painful but necessary continuing journey of life. Patience is certainly needed as we face up to much that happens amongst God’s people. There is a time to speak and a time to be silent – and pray. And that’s where I believe we still have a vital ministry which grows by the day. Most of us will never meet the people we pray for. Even if we are visiting Israel several times a year, we can’t keep up with the details of everyone’s lives. How are they to respond even if you have some revelation that you believe is vital to their work. How can you deliver that Word from the Lord from such a distance? But we can pray that God will raise up true Prophets who will be God’s spokesmen to the nation. Jeremiah describes these ones as those who can distinguish “...between the precious and the vile” (15:19-20) those kind of people who can see through all the hype and touch the real motivations of men and bring that piercing Word of the Lord to bring resolution to impossible issues. Oh that the Lord would raise up more of such people today, who don’t bring ‘pleasant words’ but challenging life changing Words from God. Are we not in similar days to Samuel when

the Word of the Lord was rare in the Land (1 Sam 3:1) There is an abundance of men's words, plans and schemes but what of the Lord's?

More people equals more challenges. One of the consequences of growth in numbers of believers is that often there is more than one fellowship group that meets in a town or city. Each one has developed as a result of direct evangelism or people moving into or by planting believers into that place from another congregation. Often they will have different ethnic, language, religious and cultural background. One group might have a Charismatic inclination, the other a more conservative background. One might have outside 'mission' support; the other has no resources other than its own. The one is led by someone who has great plans for 'growth' and loves the big speakers who keep visiting from abroad. The other shies away from what they see as brash, superficial, insincerity and prefers things small and personal. What happens when there is friction between them? How do we pray for them particularly when they both want to relate to us but they do not want to relate to each other? Now this is where it's getting difficult!

PFI has a prayer bulletin which contains confidential and carefully edited prayer information for prayer partners who are all in a fairly detached situation here in the UK or elsewhere around the world. But what happens when the two congregations in Israel get hold of the bulletin and read about each other. One asks for prayer, "Brethren pray for us to have a congregation of thousands and a building that will hold everyone from all over the region." !! You can imagine the feelings in the other congregation when they are losing all their best people to this 'Peter

Pan' who they think mesmerises all their young people with a diet of trendy music. No, "Pray for us as we plan this week long prophetic prayer conference that God will reveal extraordinary sights and sounds to us as we rise up in revelatory ecstasy" Precisely what are we to pray for them?

So where do we go from here? I think that Paul must have thought the same thing as he wrote to the Corinthian Church "Now I plead with you brethren, by the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment." (1:10) – Amen! Some prayer!

But this was no pie in the sky wish list. He penned these words because what he saw in Corinth was so much selfish ambition in their building programme, the cement would never dry. It was too centred on personalities and efforts of men and destined to collapse. Now - men are good, you need men and you need women but if you are choosing people who are qualified according to the world's estimation, then remember what happened when Saul who was chosen for his good looks. Saul represents the fleshly leader who gave the people what they wanted and made Israel "...like unto the nations" But when David came to reign, it was because he was a man after God's heart. Paul continues, "But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise...He has chosen the weak...and the base...to confound the wise...that no flesh should glory in His presence." Churches that last are not built upon men with flashy suits and degrees, or women with 'triple anointings'. The ones that last are built on sacrifice, as Tertullian said, "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church."

Our hope for a Holy Body. When human personalities so dominate a fellowship, you know there's going to be trouble. It's going to end in tears and people will get hurt and offended. Maybe they will blame God, a not unusual reaction. But is God to blame for anything. More often people no longer trust men and end up isolated, backslidden and disillusioned. But if only we acted with wisdom and avoided these things before they get a hold. It takes courage but I think if there is one thing needful for believers today - especially men, it is to take courage and speak up when things are not right. It applies

in Israel as much as with us here. Our prayer is that "All Israel shall be saved." But before that, we need to be in faith that the Body of Messiah – small as it is – will grow up into "...a holy Temple in the Lord" Eph 2:21

PFI Prayer partners will only ever be able to pray for a little of what is happening. We may well have to narrow our focus so that we don't dissipate ourselves in too many concerns. Who knows what the Lord might do, but this thing I do know, "He who has begun a good work in (PFI) will carry it through to completion until the day of Jesus Christ." Phil 1:6

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