



The Burning Bush - Online article archive

The glory days of Ian Paisley



Dr. Ian Paisley

"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children," Hosea 4:6.

I thought of Ian Paisley or 'Doc' as many of us affectionately called him who knew him in the 60s and 70s, when I recently read the words of the above verse during the course of my daily Bible reading, as I followed R Murray McCheyne's Bible reading calendar.

I thought of him because I recall him mentioning this verse many times when he was preaching on the

times in which we lived and sought to counter the errors of Ecumenism, Popery and Modernistic Theology.

What a man of God dear Dr Paisley was in those days, which I consider his heyday, the zenith of his pulpit ministry. How faithfully he warned the people of God in Ulster and also in the United Kingdom and further afield, regarding the gathering clouds of ignorance which were the direct result of the apostasy in the so-called Protestant pulpits. The main 'Protestant' denominations in Ulster had, through their links with the ecumenical movement and involvement with the World Council of Churches, imbibed the modernistic notions and the unity with Rome delusions, propagated by the false prophets of 20th century 'Christianity'!

Ian Paisley stood against them boldly and defiantly, largely on his own, in those days.

Ian Paisley was above all, an evangelist. I do not believe that there was his equal within the British Isles when it came to preaching the cross of Calvary in its fulness, its power and in its glory.

I had the privilege of hearing him preach during the first nine months of my Christian pilgrimage in the pulpit of Ravenhill Free Presbyterian Church as well as later in gospel missions in tents and mission halls around Ulster.

I count it one of the great mercies God bestowed upon me to have heard him preach in those days. What a moving of God's Holy Spirit there was at that time!

But, like Jude of old, Ian Paisley knew that there were occasions when the subject of the gospel had to be preached in the context of earnestly contending for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints (Jude 1:3). The genius of Ian Paisley was that he could expose the errors of Rome, Ecumenism, and Modernistic Theology against the backcloth of the cross so that his exposé of error was no 'dry as dust' lecture but a soul-thrilling shining of the light of the cross upon the delusions and lies of men so as to make them appear most vividly in all their heinousness.



Rev Ivan Foster, Pastor Jack Glass of Glasgow and Dr Paisley at a protest in the 1970s at Buckingham Palace.

It was for this reason that such meetings in which he challenged the follies of the day were notably soul-winning meetings. My first time in Ravenhill Free Presbyterian Church was on 12th April 1964 when Dr Paisley was preaching his second message on the errors of Roman Catholicism and it proved to be a message of



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assurance of salvation to me. I had called upon the Lord on the previous Sabbath in the home of a friend, but had no guidance or instruction at that point and for a week I was in deep despair as to my spiritual state until that Sabbath when I accompanied my parents to hear Dr Paisley. That night I entered into the joyful assurance of God's mercy and it took place as Dr Paisley was, as only he could, castigating Romanism. But, as I said, he always preached such messages under the shadow of the cross which I believe was what made them so effective.

Up until the mid-60s, the Free Presbyterian Church was to a large degree at a standstill. The gospel was certainly preached and there was an earnest contending for the faith but the ear of the people was not attuned to the message being proclaimed.

All that changed with the trial and imprisonment of Dr Paisley, Rev John Wylie and myself from mid-July until mid-October 1966. Suddenly, the Free Presbyterian Church had the ear of the people of Ulster. During the three months of our imprisonment, Free Presbyterian ministers were asked to speak at open-air protest meetings, in Orange Halls and other public halls. Presbyterians, Church of Ireland and Methodist people wanted to hear the story behind the Free Presbyterian protest against the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland on June 6th 1966 and the subsequent arrest, trial and imprisonment of the three ministers.

There began a wonderful time of revival blessing with many, many souls being saved, Free Presbyterian congregations being formed and the people of God stirred and blessed. Right in the heart of it, in the thick of it was Ian Paisley and his glorious preaching. Virtually every weeknight from the day of their release for a period of nigh on six months, the three ministers spoke at special rallies and meetings organised in local towns and villages throughout Ulster.

The meetings always took the same form. I was first to speak, being 'the youngster'. I was 22 years old and a second year Theological Student of the Free Presbyterian Church. Rev John Wylie followed with a report of our three months in jail. John's unique brand of wry humour served him well as he regaled the people with our experiences in prison. Then Dr Paisley preached. What preaching it was! This was no coarse, 'kick the pope' rabble-rousing demagoguery as the 'wise men' of the press declared it to be. It was rousing yes, but it was a rousing of the soul by the preaching of God's truth in the power of the Holy Ghost. Many of those meetings were sealed with Heaven's approval through the saving of souls and the restoring of backsliders. I cannot recall them without my heart overflowing with affection for the man at the centre of that time of blessing, God's man, Ian Paisley.

Now, as I said, my heart-moving musings on Dr Paisley began when I read Hosea 4:6 some days ago. They were sparked as I thought of how Ian Paisley set himself to combat the 'lack of knowledge' that pervaded the churches of Ulster in the days to which I have been referring.

Such was the burden of his ministry. It epitomised his ministry. He was a David standing against the lies and propaganda of hell which the modern Goliaths, the false teachers in the mainline churches, were declaring.

There was a wholeness, a completeness to Dr Paisley's message that I believe is sadly lacking today and which is greatly contributing to what can only be called the ineffectiveness of our witness.

Dr Paisley roundly set forth in his ministry:

I. THE KNOWLEDGE ENJOYED BY GOD'S PEOPLE.

No one was better at preaching the Bible than he. He had an intimate knowledge of the Westminster Confession of Faith and its Catechisms and their doctrines undergirded his messages. He was well imbued with the writings of the Reformers and Puritans and they spoke out through him. He truly was a throwback to Reformation days, though his enemies loved to cast this up against him. Little did they understand the compliment they were paying him.



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Dr Paisley faithfully warned of:

II. THE TERRIBLE CONSEQUENCES OF THE LACK OF KNOWLEDGE

He warned Ulster of the destruction Ecumenism and its false teaching would bring upon the country. He illustrated the dangers the country was facing from the records of similar follies in the days of the prophets.

There was no one better equipped to issue forth a prophetic warning than Ian Paisley.

Dr Paisley plainly told the people that:

III. THE LACK OF KNOWLEDGE STEMMED FROM THE REJECTION OF GOD'S TRUTH.

I recall sitting in the old church on Ravenhill Road, just a month or two after I was saved. Dr Paisley was replying to yet another attack upon his ministry by those who hated the truth of God and all he stood for. He turned the congregation to Paul's first epistle to Timothy and asked the question: "What is a good minister of the gospel?" He pointed to the first six verses of chapter 4 of the epistle.

"Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth. For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer. If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things, thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine, whereunto thou hast attained," 1 Timothy 4:1-6.

"Here is the mark of a Good Minister," he said. He pointed out the errors that Paul warned would come in the 'latter times' and indicated that we were seeing a fulfilling of this prophecy today with the world-wide propagation of the errors of Ecumenism. "A good minister is he who puts 'the brethren in remembrance of these things,'" he said. On that basis he certainly qualified despite the denunciations by the critics.

There was burned into my soul that evening the essence of what a God-honouring ministry in this day of apostasy was. It was one in which a warning against the falsehoods of the hour was continually sounded out, irrespective of what ridicule and derision came as a result.

I saw that there was a need for men of Micah's ilk today. "But truly I am full of power by the spirit of the LORD, and of judgment, and of might, to declare unto Jacob his transgression, and to Israel his sin," Micah 3:8.

Does such a spirit dominate the Free Presbyterian ministry today? I honest and sadly believe it is not so. Is there not too great a concern shown about appearing foolish in the eyes of the 'learned', the 'academics' among our 'Reformed' brethren?

Is there not an over-riding anxiety not to offend any, for there are all too many within the ranks of Free Presbyterianism who have cosied up to 'evangelicals' within apostate denominations.

It seems that we feel compelled to maintain attendances, even at the cost of watering down denunciations of the wrongs of today and Biblical separation from worldliness and those brethren who have chosen to stay in ecumenical denominations.

How little Ian Paisley cared for these things! How he chided those beset by such notions!

Dr Paisley's ministry demonstrated that:

IV. IN THE DAY OF THE LORD'S POWER THERE IS KNOWLEDGE IN THE LAND.

Under Dr Paisley in his heyday there was a 'knowledge' of the gospel.'



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Do we have the light from heaven shining as it did in those days? I think not. Everywhere there is lamentation at the lack of power, the lack of conviction amongst sinners. There is a general disregard for the old message of the cross which those of us who laboured in the 60s and 70s recall with longing.

Under Dr Paisley in his heyday there was a 'knowledge' of the enemy.

Now, I fear there is a tip-toeing around controversy. How loud the voice of the Free Presbyterian Church sounded out in the days to which I am referring! Is there not a great degree of silence today? Is there not a great avoidance of controversy today, a challenging of the enemy? I sadly see a likeness to the record given us of Israel while Goliath roared forth his challenge. "And the Philistine said, I defy the armies of Israel this day; give me a man, that we may fight together. When Saul and all Israel heard those words of the Philistine, they were dismayed, and greatly afraid," 1 Samuel 17:10-11. To fear is to be human. To be filled with courage and to face the enemy of the gospel requires Holy Ghost courage. Do we not lack that today?

Under Dr Paisley in his heyday there was a 'knowledge' of separation.

It was a doctrine central to his preaching and practice. Separation, not just from ecumenism but from worldly ways and habits, from the trends and delights of the age. Now, I feel compelled to say that it is as it was in the days of the Judges of Israel. "Every man did that which was right in his own eyes," Judges 17:6.

Here is the rule that even Christians in large numbers have embraced. Whatever appears right to our eyes is permissible. How far removed that is from the emphasis placed by Dr Paisley upon such scriptures as: "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them," Isaiah 8:20.

The Word of God was once the universal rule of the Free Presbyterian Church. Is it still so?

Under Dr Paisley in his heyday there was a 'knowledge' of the Person and Power of the Holy Ghost.

I recall that evening, April 12th, 1964, when Dr Paisley spoke to me about my soul. He gave me a little leaflet of his own which counselled me to read the scriptures and pray every day and to especially pray to be filled with the Holy Ghost.

What an emphasis he placed, and under him the Free Presbyterian Church placed upon the ministry of the Holy Ghost and the need of His grace! There were frequent days of prayer in which the cry went up for the Holy Ghost to come again amongst His people. That prayer was heard and we did indeed see days of His power. Is it so today?

Were Dr Paisley to speak today as he did then he would call for days of crying unto God for the Spirit's grace and power to fall again amongst us.

Under Dr Paisley in his heyday there was a 'knowledge' of holiness and victory over sin.

Ian Paisley was a preacher of holiness and victorious living back in those days. Not just a preacher of these blessed truths but one who showed every evidence of experiencing such grace. Many a late night men's prayer meeting lit up when he came into it on his way home from preaching in a mission somewhere. We do not wish to glorify a man but we tell you he was man who evidenced the power of God resting upon him and living in the victory. He was as the one the Lord Jesus spoke of in John 7:38. "He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water." Many drank of the rivers flowing from Ian Paisley.

He preached God's word in order that others might share such victory. How sweet were those meetings on a Wednesday evening at the start of a gospel mission when he would preach upon being filled with the power of the Holy Ghost after having preached on backsliding and sin on the Monday evening and repentance and renewal on the Tuesday evening.



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I can remember on numerous occasions when dozens and dozens of Christians: children and teenagers, mothers and fathers, grandfathers and grandmothers, responding to the challenge of God's servant at many missions. What weeping, what rejoicing, what thanksgiving to God, what open confession of God's mercy took place on those occasions!

I have often thought that it was little wonder that in those missions from that night onward, scores of people were converted. How could it be otherwise when you had people newly restored to their first love, joined by those newly converted, crowding into the pre-service prayer meeting?

Glory days indeed.

May the Lord cause us to think upon those days, long after those days and pray for such days to return amongst us.

Above all, that God would fill our pulpits with men such as Ian Paisley, great man that he was, in these days.

Ivan Foster.

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