

A personal vision for the Lord's Work among some assemblies in Colombia

PRIORITIES FOR 2024 - by Philip Nunn

At the beginning of 2023 I visited Colombia to participate in the Intensive Bible Study week in Pereira. I was also able to visit some assemblies and enjoy many good conversations. In preparation for our move to Colombia later that year, many of my questions revolved around the current state of the assemblies here: How are you seeing God's hand at work in the assemblies these days? What causes you joy and gratitude? What do you think could be better? What needs do you see in the Work?

At the National Encounter of Elders in Pereira in November 2023 I had the opportunity to share some of my personal observations under the title 'Vision for the Work'. After presenting these 7 points there was a constructive dialogue. Some brothers suggested that I put these thoughts down on paper so that more brothers and sisters in Colombia could reflect and discuss these priorities, so that in each locality they could seek the Lord's direction and priorities for 2024. Please do not read this writing as criticism. My aim is to edify, so that together we can foster an environment where Christ, as the Head of His Church, may more freely do His work among us. Upon request, I have now translated these thoughts into English for the benefit and inspiration of a wider readership.



- 1. Spiritual reality:** As assemblies, our key scripture is Matthew 18:20, "For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them". Do we behave as if Christ is present in our meetings? Is the Lord's presence felt, or evident, in our midst? Do we seek to be led by the Holy Spirit as we worship and partake of the Lord's Supper? Do you notice that your heart grows warm as you worship the Lord together? Or do we feel satisfied with singing sound doctrine, teaching Biblical truths and practising the traditions we have inherited? *How can we notice 'spiritual reality'?* When the Spirit of God speaks through us and the unbeliever feels his need and comes to the feet of the Saviour, when the troubled saints confesses his sin and changes his way of life, when a believer with traumas and bondages finds freedom in Christ, when the discouraged Christian hears the voice of the Lord again and is encouraged; when there is brokenness and interpersonal problems find solution, when we truly love one another and show it in practical ways, when there is a growing love for the Lord Jesus and a commitment to His church.... These supernatural things happen when God is truly at work among us. Wouldn't it be fantastic if God's joy, presence and power would regularly be sensed in our meetings? And in such a way that even visitors would say "God is really among you!" (1 Cor. 14:25).
- 2. Families:** It is a great encouragement and joy to find second and third generation brothers and sisters serving the Lord among the assemblies. Passing on the faith from one generation to the next continues to be a challenge in the Work in Colombia. Too many children and grandchildren are absorbed by the secular world. Others follow the Lord Jesus but leave the assemblies because they are not comfortable with some of our traditions, forms and protocols. They long for more 'spiritual reality'. God desires to work through our families. He is "seeking a godly offspring" (Mal. 2:15). I believe we need assemblies with more flexible forms, where our children and grandchildren can also grow up, worship and serve their generation. It is "sincere faith" that inspires the next generation (2Tim. 1:5).
- 3. Leadership:** It is of utmost importance that the leaders in an assembly are men who truly walk with God. It is very difficult for the spiritual temperature of an assembly to be higher than that of its leaders. As elders we should set an example in our family life, our dedication and in the way we face difficulties and solve interpersonal problems (1Pt. 5:1-3). Elders should care for each other and, together as a team, for the congregation. They are to meet

regularly, be organised, know and care for “all the flock”, that is, know and care for every believer in their assembly (Acts 20:28). As elders we sometimes behave more like ‘civil servants’, limiting our work to ‘giving permissions’, applying ‘church discipline’ and putting obstacles in the way of those who want to serve. But leading is about showing the way, motivating, inspiring and showing possibilities. We must get to know the gifts and abilities of each believer. It’s like dividing a large farm into sectors so that each brother and sister can find a space to serve the Lord with joy and profit. When believers fail, good spiritual leaders do not punish or abandon them but visit them and seek to restore them (Gal. 6:1).

4. Spiritual food: The Word of God is food for our souls. God desires to speak to us, correct us, encourage us and motivate us through the Holy Scriptures. He who expounds the Word speaks on behalf of God and that is a serious matter (Jas. 3:1). “If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides” (1Pt. 4:11). A healthy family regularly eats fresh, good quality food (Matt. 24:45). The food is adjusted to the age and need of the person, and if it is properly prepared, it will give more pleasure and joy in eating it. It is similar in spiritual food. The one who is to bring the Word should ask the Lord, ‘What do You want to say to Your church today?’ To do this, we must spend time “in the council of the Lord” (Jer. 23:18). Not every man or elder is gifted as a teacher. A gift is evident if these three conditions are met: (1) the one exercising the gift prepares and does it willingly and joyfully, (2) those receiving the ministry receive it with gratitude, and (3) there is some evidence that the Holy Spirit is at work through what is being done: Lives are being changed.



5. Pastoral work: A general weakness among assemblies with roots in the Brethren Movement is the lack of shepherding. If a believer is correctly dressed and attends meetings regularly, it is assumed that all is well. In some assemblies home visits only take place when there are problems to be solved. If we want to care for the sheep and “know the condition” of the flock (Prov. 27:23) it is essential to have personal meetings and home visits. We elders are to set an example (Acts 20:20, 31). It is not for nothing that the word most often used in the Bible for church leaders is ‘shepherds’. Shepherds know their sheep, they spend time with them. They also seek out the lost and “search for the lost and bring back the strays” (Ezek. 34:16). Without shepherding there is little sense of community. May God raise up more shepherd-hearted brothers and sisters among us!

6. Activity of sisters: It is clear from Scripture that God expects something different from men and women, both in the home and in the church. That is a divine design that we do well to respect. Sadly I have noticed that when talking about the ‘role of sisters in the church’ many think only of the few things they should not do rather than the many things they can and should do. In the assemblies there are many sisters. I also observe that, as a general rule, sisters love the Lord Jesus with more passion and devotion than we men do. The Lord’s work will benefit when all our sisters serve God according to their gifts, experience and ability (1Pt. 4:10). Encourage them to organise ladies’ meetings, visit homes, counsel, evangelise, disciple others, do work among children and youth. Invite them to help with the assembly finances, legal matters, maintenance of the premises, the co-ordination of events and more.

7. Being light: Fellowship among believers is a beautiful and edifying thing (Ps. 133:1-3). That is why the Lord encourages us to regularly come together (Heb. 10:24,25) and to care for one another as “family of believers” (Gal. 6:10). Over time it is easy to focus our energies *inwardly* and neglect our individual and collective calling to be Light in this dark world (Matt. 5:14). I note that a constant balance is needed between an *external focus* and an *internal focus*, between taking the message of salvation to lost souls and promoting a healthy assembly life. In this way new believers will find a welcoming spiritual home where they will feel God’s presence and be able to worship, grow and serve.