

It Is Written

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Contrasting Churches

By Sewell Hall

Local churches may be led either by godly or by not-godly men—that is, by men who are most concerned for God and things of the Spirit or by men whose concerns are primarily human and temporal. Such churches can be distinguished by the following: Goals: Godly leaders have as their goal "the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ" (Eph. 4:12-15). Ungodly men have as their primary goal increasing numbers—a big church. They consider numerical growth proof of God's approval.

Doctrine: Godly leaders are determined to abide in the doctrine of Christ and not to go beyond it (2 John 9). Not-godly men, knowing that most of the public "will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables" (2 Tim. 4:3-4), provide the teachers that will tickle their ears.

Discipline: Godly leaders will insist that in harmony with God's instructions the church "withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly" (2 Thess. 3:6). Not-godly leaders advertise: "Come as you are" and boast that they are not judgmental, receiving everyone regardless of lifestyle.

Worship: Godly leaders insist that God be worshiped "acceptably with reverence and godly fear" (Heb. 12:28) while not-godly men place great emphasis on "worship" that pleases the public and seem concerned only that everyone leave "feeling good about themselves" and eager to return.

Preachers: Godly leaders are not nearly as concerned with excellence of speech or of wisdom as that preachers be "determined not to know anything ... save Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:1-2). Not-godly leaders insist that preachers be entertaining and personally popular, even with the world.

Activities: Godly leaders test every proposed action by the scriptures, determined to "do all in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Col. 3:17) while not-godly leaders offer whatever people want—sports, entertainment, education, feasts, travel—with little apparent concern for what God wants.

What kind of church are you seeking—the church of your choice or the church of God's choice?

Friendship With the Lord is Conditional

By Jonathan Perz

In John 15:14, the Lord Jesus says, "You are my friends, if you do whatever I command you." Amazingly enough, one word within this phrase causes much difficulty. It is the word "IF." Though only two letters long, it is one of the most powerful words in scripture. Why? Because it implies a condition that must be met for the statement to be true. In order to maintain a friendship with the Lord, one must do whatever He commands. Jesus states this in plain language in John 15:14.

Many people try to claim an intimate friendship with God while at the same time maintaining an intimate friendship with the world. While proclaiming to be Christians, they partake of the very things the Lord commands Christians to abstain from. This is not being a friend to Christ.

Regarding friendship with the world, James writes in James 4:4, "Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God." When we befriend the world, we make an enemy of God.

Many claim to be friends of Jesus Christ yet do not obey His words. In Mark 16:15-16, Jesus commands men to be baptized, yet many claim it is not necessary. Not only do they disobey the Lord, they contradict Him. Is this an example of friendship with the Lord? Remember what the Lord said in John 15:14, "You are my friends, if you do whatever I command you."

Let us become friends with God on His terms. Let us be like faithful Abraham. As it is written, "and Abraham believed God... He was called a friend of God" (James 2:23). Don't incur the punishment of one who is not a friend of the Lord (2 Thess. 1:8-9). Obey the Gospel today!

Pleasing The Pharisees

By Dan S. Shipley

Nevertheless, even of the rulers many believed on him: but because of the Pharisees they did not confess it, lest they should be put out of the synagogues: for they loved the glory of men more than the glory that is of God. (Jn. 12:42,43)

Even of the rulers— even among the elite Sanhedrin were many who believed on Christ. Speculation about whether they actually believed only reflects on the skeptics faith, not the rulers. God says they believed and for believers, that's enough. But they did not confess it, and herein lies their great sin. It was not so much what they did as what they failed to do. Their faith indicates knowledge. They knew, yet still would not confess and follow Christ. Why: What power, what influence could be so compelling as to cause believers to turn their backs on the Saviour and salvation? We are not left to wonder.

It was because of the Pharisees. The One who knows all hearts shows their weakness as loving the glory of men more than the glory of God. To them, getting along with men (gaining their favor and avoiding their disfavor) had priority over pleasing God. These were not men to allow such things as truth and right to interfere with their religion! While these Pharisees no longer exist as a religious sect, they are still very much in evidence as they represent those who men strive to please more than God. Because of the Pharisees many of all ages have proved themselves to be as these rulers — found wanting at a crucial time; succumbing to pressures and circumstances.

"Because of the Pharisees Pilate delivered up Christ to be crucified, wishing to content the multitude (Mk. 15:15). It was for the same reason that Peter followed Christ from afar, denied Him with cursing and swearing and said, I know not the man. He later showed the same weakness in Antioch by withdrawing from the Gentiles, fearing them that were of the circumcision (Gal. 2:12).

Fear and favor of the Pharisees continues to flavor the religion of many. It has influenced the revision and updating of Catholic and denominational creeds. It promotes watered— down preaching and encourages the fear of offending phobia. As the rulers, many have learned the way of truth, but because of the Pharisees will not embrace it. Even among the brethren are some who prefer to stay with the synagogue rather than to stand for what they know to be right. No Pharisee should be allowed to determine where I shall spend eternity! For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? or am I striving to please men?...