

PLEASING MEN OR PLEASING GOD?

Church leaders in this postmodern age have concluded that success and growth are dependent on the church winning and maintaining the favor of non-members in its community. Many even conduct surveys of the non-churched asking just what it is they are looking for in a church? They then seek to provide that which the non-members want. The emergence of giant mega-churches with their multitude of ministries and services, few of which are Biblically mandated, demonstrates that following the advice of the church growth specialists and adoption of secular marketing programs does attract people. It says nothing however about the favor and approval of God.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon went to London, England as a young man and built the Metropolitan Tabernacle Baptist church into one of the largest, most successful churches of his generation. Mr. Spurgeon believed that the preaching of God's Word and involving the church in extensive benevolent and missionary activities were the divine means to produce the healthy spiritual and numeric growth desired.

One of Spurgeon's penetrating observations is timely for churches of Christ in the 21st century. He rightly observed, "That very church which the world likes best is sure to be that which God abhors." Many of our younger men have concluded that the church growth experts have the formulae for growth and prosperity for their congregations. They have reduced their message to one of platitudes and positive self-help lessons. Doctrine has been cast aside, reproof and rebuke are out of the question. A studied effort is being made to leave the impression that churches of Christ are just another nice denomination. Pluralism and ecumenism are the watchwords of these promoters of change. They are reaching out to embrace their denomination neighbors, not for the purpose of teaching them the way of the Lord more perfectly (Acts 18:26), but in a misguided desire to be accepted by those who teach and practice a distorted version of the religion of Christ. They have forgotten to factor in how God might view their new approach to church growth. God said to Jeremiah, "he that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully" (Jer. 23:28). Jesus said "Woe unto you when all men shall speak well of you! For in the same manner did their fathers to the false prophets" (Luke 6:26). Paul said, "if I were still pleasing men, I should not be a servant of Christ" (Gal. 1:10). James asked "Know ye not that friendship with the world is enmity with God?" (Jas. 4:4).

May God raise up a band of elders and preachers who are willing to stand up for Christ, his church and his Word even if it means standing alone. Great will be their reward in heaven. JHW