

The User Friendly Church

There is a general trend in the world towards making things and processes simpler. We see this in technology e.g. computers, CD/DVD players and recorders etc. The rationale is to make these more user friendly. We've seen the same trend in the Christian world in simplifying the word of God by producing various versions of the bible. In many of these versions the original meaning is lost in translation and the bible becomes nothing more than a glorified storybook.

If you visit most Christian bookstores you will find many books glorifying the merits of a user-friendly church and telling you all the different marketing methods that you can use to grow your church and make it more user friendly.

In an interview with the pastor of one of the largest churches in the USA he made it clear that at his church they don't have altar calls where individuals have to make a decision for Christ as it might make them feel uncomfortable. Instead they give all visitors cards for them to fill in at their leisure and return by post. While this may seem reasonable it is one of the subtle ways that Satan has infiltrated and continues to infiltrate Christian churches.

Slowly but surely there is a gradual almost unnoticeable drift towards pragmatism where everything is rationalised and the power of God is diminished.

Pragmatism: *A philosophical movement holding that practical consequences are the criterion of knowledge, meaning and value.*

For example if when people come to church we do every thing to make them feel comfortable they will continue to come. This philosophy says...**don't rock the boat**. If you make people uncomfortable they won't come back. You ever wondered why some places of worship are so full on a Sunday? Jesus did not establish the church to be a place where people would come and feel comfortable in their sins.

Many Christians today sing the praises of this new way of doing things and congratulate themselves that they have moved forward. When you talk to them they tell you that they have received new revelation and they have never been so happy, not realising that they have unwittingly played into the hands of Satan. These churches become dead and formal and are little more than a social club where people attend every week to simply have fellowship with one another.

If we examine the history of the early church we saw a gradually drifting away from God yet still thinking they were ok. Christ had to send His angels to warn them and point out their condition.

Revelations 2:1 – 5....Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who

walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks; I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars: And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted. Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.

We as The Church of God need to be on the alert that we do not follow this trend, but there are tell tale signs that we are drifting into this pragmatic state, having a form of godliness but no power. We need to maintain the favour of God. If we just come to church each time without thinking where we are going or making any preparation we cannot expect to have God's favour. We need to consecrate ourselves when we are going to meet with God.

What are some of the signs and characteristics of the user-friendly church?
One is a lack of reverence for God and the house of God. Have you ever noticed the reverence that some other religions show when they attend their places of worship?

Ecclesiastes 5:1....Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil.

Prayer time is a time to talk to the King of kings not a time to talk to one another or go to the toilet. This is a time to close our eyes and show some respect to almighty God. You'll be amazed if you happen to open your eyes during prayer times to see what people get up to. It's as if they have no idea where they are or what they should be doing. Sometimes it's like a game to try and get away with things without being seen. Some of our members have been in church for years and they still have no concept of God, like Jacob at Bethel. He grew up in a godly environment with godly parents but he did not know God for himself. Satan doesn't mind us going to church if we are not serious about our salvation, because he knows that we are going nowhere.

When the Queen of Sheba came to see Solomon [2 Chronicles 9] one of the things she took away with her was the order that she saw in the house. Every one was in their place and doing their part.

An extract from our Advice to Members reads: ***Children are a heritage from the Lord. Those who have children are responsible to teach them at an early age to reverence the house of God. This should be done by setting a good example before them and by instructing them with a good spirit that they will have a strong desire to serve the Lord. Ministers are to meet all the requirements in being examples to the members by keeping their children under reasonable control at all times, and by***

restraining them from running about over the house of God, especially when services are in progress.

Parents if for some reason you can't sit with your child perhaps because you have a part to play in the service you should place him or her by a **RESPONSIBLE ADULT**. When children sit together in church they have a tendency to play and chat, which can be disruptive to others who come to church to worship. Sometimes the children sit on the back rows, and the parents or grand parents are in front of them and are not aware of what they are getting up to behind them. If children are seated near the front then parents are able to keep an eye on them. When I was growing up that's how it was.

Some parents bring toys and colouring books for their children or allow them to bring them to church. We need to let our children know the difference between church and school. We have to teach our children to sit and listen when they are in church.

When people come to our services and see our children running all over the church it does not demonstrate good public relations. They have to behave themselves at school and so we need to let them know that is not acceptable in the house of God.

In the user friendly church people come to church dressed anyway.

When we as God's people go to church we should dress appropriately. Our advice to members advises us on how we should adorn ourselves. Ladies sometimes your skirt/dress may be below the knee when standing but when you sit down take a look and see how you look especially when you are sitting at the front.

In the user friendly church there is no discernment of sin so people can live any way and come to church and feel comfortable. We need people with the gift of discernment in the house of God as with **Annnias and Sapphira [Acts 5]**. This couple had the wrong concept of God and The Church of God. They simply saw Peter and the other Apostles as mere men. They did not see the God behind the men or understood the power of God. The Church indeed can be a dreadful place as Jacob saw it [**Genesis 28:17**] especially if we are not living right in the sight of God.

One old song says; ***We read of a place that's called heaven, its made for the pure and the free: These truths in God's Word He hath given, How beautiful heaven must be.***

We make a sad mistake if we think that we are going to rock our way into heaven. We will have to live right if we are going to make it to heaven.

In the user-friendly church no one addresses anything for fear of offending one another. The Pastor won't reprimand any one and the Leaders keep their mouths shut and turn away their eyes when they see anything. There's no point having leaders if leaders are not going to lead.

Isaiah 56:10 – 11....*His watchmen are blind: they are all ignorant, they are all dumb dogs, they cannot bark; sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber. Yea, they are greedy dogs which can never have enough, and they are shepherds that cannot understand: they all look to their own way, every one for his gain, from his quarter.*

If a leader sees things and don't address them these issues will soon become imbedded and almost impossible to address later. When members blatantly ignore the advice to members such as attending church regularly it shows they are drifting. Pastors and Band Leaders should observe their members and occasionally go through the advice to members with them and not assume that they already know them.

In the user-friendly church members tends to show a lack of respect for one another and for those over them in the Lord. One growing trends is the use of members addressing one another just by their first name. The bible said we should give honour to whom honour is due, if not for who they are, then for the office they hold. Members do not necessarily have to address another by their title e.g. Pastor, Evangelist, Deacon etc., but brother or sister before the name sounds a lot better and is more respectful. Sometimes I hear young members addressing those over them in the Lord just by their first names where these leaders are old enough to be their parents. As one old saying goes, *familiarity breeds contempt*. We can become too familiar with God and with God's leaders and ministers. Uzzah did not think anything about putting his hands on the ark but it cost him his life [2 Samuel 6:6,7]. Psalms 105:15 states... ***Touch not mine anointed and do my prophets no harm***, that includes touching them with our tongues [slander].

Some people don't feel that they need anyone to lead them. They feel that they know what to do; but if that were the case God would not call and appoint leaders. God calls leaders ***“for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry and for the edifying of the body of Christ.”*** [Ephesians 4:12].

There will always be a need for leaders, ***“till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ”*** [Ephesians 4:13].

Some may not think all this is necessary but God wants us to know how we ought to conduct ourselves in The Church of God.

1 Timothy 3:15...*But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.*

"Submitted by Philip Bennett."