

COUNTERFEIT CONVERSION – PART 3

The “People-Pleasers” (Social)

“For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God” (John 12:43).

This verse describes men who refused to confess that Jesus was the Christ because He was extremely unpopular with the scribes and Pharisees, leaders of Jerusalem.

These men were, of course, never saved. They chose to respect men rather than God, and as a result forfeited life. They were representatives of the third main class of religious people without true faith. We shall call them the “people-pleasers.”

No mere regard for reputation has led the people-pleaser to choose religion. This has always been too unpopular with the crowd. But where it is not generally unpopular to become a professing Christian, where it will not lessen, but increase chances of popularity with many, a complex motive operates. It is the hope of securing happiness in a future world and to increase reputation here. This is their basic motive.

Many profess conversion or religion, when on a close look it will be seen that their leading object, prized beyond anything else, is the good opinion of the crowd. Sooner than lose this, they would deny their religious stand. Their whole “faith” is based on this. You can see by a close look at their lives that they will do nothing to lose this good opinion of men. They will not face the hatred, scorn, ridicule and unpopularity from unbelievers that must come if they really gave themselves up to root sin out of the world.

How can you tell a people-pleaser? If a man professes to love God and put Him first, yet makes the praise of men his idol, how can you tell? Test your own character by these signs if you hope you do not belong in the class of counterfeit converts...

They do what Paul says: *“...measure themselves among themselves...” (II Cor. 10:12)*, and for this reason do not find true faith.

There are a vast many people who, instead of making Jesus Christ their standard and the Bible their rule of life, obviously aim at no such thing. The great question they ask is - “Do I do as much in religion, and am I as good as others in the crowd or church around me?” Their aim is to keep up a respectable religious front for others. Instead of seriously asking for themselves what the Lord and His Word requires, they look simply at the common run of professing church people and copy them. They do that which is outwardly respectable, not primarily that which is right. (*Ps. 36:1-2; Prov. 12:15; 16:2; 30:12; Eccl. 11:9; Judges 17:6; Matt. 6:1-7, 16-18*)

People pleasers never bother to raise the standards of right around them.

They are not bothered that the general standard of piety is so low in the church that a visiting early church Christian would have to backslide to be in fellowship! People-pleasers like the “present” standard, because they have conformed their religious reputation around it. If the real friend of God and man tries to wake up the church and raise the tone of faith, he seems critical and meddling to the people-pleaser. (*Matt. 25; Jer. 14:10-14; Mk. 6:1-3; Acts 5:28*)

When Jesus denounced the church leaders of His day, they said, *"He has a devil!"* He dared to say that unless a man's righteousness exceeded theirs they would not make it. (*Matt. 5:20*) A large part of today's church people have the same attitude as the scribes and Pharisees, and the same destiny. Every effort to open their eyes to make them see they are living lives so low, so worldly, so phony that God is grieved terribly, only excites ill-will from them. They forget how Jesus said His strongest words of judgment to those who had a reputation of being the most pious people of His day. It was their hypocritical spirit that roused His soul. He saw through their fake fronts of piety, called them hypocrites and thundered over their heads the terrible words, *"How can you escape the damnation of Hell!"* No wonder there is excitement when the truth is told, when so many love the praise of men more than the praise of God. They do not seem to know that the lives of so many professing Christians are almost as different from God's standards as light is from dark. (*Lev. 11:44; Ps. 24:3,4; Jer. 23:9-22; 26:1-15; Rom. 6; I Thess. 4:3-7; Heb. 12:14; I Jn. 3:3-10; I Jn. 5:18*)

They often oppose men, measures, and efforts to wake the church as long as they are unpopular; but if they become popular, fall in with them.

The opposite is also true. If the work becomes *unpopular* they will turn against it. (*Matt. 3:7-10; Mk. 6:14, 17, 20, 22, 26; Lk. 13:23-27; Jn. 6:60-66; 7:10-13; Acts 6:8-13*) Let a man of God begin to wake up churches to true faith. While he *is* little known, the people-pleasers are not reluctant to speak against him. But let him go on and gain influence and they will profess to be his warmest friends. (*Lk. 6:7-9; Jn. 2:23-25*).

This class of person stands with the crowd when it condemns a man, and turns the other way when he is honored. There is only one exception. That is, when they have become so far committed to the opposition that they cannot change without disgrace. Then they will be silent, until another chance comes up for letting out the smoldering fires that are burning within them. (*Matt. 22:15, 22, 24, 46; Luke 11:27-28; Acts 5:17-33*)

They never aim at forming a public sentiment in favor of godliness.

They always follow the crowd as it is, and feeling after the tide, go that way, shrinking back from everything that goes in the face of public sentiment. (*Jer. 42:16 cf. 43:1-7; Lk. 14:25; Jn.9:18-25; Acts 24:24-27*)

People-pleasers separate God's requirements into two groups: those which are strongly enforced by public feeling and those which are not. They do the first to please men and break the rest as it suits them.

A people-pleaser is careful to stay away from sins forbidden by public opinion, but does other things not frowned on that are just as bad. He will never miss public worship - oh no! - because he could never hold a reputation for religion if he did... but neglects other things plainly required in the Word of God. When someone habitually disobeys any known law of God, the obedience he seems to have to other laws is not from a true love for God, but from selfish motives. (*Luke 16:10; I Jn. 3:3-6; Jn.14:21*) He does not, in fact, obey any command of God. (*Jas. 2:10*) Obedience to God implies an obedient state of heart, and therefore nothing is obedience that does not imply a supreme regard to God's authority.

Now, if a man's heart be right, whatever God requires, he regards of more importance than anything else. (*Matt. 6:33; 22:36-40; 10:37-39*) If he regards anything else of greater importance, *that* is his god. Whatever we supremely regard, that is our god; if it is riches, comfort or pleasure, honor or power, that is the god of our hearts. If it is Jesus, that man is a true Christian. If it is anything else, whatever his reason, it is his true god, and all his religion is selfish. He is a counterfeit convert. (*Luke 16:10-15; Deut. 6:5; Matt. 6:24; Jn. 8:34-36*)

How is it with you, friend? Do you habitually neglect any command of God because it is not sustained and enforced by public opinion? If you profess to be a true Christian, you probably do not neglect anything strongly urged by public sentiment. But how is it with others? Do you habitually practice some things acceptable among men that you know to be contrary to the law of God? If you do, write down your name; "people-pleaser". (*Luke 18:9-14*)

They are apt to sin away from home when they would not if they were with those they know.

Many a man who is outwardly very religious and respectable in his own community drops his mask at a distance and begins to act like he has always lived inside. If he is fairly sure no-one knows him there, he will sin. If he is a religious man in church, away from church company he is ready to "let his horns grow". The true Christian in love with God does not lead a double life. The things that make him happy in church are the same things that make him happy a thousand miles away from it. (*Matt. 15:8; Jer. 23:24; Titus 1:16; Titus 2:7-15; Jas. 2:9; 1 Jn. 2:3-6, 23*)

A people-pleaser also often indulges in secret sin. I am now speaking of something by which you may know yourselves. If you allow yourself any sin secretly, (when you know how to get out of it but you can "get along" without any human being knowing it), know that GOD sees it, and He has already written down your name, "hypocrite"! You are more afraid of disgrace in the eyes of men than disgrace in the eyes of God. If you loved God as you claim to, and were tempted to do such a thing, you, as a true Christian would react like Joseph: "*How can I do this wicked thing and sin against God?*" (*Gen. 39:7-9; Ezek. 8:12; Job 31:33-34; Rom. 2:16-29; 2 Tim. 2:19*)

They may not secretly sin, but secretly neglect duties that if known would bring them shame. Things like Bible study and secret prayer, for instance. They will appear very pious at church, but in the privacy of their own rooms, live different lives. How is it with you? Do you habitually and secretly omit some things, knowing how and why you should do them, and yet are careful to perform all your public duties? Need it be said that you "*love the praise of men more than the praise of God*"?

People-pleasers dread the thought of being called "fanatical".

They miss a first principle of Scripture: That all the world is wrong! The world's feelings are all against God, and every one who intends to serve God must, from the start, oppose its opinions. It is true and always has been, that "*they that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecutions*". They shall be called "fanatical", "extreme" and the like. They always have been and always will be, as long as the world is wrong. (*Matt. 5:11-12; Jn. 15:18-25; Acts 14:22; Acts 21:27-31; 26:24-29*) But people-pleasers never go further than people's opinions. They say they "must" do this to influence such men.

Right against this, is the purpose of God's true children. Their leading aim is to reverse the world's order and turn the world upside down, to bring all men to obey God and all the opinions of men to conform to the Word of God. (*Acts 17:6; Acts 2:37-40; Luke 12:49; Matt. 3:1-3; 4:16-17; Jn. 8:44-50; 12:37-43*)

They are very intent on making friends on both sides of the line.

They always make compromises and concessions to the crowd. They try to take both sides. It has always been so for centuries, that men could make a good show of religion without ever being labeled as "holy". The standard is still so low, that a great mass of churches still try not to be set down as "reprobates" on one hand or "fanatics" on the other. They are "fashionable Christians!" Their style of religion is fashionable and popular and they generally follow the world's fashions in dress and custom. No matter what God requires, they are carefully determined not to offend His enemies. If they are ever faced with a choice between pleasing their crowd or God, they will offend God. (*Prov. 4:14; Ex. 23:24; Matt. 14:1-10; 21:23-27; Luke 12:51-53; Jn. 15:14; Rom. 12:2; Jas. 4:4*)

They will do more to gain the applause of men than the applause of Heaven.

They are more anxious to know what men think about them than about what God thinks. If such a one is a minister preaching a sermon, or a singer giving a song, they fish for compliments, more interested to know what men thought of it than what God thought of it. If an elder or church member prays or speaks in a meeting, if he is a people-pleaser, he is thinking, how he sounds to those who listen. (*Matt. 15:7-8; 23:14; Jude 16; Jas. 2:1-4*) If he makes anything like a failure, the disgrace of men cuts him ten times more than the thought that he has let God down or hindered others. (*I Cor. 7:23; Eph. 6:6; Col. 3:22-23*)

Females of this kind are vastly more concerned in church with how they look in the eyes of men than how they look in God's eyes. You can see at a glance what this religion is, the moment it is held up to view. No one is at a loss to say what that man or woman's name is. It is hypocrite. They go into God's house with hearts as dark as midnight, while everything on the outside is respectable and decent. (*I Sam. 16:7; Matt. 23:5-7; Matt. 23:28; I Peter 3:3; II Cor. 5:12*)

They are often ashamed to do what they should; so much ashamed they will not do it! When a person is so much ashamed, it is plain that his reputation is his god. How many people-pleasers do you know? They are ashamed to acknowledge Jesus Christ, ashamed to reprove sin in high and low places, ashamed to speak out when Christianity is assailed! If they really loved God, how could they be? If a man really loved a girl, would he be ashamed to defend her if she was slandered? If a man's children were abused, would he be ashamed to stand up for them? Not if he loved them, (*Mk. 8:38; Joel 2:26-27; Jer. 17:13; Rom. 1:16; 9:33; 10:11; I Tim. 1:12; Phil. 1:20; Heb. 2:11; I Jn. 2:28*) The people-pleaser does not really love God. He loves himself and his reputation among others. When among church people he is very bold for the truth and makes a great show of his faith. But put him among Christ's enemies, where it would be a reproach to be called a Christian, put him to trial, and he will sell Christ out like Judas or deny Him before His enemies. (*Matt. 10:32-33; 26:47-50; Mk. 4:16-17; Luke 9:26; 12:9; John 1:20; 9:22; 12:42; Acts 3:13*)

There is a great deal more *apparent* piety in the church than *true* piety. There are many

things which sinners suppose are good which are abominable in the eyes of God. It is easy for people to take credit for people-pleasing lives and make themselves believe they are models of piety, when in fact they are only examples of hypocrisy.

But for the love of reputation and fear of disgrace, how many in the church would break out in open apostasy? All that holds them back from open sin is public opinion, fear of disgrace, and desire to gain credit for virtue. When a person is good from a regard to God's authority - whether public sentiment favor or frown upon it - that is the true faith. (*Jn. 8:28-29; Acts 5:40-42*) If otherwise, they have their reward. They do it for the sake of gaining credit in the eyes of men, and they gain it. (*Ezek. 14:6-8; John 7:3-7*) Who will agree to take the Bible for your rule and Jesus Christ for your pattern, doing what is right in all cases, whatever man may say or think? If you are not willing to take this stand, you are a stranger to the grace of God. A people-pleaser is by no means His child. If you are not resolved upon doing what is right, public sentiment or not, you love the praise of men more than the praise of God.

Friend, I have been honest with you. If I did not really love you or care, I would not have risked your censure. I have told it like it is. If you mean to be a Christian you must give yourself wholly up to Christ. You cannot float along to Heaven on the waves of public sentiment. I will not pretend you can when God says you cannot. (*Luke 14:25-27; I Thess. 2:3-6*)

Do you ask, sinner, what is to become of all these professing Christians who are conformed to the world and who love the praise of men more than the praise of God? The Bible answers. They will go to hell, with you and with other hypocrites, just as certain as that the friend of the world is an enemy of God. (*Luke 6:26; 12:8-9; Matt. 7:21-23; II Tim. 2:12; I Jn. 3:15-17*)

"Wherefore come out from among them, and be a separate people...and I will receive you, saith the Lord...and will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters" (2 Cor. 6:17-18).

And now, will you do it? Who is on the Lord's side? Who is willing to say, *"We will no longer follow a multitude to do evil, but are determined to do the will of God in all things no matter what the world thinks or says about us" (John 12:24-26)?*

"Search the Scriptures; for in them you think you have eternal life; and they are they which testify of Me... I RECEIVE NOT HONOUR FROM MEN... how CAN you believe, which receive honor one of another, and seek not the honor that comes from God only?" (John 5:39,41,44)