

Please God ... by Pleasing People?

“Please God; don’t please people.” This statement has been continually drilled into me. We tie this to the idea of obedience and the statement first uttered by the apostles Peter and John: “Whether it’s right in the sight of God for us to listen to you rather than to God, you decide; for we are unable to stop speaking about what we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:19-20).

In 1983, Petra underscored this with a song that, almost 40 years later, I can still hum.

“Don't wanna be a manpleaser - I wanna be a Godpleaser. I just want to do the things that please the Father's heart.” (Words and music by Bob Hartman)

To acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord is to acknowledge that I belong to Him. Every aspect of my being—body, soul, spirit ... mind, will, emotions ... thoughts, attitudes, actions—however I subdivide myself, I wholly belong to Him. I belong to Him; therefore, I am to live to please Him.

I’m in good company. Paul said about himself: “For am I now trying to persuade people, or God? Or am I striving to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ” (Gal. 1:10).

So it caught my attention when Paul wrote later to the Corinthians: “I also try to please everyone in everything” (1 Cor. 10:33).

So which is it, Paul? Are you seeking to please God or are you seeking to please people? Hmm?

Unfortunately, we have often acted like there is dichotomy between pleasing God and pleasing people, as though they were on opposite ends of the spectrum. But they can go together! In other words, by seeking to please others, we can in the process be pleasing God.

In Paul’s desire to please others, he was not compromising his faith or practices. Paul was seeking to get along with people, build bridges, and ultimately seek their benefit by leading them to Christ.

Many of us can look back to a particular individual who led us to Christ. Some of us may have even been resistant at the time to their words or actions, but now that we’re saved, we are *pleased* that they did what they did!

Of course, we must understand Paul’s desire to please everyone in the context in which he said it. Beginning in 1 Corinthians 10:23, Paul was addressing the freedom we have in Christ. Paul willingly set that freedom aside if his actions might offend or cause someone to stumble. He wanted to please them—not offend them—in order to point to Christ. He chose to “give no offense to Jews or Greeks or the church of God” (v. 32). Look at those three groups; no one is left out. Paul truly sought to please *all* peoples for their benefit.

Earlier, Paul wrote, “To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win Jews; to those under the law, like one under the law.... To those who are without the law, like one without the law ... to win those without the law. To the weak I became weak, in order to win the weak. I have become all things to all people, so that I may by every possible means save some” (1 Cor. 9:20-22).

Is there a better way to seek to please people? And if I’m striving to lead people to see Jesus and place their faith in Him—leading them to the ultimate pleasure!—then I am pleasing God.

“This is good, and it pleases God our Savior, who wants everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:3-4).

So let’s get out there and start pleasing people!