

Appealing to God . . . or Man?

Bulletin Article from March 18, 2018 – Rock Messenger

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The idea that many have on worship is truly unusual to me. Worship in America has become like everything else, simply designed to please man. The apostle Peter stated in Acts 5:29 “We ought to obey God rather than men.” Where has this idea gone from the “churches” in this world today?

Many do not heed these words today, and rather are like the men and women Paul described as “wanting teachers who will scratch their (audience) ears”. Paul forewarned that the time was coming to the Lord’s church, but was not a new issue.

When you look at the early stories in Genesis, this mentality is seen in the third chapter. In Genesis 2:16-17 it says “Then the Lord God commanded the man, saying, ‘From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you shall surely die.’” In the beginning of chapter three, the serpent tempts the woman. She knows what God has said and even recites it to the serpent but notice verse 6. “When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruits and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate.”

We must be careful to make sure that our worship is pleasing Him who gave His Son for us and not appeasing ourselves. Many in the world have added to worship in ways that pervert it. You are unable to find many of the actions some have put into worship as authorized to God. The idea of “it makes it better” is truly an issue with the Lord’s commandments.

If we believe we can alter worship to make it more appealing, then we are worshipping our own desires and not God. We have made the service about ourselves and not about why we are there. Need we be reminded that worship is to Praise the Almighty?

If I was having a birthday party, and I asked for a certain song to be sung a certain way and you decided to change the arrangement or tune completely to another song, would

I be pleased? You may think it sounds a million times better, but the party was for me by my rules. God has commanded that worship be done in a certain manner, and thus we must be mindful of his commandments, and not change them.

Likewise, would I be happy if I asked you to sing me songs about joy and you spent a lot of time working on preparing the sheet music to be sung, making sure you were on the exact key of the song, making sure that each word is pronounced correctly, while neglecting the context of the song? Sure, these all amplify our songs of praise to God, but I fear that many song leaders, myself included, spend too much time on the incidentals that the big picture is overlooked. Some songs are simply beautiful when sung in four-part harmony, at the right tempo and key, but some songs with a simply melody have more context in them for praising God than other songs combined!

Do we say the same words in prayer time after time because that's what everyone is used to hearing, or do we take time to truly pray for the needs of the congregation? Public prayer is something neglected. We do not want to be as the Pharisee who prays openly for people to recognize his action, but we want to make our prayer pleasing unto God. Prayer is a conversation with our Heavenly Father, and we need to offer praise unto Him, and speak on the needs at the time both for our congregation, individuals, and those around us in our communities.

The same mindset should be applied to our talks and prayers at the Lord's Table. Often the same passages are read, and worship becomes more of a methodical assembly-line. The passages ought to bring to our remembrance what Jesus suffered up to and while on that cross.

Lastly, we must be careful in our preaching. It is easy to preach on top of a soap box to individuals who are not in the building. We, as preachers and teachers, need to work on edifying the whole and taking opportunities as we can to address issues. We also must be careful that we stay true to the Word and rightly handle it. Too many times individuals use passages out of context, and we must be careful not to do the same.

At the same time, we need to be sure that we are not speaking as one seeking to be approved of by men. There is a time and a place for everything, but in our preaching and teaching we need to be found acceptable unto God. Some in this world preach love and mercy, and twist passages to their own teachings. While these are two wonderful topics to preach on, we must also spend time talking about the perils of disobedience.

Brothers and sisters, we need to make sure that our worship is pleasing unto God. Our worship is precious to the Lord, and we must be sure he remains the center of it as well as his commandments are followed in it. **-CW**