

## MONDAY MANNA

23 May 2016

### WHO ARE YOU TRYING TO PLEASE?

By Rick Foster

Many products are designed to imitate the real thing. There is plastic decking that looks like real wood, and vinyl flooring that appears to be ceramic tile. We can purchase fake fur or jewellery, phony noses, hairpieces, and other body parts. The purpose behind all of these items is fairly obvious, but what about a canned product called "Spray-on Mud"?

Spray-on Mud was designed for use on the outside of a sport utility vehicle. Its purpose was to make it appear that the owner of the SUV uses the expensive gas-guzzler for more than taking the kids to soccer practice. If you sprayed it on, friends would think you have just returned from a wilderness adventure. If you wanted this seemingly authentic look, without the trouble of actually attempting a rigorous off-road drive, you could buy this produce for \$15 a can!

We see similar practices every day in the business and professional world, men and women trying to make themselves seem to be something they are not – more successful, more skilled, more experienced. People fictionalise resumes, exaggerate achievements during job interviews and make unrealistic promises to potential customers; all in the attempt to please others and win their favour.

Observing such behaviour in others should prompt us to ask ourselves, "Who am I trying to please?"

Looking for a biblical parallel, we find no better example than the apostle Paul, who presented a striking contrast from that of the people-pleaser. After a brutal experience sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ in the ancient city of Philippi, Paul headed into Thessalonica. After being beaten and jailed, one might think he would have learned his lesson and changed his message or his tactics as he entered this next town. Instead, we read in 1 Thessalonians 2:2, "we had the boldness to speak to you amid much opposition."

What motivates a man or a woman to "stay the course," holding firm to their beliefs, values and message, being unwilling to settle for the equivalent of buying a \$15 can of "authentic" appearance? For Paul the answer was simple: God. This is the option we face even today in the decisions we make in the workplace, choosing between wanting to please those around us – or the One above us. As one celebrated comedian once remarked, "I don't know the key to success, but the key to failure is trying to please everybody."

Why was pleasing God so high on Paul's priorities? Because he understood God's perspective. Paul wrote he served, "Not as pleasing men, but God who examines our hearts" (1 Thessalonians 2:4). In other words, the Lord is not impressed with a \$15 can of spray-on anything. We have a difficult time seeing beyond outward appearances, but He never has a problem with it. The Scriptures tell us, "I the Lord search the heart and examine the mind, to reward a man according to his conduct, according to what his deeds deserve" (Jeremiah 17:10). And, "Lord, you know everyone's heart" (Acts 1:24).

Paul was unwilling to use a spray-can approach in dealing with a heart-examining God. That influenced three specific areas of his life: his words ("we never came with flattering speech"); his finances ("nor with a pretext for greed"); or his status ("nor did we seek glory from men"). Does knowing this get the same response from us? Word to the wise: Save \$15 and be yourself!

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## Reflection/Discussion Questions

1. Why is it so common for us to try and put on a “good front,” seeking to disguise our outward appearance to conceal what we truly are on the inside?
2. Can you think of a time when you took the “spray-on can” approach in dealing with someone, whether a person you just met, someone you work with, or a customer? What was the outcome – did you convince them of what you wanted them to think about you?
3. Why can this approach, trying to represent ourselves with an imitation rather than the real thing, be so problematic?
4. The apostle Paul wrote that his sole motivation was to please God. How often is this true of you? Why do you think we are more inclined to seek to please people rather than God? What can we do about this – what should we do about this, in your opinion?

### NOTE:

If you have a Bible and would like to read more about this subject, consider the following passages:

- 1 Samuel 16:7;
- Proverbs 10:9, 11:3, 16:2,9, 20:14, 21:2;
- 1 Thessalonians 3:13

Copyright 2016. For many years Rick Foster was on the staff of Lost Valley Ranch, a guest ranch in Colorado Springs, Colorado, U.S.A. He now serves as an interim pastor in North Carolina, and writes on occasion for The Challenge newsletter.