

WHEN YOU GIVE - SEEK GOD'S APPROVAL
Matt. 6:1-4

INTRO.:

1. **ILLUST.:** There is a story told about a person who went to a concert at a beautiful restored old art-deco theatre.
 - a. The man was thrilled with this particular concert because of the talent of the musicians.
 - b. At the end of the concert, he noticed two ushers standing near his seat who were applauding harder than anybody else in the whole building.
 - 1) It thrilled him to see these two ushers standing there applauding more vigorously than all of the rest of the concert goers.
 - 2) But his experience was somewhat diminished when he heard one usher say to the other, "Keep clapping. If we can get them to do another encore, we get overtime!"
 - c. While it appeared that these two ushers were serious music lovers; it turned out they were only applauding so long and so hard because it would mean a few dollars more in their pockets.
 - d. While on the outset it might seem that they are trying to do what is right; in the end we find that they only did it for their own benefit.
 - e. And like these two ushers, there are people who do good things for the wrong reasons.
2. As Jesus continues the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 6 He will be talking about doing good things - giving, prayer, and fasting - but He will also deal with the right motive for our worship.
 - a. In this chapter Jesus will refer to the three marks of Jewish piety or spirituality: Giving to the poor, prayer, and fasting.
 - 1) A devout pious Jew was one who was generous to the needy, faithfully prayed to God, and fasted once a week.
 - 2) But the real question became, "Why did they, and why do we do these things?"
 - a) What do we hope to accomplish by our prayers or by giving to those in need?
 - b) What is the point of fasting?
 - c) What are the results we are hoping to achieve by these acts of piety?
 - 3) If you cannot honestly answer these questions then one of two outcomes is likely:
 - a) Either you will not waste your time giving, praying, or fasting.
 - b) Or you might do these things, but miss any real benefit because you are doing them for the wrong reasons.
 - b. In our text for today Jesus will be teaching that those who do right things for the wrong reasons will get the wrong reward.
 - 1) Jesus shows that doing things for man's applause will cause us to miss out on the Father's applause.
 - 2) While you may get man's applause, it holds very little real value, and will not benefit anyone in any significant way.
 - c. The main point of Jesus message in Matthew 6 is: True worship is all about God and not about us.
3. So in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus encouraged His disciples to play to an audience of One - to seek only the approval of our Heavenly Father.
 - a. He urges us not to be people pleasers seeking to impress others with our acts of service and worship.
 - b. The simple fact is that if you try to get your self-worth from the approval of people, your mood is going to be frequently depressed and your performance often erratic.
 - c. Jesus' point is that God is faithful.
 - 1) He is always rooting for you.
 - 2) He wants the best for you and, in the end; it is only His favor that matters.
4. So this chapter speaks to those who are tempted to be people-pleasers.
 - a. The fact is that there are some people who have such a ravenous appetite for praise that they will do almost anything to get it.
 - 1) You want so much to be liked that it is almost impossible to overcome peer pressure.
 - 2) You want the approval of others so much that you have a hard time saying "no" to anyone,

- b. You are always wondering what people will say, what people will think, and how people will respond so you let that control your life.
 - c. So when people approve you, you are up; but when someone is upset with you, you are devastated.
 - d. Your whole life is viewed as a stage performance seeking the applause and avoiding the disapproval of the crowd.
 - e. Even when it comes to spiritual service, instead of seeking God's approval, you are more concerned about what people think.
5. Today, I want to encourage you to pay attention as we study Jesus' words from the Sermon on the Mount where He encourages us to seek only God's approval.
- a. We will center our lesson this AM on Matt. 6:1-4 where Jesus talks about doing charitable deeds.
 - b. In this text there are 3 points that I want us to consider:

LESSON:

- I. 1st: Jesus began this section by giving a warning against self-promotion (vs. 1).
- A. The simple fact is that we all instinctively want to be liked.
- 1. From the time we are born we want praise, approval, and attention.
 - a. Little children cries out, "Watch me, Daddy!" or "Look at me, Mommy!"
 - b. When they do something they think is great they want our approval.
 - 2. Teenagers want to be popular with their peers more than anything else.
 - a. Thus they are careful to dress, talk, and act in whatever fashion is acceptable among their peers.
 - b. Some will even go so far as to be nonconformists (Body piercing, tattoos, green hair, black lipstick, etc.) in order to draw attention to themselves - "Look at me!"
 - 3. As adults we worry, "What will the neighbors say if we do not mow our grass?"
 - 4. Even in the church we worry about what others will think:
 - a. What if our building is on the wrong side of the track?
 - b. What if our building has a few cracks or our sign has some paint coming off it?
 - 5. But the problem with being people-pleasers is that we become overly concerned with what other people think, and forget about what God thinks.
- B. In this passage Jesus is not talking about doing evil but rather about doing good for the purpose of impressing other people.
- 1. On the surface it seems that Jesus is contradicting Himself.
 - a. In Matt. 5:16 He said: "*Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.*"
 - b. Jesus said we are to care what people think about us and that is not always bad.
 - c. In Matt. 6 He said we are to be sensitive to our witness to others.
 - 2. But the difference between Matt 5:16 and 6:1 is in motive.
 - a. Why do we do what we do?
 - b. Are you doing the good deeds to exalt Christ or to promote self?
 - c. When people call for a change in worship style is it to glorify God or to please ourselves?
 - d. Simply, what is the motive for our actions?
 - 3. It is the self-centeredness of our motives that Jesus warns against.
 - a. When we want people to notice our goodness then we are doing it for the wrong motive.
 - b. John Ortberg put it best when he said facetiously, "I know I'm supposed to be humble, but what if no one notices?"
 - 4. Jesus says do not be so concerned about what people think that you end up doing religious things to impress them.
 - 5. In the Message Bible Eugene Peterson's paraphrased this passage this way: "*Be especially careful when you are trying to be good so that you don't make a performance out of it. It might be good theater, but the God who made you won't be applauding. When you do something for someone else, don't call attention to yourself.*"

- C. If you are tempted to be a people-pleaser let me share with you four good reasons to quit.
 --There are 4 good reasons why we need to stop worrying so much about what people think and start being more concerned about what God thinks:
1. 1st: People are fickle.
 - a. People will applaud you one minute and condemn you the next.
 - b. They will say you are the greatest preacher they have ever heard one week, and then fall asleep during your sermon the next.
 - c. The simple fact is that you can never please everyone.
 - d. People are so inconsistent in both their praise and their condemnation that you never really know where you are with them.
 2. 2nd: Most people do not really care about you anyway.
 - a. Someone once said: "If you worry too much about what people think of you, you will probably be disappointed to discover how seldom they do."
 - b. When we think about it we know that is the truth.
 - c. So why spend so much time worrying about someone else's opinion when in reality they really do not even notice.
 3. 3rd: The most popular people are those who do not try to please others.
 - a. It is kind of a paradox, the less self-conscious you are; the more likely you are to be liked.
 - b. The people who try extra hard to please others are usually rejected; while the people who do not seem to care what others think are the most respected for their courage, uninhibited behavior, and self-confidence.
 - c. One of the things that made Jesus so attractive to His contemporaries was that He was not very concerned about their opinions of Him.
 - d. In fact, one of his detractors admitted this trait to Jesus in Matt. 22:16: "*We know you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren't swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are.*"
 4. 4th: In the end only God's evaluation really matters.
 - a. Jesus says in John 5:30: "*I seek not to please myself but him who sent me.*"
 - b. James 4:12: "*There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy.*"
 - c. Paul says in Gal. 1:10: "*Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? ...If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ.*"
 - d. **ILLUST**: Serena Williams won the Wimbledon Tennis tournament for the first time in 2002.
 - 1) After her impressive victory, a reporter asked Serena if it bothered her that many of the English fans were rooting against her.
 - 2) She politely said, "No," and stated that she understood because there had been people rooting against her all her life.
 - 3) But she still wanted to win for herself.
 - 4) Then she added, "Besides my dad was sitting in those stands, and I knew he was rooting for me and I wanted to please him."
 - e. In the end, all that really matters is if we have pleased God.

II. 2nd: Jesus gives an example of a hypocrite - one who seeks to impress others with their righteousness (vs. 2-4a).

- A. Jesus calls those who do good things with selfish intentions hypocrites.
1. A hypocrite is someone who pretends to be something that in reality they are not.
 2. This word comes into our language directly from the Greek.
 - a. The Greek word means "an actor who wears a mask."
 - b. In the theatre of Jesus' day, one actor would play several roles on stage.
 - c. They designated the changing of the role onstage by wearing different masks.
 3. Thus a hypocrite is someone who puts on a mask to make people think they are someone they are not.

4. ILLUST.: A number of years ago vandals cut down 6 huge royal palms along a major Miami Blvd.
 - a. The city was not sure if they could pay to replace palms that large.
 - b. But then someone donated 6 new palm trees that were even bigger ones.
 - c. They even paid to have them planted.
 - d. The old ones were 15 ft. high and were a nice foreground to a billboard which said, 'Fly Delta'.
 - e. The new ones were 35 ft tall and completely hid the sign.
 - f. The new donor: Eastern Airlines!
 - g. They did something good, but for the wrong reason.

- B. Coming back to our text we find that evidently the Pharisees, who craved the praise of men, sometimes made a big show out of what they gave to the temple treasury.
 1. In the Jewish system of worship, they did not pass the offering tray and the people did not give by anonymous envelopes or folded checks.
 - a. The treasury boxes were set outside the worship area and people gave their money as they came in.
 - b. In Mark 12:41 we find an example of this: *"Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts."*
 2. Even today, like the Jews in Jesus' day, some people give to good causes only for public approval.
 - a. Just listen to any fund-raising telethon and you will hear the names of the donors read out loud: "So and so gave a hundred dollars."
 - b. Go to almost any hospital in America and you can read plaques like: "This wing donated by so and so," and a family is listed who has donated hundreds of thousands of dollars to that hospital.
 - c. Our Christian Colleges put names of donors on bricks or, if you give enough money, you can have a dormitory or library named after you.
 3. This method is very successful in raising donations and it is not all wrong, but it can be done from the wrong motive.

- C. But once again, as He has done so many times in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus raised the bar on those who would be His disciples.
 1. In our text Jesus used a unique phrase that has puzzled many people throughout the ages: *"But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing."*
 2. Notice, first of all that Jesus assumes that if we are subjects to the King of kings and want to live according to His expectations, we will be "givers."
 - a. He does not say *"If you give"* but *"When you give."*
 - b. Being generous in helping meet the needs of others was a mark of the early church, and has always been a mark of Christ's church.
 - c. ILLUST.: A Greek philosopher named Aristedes from Athens, as early as 125 A.D., presented a defense of Christians to the Roman emperor Hadrian. Speaking about normal Christians. He said: "He who has gives to him who has not without grudging. When one of their poor passes away from the world, and any of them sees him, then he provides for his burial according to his ability. If they hear that any of their number is imprisoned or oppressed for the name of their Messiah, all of them provide for his needs, and if it is possible that he may be delivered, they will deliver him. If there is among them a man that is poor or needy and they have not an abundance of necessities, they fast two or three days, that they may supply the needy with their necessary food."
 - d. The point is that those who choose to follow Jesus will be generous givers.
 3. Next, notice the phrase, *"Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing."*
 - a. Jesus is not telling us that we should not keep track of what we give for income tax purposes or that it is wrong to give by envelope or check because someone is going to find out.
 - b. He is not saying to just reach into your wallet and close your eyes and give whatever bill you pull out.
 - c. What He is saying is that we should "give and forget."
 - 1) Give and do not dwell on or gloat over how much we have given.
 - 2) Give and do not call attention to our giving.
 - 3) Be satisfied with having no one know what you give but God.

- d. The Message Bible paraphrase: *“They get applause, true, but that’s all they get. When you help someone out, don’t think about how it looks. Just do it – quietly and unobtrusively.”*

III. 3rd: Jesus tells us what must be the proper motivation in giving: Seeking God’s approval (vs. 4b).

- A. While we may try to downplay it, there is a legitimate reward motive for living the Christian lifestyle.
1. God asks us to discipline our lives, to deny self and take up the cross so that we can win the victory of eternal life.
 2. He promises that, while we are saved by grace and not works, we will be rewarded for our works.
 3. And while there are several rewards we may receive in this life, the real reward is spending eternity with God.
 4. Listen to these verses that promise a reward commensurate with our faithfulness on earth.
 - a. Matt. 16:27: *“For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father’s glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done.”*
 - b. Matt. 19:29-30: *“And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first.”*
 - c. Matt. 19:29-30: *“...because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does.”*
 - d. 1 Cor. 3:12-15: *“If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man’s work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.”*
- B. While we understand that the reward our Heavenly Father promises is eternal, we also understand that it is not just eternal, as there are some immediate rewards.
1. If you are supporting the church with your money and service, when you see a lost people come to Christ, a child taught the Word of God, hurting people comforted, and people who are at odds with one another reunited, there is a sense of satisfaction within.
 - a. You feel good because you have had a part in seeing people ministered to and God being honored.
 - b. You can honestly say to yourself, “I am glad that I helped make that happen.”
 - c. And that in itself is a great reward.
 2. Watchman Nee said: “I have never met a soul who has set out to satisfy the Lord and has not been satisfied himself.”
 3. The real reward is that we get all this and heaven too.

CONC.:

1. ILLUST.: Bob Russel, told about his grandson Charlie who was going to be playing football.
 - a. Charlie was eight years old and was a little chunkier and little slower than most of the boys his age.
 - b. On the way to the first football practice, Charlie’s dad told him, “Now Charlie, the coach is liable to want you to be a lineman.”
 - 1) The truth is: no eight year old boy wants to be a lineman.
 - 2) They all want to be a quarterback, running back or receiver – that is where the glory is.
 - 3) It is not in being a lineman.
 - c. Charlie’s dad continued: “Now the linemen are really important because they block for the other players. The lineman do not get to carry the ball or throw passes, but if the lineman do their job, the guys carrying the ball can make touchdowns—otherwise they cannot.”
 - d. Sure enough, 30 minutes into the first practice, the coach started to place his team.
 - 1) He said, “Charlie, I want you to be lineman. You will be the right guard.”
 - 2) Charlie got down in a three point stance and looked over to his dad with a big smile and went [thumbs up!].
 - 3) He was thrilled!

2. Maybe our Heavenly Father designed you to play a role that does not get much applause.
 - a. If you have a behind-the-scenes assignment where you are blocking for others and not getting much glory, can you still be content?
 - b. Are you willing to give God your all, regardless of the position you are called to play?
 - c. Are you willing to give it your all, so that He is the one who received the real honor and glory?

3. Our motive must be to covet God's approval and not that of our fellow man.
 - a. He is the only one who matters in the end.
 - b. Seek His approval today.