

Something We Must Not Love: Men's Praises

Ponder: People's Approval and God's Approval

Scripture: "Nevertheless even among the rulers many believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God" (John 12:42, 43, NKJV).

"Fine sermon, preacher!" Most of us who preach regularly have heard this countless times – and not because our sermons are always great! We appreciate sincere compliments and encouragement. However, whether we preach or do something else, we must not crave the approval and praises of people – not even religious people!

In Matthew 6, Jesus warned His disciples not to seek the accolades of people. Whether it was in charitable giving (vv. 1-4), prayer (vv. 5-15), or fasting (vv. 16-18), Jesus wanted their motive to be single: pleasing God. If they sought the approval of men, they might well receive it – but that is all they would obtain. On the other hand, if their motive was to please God, He would "reward you openly" (vv. 4, 6, 18).

Of the hypocritical Pharisees Jesus said, "all their works they do to be seen by men" (Matthew 23:5). Not everything the Pharisees did was good; but even good works, when motivated by the desire for human approval, fall short of pleasing God.

One of those proud Pharisees was Saul of Tarsus. He converted to Christ, and is better known to us as the apostle Paul. Before his conversion, Saul was a rising star in the Jewish religion (see Galatians 1:14). He was on his way to a brilliant career as a respected Rabbi. After his conversion, though, Paul suffered the wrath and resentment of those who formerly had approved of him. To his credit, Paul stayed true to Jesus. To the Corinthian church he wrote, "Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him" (2 Corinthians 5:9). Why did Paul maintain this motive? "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ . . ." (v. 10). On the Day of Judgment, what people think about us will not matter; our only concern will be whether we are pleasing to God.

Let avoid the bad example of the rulers who believed in Jesus, but would not confess Him because they would lose the praises of men. Instead, like Paul, let us seek only to please God.