

Sermon 23, Covert Charitable Giving, Matthew 6:2-4

Hypocrisy: the attempt to project a version of yourself that you know to be false. "Hypocrisy is dissimulation, not, however, any form of dissimulation, but only when one **person** simulates another, as when a sinner simulates the **person** of a just man."--Thomas, *ST*, II-II, 111, 2.

A hypocrite may love the ways of holiness, but it is not the holiness of those ways that he is in love with."--David Clarkson, *Works*, vol. 2, 271

A hypocrite is someone who does things he claims he does not do.--R.C. Sproul

Hypocrisy lies in the step from the sign to the thing signified. The good outward deed (the sign) signifies good inner motives (the thing signified). But in reality, the hypocrite has bad inner motives. A hypocrite does good things just to get conscience off his back, not to please God.

What if you think that your faith is real when it's fake? Is that hypocrisy? Yes, because your good fruits don't come from a good tree, as it were. You're faking faith, even if you don't know it.

The fundamental character of hypocrisy: "They say, and do not do" (Matthew 23:3). Thus, they signify that it's right to be holy — but they don't pursue holiness. They say that it's good to believe — but they don't believe.

A true Christian is a "fallible man, but not a false man."--Spurgeon

Ps. 119:128, bulletin verse; Psalm 139, OT reading (a description of the man who is not a hypocrite!)

"As one hole in a ship will sink it, and as one stab at the heart will kill a man, and as one glass of poison will poison a man, and as one act of treason will make a man a traitor, so one sin lived in and allowed will damn a man for ever."-- Thomas Brooks

Qui habet unum vitium habet omnia; he that hath any one vice, viz., reigning, hath all others with it—Seneca, *de benef.*, lib. v. cap. xv.

but certainly it were better with the philosopher **to** have honesty without religion, than **to** have religion without honesty.--Brooks

there is never an hypocrite in the world **that** is more pleased, satisfied, delighted and contented with the righteousness of Christ, than with his own,--Brooks

Hypocrites give to gain applause. They want to be reputed generous, and they pay real money for the privilege of being admired as generous. Their sin lies not in giving money away but in doing it for men’s applause. True Christians, on the other hand, give real money away to give God pleasure. They do it because He likes it. Hypocrisy in general, which seeks the reputation of being good without the trouble of actually being good, is related to hypocritical giving thus: the the hypocrite gives to purchase applause from men rather than to please God. Thus, he is not actually good; he is a hypocrite.

Hypocrisy

Self	Others	God
Known	Known	Known
Not Known	Known	Known
Not Known	Not Known	Known

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Proposition: Because heart religion is done to please your Father, give strictly to please Him!

I know that at least one person in this congregation can play the trumpet. But I highly doubt that any of you have ever blown a trumpet to attract attention before you gave money to some charitable cause. That’s not only because Jesus directly forbids doing it, but because that just seems so tacky. Who on earth would openly call attention to his own generosity?

Well, Jesus says, all of us want to. Oh, not in a tacky way; not in an off-putting way; but in a real way nonetheless. In fact, I can promise that every one of us in this room has felt that desire for the approval and applause of those around us stirring in our hearts. At times, particularly when we've just received some harsh criticism, we may feel little else!

The sermon this morning revolves around motives. As we saw last week, the whole point is that you're doing good things. That's not in question. Of course it's bad to do bad things. But Jesus says it's bad to do *good* things with bad motives. And the bad motive He singles out is this desire for applause, for human approval, for glory. My Mom used to say about certain antics of Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn, "There was enough glory in that to live on for a week." Do you ever feel that way? That if you were just admired by everyone for being such a good person, you would be satisfied? Well, I don't have to ask. I know you have, because I have and everyone has.

But Jesus forbids that. Jesus says to stop seeking glory from men. That is, in fact, the very definition of hypocrisy. Last week we looked at the desire for glory in general. Today, we look at that desire as applied specifically to charitable giving. What I hope to show you from the passage is this: because heart religion is done to please our Heavenly Father, give strictly to please Him! That is, don't give to please men. Give to please God.

I. Hypocritical Charity, v. 2

We begin where Jesus begins — by examining hypocritical charity. What is it?

A. Its Definition: Giving for the Sake of Gaining Applause

Well, it's clear what hypocritical giving is. It is giving for the sake of gaining applause. The hypocrite attracts attention to his giving so that he can get praise from other people. The hypocrite does things for the major purpose of attracting attention and applause.

1. Hypocrisy: Seeking Reputation Without Reality

Now, while we're here, let's examine this theme of hypocrisy more deeply. Hypocrisy is an attempt to project a false version of yourself. Its sin lies in the split between what you are and what you try to make people think you are. If your actions say, "I am a holy person" when you're not a holy person, then you are a hypocrite! If you try to gain the reputation of being holy, without trying to gain the reality of being holy, then you are a rank hypocrite.

2. Thinking Your Faith Is Real When It's Not

However, that definition only applies to people who know that they are hypocrites. But here's the scary part: you may be a sincere hypocrite. You might be a total hypocrite and not even know it! How is that possible? Well, it's like this: you might do things that say, "I am a Christian." You might, for instance, pray every morning. You might lead your family in family worship. In advanced cases, you can even preach the gospel every Sunday, do miracles, practice exorcisms, and have incredible experiences of the Holy Spirit. All of these things say, "I am a Christian." After all, if you weren't a believer, why would you do all these things in the name of Jesus? And yet Jesus says *many* will come to Him on judgment day and claim all these things, and He will say, "I never knew you." Hypocrisy is not only being insincere, or saying one thing and doing another. Hypocrisy is also *sincere actions flowing from an unrenewed nature*. If you don't have

the inner principle of a new heart, yet behave as if you do have a new heart and think yourself to have a new heart, that is hypocrisy. Thus, one can be as it were “an innocent hypocrite” (the phrase is from Sydenham). However, this hypocrite’s guilt lies in his failure to detect his own hypocrisy. He should have examined himself more deeply. You should examine yourself deeply. Don’t just look at whether you have an eye to human applause when you’re doing good deeds. Look even deeper, to see whether you have a renewed nature. First John has a lot of material on how you can know you’re a Christian. I encourage you to read what John says and ask whether the marks of a Christian that he mentions are present within you.

So the hypocrite, who acts like a Christian but isn’t one, may be self-deluded. He may give money to the poor, not thinking that he’s doing it to please men, but also not doing it because he has a renewed nature that wants to please his Heavenly Father. Doing something because it’s right, but not because you have been born again, is good — but it’s not good enough to be pleasing to God. It’s better that you be a good unbeliever than a bad unbeliever, but you’re still an unbeliever.

3. Not: Failing to Live Up to Your Own Standard

So what about it? Are we all hypocrites? By the very habit of being in church every Sunday, are we declaring ourselves to be holy when we actually all have sins and even sinful habits in our lives? I would say no. You see, if you are a true believer, if you genuinely love God because He is holy, and hate every sin because it is sinful, then you are not a hypocrite. What if you say that people shouldn’t yell at their kids, but then, one day, your children are extremely provoking and you lose it and yell at them? Does that make you a hypocrite? Only if you try to justify it. Only if you say, “Normally it’s wrong to yell at your kids, but if God knew how aggravating these kids are, He would agree that they deserved everything they got, and more.” But if you say, “I was wrong. I yelled at my kids and that was a sin. Children, daddy was wrong. I sinned against you. Please forgive me!” If you say that, you’re not a hypocrite. As Spurgeon said, the true Christian is a “fallible man, but not a false man.” Hypocrisy lies in pretending to be holy when you aren’t; it isn’t found in admitting that you were wrong, that you violated your own standard, and then in seeking forgiveness.

4. But: Seeking Worldly Glory, whether you deserve it or not

Genuine hypocrisy, if we can call it that, is found in seeking glory from men, worldly glory — even if you deserve it! Maybe you did bring clean water to 10 million people in Africa. Maybe you are the head of a multi-billion dollar enterprise that makes food and communication cheaper for tens of millions of consumers. Maybe your singing and acting skills entertain hundreds of millions. Maybe your job keeps the streets of Gillette and Sheridan safe, or has led your school to multiple state championships. Maybe you give sacrificially right here in this church, sharing 30 or 40% of your income to keep the doors open. All of those things are noble and praiseworthy. You deserve worldly glory for those good deeds. But Jesus’ point here is simply that if you are doing that good deed *for the sake of the worldly glory*, you are a hypocrite. You’re obviously hypocritical if you want applause when you don’t deserve it. If you want a scholarship

because you cheated on your finals and got a 4.0 your last year of high school, forget it. You don't deserve worldly glory. But Jesus isn't just saying that those who don't deserve worldly glory shouldn't work for it; He's saying that no one should seek it, not even those who richly deserve it.

Now, as a congregation you all don't have problem with this sin. In public, in your giving, you are very discreet. You are models of seeking God's pleasure rather than human applause. But what about at home? What about when you generously give up your own way and do it your wife's way? If you don't get credit, do you blow up on the fourth day and say, "I watched your dumb chick flicks three nights in a row. Can't I get any respect around here?"

What does that comment reveal? That your supposed generosity was really a way to get your wife's applause. You wanted her to be impressed with your self-sacrifice.

Or say you made a bunch of nice meals, and your spouse never thanks you. Finally, one day you blow up. "Don't you like this food I slave to make you?"

Again, such a comment reveals a spirit that wants applause and approval. Now, we need human applause and approval. We wither without it. But Jesus commands not to seek it. If you cook delicious meals for forty years and never hear a word of thanks, much less genuine appreciation; if you watch dumb chick flicks for forty years and never politely explain that you can't take it any more, but instead blow up over your wife's lack of care for you; then you are seeking human glory. You want some appreciation, and you're mad if you don't get it.

Jesus says to forget about the appreciation. You do the right thing because your Father appreciates it, not because your spouse will or your kids will or your boss will or the recipients of your benefaction will.

Don't give to get! Don't give to gain approval and applause.

B. Its Method: Ostentatiously Self-Advertising, v. 2b

Now, hypocritical charity is ostentatious. Jesus uses the hyperbolic example of someone blowing a trumpet to summon poor people and simultaneously let the whole world know that a good deed was about to be done. That's how hypocritical charity works. You come in here and remind us all the time that you support two children in Africa. You make sure to let me, the pastor, know that you tithe on your gross income. You always give extremely nice presents to your kids and grandkids. You pay for the church piano to be tuned, and then mention it regularly. You let your own evening plans go to do your spouse's plans. You give up your day off to chip away on the honey-do list. And then you mention it every day for the next two weeks, demanding appreciation and admiration for your generous deeds. That's what's in view here. You know, all of these kinds of giving are good! I'm not opposed to giving and Jesus is not opposed to giving.

C. Its Motive: Human Adulation, v. 2c

But what makes giving bad is when you want to let people know. It doesn't matter how subtly you want to let them know. It doesn't matter how tastefully you advertise your generosity. If you're advertising it at all, that's a sin.

Now, what about the other side of the equation? That is, what about when the recipients of generosity advertise where it came from? In other words, what about actually getting worldly glory for your generosity? Is that wrong? Of course not! It's not a sin for the hospital to build a "Fred A. Jones Patient Center" or a "Tom Ridgely Cafeteria." It's not a sin for a church to put a plaque on the piano that says, "Donated by Ethel Watson, in loving memory of George Watson." It isn't wrong for a husband to say, "Honey, you're so wonderful to watch these ball games with me. I know they aren't your favorite, and I really appreciate your sacrifice." Jesus doesn't call it a sin to receive glory from men. It's only a sin to seek it. If your motive in philanthropy and charity is be admired, then you are sinning.

D. Its Reward: Vainglory, v. 2d

But, you do get a reward. What is it? Vainglory, we call it. Short-lived glory. Passing glory. Worthless glory. Think about the most famous movie stars of the 1940s. How many of them can you name? Or even those of you who are a bit younger than that — how many stars of the 1980s can you name? How many of them are still famous? Human glory is passing. Think about the most famous artists in human history — men like Homer, Shakespeare, and J.S. Bach. How many of us enjoy their works regularly? How well-known are they to you typical American high-school student? Or, in domestic terms — say your spouse praises you to the skies because you took your day off to work on the garage instead of beating level 10 in your new favorite video game. How long will that praise last? I can guarantee that it won't make your life better for eternity. And so, Jesus says, if you seek worldly glory, understand that it is a very temporary reward. It simply is not going to satisfy you for a long time. If that's your own reward, it's a pretty pathetic reward.

II. Christian Charity, vv. 3-4

Christian charity is not like hypocritical charity. Christian charity is done in a totally different way.

A. Its Nature: Compassionate Generosity to Help the Undeserving

What is it to give? Well, this means donating or transferring something you have as an act of mercy or compassion. As we said on "Blessed are the merciful" a few months ago, mercy by definition is directed toward the undeserving. Furthermore, giving to the needy, as the phrase is used here, doesn't just mean giving spare change, or giving what you weren't going to spend anyway. It means making a real contribution, something that may very well deprive you of doing something you wanted to do. Further, it doesn't have to be financial. You can give lots of time to a needy person to try to help him get his life in order. You can give professional services, say, legal help or accounting help, to someone. Though some translations say "When you give to the needy," the Greek word literally means "Whenever you show compassion." When you're moved by misery and want to help, here's how you do it, Jesus says. Do it privately.

B. Its Necessity: "When," vv. 2a, 3a

"When you give," Jesus says. Twice. In other words, folks, giving is not optional. Giving is mandatory in the Kingdom of God. How much do you give? Well, Jesus doesn't say. The New

Testament never gives a figure. It simply says to give generously. Remember, the point is that you must give. A selfish Christian is an oxymoron.

The Old Testament required that you give 10% annually to support your local priest and Levite (Numbers 18:24). I think it makes sense to translate that as a good baseline figure for the New Testament church. If you want to exercise the Christian charity that Jesus assumes you will exercise, you should start with giving 10% of your income to your local church.

The Old Testament, secondly, required that you budget 10% of your income to spend on a religious festival pilgrimage to Jerusalem (Deuteronomy 14:23). Now, if you want to do this today, I don't think that's a bad idea at all. If 10% of your income will get your family to Jerusalem for 10 days, and you can go over there and worship God and see the places where the events narrated in this book really happened, then go for it! But obviously God doesn't require us to go to religious festivals any more. That was part of the ceremonial law. At most, you could say that the NT equivalent of this pilgrimage tithe is a reminder that family joy is worth spending money on. Don't forget, though, that the OT "family vacation" orbited around worshipping God. If your vacations don't, then you can't claim that the money you spend on them has any relationship, however distant, to this OT tithe.

Finally, the OT required a triennial tithe, given to the poor and needy (Deuteronomy 26:12). That works out to about 3.3% per year. This amount is not mentioned in the NT, but again, it makes sense to use it as a baseline figure. If you aren't figuring out a way to share 3.3% of your family's income with the poor, then you aren't even meeting the OT standard of righteousness. I can't tell you for sure whether God still requires this particular amount. But again, call it a "suggested donation." Think of it as a figure to help you get started. I know that there are lots of places for your money to go, and that even 3.3% can seem like an overwhelming burden. If your household after-tax income is \$45,000, then 3.3% is \$124 a month. That's not chump change. That's my electricity bill. But, even on top of a tithe, that can be affordable. After all, Jesus assumes that you will do it. Besides, both Scripture and empirical evidence show that you will be better off if you are generous than if you hang on to everything that comes in the door.

Listen to Scripture: "Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the LORD, and he will repay him for his deed" (Pro 19:17 ESV). Had you thought about that? Every dollar you give to the poor is a loan made to God Himself, and He promises to pay it back to you.

The best empirical evidence shows that God keeps His promise here. Listen to this from Arthur Brooks's *Who Really Cares: Who Gives, Who Doesn't, and Why It Matters*³:

In 2000, controlling for education, age, race, and all the other outside explanations for giving and income increases, a dollar donated to charity was associated with \$4.35 in extra income. Of this extra income, \$3.75 was due to the dollar given to charity. . . . All

³ New York: Basic Books, 2006.

told, this is evidence that charity has an excellent return on investment, far better than the return from the vast majority of stocks and bonds. (pgs. 146-147)

Did you get that? The Lord promises to repay you when you're generous to the poor. The best available evidence suggests that He pays back \$3.75 for every \$1 you give to the poor. I don't know about you, but I think that's a pretty good rate of return! However, ultimately, that's not why you should give. Jesus tells us here that you should give to please your father.

For instance, if your family plays sports, you could sponsor another child from a needy background for the team. You could slip the coach \$300 and say, "Please give this to a family who needs help paying for their equipment." Or if your family raises food, whether produce or meat or dairy, you could contribute 3.3% of what you grow directly to the food bank or the Council of Community Services. Same thing for you hunters. Are you willing donate a portion of each animal you kill to those in need? Most of you know that we have a nonprofit executive who is a member of this congregation. Staci is a great resource for more ideas on how to use your money to help the poor.

C. Its Method: Discreetly Self-Effacing, vv. 3b-4a

So that's what charity is; it's giving to the church and to the poor, and it's something God's people must do. It's also giving yourself and your time, your skills, and your money at home and on the street. How should you do all this? Not ostentatiously, Jesus says. In fact, if at all possible, conceal it even from yourself. If you're giving to get that warm little glow inside that says, "You know, I'm a pretty generous person. Wow!" then you are giving for human applause — your own applause. Don't do that. Obviously, you need to keep track of your expenditures, including giving. But don't do it so that you can be impressed with yourself; do it so that you can give in secret. Your goal should be to keep your charity as private as possible. That's why only one person in this church — the treasurer — sees what each of us gives to the church, and I have no doubt that she tries not to remember. Does your left hand have to know? Yes, it does. But it should try to forget as soon as possible.

D. Its Motive: The Father's Pleasure, v. 4b

Why give? Because your Father sees in secret, and He likes what He sees. He takes pleasure in your generosity. I've said it many times already from this pulpit, and I'll say it some more: the reason we give is ultimately not that others need it, or that ministry needs it, or that we have too much and need to rid ourselves of excess. Rather, the ultimate reason we give is that our Father gives. God is "the giving God," as James says (James 1:5). All of those other reasons are true, and can be helpful. We give to participate in the expansion of the Kingdom through ministry and relief of the poor. But again, we delight in the work our time and money does for the Kingdom precisely because the Kingdom is our Father's project! Do you want to be like your Father? He gave His only Son. He didn't do it ostentatiously. He did it in through a small-town girl, in a stable, during the census when everyone was busy. Most of Jerusalem didn't know, never mind

the rest of the world. God gave in secret. Can you do any less? Does your charitable work require more exposure than His? You know the answer. Of course it doesn't.

E. Its Reward: The Father's Bounty, v. 4c

And, in any case, your Father delights in your generosity so much that He will reward you. We already saw that even in this life a single dollar of charitable giving is correlated with \$3.75 in additional income. What kind of reward do you expect that He will give you in eternity, when He really gets serious about distributing rewards? Do you think it will be paltry? Do you think it will be less than \$124 per month? Of course not.

Human adulation feels really good. But the whole point here is that Jesus has promised an even better reward. The Father already has given us salvation, eternal life, every good and perfect gift — and He promises more and still more, beyond all that we can ask or even think! Do you want that reward? Do you want God Himself, His approval, His favor, His delight? That is the reward given to the generous. Stop seeking the reward of human admiration. Start seeking the reward of Divine approval. Amen.