



Here are your Idols

Acceptance & Approval

Series Summary: Idolatry is a sin that the nation of Israel dealt with time and time again as they worshiped false gods such as Baal. It is easy for us today to assume that because we do not worship false gods in temples that idolatry is a thing of the past. Nothing could be further from the truth. Instead, idolatry is alive today because just like Israel we worship things other than God. The question is what are they?

Big Idea/Question: When we idolize acceptance from peers we conform to their standards rather than God's. Our ultimate goal can be to please God or people, but not both.

GET THEM TALKING

Why is living for the approval of people such a big deal? How does living for the approval of others affect our lives and our faith?

How do you know if human praise (approval) is becoming an idol?

GROUP DISCUSSION

(the danger of approval)

Galatians 1:10 Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ.

Why can't we live for the approval of people and serve Christ? Why can't we do both?

Leader Note (answer): Eventually the will of God and the will of people will come

into conflict. When they do we have to choose who do we want to please, God or people. In Paul's situation in Galatians 1 he was faced with the problem of false teacher preaching a false Gospel to the church of Galatia. He had to choose if he would tell them what they wanted to hear or what they need to hear.

Have you ever gone against something your friends wanted you to do?

Leader Note: This is the danger of living for approval, our decisions are no longer our own. We need to be careful not to allow acceptance from others to fuel our daily choices.

Transition - Jesus dealt with this very issue in John 12 when many people wavered in their decision to follow because it would cost them the acceptance and approval of their peers.

John 12:42-43 Yet at the same time many even among the leaders believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they would not openly acknowledge their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue; **43** for they loved human praise more than praise from God.

Leader Note/Answer: At this time in Jesus' ministry had become a highly controversial. Many had chosen to believe in Jesus and follow Him while others accused him of being a liar just as the Prophet Isaiah predicted (Isaiah 6:10). But what is fascinating is that many who believed in Jesus remained silent out of fear of rejection and disapproval by the Pharisees. Centuries later the same decisions are made.

Clarification: The Bible is not teaching us that human praise (compliments and acceptance) are inherently bad or evil. The vast majority of things that we make into idols are not bad or evil. It our own decisions and hearts that are the issue.

So how can we take human praise (such as a kind complement) and appreciate it without living for it and idolizing it?

VIDEO TEACHING

Who do you want to please? You have to make that choice because you can not please everybody. Here is how I worked out that dilemma. I want to please the people that love me rather than please people so they will love me.

John 3:16-18

Challenge: We need to seek God's acceptance above all else because he first pursued after and died for us.

- When we seek God's approval... When we seek out God's approval by obeying him and glorifying Him we find purpose and joy.
- When we seek man's approval... We are chasing an ever-moving target that we never hit.

Matthew 6:33 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

God is perfect and good. He also loves us perfectly. This is an agape love God has for us. We may not get things right all the time, even still, God loves us.

Transition - So how then do we seek out God's approval? Let's talk about that in group.

GROUP DISCUSSION (Seeking God's Approval)

Leader Note: Some students may be confused on what it means to seek out God's approval or to please God. This is because they equate God's love as being the same as God's approval, they are not the same thing. God does love us but that does not mean he approves of all of our actions and choices.

What does it look like to seek out the approval of God? If it helps to phrase it in fill in the blank format, I am seeking out the approval of God by _____.

Set up the passage: We are called to seek out the approval of God with our actions and our motives. What Jesus points out in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) is that we can do the right things for the wrong reasons (motives). For example reading the Bible is pleasing to God but not if it is just something we do to check it off our spiritual to do list. As we read these passages be looking for the right actions and the wrong motives.

Matthew 6:5-8 "And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. **6** But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. **7** And when you pray, do not keep on

babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words.
8 Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

What were the right actions?

What was the wrong motive?

How do we seek God through prayer? In other words what does it look like to pray with the right motives?

Leader Note: You will want to make sure students understand that God is pleased when we seek Him out. God desires to have a relationship with us. Even more so he desires for us to desire that relationship.

Matthew 6:1-4 “Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. **2** “So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. **3** But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, **4** so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

What were the right actions?

What was the wrong motive?

What did Jesus mean when he said “they have received their reward in full”?

Answer: Jesus was pointing out that the religious leaders and Pharisees of the day had received a reward of praise from people. That reward faded fast. If we live for the approval of people for any reason we will always want more because the approval of people fades quickly.

For Further Study: You can use the same questions above for Jesus' similar message about seeking God via fasting for the wrong motives in Matthew 6:16-18.

What are some other good God-honoring actions that can be done for the wrong reason of the approval of people?

What do you need to change in your life to live for the approval of God rather than the approval of people?