

What Did Jesus Mean? "Don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing?"

Written by Bill Perkins

When I open the door for someone at the grocery store, I appreciate a friendly, "Thank you." Don't you? I pretty much feel that way about any act of kindness I perform. In fact, it annoys me when I'm denied appreciation. After all, I'm not a doorman hired by the store to greet people. I'm just a nice guy showing my niceness. Right? I want my sacrifice to be applauded by the person I helped. And noticed by others.

Jesus addressed me when he said (and I'm paraphrasing here), "For you'll be judged by the same standard you judge others. By the same rule you use to judge others, by that rule you'll be judged. And why do you see the speck in your brother or sister's eye, but don't notice the beam in your own eye? How can you tell someone, 'Let me remove the speck from your eye,' and look, there's a beam in your own eye?" (Matthew 6:2-4 NIV).

Secret Acts of Kindness

Pretty clear, isn't it? Jesus expects us to perform acts of generosity and kindness in secret. Of course, in the Sermon on the Mount, where he spoke those words, Jesus specifically referred to financial gifts for the needy. But the application is broader, isn't it. When we give money to meet a need, our generosity should be kept secret. When we perform an act of kindness, we shouldn't point it out to others.

But behind giving to the needy or showing kindness, lies our hidden motive. My disappointment when an act of kindness is ignored shows I did it for a person's praise. Not God's. When we show generosity or kindness for the applause of God, it's irrelevant if anyone notices.

Two Principles

The principle is simple: Give for God's applause, and you won't care who notices. And he will reward you. I'm not sure how, but he will reward you.

A second principle is just as simple: Give for the applause of people, and when they clap, that will be your full and final reward. If they don't even notice, then you'll have missed out on their reward and God's.

This brings us to the title of this blog. What did Jesus mean when he commanded us not to let our left hand know what our right hand is doing. I've always heard it means you must keep your giving a secret. But that meaning never seemed right. And then something occurred to me. In order to applaud you need two hands.

If my left hand doesn't know what my right hand did, it won't applaud. You see, don't you? Jesus doesn't want us to applaud ourselves. When we perform an act of generosity or kindness, if we reflect on what we've done, we've rewarded ourselves. And we'll get no reward from God.

The Applause of Heaven

The next time you give to a ministry or other cause, or help someone in need, don't let your left hand know what your right hand did. Don't think about it. Don't applaud yourself. Then, and only then, will you win the applause of Heaven.