

R.T. Kendall: The Question Every Christian Should Ask Themselves

“How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?” (John 5:44, KJV).

It was the fear of man that lay behind Israel’s greatest error of all time. How true it is that “fear of man brings a snare” (Prov. 29:25, MEV). The snare of being motivated by the fear of what people think can cause human beings—even an entire nation—to be trapped and come to ruin.

Here is the question that you and I must ask: How important is God’s praise to us? Or does the praise and approval of people mean more to you and me than God’s praise?

People sometimes ask me, “How could the Jews be so blind that they missed the very Messiah promised to them?” Good question. But Jesus’ question to the Jews in the book of John answers that and tells you exactly why they missed Him: the fear of man. Jesus wept over the city of Jerusalem because of it, knowing that the Jews were forfeiting what would have brought them peace: They did not “recognize the time of God’s coming” to them (Luke 19:44, NIV).

But this verse is equally relevant to you and me today. There is a grave principle that lies behind John 5:44; it not only shows how Israel missed their Messiah, but also shows how you and I can miss what God is in today. This is, therefore, an eternal principle.

Jonathan Edwards taught us that the task of every generation is to discover in which direction the sovereign Redeemer is moving, then move in that direction. If we are addicted to the

approval of people, we quench the Holy Spirit; it is perhaps the quickest way to put out the Spirit's fire (1 Thess. 5:19). Quenching the Spirit leads to the sad fact that we would not even recognize it if God were at work today. John 5:44 shows the reason we may forfeit hearing God speak and consequently forfeit receiving the knowledge of God's will.

Why We Listen for God's Voice

The ability to hear God's voice is a most precious asset, arguably the most precious asset you and I have. This ability to hear God speak is exactly what Israel lost when God swore in His wrath that they would not enter His rest. They became stone-deaf. Unteachable. Unreachable. It is why the writer of Hebrews quoted Psalm 95:7 in Hebrews 3:7-8, 11 (MEV): "Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion. ... So I swore in my wrath, 'They shall not enter My rest.'" The writer was addressing Hebrew Christians who were already "hard of hearing" (Heb. 5:11). The worst scenario would be for them to become stone-deaf like the ancient Hebrews.

This explains Hebrews 6:4-6: If these Christian Jews ended up repeating the error of ancient Israel, it would be impossible for them to be restored again to repentance. In a word: The people described in Hebrews 6:4-6 are saved, as were those ancient Israelites, but they lose their inheritance (also called reward, prize or crown in the New Testament). They are among those who will be saved as through "fire" but lose their reward at the judgment seat of Christ (1 Cor. 3:14-15).

John 5:44 shows the basis on which one receives a reward at the judgment seat of Christ. "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive his recompense in the body, according to what he has done, whether it was good or bad" (2 Cor. 5:10).

John 5:44 also shows that there is a difference between

seeking God's praise and consciously receiving it. We may or may not consciously achieve His praise, but we can keep on seeking it. The Pharisees made no effort to do this! The question follows: Can we consciously receive His praise in advance of the judgment seat of Christ? Maybe, as I will show later in this chapter. I cannot forget this parable of Jesus:

Suppose one of you has a servant plowing or looking after the sheep. Will he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, "Come along now and sit down to eat"? Won't he rather say, "Prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink"? Will he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do? So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, "We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty" (Luke 17:7-10, NIV).

This parable leaves no room for us to think God is going to give us a pat on the back each time we do something that He has commanded us to do. This parable removes all ground of entitlement. This tells me, therefore, that we are commanded to seek the glory that comes from the only God—on and on and on—without knowing in the meantime to what extent He is happy with us. I choose to believe that He is pleased—I am sure that He is. But the honor, praise and glory that is implied in John 5:44 is only guaranteed at the judgment seat of Christ and not before.

That is what matters in the end. It is worth waiting for. Said Paul, "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed to us" (Rom. 8:18, MEV).

It comes down to one thing: Do we do what we do and say what we say for an audience of One? {eoa}

*This is an adapted excerpt from For an Audience of One: Seek the Praise That Comes From God Alone by **R.T. Kendall**.*

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