

Your John 5:44 Secret to Canceling Your Fear of What Others Think

For more than 60 years, John 5:44 has been my life verse. By that, I mean I have sought to be governed by this principle: seeking God's honor rather than man's. I do not say I have always succeeded in doing this. Too often I have been influenced by the approval of people and the fear of man. The fear of man will always prove to be a "snare"—so true; but whoever trusts in the Lord will be kept safe (Prov. 29:25). Or as the New Living Translation puts it, "Fearing people is a dangerous trap, but trusting the Lord means safety." Fearing people is the devil's trap to keep you and me from receiving the blessing from God that would come to us by choosing the people's approval.

Pursuing the principle of John 5:44 is the best antidote to keep us from being governed by the fear of people and lead us to being popular in heaven.

John 5:44 is directed to the Jews generally and almost certainly, the Pharisees particularly. The Pharisees were a prominent sect in ancient Judaism. They considered themselves not only to be experts in the Mosaic Law but fancied themselves to be a cut above all other Jews—whether these Jews be Sadducees, scribes or zealots. The Sadducees were made up mostly of priestly families. They were more prestigious but fewer in number than the Pharisees. A real rivalry existed between the Sadducees and the Pharisees (see Matt. 22:34, for example). That said, verses that precede John 5:44 (verses 5:1, 10, 15-16 and 18) merely refer to "Jews," but these would probably refer to Pharisees if not also the other groups. (See John 1:24, 3:1, 4:1, which show Pharisees being mentioned in the fourth Gospel prior to John 5).

My point is this. John 5:44 contains a question—a question that cannot really be answered. How do you answer a question like that? Likewise Jesus asks a question implicitly to all Jews that is almost impossible to answer: “How can you believe that I am the promised Messiah?” Jesus knew that they did not believe that He was the promised Messiah. So when Jesus asks the question, the answer assumes an implicit conclusion: *You cannot believe. You are not able to believe.* It is as if Jesus implicitly answers the question by the way He framed the question: “Surprise, surprise, you are *unable* to believe!”

The reason therefore they were unable to believe is because they *made no attempt* to obtain the honor that comes from the only God. It was not on their radar screen to seek the honor and approval and opinion of God. It should have been. Had the Jews in Jesus’ day been in a good place spiritually, they would have wanted the honor of God. Had the honor and praise of God been of paramount importance to them, they would not have missed what He was doing in their day. Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) taught us that the task of every generation is to discover in which direction the sovereign Redeemer is moving, then move in that direction. The clear direction of the sovereign Redeemer 2,000 years ago was sending His Son to His own people, the Jews. Jesus came to His own people but His own did not receive Him (John 1:11). Sadly they only wanted approval from one another; that was all that mattered to them. For this reason, the Jews shut off, closed down, any conduit or channel by which they would be able to discern what God was doing before their eyes. God’s sense of approval of them was consequently forfeited. They therefore lost the opportunity to believe in their promised Messiah.

Had they been devoted to God’s honor, then, they would not have missed recognizing Jesus as God’s promised Messiah. But they did miss Him; they missed Him entirely, and forfeited the praise and approval that would have come from the only true God.

In other words, the Jews in Jesus' day made a choice to be popular with people. All they did was for people to see (Matt. 23:5). If they gave to the poor or fasted and prayed, they did it in order to be admired by people (Matt. 5:1-18). It did not cross their minds to do these things only to honor God.

Therefore when you and I make choices like they made, we forfeit being popular in heaven. Also like them, it means we might miss out entirely on seeing God work. We do not need to repeat their folly.

✖ *Adapted from Popular in Heaven, Famous in Hell by R.T. Kendall, copyright 2018, published by Charisma House. This book reminds you that you can live a life that both pleases God and terrifies the devil. It encourages you to base your life decisions not on what people think of you, but what God thinks of you. To order this amazing book, click on this link.*

Prayer Power for the Week Beginning April 14, 2019

This week, incorporate praise and worship in your prayer time so you can experience God's presence in a tangible way. As you worship, allow the Holy Spirit to fill you with His joy, peace and love. Determine to seek His praise and honor above all else and submit anew to His sovereign will for your life. Continue to pray for our nation and its leaders. Pray for the lost, for more laborers into the harvest and for revival to ignite in our churches and spread around the world. Read: 2 Chronicles 7:14, Matthew 22:37-39.

For a special interview with R.T. Kendall about his book, Popular in Heaven, Famous in Hell, listen to the podcast below!