

John 5:44

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?

Analysis

How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only? Jesus diagnoses the fundamental barrier to faith: the human craving for peer approval versus divine approval. The Greek *doxan para allelōn lambanontes* (δόξαν παρ' ἀλλήλων λαμβάνοντες, "receiving glory from one another") describes a reciprocal system of human validation that becomes spiritually blinding.

The word *doxa* (δόξα, "glory/honor") appears twice, contrasting human and divine sources of validation. Human glory is *para allelōn* ("from one another")—a closed loop of mutual admiration that excludes God. Divine glory comes *para tou monou theou* (παρὰ τοῦ μόνου θεοῦ, "from the only God"), emphasizing exclusivity: there is only one true source of honor worth pursuing.

Jesus' rhetorical question *pōs dynasthe pisteusai* (πῶς δύνασθε πιστεῦσαι, "how can you believe?") suggests impossibility rather than mere difficulty. When reputation management becomes paramount, genuine faith becomes impossible because faith requires submitting to divine authority that may cost human approval. The religious leaders' addiction to peer recognition created spiritual blindness. This principle applies universally: we cannot simultaneously serve two masters of approval—human and divine. The pursuit of worldly honor inevitably compromises faith, while seeking God's honor liberates us from enslaving human opinions.

Historical Context

First-century Jewish religious leaders operated within an honor-shame culture where public reputation determined social standing, religious authority, and economic stability. The Pharisees and scribes derived their influence from peer recognition within the complex hierarchy of rabbinic schools. Disciples of Hillel competed with followers of Shammai; Jerusalem scholars looked down on Galilean teachers; Sadducees and Pharisees vied for political influence.

The Sanhedrin's 70 members represented the pinnacle of Jewish honor, wielding religious, judicial, and limited political power under Roman occupation. Maintaining position required careful navigation of both Jewish and Roman expectations. Excommunication (niddui or cherem) meant social death, economic ruin, and religious ostracism—a fate feared even more than physical death (see John 9:22, 12:42).

This honor system created profound pressure to conform. The rabbinic saying "the fear of man brings a snare" (Proverbs 29:25) was well known, yet the system rewarded those who mastered its politics. Jesus' teaching directly challenged this structure, explaining why many leaders believed in Him privately but refused public confession (John 12:42-43). Archaeological evidence of elaborate burial monuments and honorific inscriptions confirms this culture's obsession with lasting honor and public recognition. Understanding this context illuminates why seeking God's honor alone seemed so radical and threatening to the established religious order.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. What specific forms of 'honor from one another' in contemporary church or Christian culture might hinder genuine faith?
2. How can we discern when we're seeking human approval versus God's approval in our ministry, career, or relationships?
3. Why does Jesus present human honor-seeking and faith as mutually exclusive rather than complementary pursuits?
4. In what practical ways can we reorient our lives to seek 'the honor that comes from God only' rather than peer validation?
5. How might the fear of losing human honor be preventing us from taking specific steps of obedience to God?

Interlinear Text

πῶς	δύνασθε	ὕμεῖς	πιστεῦσαι	δόξαν	παρὰ	ἀλλήλων	
How	can	ye	believe	honour	one of another	G240	
G4459	G1410	G5210	G4100	G1391	G3844		
λαμβάνοντες	καὶ	τὴν	δόξαν	τὴν	παρὰ	τοῦ	μόνου
which receive	and	G3588	honour	G3588	one of another	G3588	only
G2983	G2532		G1391		G3844		G3441
θεοῦ	οὐ	ζητεῖτε					
God	not	seek					
G2316	G3756	G2212					

Additional Cross-References

John 12:43 (References God): For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.

Romans 2:29 (References God): But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.

Philippians 2:3 (Parallel theme): Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.

Matthew 23:5 (Parallel theme): But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments,

1 Peter 1:7 (Faith): That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ:

1 Samuel 2:30 (References God): Wherefore the LORD God of Israel saith, I said indeed that thy house, and the house of thy father, should walk before me for ever: but now the LORD saith, Be it far from me; for them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed.

Romans 2:7 (Parallel theme): To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life:

Romans 2:10 (Parallel theme): But glory, honour, and peace, to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile:

1 Corinthians 4:5 (References God): Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God.

Luke 19:17 (Faith): And he said unto him, Well, thou good servant: because thou hast been faithful in a very little, have thou authority over ten cities.