

Mark 11:32

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But if we shall say, Of men; they feared the people: for all men counted John, that he was a prophet indeed.

Analysis

But if we shall say, Of men; they feared the people—The other horn of the dilemma: denying John's divine authority would provoke public outrage. **They feared the people**—fear of human opinion determined their response, not conviction of truth. Leaders who should guide people toward truth are instead controlled by popular opinion. This is man-pleasing versus God-pleasing (Galatians 1:10). **For all men counted John, that he was a prophet indeed**—The people's discernment surpassed their leaders'. Common folk recognized John's authenticity—his holiness, courage, prophetic authority—while religious elites rejected him. This reversal is a consistent biblical theme: God reveals truth to the humble while hiding it from the supposedly wise (Matthew 11:25). The leaders' fear is deeply ironic—they should fear God but instead fear crowds.

Historical Context

John's popularity was immense. Josephus reports Herod feared John's influence might lead to insurrection. When Herod executed John, people believed Herod's later military defeat was divine judgment. John's memory remained revered; questioning his prophetic status would alienate the masses. The religious leaders' fear of crowds was pragmatic but revealed misplaced priorities. They held authority by maintaining public support and Roman tolerance. Losing credibility could undermine their position. Yet leaders who fear losing position more than offending God are unfit to lead.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Psalms 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. How does fear of human opinion—what will people think?—silence truth-telling and compromise integrity?
2. Why did ordinary people demonstrate better spiritual discernment than educated religious leaders?
3. What positions, relationships, or reputations might you be protecting at the expense of speaking or acknowledging truth?

Interlinear Text

ἀλλ'	ἐὰν	εἴπωμεν	Ἐξ	ἀνθρώπων	ἐφοβοῦντο	τὸν	λαόν
But	if	we shall say	Of	men	they feared	G3588	the people
G235	G1437	G2036	G1537	G444	G5399		G2992
ἅπαντες	γὰρ	εἶχον	τὸν	Ἰωάννην	ὅτι	ὧτως	
all	for	men counted	G3588	John	that	indeed	
G537	G1063	G2192		G2491	G3754	G3689	
προφήτης	ἦν						
a prophet	he was						
G4396	G2258						

Additional Cross-References

Mark 12:12 (Parallel theme): And they sought to lay hold on him, but feared the people: for they knew that he had spoken the parable against them: and they left him, and went their way.

Matthew 14:5 (Prophecy): And when he would have put him to death, he feared the multitude, because they counted him as a prophet.

Matthew 21:46 (Prophecy): But when they sought to lay hands on him, they feared the multitude, because they took him for a prophet.

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