

HOW CAN YOU BELIEVE?

John 5:31-47

Sandy treasures a “**Best of Show**” ribbon she won in a photography contest at our county fair. Her winning photo was just a lucky snapshot of our two cats. She didn’t think it was a great photo, but it had a certain appeal to cat lovers, and maybe the judge was a cat lover. Anyway, Sandy cheerfully accepted the judge’s favorable opinion and the ribbon to prove it.

People receive trophies, rewards, medals, and bonuses for all kinds of achievements, even some that onlookers think aren’t that monumental. Everyone likes to be congratulated and honored by others. That’s why it is striking that the Son of God, who deserved more honor than anybody, was uninterested in human praise.

Group Discussion. Do you think people in our society are publicly honored too much or not enough? Explain.

Personal Reflection. Whose praise do you yearn for most, and why?

Jesus attracted bitter opposition from the Jewish religious leaders by healing a man on the Sabbath. They determined to kill him because “not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God” (John 5:18). Jesus replied to their criticism with a series of bold, even audacious, claims of authority. He said he should be honored as God is honored, that he would judge people’s destinies at the final judgment, and that he could grant eternal life. No sane human being could speak in such a way—unless he was God incarnate. *Read John 5:31-47.*

1. Throughout this passage, where do you see Jesus claiming the right to be honored?

2. Throughout this passage, where do you see Jesus deferring to his Father as the one who should be honored?

3. Who and what testified to Jesus' identity (vv. 32-33, 36-39, 46-47)?

4. Why did Jesus' hearers fail to understand and acknowledge who he was (vv. 38-47)?

5. Jesus said, "Not that I accept human testimony," and, "I do not accept glory from human beings" (vv. 34, 41). Why could he take such an attitude toward human praise?

6. What are the dangers of receiving praise from people, even if it is deserved?

7. We constantly see people who come in their own name (as in v. 43)—that is, with the aim of glorifying themselves. Their ranks include many entertainers, politicians, businesspeople, athletes—even Christian ministers. Why do you think these self-promoting people achieve so much popularity?

8. Jesus' question in verse 44 is rhetorical; that is, it is asked to make a statement rather than to get an answer. What point was Jesus making by his question?

9. Why are belief in Christ and seeking the praise of people at odds with each other?

10. If we cannot earn God's favor through our good works, then what does it mean to "seek the glory that comes from the only God" (v. 44)?

11. In what areas have you struggled with being vulnerable to flattery?

If you have made progress in overcoming this tendency, how did it happen?

12. What steps will you take this week to notice when you are seeking human approval and to remind yourself that what counts is the Lord's approval?



Thank the Lord for showing you his glory in Christ. Pray that living for his honor becomes more and more the goal of your everyday life.

NOW OR LATER

Study Philippians 3:1-16 in which Paul rejects the things that brought him worldly approval, even religious approval, in favor of knowing Christ.

Take notice of areas in which you crave the praise of other people. Make note of when this happens, think about why it happens, and pray that you will be increasingly free from being tied to what others think of you.