

## CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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**Series:** Exposition of Romans  
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**Text:** Romans 12:1-2; Matthew 10:32; Mark 8:38; Luke 12:8, 9  
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### The Mercies of God and the Deity of Christ (Part IV)

There is a memorable scene in the movie *The Untouchables* where Kevin Costner (Elliot Ness) and Sean Connery (a Chicago street cop) are kneeling in a sanctuary of a large church. They are discussing how to go about getting Al Capone; Sean Connery, the seasoned beat-cop, is laying it on the level in terms of what it will cost to get Capone. He says to Elliot Ness, "Well, you know the Lord hates a coward." Does God hate cowardice? In one particular sense He most certainly does and Jesus' words as recorded in Matthew 10:32 tell us why. We are examining what it means to *confess* faith in Christ. We are called upon to *publicly* confess saving attachment to Christ. This is both a *duty* and a *privilege*. Perhaps the best known verse in the Bible stresses this very point - "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever *believeth in Him* should not perish, but have everlasting life." John 3:16 is probably the best known, and evangelistically speaking, the most quoted verse in the Bible. We have already unpacked the biblical and theological significance of what it means "to believe". The New Testament uses other terms to express what it means "to believe"--words like *faith*, *trust* and *confess* readily come to mind. It will, no doubt, come as a surprise for many people to discover that popular expressions like "ask Jesus to come into your heart" are *never* used as a synonym for believing.<sup>1</sup> We are very prone, I think, to adopt ways of speaking about Christianity in general and the Gospel in particular that are quite foreign to the Scripture. For example, there is no escaping the influence our culture exerts on us in its emphasis on exalting *experience* (the subjective) at the expense of thought.<sup>2</sup> We have to be alert to the danger of what the late Francis Schaeffer called the "*escape from reason*"--which is what our irrational culture actually conditions us to do.<sup>3</sup> On top of this is the threat posed by New Age advocates. They too are seeking religious experiences. They too are urging people to get in touch with the spiritual dimension. "People of the New Spirituality can usually live contentedly with themselves and others even when their experiences, views, and lifestyles are personally or mutually contradictory. Nothing is absolutely true for them. So truth is merely whatever happens to the seeker, whatever he or she happens to like intuitively. If you sweep away reason and rationality from life's big questions, you no longer need to be responsible for truly knowing if you are right or wrong. You just leap into your experience."<sup>4</sup> Over seventy years ago the noted New Testament scholar J. Gresham Machen made this important observation about the need to ground our experience in knowledge of God that is revealed to us in Scripture. "But in reality it depends upon the whole rich content of God's revelation of Himself in the salvation which He has provided through His Son. At any rate, pure feeling, if it ever exists, is non-moral; what makes our relation to another person, whether a human friend or the eternal God, such an ennobling thing is the knowledge which we have of the character of that person. The experience of the real mystic, then, as distinguished from that experience of direct contact with God in the depths of the soul which is popularly called mysticism--the latter being of course a part of all vital religion--is not Christian experience; for Christian experience is a thoroughly personal thing; the Christian holds fellowship with a Person whom he knows."<sup>5</sup>

## I. CONFESSING CHRIST

There are a number of references in the New Testament that speak of *publicly* confessing saving attachment to Jesus Christ (cf. Matthew 10:32; John 12:42; I John 2:23; 4:2, 3, 15). G.T. Purves points out that as opposition to Jesus increased and the critical period of His life drew near, “He evidently felt it necessary to draw out by means of a public confession the vague, latent faith of such of His followers as might be true disciples.”<sup>6</sup>

- A. What is Confession? This does not simply refer to mouthing certain words--Judas could have done that.<sup>7</sup> The Greek verb HOMOLOGĒO, along with its strengthened form EXHOMOLOGĒO, the noun HOMOLOGIA and the adverbial HOMOLOGOUMENŌS mean “to speak the same together” or “to agree with or to avow.” It involves making public what is inside oneself, so that all may share.<sup>8</sup>
- B. What is Confessed? The word is sometimes used *generally* of revealing one’s intent (cf. Matthew 7:23) or consent as by general agreement (cf. I Timothy 3:16). It may come as something of a surprise to learn that there are only four references to *confessing* or *declaring our sins* (Matthew 3:6 and the parallel passage in Mark 1:5; Acts 19:18; James 5:16 and, of course, 1 John 1:9). This is not to say that this kind of confession is unimportant. But, as Moulton has written, “the Christian life is not centered round confession of sin; it is centered round confession of faith in Christ. This is where the main New Testament emphasis lies.”<sup>9</sup> *Confession of faith* always centers on Christ. This is done openly and as an expression of faith (Romans 10:9-10). This public declaration *always* is associated with certain distinctive beliefs (cf. Hebrews 3:1; 4:14; 10:23; I Timothy 6:12). The final sense in which confession is used is in reference to *praising God*. This is Paul’s point in Romans 14:11 and 15:9. The writer to the Hebrews echoes this same theme in 13:15.

## II. THE OBJECT OF CONFESSION

“Whosoever shall confess Me.” Jesus has been exhorting His disciples not to fear men, but to trust God and this trust will be demonstrated in confessing Christ. Writing in a period when the same kind of liberal scholarship as advanced by Marcus Borg threatened to obscure the message of the cross, J. Gresham Machen took pen in hand and wrote these words about the nature of true confession: “In order, therefore, that the purity of the Church may be preserved, a confession of faith in Christ must be required of all those who would become Church members. But what kind of confession must it be? I for my part think that it ought to be not merely a verbal confession, but a credible confession. One of the very greatest evils of present-day religious life, it seems to me, is the reception into the church of persons who merely repeat a form of word such as, ‘I accept Christ as my personal Savior,’ without giving the slightest evidence to show that they know what such words mean. As a consequence of this practice, hosts of persons are being received into the Church on the basis, as has been well said, of nothing more than a vague admiration for the moral character of Jesus, or else on the basis of a vague purpose of engaging in humanitarian work. One such person within the Church does more harm to the cause of Christ, I for my part believe, than ten such persons outside; and the whole practice ought to be radically changed. The truth is that the ecclesiastical currency in our day has been sadly debased; church membership, as well as Church office, no longer means what it ought to mean. In view of such a situation, we ought, I think, to have reality at least; instead of comforting ourselves with columns of church statistics, we ought to face the facts; we ought to recall this paper currency and get back to a standard of gold.”<sup>10</sup>

## III. THE MANNER OF CONFESSION

This is to be done “before men”, i.e. publicly. Confession is the genuine fruit of faith. Why is this important? After all, as we are frequently told, religious faith is intensely personal and

private. Keep it to yourself, is the advice often given. But Jesus demands otherwise. He calls for open allegiance. He calls for faith being demonstrated or exhibited on every circumstance of life.<sup>11</sup> In II Timothy 2:19 the Apostle Paul declares, “Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness.” We must not only positively identify ourselves with Christ; we must likewise manifest and avoid anything that would bring the name of Christ in disrepute.

#### IV. THE CONSEQUENCES OF CONFESSION

“Whosoever shall confess me before men, him shall the Son of man confess before the angels of God.” Please note that Jesus gives no allowance for those who chose to take a so-called middle of the road position.<sup>12</sup> “Jesus makes the entire position of men in the world to come, whether for weal or woe, to depend upon their relationship to and attitude toward him in this present world. Is this a claim which any mere man might have made? Do we not encounter here essentially the exclusiveness of Acts 4:12, ‘And in none other is there salvation; for neither is there any other name under heaven, that is given among men, wherein we must be saved’? And thus we also hear Jesus speaking with unqualified sovereign authority and self-assurance: Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light (Matthew 11:28-30).”<sup>13</sup>

**CONCLUSION:** The Lord Jesus expects His followers to declare their allegiance to Him openly and without shame. A faith that refuses to acknowledge Him is as worthless as a confession that is insincere. “We must be ashamed neither of the person, the character, the doctrines nor the requirements of Christ.”<sup>14</sup> In confessing Christ, we are confessing our own sinfulness and the need for His atoning sacrifice on our behalf. In confessing Christ, we are confessing our spiritual poverty, need and helplessness. But we are also confessing His great power to save to the uttermost, all who call upon His Name. The New Testament knows nothing of a *hidden* or *secret* Christian faith.

#### ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> See J.D. Greear, *Stop Asking Jesus Into Your Heart: How to be Sure You are Saved* (Broadman and Holman, 2013) Green writes: “If there were a Guinness Book of World Records entry for ‘amount of times having prayed the sinner’s prayer,’ I’m pretty sure I’d be a top contender,” says pastor and author J. D. Greear. He struggled for many years to gain an assurance of salvation and eventually learned he was not alone. “Lack of assurance” is epidemic among evangelical Christians. In *Stop Asking Jesus Into Your Heart*, J. D. shows that faulty ways of presenting the gospel are a leading source of the confusion. Our presentations may not be heretical, but they are sometimes misleading. The idea of “asking Jesus into your heart” or “giving your life to Jesus” often gives false assurance to those who are not saved—and keeps those who genuinely are saved from fully embracing that reality. Greear unpacks the doctrine of assurance, showing that salvation is a posture we take to the promise of God in Christ, a posture that begins at a certain point and is maintained for the rest of our lives. He also answers the tough questions about assurance: What exactly is faith? What is repentance? Why are there so many warnings that seem to imply we can lose our salvation? Such issues are handled with respect to the theological rigors they require, but Greear never loses his pastoral sensitivity or a communication technique that makes this message teachable to a wide audience from teens to adults.” (Book description)

<sup>2</sup> The flamboyant, charismatic TV personality Benny Hinn in his best selling (but decidedly heretical) book *Good Morning, Holy Spirit* (Thomas Nelson, 1990) is so preoccupied with experiences of one kind or another (all of which he is sure are God-given) that he repeatedly declares, “A man with an experience is never at the mercy of a man with an argument.” (p. 98)

<sup>3</sup> F.A. Schaeffer, *Escape From Reason*, (IVP, 1968).

<sup>4</sup> Charles Strohmmer, *The Gospel and the New Spirituality: Communicating the Truth in a World of Spiritual Seekers* (Thomas Nelson, 1996), p. 33

<sup>5</sup> J.G. Machen, *What is Faith?* (rpt. Eerdmans, 1979), p. 37. I highly recommend Machen's writings, and especially this book.

<sup>6</sup> G.T. Purves, *The Sinless Christ: The Presbyterian Pulpit* (Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1902), p. 47.

<sup>7</sup> D.A. Carson provides some helpful analysis of how the slogan “Jesus is Lord” is practically useless unless it is framed in a specific Biblical, theological world-view that takes in a personal/transcendent God, the revelation of the Scripture, and most importantly, an understanding of who Jesus is. See his *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (Zondervan, 1996), pp. 99-100

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<sup>8</sup>cf. Harold K. Moulton, *The Challenge of the Concordance: Some New Testament Words Studied In Depth* (Bagster, 1977), p. 113.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid. P. 114

<sup>10</sup>J.G. Machen, *What Is Faith?* (Rpt. Eerdmans, 1979), p. 155. Machen wrote during the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>11</sup>Listen to the wise words of John Calvin: “As to the where, when how often, in what way, and to what extent, we are to confess our faith, this is difficult to refine with any exact rule, but we must look to the occasion, that none of our people fail in his calling in his time. We must ask the Lord, the Spirit of discursion and fortitude, and with His direction we shall know what is expedient, and boldly carry through what we are sure is laid upon us.” *Calvin’s New Testament Commentaries I* (rpt. Eerdmans, 1972), p. 309.

<sup>12</sup>Literally this reads, “Who shall confess in Me (HOMOLOGĒSEI EN EMOI)... in him will I also confess (HOMOLOGĒSŌ KAGŌ EN AUTŌ). The use of the preposition EN is in keeping with the Aramaic, cf. J. H. Moulton, *A Grammar of the New Testament Greek II* (T & T Clark, 1976), p. 463.

<sup>13</sup>N. B. Stonehouse, *Origins of the Synoptic Gospels: Some Basic Questions* (rpt. Baker, 1979), p. 190.

<sup>14</sup>Albert Barnes, *Barnes’ Notes On the Old & New Testaments: Matthew and Mark* (rpt. Baker, 1981), p. 115