

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Series:	The Nicene Creed	Pastor/Teacher
Number:	6	Gary L.W. Johnson
Text:	Matthew 10:32; Mark 8:38; Luke 12:8, 9	
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I BELIEVE IN ONE LORD JESUS CHRIST

There is a memorable scene in the movie *The Untouchables* where Kevin Costner (Elliott 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 then says to Costner, "Well, you know the Lord hates a coward." Does God hate cowardice? In one particular sense He most definitely 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 noted already what is involved in confession. We are called to *publicly* confess saving attachment to Christ. This is both a *duty* and a *privilege*. "To follow Jesus still seems often like entering on an unknown and perilous way. Therefore the need of open, positive, avowed, committed, consecrated faith is as great as ever."¹ The late R. C. Sproul issued this warning on the subject: "Some well-meaning persons confuse biblical faith with elements of superstition. Their wrong-headed teachings seriously damage the faith of new Christians, who are invariably let down by false promises. Some preachers maintain, in one for or another, *Come to Jesus. God will lift all of your burdens. You need never be troubled again.* What troubled person wouldn't respond to a gospel like this? Because it is not the real gospel, however, misled converts often become bitter and disappointed. Some mature and learn from the experience; others abandon Christianity altogether. Most limp along, wondering why their faith doesn't quite cut it with God."²

- I. **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 social gospel 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 words such as *I accept Christ as my personal Saviour*, 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.”³

II. **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 *demand*s otherwise. He calls for open allegiance. He calls for faith being demonstrated or exhibited in every circumstance of life.⁴ In 2 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 into disrepute. “Once a person has sincerely made that life-giving confession, there is never any going back. One is transferred into eternal union through the Holy Spirit with the crucified, risen Christ, and thereby shares His highest motivation: glory to the Father. Therefore, there can never be any question of his wishing to deny Him *who is their life*, which would be the case if one committed this particular sin of denying that Christ is come in the flesh. Because of where they are, and who they are, such a denial is beyond the range of possibility. That is the sin which no true believer can ever commit.”⁵

III. **THE CONSEQUENCES OF CONFESSION.** “Whosoever shall confess Me before men, him shall the Son of man confess before the angels of God.”⁶ Please note that Jesus gives no allowance for those who choose to take a so-called middle of the road position. 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).

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. Listen once more to R. C. Sproul: “That Jesus is objectively *the* Lord is a common assertion of the New Testament. He is the imperial authority of the entire creation. His authority has cosmic proportions. But the creed confesses not only that he is *the* Lord, but that he is *our* Lord. At the heart of the Christian faith is the believer’s personal submission to the authority of God’s exalted King. The confession is, in itself, meaningless. Jesus said, *Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’* (Matt. 7:22-23). To say *Lord* and mean all that it implies cannot be done apart from the Holy Spirit.”⁷

ENDNOTES

¹G. T. Purves, *The Sinless Christ* (Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1902), p. 50.

²R. C. Sproul, *What We Believe: Understanding and Confessing The Apostle's Creed* (Baker, 2015), p. 22.

³J. G. Machen, *What Is Faith?* (Rpt. Eerdmans, 1979), p. 155.

⁴Listen 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 define with any exact rule, but we must look to the occasion, that none of our people fail in his calling at his time. We must ask the Lord, the Spirit of discretion 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.

⁵D. F. Kelly, *Systematic Theology III* (Mentor, 2021), p. 165.

⁶Literally this reads, "Who shall confess in Me (*homologēsei en moi*) . . . in him will I also confess (*homologēsō kagō en auto*). The use of the preposition *en* is in keeping with the Aramic, cf. j. H. Moulton, *A Grammar of the New Testament Greek II* (T&T Clark, 1976), p. 463.

⁷Sproul, *op. cit.*, p. 99.