

To Seek and To Save the Lost

Acknowledge Christ Before Men

Luke 12:8-12

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Scripture

During the final few months of Jesus' life he journeyed from Galilee to Jerusalem, where he would be crucified. While traveling to Jerusalem Jesus gave his followers some very important teaching regarding discipleship. His instruction covered a number of different topics regarding Christian discipleship.

Today, let's read about acknowledging Christ before men in Luke 12:8-12:

⁸“And I tell you, everyone who acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man also will acknowledge before the angels of God, ⁹ but the one who denies me before men will be denied before the angels of God. ¹⁰ And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but the one who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven. ¹¹ And when they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities, do not be anxious about how you should defend yourself or what you should say, ¹² for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say.” (Luke 12:8-12)

Introduction

Schutt Sports, a major supplier of football helmets for the National Football League, issues the following warning on their website's homepage:

WARNING. . . NO HELMET SYSTEM CAN PREVENT CONCUSSIONS OR ELIMINATE THE RISK OF SERIOUS HEAD OR NECK INJURIES WHILE PLAYING FOOTBALL.

The warning label continues with some information about the symptoms for concussions, then repeats the previous warning, and concludes with these words:

TO AVOID THESE RISKS [OF PLAYING FOOTBALL], DO NOT ENGAGE IN THE SPORT OF FOOTBALL.

A visitor to the website cannot access any further content until checking a box next to the words: “Please indicate that you have read and understand the message.”¹

At least this company is honest about the risks of playing football.

Similarly, the Bible is honest about the risks of following Jesus. In a way, the Bible says, “To avoid the risks of discipleship, do not engage in following Jesus.”

Discipleship entails risk. Following Jesus means opening yourself to opposition, derision, resentment, harm, injury, and even death.

During Jesus’ ministry he experienced growing opposition and persecution. He noticed that his disciples were becoming increasingly fearful as they saw what was happening to him. So, he urged his disciples not to fear people, but instead to fear and reverence God, knowing that God cared deeply for each one of them (Luke 12:4-7).

Then he urged his disciples to acknowledge him before men.

Lesson

The analysis of acknowledging Christ before men as set forth in Luke 12:8-12 teaches us what is involved in acknowledging Christ before men.

Let’s use the following outline:

¹ See <http://www.schuttssports.com> (accessed November 1, 2014).

1. The Priority of Acknowledging Christ Before Men (12:8-9)
2. The Principles in Acknowledging Christ Before Men (12:10)
3. The Persecution for Acknowledging Christ Before Men (12:11-12)

I. **The Priority of Acknowledging Christ Before Men (12:8-9)**

First, let's look at the priority of acknowledging Christ before men.

The importance of acknowledging Christ before men has both a positive and a negative aspect.

A. *The Reciprocation for Acknowledging Christ Before Men (12:8)*

First, notice the reciprocation for acknowledging Christ before men.

This is the positive aspect of acknowledging Christ before men. Jesus said in verse 8, **“And I tell you, everyone who acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man also will acknowledge before the angels of God.”**

Jesus puts our relationship to him in eternal perspective. He says that if we acknowledge him before others here on earth, then that will lead to him acknowledging us before the tribunal of heaven. This is an astonishing statement, isn't it?

What does it mean to acknowledge Jesus Christ? What does it mean to **acknowledge** him **before men**? Surely it means that we have embraced the gospel of Jesus Christ. It means that we are clear about our allegiance to Jesus. It means that we affirm by our actions and our words that Jesus is our Lord and Savior. It means that whatever we do, whether at

work or at school or at home or at play, we do it all for Jesus. The Bible says, "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (Romans 10:9). To acknowledge Christ before men means that we do all these things regardless of what opposition or even persecution we may suffer.

Jesus has promised that if we acknowledge him, then he will acknowledge us at the last day. What a precious promise that is for every believer! On the day we die we will stand before God and the tribunal of heaven. Everything about us will be revealed. All our sins – even those that are secret – will be exposed before a holy God. Each one of us will be condemned by God's Law, condemned by our sin, condemned by our conscience, and condemned by Satan himself. We will stand before God without hope. But – and this is a glorious "but"! – if we have acknowledged Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior on earth, then Jesus Christ himself will rise up in our defense! He will tell God the Father and all the **angels of God** that we belong to him by faith. He will tell them that he died to pay the penalty for every single sin of ours – even our secret sins. He will tell the tribunal of heaven that because of our faith in him, because we have received the gospel, because we have acknowledged him on earth, he is acknowledging to all in heaven that we belong to him. His merit covers all our demerits, and we must be accepted into heaven because of what he has done for us. And God will do it!

Brothers and sisters, if Jesus has promised to acknowledge us in heaven, then we should take courage and acknowledge him on earth. Listen to what Bishop J. C. Ryle said:

The difficulty of confessing Christ is undoubtedly very great. It never was easy at any period. It never will be easy as long as the world stands. It is sure to entail on us laughter, ridicule, contempt, mockery, enmity, and persecution. . . . The

world which hated Christ will always hate true Christians. But whether we like it or not, whether it be hard or easy, our course is perfectly clear. In one way or another Christ must be confessed.²

But what if we do *not* acknowledge Christ before men?

B. The Retribution for Not Acknowledging Christ Before Men (12:9)

And second, observe the retribution for not acknowledging Christ before men.

This is the negative aspect of not acknowledging Christ before men. Jesus said in verse 9, “. . . **but the one who denies me before men will be denied before the angels of God.**”

What does it mean not to acknowledge Jesus Christ? What does it mean to deny him before men? Surely it means that we do not stand with or for Jesus. It means that we do not acknowledge that we are Christians. It means that when people speak against Christ and Christianity, we remain silent.

Jesus has said that if we do not acknowledge him, we deny him. And if we deny him, he will deny us. This is a fearful warning to every one of us! On the day we die we will stand before God and the tribunal of heaven. All our sins will be revealed. We will be condemned and we will have no hope. And instead of Jesus rising up in our defense, he will instead rise up and deny any knowledge of us. Because we did not take a stand for Jesus Christ while we were alive on earth, he will not take a stand for us when we die and stand before God in heaven.

Now, someone may ask about Peter’s denial of Jesus. In fact, Peter denied Jesus three times before the cock crowed. Is Peter an illustration of the denial of which Jesus speaks here in

² J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on Luke*, vol. 2 (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1879), 65.

verse 9?

It is true that Peter denied Jesus three times. But he quickly regretted his denials and repented of his sin. Jesus then restored him to fellowship, and subsequently Peter always acknowledged Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior.

On the other hand, Judas also denied Jesus by his betrayal of him. Judas was tormented by his decision. But, unlike Peter, he did not repent. In fact, he committed suicide without ever repenting of his denial of Jesus. "Thus," as Darrel Bock says, "Judas – not Peter – better illustrates this verse."³

Brothers and sisters, denying Jesus, that is, not acknowledging Jesus Christ is sobering. My question to you is simple: Do you today – right here and right now – acknowledge Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior? If you do, and if your life reflects your profession, you may be assured that Jesus will acknowledge that you belong to him in heaven. But, if you do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, I need to warn you as clearly as I can that if you die without such a profession, Jesus will acknowledge that you do not belong to him in heaven.

II. The Principles in Acknowledging Christ Before Men (12:10)

Second, notice the principles in acknowledging Christ before men.

Verse 10 is a difficult verse to understand. Nevertheless, there are two principles that we observe in verse 10.

A. There Is Sin That Is Forgivable (12:10a)

First, there is sin that is forgivable.

³ Darrell L. Bock, *Luke: 9:51–24:53*, vol. 2, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1996), 1140.

Jesus said in verse 10a, **“And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven.”**

What does it mean to speak a **word against the Son of Man**, that is, Jesus? I think Philip Ryken explains it well when he said, “To speak against the Son of Man is to speak against Jesus Christ without fully understanding who he is or what he has done.”⁴ This is not the full and final denial that is illustrated by Judas in verse 9. Nevertheless, to speak a word against the Son of Man is sin. But – and here is the good news – it is a sin that God can and will forgive.

A good example of such forgiveness is the forgiveness that Jesus offered the people who taunted him while he was hanging on the cross, saying, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34).

Almost all Christians spoke a word against Jesus before coming to saving faith in him. But, as soon as we fully understood who he was and what he did, we repented of what we said and received forgiveness from him.

B. There Is Sin That Is Unforgivable (12:10b)

And second, there is sin that is unforgivable.

Jesus said in verse 10b, “. . . **but the one who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven.**”

This is where the text is difficult to understand. What does it mean to blaspheme **against the Holy Spirit**? Again, I think that Philip Ryken gives the right answer. He said, “From similar passages in Matthew and Mark, it appears to be the sin of someone who knows that Jesus is the Christ, but attributes his power to Satan instead (see Matthew 12:31-32; Mark 3:28-30).”⁵

⁴ Philip Graham Ryken, *Luke*, Vol. 1: Chapters 1-12, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2009), 652.

⁵ Philip Graham Ryken, *Luke*, 652.

R. C. Sproul agrees with Ryken. He says that blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is “when a person has become aware of the true identity of Jesus through the revelation of the Holy Spirit, if that person then calls Jesus the devil, that is the unforgivable sin.”⁶

Sometimes people worry if they have blasphemed against the Holy Spirit and have therefore committed a sin that is unforgivable. The mere fact that a person is worrying that he or she might have blasphemed against the Holy Spirit is an indication that he or she has not done so. A person who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit is so vehemently opposed to Christ that he believes that Jesus is in fact Satan. And that sin will not be forgiven.

III. The Persecution for Acknowledging Christ Before Men (12:11-12)

And third, observe the persecution for acknowledging Christ before men.

A. The Hostility in the Persecution (12:11a)

First, notice the hostility in the persecution.

Jesus said in verse 11a, **“And when they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities.”**

Jesus was preparing his disciples for persecution. They would be dragged before the various religious and political leaders and forced to defend their faith. In fact, this happened shortly after Jesus’ death, resurrection and ascension into heaven, when Peter and John were arrested and hauled before the Jewish Sanhedrin (Acts 4:1ff). The apostles were often arrested for their faith in Jesus Christ.

⁶ R. C. Sproul, *A Walk with God: An Exposition of Luke* (Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 1999), 260.

B. The Help in the Persecution (12:11b-12)

And second, observe the help in the persecution.

Jesus said in verses 11b-12, “. . . **do not be anxious about how you should defend yourself or what you should say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say.**”

When Peter and John were arrested and hauled before the Sanhedrin, the Holy Spirit helped them to say what ought to be said in that situation. The same was true for the apostle Paul when he was arrested and brought before various officials. Each time the Holy Spirit helped them to say what ought to be said. It was another opportunity to acknowledge Christ before men.

Although Jesus’ promise was particularly directed to the apostles, it also applies in principle to all disciples of Jesus Christ. We can trust the Holy Spirit to help us whenever we speak for Jesus Christ. You may feel inadequate or ill prepared or not very knowledgeable. That is not the point. Just tell what you know about Jesus, and pray that the Holy Spirit will take what you say – however inadequate it may be – to do his saving work in other people’s lives.

Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed the concept of acknowledging Christ before men as set forth in Luke 12:8-12, we should take a stand for Jesus Christ.

One man who did take a stand for Jesus Christ, although he waivered for a while, was Thomas Cranmer, the famous archbishop of Canterbury and author of the *Book of Common Prayer*. Cranmer was at the forefront of the English Reformation, and served Jesus Christ faithfully for many years. But

when Bloody Mary became Queen of England, the Roman Catholic Church condemned Cranmer to die. He was forced to watch in anguish as his friends Hugh Latimer and Nicholas Ridley were burned at the stake in the center of Oxford. For a time Cranmer faltered. Fearing the pains of his body more than the authority of his God, he recanted his faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ. He did this, writes one of his biographers, because he saw “the poignant contrast between the pleasant prospect of life and the vivid horror of an agonizing death.”⁷

Happily, on the eve of his execution, Cranmer’s courage returned. He repented of his sin and retracted all his recantations. As he looked to eternity, he realized that he feared God more than he feared the Queen of England or the fiery pains of death. And with the help of the Holy Spirit, Cranmer went to his death making one last courageous profession of his faith in Jesus Christ. In his farewell remarks he exhorted the people “to care less for this world and more for God and the world to come,”⁸ and not to fear the queen, but only the power of God.⁹

God is not yet calling you to die as a martyr for Jesus Christ. However, he is calling you to take a stand for Jesus Christ and acknowledge him as your Lord and Savior. He is calling you to live for Jesus and speak for Jesus in your home, in your office, in your playground, in your neighborhood, and in your school. And remember, when you do so, you have the glorious promise that Jesus will take a stand for you on the day you appear before God in heaven. Amen.

⁷ Albert Frederick Pollard, *Thomas Cranmer and the English Reformation, 1489-1556* (New York and London: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1905), 369.

⁸ Albert Frederick Pollard, *Thomas Cranmer and the English Reformation, 1489-1556*, 379.

⁹ Philip Graham Ryken, *Luke*, 654-655.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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1. www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons
2. www.sermoncentral.com/contributors/freddy-fritz-sermons-11181.asp
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PRAYER:

O Lord our God, thank you for the teaching of Jesus.

He urged his disciples to acknowledge him before men.

Father, if there is anyone here today who has not yet acknowledged Jesus as his or her Lord and Savior, will you please grant that person saving faith? Enable that person to turn from sin and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And will you please help each one of us to take a stand for Jesus Christ in our homes, in our workplaces, in our neighborhoods, and in our schools so that Jesus will one day take a stand for us when we appear before you in heaven.

And for this I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

BENEDICTION:

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.

CHARGE:

Now, brothers and sisters, go and serve God wholeheartedly!