

## Matthew 10:32-33

### Introduction

Jesus is sending His disciples out to proclaim that the promised kingdom of heaven has arrived in the person of the Messiah. And as He sends them out, Jesus warns His disciples about the inevitable realities of suffering and persecution, and being hated by all for His name's sake. Up to this point we have had words of encouragement and comfort. "So have no fear of them... do not fear... fear not, therefore..." "Not one [sparrow] will fall to the ground apart from *your Father*. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore; *you are of more value than many sparrows*." Jesus has spoken tenderly and with an understanding of the weakness of our flesh. "He knows our frame; He is mindful that we are but dust" (Psalm 103:14). And yet when Jesus *comforts*, He also *commands*. "So have no fear of them... do not fear... fear not, therefore..." These are words not only of comfort, but also of command! In light of the wonderful comforts and assurances that Jesus has given us, there can be *no possible* excuse or justification for fear. When Jesus commands us not to be anxious or afraid, He shows us that to *be* afraid is sin – it is to doubt the holy and sure word of God, which is always a wicked and evil thing to do. In fact, there is hardly anything more wicked in the world than doubting *God's Word*.

Now if you really think about it, this uncompromising command of our Lord against all fear is also a great *comfort* – because this command proves how powerful and effective all of the other comforts must be! If Jesus merely encouraged us with comforts, but then still allowed for the legitimate possibility of fear, then we would be *right* to doubt the *sufficiency* of His promises. But the promises are so sure, and so powerful, and so practical, and so real, that any kind of fear can only be an assault on the character of God – an *affront* to His truth and faithfulness. So now we can see that *overcoming* fear is not left to the chance that someone might be able to comfort us sufficiently, but rather to the sure solution of *repenting* of our sinful *unbelief* and *obediently* claiming the *Word* of God – by faith. Now this doesn't at all mean that overcoming the sinfulness of our flesh will be easy, and neither does it mean that the Lord is no longer compassionate and mindful that we are but dust, but it does mean that the solution is *clear* – and that should be a great relief to us. And so in light of the fact that there can never be any legitimate excuse for worry, anxiety, or fear, Jesus goes on to say:

- ✓ "So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven."

### I. "So"

The word "so" ("therefore" in NASB) shows us that there is a *connection* between verses 26-31 (comfort and encouragement in the face of fear) and verses 32-33 (warning against fear). These two ideas may seem contradictory. When we get to verses 32-33, it may seem like these words don't really fit with the comforting words of verses 26-31. Obviously, the point here is not so much comfort as it is a very serious warning and exhortation. And yet the warning and exhortation is rooted in the words of comfort and encouragement in the previous verses! In light

of the wonderful comforts and assurances that Jesus has given us, there can be *no possible* excuse or justification for fear. To be afraid is to doubt the holy and sure word of God, which is always a wicked and evil thing to do. To be afraid to the point of denying Christ is evidence of a fundamental attitude of unbelief and the absence of true saving faith. *Therefore* (“So...”), it is safe to say that the one who denies Christ before men because of *fear* will himself be denied by Christ before His Father – that’s how confident Jesus is in the sufficiency of God’s word! Persecution has a way of weeding out the frauds from the genuine article.

Now some will already want me to qualify these statements – and we will. We *do* need to *balance* truth with truth, and yet we also need to carefully guard against undermining or diminishing one truth with another truth!

## II. “Confess” or “deny”

The ESV (along with the NIV and NRSV) uses the word acknowledge, but I prefer the word “confess” (NASB and NKJV). “Acknowledge” may give the impression of a simple—perhaps even a grudging—“admitting”. But “confess” has more the idea of a public *declaration* – a positive *affirmation* of faith, of allegiance and belonging. That which is confessed is no longer private and secret, but public and out in the open. So creeds and statements of faith are called “confessions” (“*We believe!*”). To confess is to publicly, and boldly, and unashamedly affirm something to be true.

Jesus speaks here of all those who confess Him *before men*. Here again is the *public* nature of a confession, but the point here is not just men in general. The point here is to confess Jesus before the very ones who already hate us for His name’s sake! The point is to confess allegiance to Jesus before the very people who will persecute us and put us to death *for confessing allegiance to Jesus!* Why would anyone do this? It’s like suicide – like passing your own death sentence. Well Jesus is very clear: “Whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.”

To confess Christ is to publicly and boldly affirm that we belong to Him – that we are His servants and disciples. So then, to deny Christ is to deny that He is our Master and Lord. We can think, for instance, of when Peter denied Jesus. His response to those who accused Him of being one of Jesus’ *disciples* was this: “I do not *know* the man” (Mat. 26:72, 74). Peter denied that he *knew* Jesus specifically *as* his teacher and Lord. Now let’s look at the other side of the coin. If Christ confesses us by unashamedly affirming that we belong to Him, then He denies a person by declaring that that person never was His true follower and disciple. Jesus will say to many of those who stand before Him on Judgment Day: “I never *knew* you” (Mat. 7:23). So you see this whole issue of confessing or denying is really one of relationship. The point is not affirming some set of facts about Jesus, though that would certainly be involved. (When we confess Jesus, we must confess Him *accurately* in light of who God’s Word has revealed Him to be.) But again, the *ultimate* point is not stubbornly insisting that something is true, but rather joyfully confessing that we stand in relationship to Him as a servant to a master, a disciple to a teacher, a sinner to a Savior – that He has bought us and we belong to Him. To deny this *relationship* is to deny the very essence of Christianity and therefore to deny the only hope of our salvation. You see, if I were to deny that Andrea is a wife and mother, I’m not just denying a fact about Andrea and

saying something that is not true. I'm denying our *relationship*. For me to deny that Andrea is a wife and mother would be to deny that she is *my* wife and the mother to *our* children. And so in a similar way, if I were to deny that Jesus is King of kings and Lord of lords, I'm not just denying a fact about Jesus and saying something that is not true. I'm denying my relationship to Jesus. For me to deny that Jesus is King of kings and Lord of lords is to deny that He is *my* King and *my* Lord. For me to deny that Jesus is God is to deny that He is *my* God. The point is not just affirming facts that are true, but affirming a relationship that saves. When we're confronted with the threat of persecution and martyrdom, it may seem easy to deny the *fact* of Jesus' deity, or the *fact* that He is Lord and King. But perhaps we can feel how impossible it would be for true faith to ultimately and finally deny that Jesus is "*my* Lord", "*my* King", "*my* God". True faith cannot ultimately and finally deny a relationship with the Savior.

### **III. The wonder and beauty of saving faith**

Notice that I said "ultimately" and "finally". It is impossible for true faith to *ultimately and finally* deny that Jesus is "*my* Lord", "*my* King", "*my* Savior", and "*my* God". As we have already seen, Peter did deny Jesus – three times in one night. Peter was afraid. He was fearful. And this fear was *sinful* – not least of all because it led to his *denial* of Jesus. And we know now that all those who ultimately and finally deny Jesus will themselves be denied by Jesus on the Day of Judgment. Peter's denials of his relationship to Jesus were sinful, and but for the grace of God, they would have led inevitably to his everlasting destruction in hell. We know this because of the words of Jesus here in Matthew chapter ten! But what did Jesus say to Peter before he denied Him three times?

- ✓ Luke 22:31-32 – Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.

See the mercy and grace of God! – Not simply in the fact that He bears with us when we do fall, but that He *promises* that our faith will *never* ultimately and finally fail. True saving faith, if it sins against God by denying Christ today, will turn again "tomorrow" and confess Christ no matter what the cost. Why? How can we know this? Because Jesus prays for *us*, *just like* He prayed for Peter. Jesus prays that our faith may not fail. And just as surely as Jesus' prayers for Peter were answered, so also will His prayers for us be answered!

- ✓ John 17:11-12, 14-17, 9, 20 – I am no longer in the world, but ***they are in the world***, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, ***keep them in your name***, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one. While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me. ***I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost*** except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled... I have given them your word, and ***the world has hated them*** because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you ***keep them from the evil one***. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth... I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours... I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word.

The Peter who once denied Jesus three times in one night went on to boldly confess Christ for the rest of His life and ultimately to die a martyr's death. Why? Because Jesus prayed for him. This is not to say that if one of us were to sinfully deny Jesus under the threat of death, then we could only be restored if we went on to eventually suffer martyrdom. The point is not what kind of death we die, but whether we *remain* those who would deny Jesus again, or whether we *turn again* to be those who boldly and faithfully confess Jesus before men. True faith will *always* turn again. Why? Because of some good in us? Because of some nobility in us? Is Jesus promising to save us only if we perform well enough in the face of persecution and so earn His acceptance and favor? Is that what Jesus means when He says that if we deny Him before men, then He also will deny us before His Father? No, not at all! True faith will always turn again precisely because Jesus prayed for us, and is still praying for us today at the very right hand of God the Father (Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25; 1 Jn. 2:1).

It is here that we see the beauty and glory of saving faith. If faith was of us, then our faith could ultimately and finally fail. In fact, it most assuredly *would* fail. Peter (who once said: "I do not know the man") would have gone on to hear Jesus say to him in turn: "I never knew you". If faith originated with us, then our faith could fail. But the fact that true faith *never* fails is proof that even faith is a gracious gift from God.

- ✓ Ephesians 2:8 – "For **BY grace you have been saved THROUGH faith.**"
- ✓ 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14 – **God chose you** as the firstfruits **to be saved, through** sanctification by the Spirit and **belief [faith] in the truth.**
- ✓ 1 Peter 1:3-9 – Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, **who BY God's power are being guarded THROUGH faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.** In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that **the tested genuineness of your faith**—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, **obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.**

In every place that God bestows the gracious gift of faith, eternal life is *guaranteed* to follow. True faith never fails, because by God's power (and the continual intercessions of Jesus) we are being **guarded through faith** for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. If God is guarding us through faith, then by its very nature, that faith must be an *invincible* faith. And if it is an invincible faith, it must have been a miraculous creation and gift from God in the first place. You see, we don't begin with a fallible faith that originates at least partly with ourselves so that only after we have believed does God then make our faith invincible. No, the very moment that we truly believed, that faith was invincible – because only an invincible faith truly saves. And if it is only an invincible faith that truly saves, then we can know that salvation really is by grace alone – for then even faith is a gift of His saving grace, a gift given to sinners when they wanted nothing to do with God, a gift that He has promised never to take away. That's the gift of an invincible, saving faith. PRAISE HIM! Question 33 of the Baptist Catechism asks:

“How does the Spirit apply to us the redemption purchased by Christ?” And we answer: “The Spirit applies to us the redemption purchased by Christ, by working [an invincible] faith in us, and thereby uniting us [forever] to Christ.”

In light of these things, then, why does Jesus warn us that whoever denies Him before men, He also will deny before His Father who is in heaven? If the outcome of our faith is already certain, then what’s the point of a warning? Well God has ordained not only the end, but the means to the end. God has ordained not only the certain outcome of our invincible faith, but also that that outcome *will* be the result of our diligent striving (Luke 13:24) and working out our salvation with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12). Paul is not talking about a paranoia that our faith might fail, but rather about a holy trembling, lest our faith should be shown to be no faith at all. This warning should compel us to strive diligently and work out our salvation with fear and trembling! And in the midst of this holy trembling, we can *rejoice* to know that ***even our trembling is a sure sign of invincible faith*** – a faith by which God is graciously guarding us for a *salvation* ready to be revealed in the last time.

### **Conclusion**

Will we confess Christ before men or will we deny Christ before men? Now we don’t live in days of persecution, but that only *increases* our responsibility and accountability. If we are commanded to confess Christ before those who would kill us for His name’s sake, how much more should we boldly confess Christ when there is no real danger of persecution? We should ***tremble***(!) as we become aware of all the little ways that we are tempted to deny Christ before men every day – all the little ways that we are tempted to deny that He is “*my Lord, my King, my God*” – the little ways that we are tempted to say, “I do not know the man”. When we hide our faith, or choose not to confess our faith (by our silence), we’re not just denying a set of facts or something that is true, but rather a *relationship*. We are denying that we *know* Jesus and that we *belong* to Him. May it never be – that we should be ashamed to claim the one who died for us! May we always be unashamed to publicly and boldly affirm that we know Jesus – that He is our King, our Savior, and our God – knowing that all those who ultimately and finally deny Christ *out of fear* will one day hear Christ say to them: “I never knew you”.

- ✓ Romans 10:9-10 (cf. Rev. 14:9-13; 2 Tim. 2:11-13; Rev. 3:8-13) – *If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord [your Lord] and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead [so that He is now your Lord and Savior; Acts 2:32-36; 17:30-31], you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.*

But then let’s also remember that this warning should drive us back to the complete and total sufficiency of the comfort and encouragement of God’s word. Let’s remember that the reason fear is so sinful and inexcusable is because the promises are so sure, and so powerful, and so practical, and so real. The reason for the command is the *absolute* sufficiency of the truth and comfort of God’s Word – and this in itself should be a great comfort to us and an anchor for our souls. We need to meditate on the promises and comforts of God’s Word, and especially on the truth that He has ordained all things and now governs every event in the universe according to His providence.

Finally, we can rejoice to know that true faith is an *invincible* faith, and this invincible faith is a free gift from God by which He has saved us, and is now guarding us for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. True faith never fails because faith itself is a free, gracious, and undeserved gift from God. Are we filled with a holy trembling in response to Jesus' words of warning? If so, then let us rejoice to know that even our trembling is a sure sign of invincible faith. When Jesus warned us about denying Him, He could only have been *assuming* the indestructibility of true saving faith – because He Himself never ceases to pray that our faith may not fail.

- ✓ Hebrews 10:36-39 (NASB) – For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised. FOR YET IN A VERY LITTLE WHILE, HE WHO IS COMING WILL COME, AND WILL NOT DELAY. BUT MY RIGHTEOUS ONE SHALL LIVE BY FAITH; AND IF HE SHRINKS BACK, MY SOUL HAS NO PLEASURE IN HIM. But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have *faith* to the *preserving* of the soul.

## Teaching our Children

- Q.** Complete the following sentences. Jesus said:  
~ Everyone who confesses me before men, I also will \_\_\_\_\_.  
~ Whoever denies me before men, I also will \_\_\_\_\_.
- A.** ~ Everyone who confesses me before men, I also will confess before my Father who is in heaven.  
~ Whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.  
~ (See Scripture on bottom of page 5)
- Q.** What does it mean to confess Jesus before men? Does this just mean insisting that Jesus *is* God when other people want us to say that He is *not* God?
- A.** ~ No. To confess Jesus before men is to joyfully affirm not just that He is God, but that He is *our* God – not just that He is Lord and King, but that He is *our* Lord and King.  
~ (See Scriptures from Matthew in the bottom paragraph of page 2)  
~ (Talk with your children about the difference between denying a fact or a truth and denying a *relationship*.)
- Q.** Is it possible for someone with true faith to keep on denying Jesus because of fear?
- A.** No. This is impossible. True faith is invincible and will never finally fail – no matter what.  
~ (Talk about Peter’s denial of Jesus and the fact that he repented and became a bold follower of Jesus, eventually dying a martyr’s death.)
- Q.** We can know that true faith is invincible and will never finally fail because of what Jesus *prayed* for Peter and what He also prays for every Christian. What does Jesus pray for all of His people? Will God always answer Jesus’ prayers?
- A.** (See Scriptures on bottom of page 3)
- Q.** We can also know that true faith is invincible and will never finally fail because it doesn’t come from us. Where does faith come from?
- A.** True, invincible faith is a free and gracious gift from God!
- Q.** How does God keep His children and guard them for the wonderful salvation that He has stored up for them in heaven?
- A.** By His great power God is keeping and guarding all of His children through the indestructible faith that He has given to them! (See 1 Peter 1:3-9 on bottom of page 4)
- Q.** If true faith is invincible and can never finally fail, then why does Jesus warn us about denying Him because of fear?
- A.** God has planned to use even our diligent striving and working to accomplish His purpose. If we know that those who deny Christ will be denied *by* Christ, then we will tremble and diligently seek to confess Christ before men!
- Q.** How can this trembling and diligence bring us joy and encouragement?
- A.** ~ Trembling and diligence is a sign that our faith is real and *invincible* – a free and gracious gift from God!  
~ (See Scripture at top of page 6)
- Q.** What are the ways that we could either confess or deny Christ before others every day?  
(As you discuss this question, keep in mind those children who are not yet Christians or whose spiritual state is not yet clear.)