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Matthew 10:32 - 10:33



Gospel of Matthew - Steve Gregg

Steve Gregg discusses Matthew 10:32-33, where Jesus says that whoever confesses Him before men will be confessed before the Father in heaven. Gregg emphasizes the importance of denying oneself and becoming a follower of Jesus, rather than being part of a routine initiation or religious system. He also mentions that even those who rebelled against God but turned their life to Christ and accepted Him as their Lord and Savior will have a defense attorney in Jesus when they face God in judgment. Gregg reminds the audience that being a true Christian requires surrendering oneself and becoming a follower of Jesus.

Transcript

We're turning now to Matthew chapter 10 and beginning at verse 32, Jesus said, Therefore whoever confesses me before men, him I will also confess before my Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies me before men, him I will also deny before my Father who is in heaven. Now, Jesus here makes it very clear that we have to be prepared to take a public stand for Him.

And this public stand, one might think from reading it, has only to do with being willing to say, I am a Christian or tell people that we believe in Christ. But that's not all that is involved in it. Because many people say they are Christians, but they do not really take a stand for Christ at all.

There are people who go to church every Sunday and if asked they'd say, of course I'm a Christian. But in their daily lives they do not give any impression that they are loyal to Jesus Christ. Because they follow the same pursuits in life as all non-Christians or as many non-Christians do.

They entertain themselves the same way. Their money and their resources go the same direction as go the money and resources of non-Christians. Their children are raised without any distinctive godliness to them.

And yet many of the people who I'm describing would say they are Christians and they would think that they are confessing Christ before men. But Paul made a very interesting

statement in Titus chapter 1 and verse 16 that brings some perspective to this. Paul is talking about certain people who are not Christians and he says of them in Titus 1.16 They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work.

Now notice they profess to know God, but in their works they deny Him. Now Jesus said if you deny me before men, then I will deny you before my Father which is in heaven. And Paul says well there's more than one way to deny Him.

It's possible to verbally profess to be a Christian, to verbally confess Christ as your Savior. But with your works you deny Him and denying Him is what Jesus said will bring denial of you before the Father's throne. There is a statement that Paul quotes apparently part of an early hymn of Christianity.

He's writing to Timothy in the second epistle to Timothy in chapter 2 also. And he says this in verse 11 through 13. This is a faithful saying.

For if we died with Jesus, we shall also live with Him. If we endure, we shall also reign with Him. If we deny Him, He also will deny us.

If we are faithless, He remains faithful. He cannot deny Himself. Now it seems very obvious that this little song that Paul is quoting, this little poem that he's quoting here, is based upon the very passage in Matthew chapter 10 that we are studying.

Because it says in it, if we endure, we will reign with Him. And Jesus over in Matthew chapter 10, as we saw in one of our recent talks, said in verse 22, He who endures to the end will be saved. The stress on enduring and not falling away is in both places.

But also the passage we're looking at in Matthew chapter 10 says, If anyone denies Me before men, I will deny him before My Father who is in heaven. And this little poem that Paul is quoting says, If we deny Him, He will deny us. So it seems clear that Paul is quoting an early poem of the church, a hymn probably that was sung, and it is based upon these words of Jesus that we're studying in Matthew chapter 10.

Now it is true in this little poem that Paul quotes, it ends with these words, If we are faithless, He remains faithful. He cannot deny Himself. Well, some people say, well, that means that even if we lose faith, because if we are faithless, if we have no faith, if we depart from the faith, if we are unfaithful, then that doesn't change our status as saved because Jesus remains faithful.

Well, it's true that Jesus remains faithful, but that doesn't mean we're still saved. He cannot deny Himself, but He can deny us. If we deny Him, He will also deny us, he says.

If we do not believe, that doesn't change the fact that God is true. That's what it means when it says, If we are faithless, He remains faithful. That is to say, regardless of whether

we are believers, regardless of whether we are denied before the throne of God, regardless of whether we go to hell or not, Jesus remains faithful.

But if we endure with Him, we will reign with Him. If we deny Him, we will not. We will be denied by Him.

Well, what does it mean to be denied by Jesus? What does it mean for Him to say, I never knew you? Jesus tells us over in Matthew chapter 7 that He will have that to say about many, many people. He said, Many will say in that day, Lord, Lord, we did these various things in Your name. And He says, I will profess to them, I never knew you.

It's very clear that He is denying any acquaintance with them. And what follows after that, I never knew you? Well, the next words after that are, Depart from me, you workers of lawlessness. They are not going to spend eternity with Jesus.

They are going to have to depart from Him because they are not working the works that He said should be done by His followers. In that same context, which if you're not familiar with it, is over in Matthew chapter 7, He actually begins this little statement by saying, Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father in heaven. So denying Christ and confessing Christ is more than something you do with your mouth alone.

It has to do with whether you do the works that He commands you to do. And that is why Paul said it's possible, and it is the case that many people profess to know God, but with their works they deny Him. Now, Jesus said, I'll deny you before my Father if you deny me.

He didn't say that that denial has to be verbal. What if you deny Him with your works? What if you deny Him by your testimony? You see, every day that you are at work, or in your family, or in the neighborhood, or wherever you may be, there are people who are paying attention to you, it may be. You might think no one's paying attention, but if you are professing to be a Christian, there are some people noticing.

And they're noticing for a variety of reasons. Sometimes they're noticing because they're really wondering if there's something genuine about Christianity. They're searching.

They're empty. They've tried other things, and they've heard about Christianity. They're wondering if there's anything to be credited with truth in this religious system of Christianity.

And when they see a person who is a Christian, they watch to see, is this something I should check into or not? And so, that's why some people are watching. Some people are watching because they're cynical, and they don't believe that Christianity has any truth, but they think that all Christians are hypocrites, and they're just watching to catch you in some act of hypocrisy that will confirm to them that all Christians are hypocrites.

Whatever the reasons be, there are many who watch you when you say you're a Christian, and they are watching to see if your works profess Christ as well as your mouth.

They're watching to see if you are denying Him with your works. And those who are convinced that all Christians are hypocrites are very much comforted if they catch you in compromise because that confirms to them that they don't have to take Christianity seriously. Of course, it never crosses their minds, it seems, that even if every Christian in the world were in fact a hypocrite, which obviously is not the case, but even if it were the case, if every Christian on the planet was a complete hypocrite, that would still not answer the question of who Jesus is and whether a person ought to follow Jesus Christ Himself.

I don't know of any non-Christian who's prepared to say that Jesus Christ Himself was a hypocrite. He certainly lived what He believed, and He was willing to die for what He believed. That's not the marks of a hypocrite.

And by the way, there have been many Christians who live what they believe and who are willing to die for what they believe, which again is not the marks of a hypocrite. But there have indeed been many persons who profess Christ with their mouth, and yet their lives show that they're not really Christians. Now, I don't want to give the impression that all of these people are hypocrites because a hypocrite is somebody who is putting on an act and trying to play a role of something that they really are not.

Many of the people I'm talking about are not trying to fool anybody. They believe that they are Christians. They themselves have been taught by their churches that all you have to do is jump through this little hoop or do this little thing or sign your name on the dotted line, and you are then a Christian.

In many cases, this means you go forward at an altar call, you say a sinner's prayer, you go ahead with baptism or something like that, and these things are regarded to be the transition from being not a Christian to being a Christian. And obviously, if Christianity were merely some kind of a club that had some kind of rites of initiation, and all Christians agreed, here's the rite of initiation, you say this prayer, you go forward at an altar call, you get baptized, you join the church, if that was what it was all about, then indeed it would be correct to say that those people have become Christians. But the Bible teaches that Christianity is not a club with some kind of a routine initiation.

Christianity is nothing else but discipleship following Jesus Christ. He is alive. He's not some dead teacher that we've started some kind of organization to memorialize.

He is a living person. He died and He rose again. And because He is alive, He is able to be known.

He is able to relate with us. He is able to command our obedience. And He is, of course, able to judge the living and the dead in the last day, as the Bible says He will.

And that being so, a Christian, a real Christian, is one who has made the transition from being a follower of one's own desires and one's own will, to becoming a follower of Jesus, one who has surrendered self. Jesus said, if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. Now, many people deny Christ with their works or with their words.

But a true Christian denies himself. He doesn't deny Christ. He confesses Christ.

He does so both in actions and in words. His words are loyalty to Jesus and his actions demonstrate loyalty to Jesus because he obeys Christ, even at times when there's pressure put upon him to do something else. And his loyalty to Christ is exhibited in behavior.

But that person who confesses Christ is the one who denies himself. Now, Jesus said, if you confess me, I'll confess you before the Father. If you deny me, I'll deny you before the Father.

And there are really two ways to go. There's really two religions. There's two ways of life.

There's the discipleship of Jesus Christ, which is sometimes called Christianity, although the Bible never uses the word Christianity to describe it. But it is discipleship. It's following Jesus.

There is that. And then there is everything else. And everything else falls under the rubric of doing your own thing, following self.

You either follow God or you follow yourself. And self is an idol. Self is a rival to God.

And God has no tolerance for rivals. On the Day of Judgment, those who follow themselves will be consigned to condemnation. Those who follow Christ will be in a category different than that.

And that's what Jesus taught. Jesus said, if you're not for me, you're against me. Well, if you're against him, who are you for? You're for yourself.

So every person, when confronted with the claims of Jesus Christ, is thereby confronted with a decision to deny something. You have to either deny Christ or you have to deny yourself. Jesus said, if anyone come after me, let him deny himself.

That's the call of Christ. Deny yourself. And deny yourself not only in speaking of yourself in a self-abnegating way, but also deny yourself in terms of your behavior.

Just as you can deny God by your behavior, you can deny yourself by your behavior. Self

wants a certain thing to be done. Self has certain goals and ambitions.

Self has its own pleasures that it wants always to be satisfied and desires and cravings. But to deny self means that instead of doing for self what self always wants, you do what Christ wants. Now, this does not mean that Christians, by denying self, become monks or ascetics or mystics or grow up and live in a cave like a hermit.

It simply means that a Christian is surrendered to Jesus Christ. Now, if Jesus calls you to walk a hard road and there are trials and there are difficulties and persecutions, that's fine. You're following Him and you're loyal to Him even unto death.

But that's not the way Christianity always is. Certainly there are times when we're called to be faithful under great hardship and under great trial of faith, maybe even to death. But the walk of discipleship with Jesus Christ is not one of continual suffering and continual persecution, at least not for most of us.

In some countries where there is overt persecution, it may well be. But there is great joy and there is great peace and there is great love in the presence of God. And in a walk with Jesus Christ, there is tremendous change in the quality of our relationships with people.

There is cleanness of conscience. There is much consolation in being a disciple of Jesus Christ. It does have its cost.

It does have its painful times. But even in those, the follower of Jesus has something to console him that the unbeliever does not have. And that is the consolation of Christ Himself.

Jesus said, I will never leave you nor forsake you. And that being so, the person who follows Christ, even in hardship and persecution, is really taking a route that is, although it has its own unique troubles, it has the greatest joy and the greatest satisfaction that any path can possibly offer. Now, when Jesus said we have to confess Him and not deny Him in order to be saved, He was not teaching some other gospel than that which is in the rest of the New Testament.

There are people who think that Jesus taught one gospel and that Paul taught a different gospel. And they believe that the gospel Jesus preached was for Jewish people, but that the gospel that Paul taught is largely for the church and the Gentiles. And this system that teaches this way is called dispensationalism.

But actually, the gospel Jesus taught is not any different from the gospel Paul taught. Paul was simply a disciple and an apostle of Jesus Christ, and he loyally and faithfully represented what his master taught. Jesus said you have to confess Him before men.

So did Paul. Paul said that in Romans chapter 10 and verses 8 and 9. He says, But what

does it say that the word is near you, even in your mouth and in your heart? That is the word of faith which we preach, that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. Notice confession with the mouth, and he mentions belief in the heart.

You see, the Bible teaches that whatever is in the heart is what spills out in your life. It says in Proverbs chapter 4 and verse 23, it says, Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life. Or Jesus Himself said that the things that defile a man are the things that flow out of his defiled heart.

Behavior comes from the heart. So you must confess with your mouth and you must believe with your heart. And if your heart believes, then your behavior will flow from that that is consistent with that belief.

And you will be confessing Christ not only with your mouth, but also with your behavior. That is what the Bible teaches. That's what Paul teaches as well as Jesus.

Now, what is at stake here if Jesus confesses you or denies you before the Father? Who is this Father that He's talking about? Well, the Father is none other than God who sent Jesus. God sent Jesus here to redeem us, to restore us to relationship with Himself, because we are sinners. Now, that's sort of an old-fashioned word, and it's not as popular even in preaching as it once was, but it's still a good Bible word.

The word sin means violation of God's commands. And every person on the planet has violated God's commands. Well, since God is the King, since God is in charge, a violation of His command is high treason.

It's rebellion. We are rebels against our King. And every king has not only the right but the duty to suppress rebellion so that he can maintain justice and peace in his kingdom.

And therefore, God, who is a great King and whose kingdom is one of justice and peace, cannot tolerate in His kingdom forever unchecked and unrequited rebellion. Now, I must confess to you, I have lived my life, some of it in rebellion against God. I lived my life, some of it, following myself and not following Jesus Christ.

But the time came when I realized that that's what I was doing, and I repented of my sins, and I turned to Christ. And you know what the Bible says is that Jesus not only died for our sins and rose again, but He sits at the right hand of God right now, and He speaks up on behalf of those who are His. So that although I have been a rebel against God, now that I have turned my life over to Christ, He has forgiven my sins.

And when I stand before God on the day of judgment, I will have Him as my defense attorney. I will have Him as my advocate. That's what it says over in 1 John 2, verse 2. It says that He is our advocate with the Father.

So we have this possibility that when we stand before God, we will stand there with Jesus as our advocate. He will confess that we are His. He will say, Father, this one is one of mine.

He is to be accepted here. And the Father always will honor what Jesus says because He loves Jesus, and He loves you too, by the way. And because of that, Jesus' word carries all the weight.

In fact, it says in John chapter 5, Jesus said that the Father has committed all judgment to the Son. So whatever the Son judges to be the case is what the Father will honor. If Jesus on the day of judgment says to the Father, this one is mine, I confess that this person belongs to me, then the person of whom Jesus says that cannot possibly be lost because that person is accepted in Christ by the Father.

Now, on the other hand, if you were to stand before God and Jesus does not know you, Jesus does not confess you, let us say you are one of those that He describes here. He says, whoever denies Me before men, him will I deny before My Father who is in heaven. Well, what does it mean to be denied by Christ before the Father in heaven? Well, it simply means that Jesus cannot speak up for you because you never were His.

You had opportunity. You have had times where you heard of the claims of Christ. You have known that there is a day of reckoning.

You have known what Jesus has said, and you have chosen to go your own way. You have never denied yourself. You have never taken up your cross.

You have never followed Him. You have as good as spit in His face, although you may have not felt like that was what you were doing. But here is the King of the universe coming and offering to you Himself as your Lord and as your Savior and as your companion.

And you say, no thanks, I am quite all right as I am. And that is the supreme insult to the God who created you. And when you stand before God, and the best thing that can be said about you is that you have insulted Him supremely and rebelled against Him, and that you have rejected the offer and the demand of repentance and salvation that He has given you in Christ, there is not much that can be said for you.

If Jesus is not going to speak up for you, there is nobody going to speak up for you. You can speak up for yourself if you like, but you will have no defense. You will have to simply say, guilty as charged, and you will be consigned to that eternity, which is reserved for those who have rebelled against God and who have never repented and have never turned to Christ.

Now, I don't think you want Jesus to be denying you on the day of judgment. And yet Jesus tells that if you deny Him, if you are ashamed of Him before men, He will be

ashamed of you. And He says this to His disciples in the context of sending them out and telling them they will be rejected and persecuted, maybe even killed.

But He says, still, even in that case, do not be afraid. Be loyal to Christ, even unto death. It will be worth it on the day of judgment to hear Him say, yes, this is one of mine.

Go into the joy of your Lord. We'll continue our studies next time.