

Salvation - Sin & Repentance

Confessing Christ as Lord: What It Is Not

By Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Part one of a three-part series.

What does it mean to truly confess Christ as Lord? To begin, we must understand what it does *not* mean. Many people think you can have the implications of the Gospel without knowing the Gospel itself.

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In a [previous article](#), we showed the essence of the reason that there is no conflict between the statement of the Lord Jesus, "Not everyone who says to Me, "Lord, Lord," shall enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 7:21), and Paul's declaration that those who "confess the Lord Jesus" are saved (Romans 10:9). But to really demonstrate this fully and properly, we need to understand what Scripture tells us it means to confess Christ as Lord.

For this explanation we turn to one of Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones' great sermons on this subject, preached at Westminster Chapel, London, in 1963. The rest of this article, as well as our next two, are from chapter eight of his book, *Romans: An Exposition of Chapter 10 -- Saving Faith* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1997), and this material is reproduced by permission.

That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. (Romans 10:9-10)

These verses obviously follow from what has gone before. The Apostle has been holding before us a comparison between an attempt to gain righteousness by

the law and that which is obtained by faith. We have seen that he contrasts these two ways in order to show that the first is hopeless because keeping the law is impossible, but that the second way is plain, clear and essentially simple. So Paul's fundamental statement is that salvation is entirely by faith. And "the word which we preach" -- that is, the gospel -- is a proclamation of that fact.

Now this, of course, has been the great theme of the entire Epistle. The Apostle announced it at the beginning, in chapter 1:16-17. He is "not ashamed of the gospel of Christ," he says, because "it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth." And now Paul is really saying that again. He tells us that the only way for anyone to be righteous before God is to believe what God has provided in the Lord Jesus Christ. That is the content of 'the word of faith'. So having stated that as a principle, Paul proceeds to set it out in detail in these two verses that we shall now examine. The first word in verse 9 -- "that" -- we can perhaps translate by the word "because". By doing so, the "nearness" of the truth to be believed and confessed is highlighted.

We are, then, once more face to face with one of the great statements of the Christian gospel. Here it is put before us from both the theoretical and the practical standpoints, and as we look at it we shall be testing our own profession. This great statement which we are considering is at one and the same time not only a statement of what gospel preaching is -- we are not only reminded of what is to be preached -- but also of what is to be believed. It is, therefore, a very thoroughgoing test of whether we do truly believe and of whether we really are in the faith or not. That is the value of those great statements of the gospel which the Apostle gives us here and there in all his Epistles.

In other words, the Apostle Paul is giving us a definition of saving faith. And there is nothing more important than that we should be absolutely clear as to

what it really is. The verses can be divided up quite simply. We must consider first of all the *content* of saving faith, and then its *character* because the Apostle's words deal with both aspects quite plainly.

Before we take up the first of these matters, there is a mechanical point which we must deal with. In these two verses Paul reverses the order of what he is saying. In verse 9 confessing with the mouth precedes believing in the heart, whereas it is the other way round in verse 10. But there is no great difficulty about this change. The explanation is as follows.

Verse 9 is written from the standpoint of a man making a statement about himself as a Christian. It begins therefore with confession. Verse 10 adopts the standpoint of how the man is ever able to speak as he does, and so the believing is the thing that comes first. Psalm 116:10 puts it perfectly: "I believed and therefore have I spoken". The same is found in the Gospels: "For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh" [Matt. 12:34].

So having dealt with that, we come to the subject of saving faith and consider its content. We are given a wonderful summary of it here. I venture to suggest that there is perhaps nothing more important for any of us than just this very matter. There is certainly nothing in the realm of the church that is more important in these days, and it therefore becomes equally urgent in the world. Because the world knows nothing, it listens to the preaching of the church, and if the world is confused -- as it is -- it is because the church to which it is listening is confused. So from every standpoint this is indeed a crucial statement.

You notice that I put the content of saving faith as my first heading. This is where this whole subject becomes so relevant at the present time. What is it that Christians believe that makes them Christian? Well, you see at once that it

is not some general ideas and notions about life and how it should be lived. It includes that, but only as the outcome of what the Apostle puts before us here.

This is a point at which so many go astray. They think that you can have the implications of the gospel without knowing what the gospel itself is. There are many people, for instance, who are very concerned at present about the moral state of their country, and they feel very strongly -- and rightly so -- that something must be done about it. But the whole question is this -- what is to be done about it? The fact that you are concerned about the moral state of your country does not mean that you are of necessity a Christian. Christian concern about this and proposals with respect to it are distinctive and special. One of our troubles today is that people imagine that anyone who is concerned about moral conditions must be a Christian. They have even used this very argument. "That man," they say, looking at a political leader, "is concerned about moral conditions and he is speaking out about them: he must be a Christian. Well, he may be, but it does not necessarily follow.

No, the content of saving faith is not general ideas about life and moral ideals and behavior. It includes those things, but when the Apostle is giving us a summary of the content of the Christian faith, that is not how he puts it, and so we must never put it like that either.

Then there is a second negative that we must stress, particularly in this connection, because there are those who say that what makes a person a Christian is experience and nothing else. There was a discussion of this very matter on the television recently and the man who put this point perfectly, it seems to me, was a man who told that he was not a Christian believer at all but a philosopher. The discussion was on the idea that you must have a new theology in almost every age, an idea about which a notorious book has been

written. [Here he refers to J. A. T. Robinson's *Honest to God* (London: SCM Press, 1963).] Now this non-Christian philosopher so rightly put it like this: "The trouble with this man, this bishop, in his book is that he does not recognize such a thing as objective truth; to him nothing matters but experience."

And that is what many are teaching. They say that we must not think of God as personal; we must not think of Him as "up there" or "out there". So, what is God? "Well," they say, "God is wherever you find love, or a deep view of life. Whenever you experience something that speaks to you in the depth of your being and makes you think of life and yourself and everything in deep terms, that is God."

They also say that you do not go to church to find God, but you go out among people who do not believe anything at all, and suddenly you find that they are kind and gentle to one another and are ready to help one another. Now that, they say, is God, because that is the expression of love, and that expression of love is God. And those people who appreciate this, and who are concerned about it, they are Christians.

So you see that what ultimately decides whether men and women are Christians or not [according to this false view] is nothing but experience. There is no objective truth at all. According to this teaching, Christianity is purely a question of your own experience, and your feelings and of all that happens to you. Of course there is nothing new about all this, but I have to refer to it because it is given such publicity, and some people are foolish enough to think that it is new and wonderful, and that modern people can no longer believe what has always been believed, and so on! This experience of yours is your contact with God. That is God -- depth! Love! And you will find this in ordinary life, among men and women who may never darken the doors of a place of worship and who do not

claim to believe anything in particular. But that, they say, is the essence of Christianity!

Compare all that with what we have here and you will see the contrast. Christian faith has content! Here it is: "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead..." -- that is it, that is the content -- "thou shalt be saved." So this modern idea of bringing Christianity up to date is not only not Christianity at all, it is a complete denial of it. It is a denial of the very essence of the Christian faith as it is defined here by this great Apostle, and as it has been defined in the creeds and confessions of the Christian church throughout the centuries. In the past, heretics were condemned by the church and excommunicated. And it is because the church does not do the same thing today, that she is in such a parlous, helpless and useless condition.

Next: The Lordship of Christ is Objective Truth

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