

## **Worship (28) Corporate – Public Profession of Faith**

One of the disciples of the apostle John was a man by the name of Polycarp. Polycarp was a very godly man, and wrote an epistle which we still have. He was the pastor of the church at Smyrna for a time. He was very old when the Roman persecutions caught up with him. He was arrested and told to deny Christ. He refused. He was brought into the stadium to be killed before the audience of unbelievers.

The Governor looked down on him and said, ‘Consider your age, and be sensible. Swear and deny Christ, and I will release you.’

Polycarp answered, ‘Eighty and six years have I served Him, and He never once wronged me; how then shall I blaspheme my King, Who hath saved me?’

He was then committed to be burnt alive. It is said that the fires would not take, and the Romans eventually had to resort to stabbing him.

Polycarp worshipped God in his last hours with a public profession of faith.

Part of the worship of God has always included some kind of public profession of faith. God has been pleased as His people openly confess their faith in Him and their love for Him amongst each other, and sometimes before unbelievers.

To openly, verbally state your belief in the Lord Jesus Christ and His Word is an important act of corporate worship.

Now to many today, that sounds like a surprise. Very often, especially in the individualistic culture we live in, you hear people say things like, ‘My religion is a very personal thing.’ Now if what is meant by that is that I experience God in a real and personal way – then that is fine and valid. But what it usually means is – ‘My religion is a private affair – and almost no one, besides me, knows about it.’ And that flies in the face of the Bible. For the Bible expects that believers will not only know God personally, but confess Him publicly.

Now the obvious place to start is with our Lord’s words.

**Mat 10:32-33** *Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven.*

Notice the two confessions and the two audiences. If a person confesses, then Jesus will also make a confession. If a person denies, then Jesus will also deny. But the audience changes drastically. Our confession or denial will be before mere men, Christ’s confession or denial will be before the Father Himself.

While our confession or denial will be about Jesus, His confession or denial will be about us. And it seems to be a simple cause and effect. Confess me openly before men; I will confess you openly before my Father. Deny me before men, and I will deny you before my Father.

Now Jesus is not teaching that our salvation hinges on a one time confession or denial. After all, Peter denied Jesus, but was a true believer and wrote his epistles looking forward to heaven. But He is teaching this: a believer – one who has been saved – openly confesses Christ before men at some point, and does not deny Him. For that reason, His salvation,

Christ will own him, and confess Him as one of His own before the Father. On the other hand, an unbeliever - one who does not know Christ - denies Jesus before men. He or she may have made a superficial profession of faith, but they deny Jesus by their lips and lives. And to them, Jesus will say, *'I never knew you, depart from me, you workers of iniquity.'*

Now, Jesus is not saying that a believer will never be embarrassed. Sadly, our pride often gets in the way, and we worry about what people think of us, more than about naming Jesus Christ. And it's for this reason that Paul often wrote:

**2 Tim 1:8** *Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God,*

Peter encourages us not to be ashamed if we suffer as Christians. So the Bible knows the temptation of our flesh to feel embarrassed, ashamed and humiliated for naming Christ. But He is saying this much, 'If you are one of Mine, you will not deny Me before men. You will, as a rule, overcome your shame and confess Me before others – be they saved or unsaved people.'

Consider **Romans 10:9-10**: *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.*

Notice the Word of God separates, but yet links, the mouth and the heart. The heart believes, but the mouth confesses. When the heart has believed to righteousness, the mouth is going to confess Jesus Christ as Lord, both initially at the moment of conversion, and then on an ongoing basis.

The Bible is simply stating in another way what Jesus said: **Mat 12:34** *For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.*

In short – a public profession of faith is a sign of true conversion. That's why when people say, 'Oh, I don't speak about my Christianity, I just live it,' they are missing the Lord's teaching. Jesus says – 'If it is in your heart, it will certainly be in your life – but it will necessarily come through your lips as well.' Permanent underground Christians, permanent secret believers fall outside of the description of believers in the New Testament.

But wait. Didn't Jesus spend much time in the Sermon on the Mount saying we should pray in secret, and fast without making it public, and give discreetly? Didn't He say we should avoid trying to make a big show of our faith? Jesus was not teaching against public faith. He was teaching against hypocrisy – doing things solely to be seen. Yes, true faith begins in unseen devotion, but it manifests itself in outward professions.

Why is a profession of faith so pleasing to God and so edifying to us?

### **1) It glorifies God**

At the heart of God's love for us is His being willing to identify with us. He became one of us – God bearing all the frailty of human flesh. Then – He went further – He became sin for us – bearing our sin and its guilt and shame and punishment. And all this He did so that He could cleanse us and receive us, and say, 'I am your God and you are my people. Since you now wear the righteousness of My Son, I identify with you.'

And this public profession of faith is the loving response to God. It is saying, ‘Yes, Lord you went public with Your love for me, so I will go public with my love for You. I love you more than the opinions of men. I am willing to lose friendships and respect from others to be identified with You.’

**Son 6:3** *I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine: he feedeth among the lilies.*

Look at **Hebrews 13**.

**Heb 13:10-15** *We have an altar from which those who serve the tent have no right to eat. For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the holy places by the high priest as a sacrifice for sin are burned outside the camp. So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through His own blood. Therefore let us go to Him outside the camp and bear the reproach He endured. For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come. Through Him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge His name.*

Jesus suffered in a place of disgrace and rejection. Since we have no place to put our roots down here, let us join Him in that place of reproach. Let us publicly identify with Him. And now look at the connection with worship – ‘Let us offer up a *sacrifice of praise*’ – clear worship language. Both are terms intricately connected with worship - sacrifice and praise.

But what is that sacrifice of praise?

The word for ‘giving thanks’ is the word translated ‘confess’ everywhere else in the New Testament. In other words – the sacrifice of praise is lips that confess His name publicly – going outside the camp, identifying with Him.

And of course, the more reproach or persecution that comes as a result of publicly identifying with Christ, the more glory God gets.

In fact, do you know what the word ‘martyr’ means? It simply means ‘witness’. A martyr was one who confessed Christ – they simply professed their faith in Him and did not deny Him. For that, they were executed. And so the word came to have the meaning – ‘one who professes Christ, and will not recant, even with the threat of death.’

## **2) It sanctifies you.**

**1Tim 6:11-12** *But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses.*

Paul enlists the witnesses who heard Timothy’s public profession as part of the motivation to keep going forward. ‘You made this public, Timothy – so you can’t quit now.’

When Julius Caesar attacked Britain, hordes of Celts ran along the shore line keeping pace with the boats. Eventually, when the Romans’ ships found a place to land, the Roman legionaries plunged forward into the waters to meet the hordes of Britons.

Once all the soldiers were out the boats, Caesar ordered the boats to be set on fire. As the legionaries turned around, they saw their boats on fire. They knew there was no immediate way back to Rome. They had to fight, and fight to win.

A public profession of faith is a bit like burning your boat home. You are making it public, known to friend and foe alike – ‘I belong to Christ. This is the path I am on. I am a disciple. You can compare my life to the teachings of Jesus, because I am born again.’ And what does that do? It cuts off any thought of going back. A person who supposedly believes in secret can choose to no longer believe and it costs him nothing. No one knew what he thought he believed in the first place.

### **Luke**

**9:62** *And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.*

But once it is known, you are on a course forward. And that is a good thing. **Hebrews 10:23** says, ‘*Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering.*’

Maybe part of the reason for the ‘easy-believism’ and consequent high fall-out of supposed professions is that the church does not hold people to the Biblical standard – ‘If you have believed on Christ, then confess Christ before men and live like it before them.’

### **3) It edifies others and strengthens you.**

Proclaiming your faith before believers is quite different from proclaiming it before unbelievers. With unbelievers you may have a hostile, sceptical, indifferent or disinterested audience. With believers you have a receptive, glad, welcoming and interested audience. When you hear testimonies of salvation – does it warm your heart or cool it? It is a gladsome time. The Body is edified as we hear of another way God saved an individual. We delight to hear it and welcome believers in. So to confess your faith before believers is like training on home ground for professing Christ before unbelievers. Unite publicly with believers, in these three forms of public professions in corporate worship.

#### **[ Baptism**

Baptism is the first and clearest form of public profession of faith. Throughout the book of Acts, this is what baptism was – a public profession. Baptism was a way of publicly saying, ‘I identify with the names I am being baptised into – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. I identify with the work of Jesus Christ – His death, burial and resurrection – the Spirit of God has joined me to His death. I identify with His cleansing work – I have been washed from my sins. I identify with following Jesus as my Lord – as He submitted to baptism – I submit to Him.’

Baptism has always been the most obvious and initial profession of faith. It doesn’t save you, but it displays publicly the faith in your heart. That’s why prior to baptism, we ask the person to share their testimony of salvation publicly. And as we are about to baptise, we sometimes ask them further questions – ‘Do you plan to follow Christ all the days of your life? Have you trusted Christ alone for your righteousness?’

“When the person being baptized goes down into the water, he who baptizes him, putting his hand on him, shall say: "Do you believe in God, the Father Almighty?" And the person being baptized shall say: "I believe." Then holding his hand on his head, he shall baptize him once. And then he shall say: "Do you believe in Christ Jesus, the Son of God, who was born of the Virgin Mary, and was crucified under Pontius Pilate, and was dead and buried, and rose again the third day, alive from the dead, and ascended into heaven, and sat at the right hand of the Father, and will come to judge the living and the dead?" And when he says: "I believe," he is baptized again. And again he shall say: "Do you believe in the Holy Spirit, in the holy church, and the resurrection of the body?" The person being baptized shall say: "I believe," and then he is baptized a third time.” -- Hippolytus, early third century 170 - 235

Baptism is part of our worship – as it is a public profession of faith.

### [ **Membership**

Now when someone is baptised, you get to hear their testimony of salvation. You get to hear their public profession of faith.

But what happens when a believer who has been baptised in another church begins attending your church? How will you know that they are truly saved and that you should treat them as a brother or sister; and not as an unsaved neighbour you need to evangelise? In order to serve in a more visible manner – it is necessary to let others know that you are indeed a believer. That happens through membership.

Well the answer is when they make a public profession of faith. When a believer moves from one congregation to another – at some point they should give their testimony of salvation. In many churches, church membership is your re-statement of your public profession of faith for the congregation God has brought you to. There is more to it – you are acknowledging God's providence in bringing you to that church; you are publicly submitting to the church's accountability; you are making yourself available for service and witnessing that you desire to serve and be served. It centres round a public profession of faith, which allows you to join in a church covenant.

### [ **Creeds & Confessions recited together**

The third form of public profession of faith is when the members, as a Body, recite the so-called creeds or confessions of the church. From the earliest times, the church has put together statements of what it believed to keep out heretics, and to guide local churches. In fact, some portions of Scripture, like **I Timothy 3:16**, **I Corinthians 15:3-4**, were no doubt early creeds or basic confessions of the church.

The so-called Apostles Creed dates from about the third century, and there is also the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed, all dating from the ancient church. As you get into later years, there have been various confessions of faith – like the London Confession of Faith of 1689. And it is a practice of corporate worship to recite some of these creeds together. Now some have struggled with this, feeling that creeds start to replace the Bible, or that it becomes a mindless chanting of words. That needn't be the case. When we together confess a creed that is orthodox, we publicly witness to what is in all of our hearts – the common faith we hold dear. We testify to unbelievers seated there what it is that unites us.

In fact, a church's statement of faith is like a creed. It is what we corporately confess to be true.

In each way – we own our Lord. We make it plain and obvious we are His and He is ours. Polycarp's view was – since Jesus has never denied me, how can I blush to own Him?

*Jesus, and shall it ever be,  
A mortal man, ashamed of Thee?  
Ashamed of Thee, whom angels praise,  
Whose glories shine through endless days?*

*Ashamed of Jesus! sooner far,  
Let night disown each radiant star!*

*'Tis midnight with my soul, till He,  
Bright Morning Star, bid darkness flee.*

*Ashamed of Jesus! O as soon  
Let morning blush to own the sun!  
He sheds the beams of light divine  
O'er this benighted soul of mine.*

*Ashamed of Jesus! that dear Friend  
On Whom my hopes of Heav'n depend!  
No; when I blush, be this my shame,  
That I no more revere His Name.*

*Ashamed of Jesus! yes, I may  
When I've no guilt to wash away;  
No tear to wipe, no good to crave,  
No fears to quell, no soul to save.*

*Ashamed of Jesus! empty pride!  
I'll boast a Savior crucified,  
And O may this my portion be,  
My Savior not ashamed of me!*