

## ACKNOWLEDGE CHRIST BEFORE MEN

Luke 12:1–12

Key Verse: 12:8

“And I tell you, everyone who acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man also will acknowledge before the angels of God...”

What does it mean to “acknowledge” someone? If we refuse to talk to somebody, that person might say: “Hey, you don’t even acknowledge my existence!” In the “Acknowledgements” section of a book, an author mentions all those who inspired, supported or helped practically with the writing. In English, to “acknowledge” a person might mean only to give eye contact or nod our head. Today Jesus tells us to acknowledge him. What does this really mean in our lives, and in our world today? How can we acknowledge him? And why is doing this so important? May God open our hearts and speak to us through his living words.

As chapter 11 opened, Jesus gave his disciples inspiring instructions on how to pray. Then he drove a demon out of a mute man. But some accused him of working by the power of the devil. Others kept seeking a sign from heaven. So he challenged people to take his side. When a Pharisee invited him to dinner, Jesus got criticized for not washing his hands. So he rebuked the Pharisees with six woes. Now, he prepares his disciples for how they will need to live in a hostile situation. What are the highlights of Jesus’ teaching here?

First, beware of hypocrisy. Read verse 1. “In the meantime, when so many thousands of the people had gathered together that they were trampling one another, he began to say to his disciples first, ‘Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.’” What stands out first is the size of the crowd. It’s so many thousands of people. And they’re trampling one another. The Pharisees are jealous of Jesus’ popularity. They’re doing their best to discredit him. But it’s not working—even more people are gathering to hear him.

Next, though a crowd is present, Jesus speaks to his disciples first. He’s not excited by the large crowd; he’s focused on developing his disciples. He warns them: “Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.” The Pharisees were all about appearances and maintaining their positions, so they were very sensitive to popularity. Jesus warns his disciples not to be influenced by such people. “Leaven” is

literally sourdough, which can easily spoil and ruin a batch of dough. It makes the rest of the dough rise or puff up, symbolizing pride. Jesus identifies this “leaven” as “hypocrisy.” The Greek word literally means “play acting.” So it means being fake or deceptive. What’s his point? Jesus is saying it’s tempting to put on an act, to get people to like or respect us. We all do it to some degree. But for a disciple of Jesus, it’s toxic.

Thus Jesus says, “Beware!” This word can mean, “Be alert!” Jesus uses this same Greek word with his disciples in verse 15: “Be on your guard!” He uses it several other times later (17:3; 20:46; 21:8,34; cf. Ac20:28). Pay attention to yourselves! Watch yourselves! The danger isn’t outside but within us. And here, this verb is in the present imperative, meaning to watch yourself continually.

So how can we overcome our own hypocritical tendencies? Read verse 2. “Nothing is covered up that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known.” Recently Jesus has talked about a lamp that gives us inner light and sets us free from darkness (11:33–36). He also told the Pharisees their inner persons were full of greed and wickedness (11:39). Here, with different words he’s basically warning about the same thing (cf. 1Co4:5). We’d all like to cover up and hide the shameful things in our hearts. But because God sees and knows it all, it’s better to be honest with him. When we come to him, honest about our sin, asking his mercy by faith in Jesus, he cleans out our inner person and makes us free. It’s beautiful (1Jn1:8–9). It’s the best remedy against hypocrisy—being honest with God.

Read verse 3. “Therefore whatever you have said in the dark shall be heard in the light, and what you have whispered in private rooms shall be proclaimed on the housetops.” In this context, these words warn against hypocritical speech. People often say nice things in person, but in private they complain or spread gossip. We call such people “the backstabbers.” God sees and knows all we’re doing and saying. Jesus wants us to recognize how evil our tongues can be (Jas3:6,8). To overcome hypocrisy, we need to cry out to God to help us with this.

Read verses 2–3 again. There’s a flip side to these verses. The Pharisees were attacking Jesus and his ministry, questioning his motives, trying to make him look bad. But Jesus was sure that God saw all the truth of what was going on. So it’s not only a warning to hypocrites but also a comfort to real disciples. They can be confident that God knows their hearts. Also, secret words being proclaimed is not only a warning to the backstabbers but a great encouragement to real disciples. Amidst fierce persecution, God will give them the courage of Jesus to proclaim the gospel boldly and publicly, like he did.

Second, overcome fear (4–7). Read verses 4–5. “I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body, and after that have nothing more that they can do. But I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him!” Here Jesus calls his disciples “my friends.” They are his friends because they’re going to suffer the same things he did. He’s also giving them the only cure of fear of people: it’s to fear God. Jesus doesn’t mean to live in the constant terror of being sent to hell. He’s explaining why we need to live in reverence of God. Ultimately, it’s God who’s sovereign over life and death. God is in control of all the details of our lives. And ultimately, God is our Judge, the only One who gets to decide our eternal destiny. Instead of being too sensitive to people, we need to be aware of the living God who sees and knows all things. This healthy awareness of God is the core antidote to hypocrisy.

Jesus says more to his disciples here. Read verses 6–7. “Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? And not one of them is forgotten before God. Why, even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not; you are of more value than many sparrows.” Jesus has just said to fear God, but here he says, “Fear not.” He means that while believing God is the Judge, we also need to believe in his loving care and faithfulness. Sparrows were the cheapest form of food sold in the market. They weren’t worth more than just a few pennies. But God doesn’t forget even the sparrows. Even little sparrows matter to God! Jesus’ disciples had no social status, no power, no wealth. And by following Jesus they were making themselves even more vulnerable. But Jesus is telling them they’re so valuable to God. Likewise, God is watching each one of us today. God won’t forget any one of us. God knows all about us, even exactly how many hairs are on our heads. We don’t have to worry; we can cast all our anxieties on him, because he cares for us (1Pe5:7).

Third, acknowledge Christ (8–10). Read verses 8–9. “And I tell you, everyone who acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man also will acknowledge before the angels of God, but the one who denies me before men will be denied before the angels of God.” This is the climax of the passage. Jesus is giving his disciples a solemn charge to acknowledge him before men. He foretold a future when secrets will be revealed (2–3), when some will be thrown into hell (5). Now he repeats the phrase “before the angels of God” (cf. 9:26), again referring to Judgment Day, when everybody is going to find out that how they lived their lives matters to God.

So how should we be living? Jesus wants every believer, each one of us, to “acknowledge him before men.” In English, to “acknowledge” can mean to know about something, to just give mental assent. But the Greek verb for “acknowledge” involves *speaking*. It can mean “to speak together” or “agree with.” When we acknowledge

Jesus, we say what Jesus said, we agree with what Jesus preached. But there's more. The essence of the Greek word "acknowledge" means "promise." So this is no casual or friendly talk; it's as serious as making wedding vows. In the English Bible this word is often translated as "confess" (e.g. Jn1:20; Ac24:14; 2Co9:13; Heb10:23; 1Jn4:2,15). Verse 8 in the KJV says, "Whosoever shall confess me before men..." Paul calls it "the good confession in the presence of many witnesses," and he adds that our Lord Jesus himself, when he was on trial, made such a confession before the governor Pontius Pilate (1Ti6:12–13).

And Paul explains it best in Romans 10:9–10: "...because, 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. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved." Every believer needs to make a public confession of their faith in Jesus. We can't just believe in Jesus in our minds. We need to speak up and speak out about our faith in him. Jesus also warns in verse 9 against denying him (cf. 1Ti2:12). But to "acknowledge" or "deny" Jesus is not just lip service; it also involves how we live. The Bible says some people profess to know God, but they deny him by their works (Tit1:16). It says when we pervert God's grace into sensuality, we deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ (Jude1:4). Here Jesus gives a dire warning to those who speak against the work of the Holy Spirit in and through him and his followers (10). He's not talking about one slip-up, but a persistent denial.

So, what should we confess about Jesus? Confessing faith in him has specific content. Once, when he asked his disciples, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered, "The Christ of God" (9:20). "Christ" means the promised Messiah. He's the only one worthy of worship, the one who's everything to me. To confess faith in him means to share not only who he is but what he's done for me.

To be honest, we often feel like failures. Even Jesus' top disciple Peter would succumb to temptation and end up denying him three times (22:31–34, 54–62). But after he received the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit, Peter boldly confessed his faith in Jesus, without fear, publicly and repeatedly (Ac2:14–41; 3:11–26; 4:5–12,18–20). Later Peter wrote, "...but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect..." (1Pe3:15). Of course it's not easy. In every place and generation, many people don't like Jesus and don't want to repent. In his time, the Pharisees dominated the synagogues. Anyone who confessed their faith in Jesus—even religious leaders—would be put out of the synagogue (Jn9:22; 12:42). A confession of faith in Jesus would cost them their reputation and their job. The same happens in Jewish and Muslim communities around the world today. It also

happens in the secular society we all live in every day. Anyone who starts saying they believe in Jesus is regarded as a religious extremist or fanatic and can lose all credibility.

During a recent survey, 1,600 Christians were asked about what prevents them from sharing their faith. Many said they were afraid of losing relationships. They said they'd rather avoid the tensions of discussing matters of faith. Others said they felt ill equipped. They were scared they wouldn't be able to give good answers. Still others said the situation never seemed right. Some said people just aren't interested. Some said they were afraid of being rejected, or even of hostility. Many said they were just too busy.<sup>1</sup> But read verses 8–9 again. We don't have to calculate or worry about the results. We just have to confess our faith in Jesus. It might happen when someone gets curious and asks us about it. Or we might have to guide the conversation to talk about spiritual things. Every time we share with others our sincere faith in Jesus, it's an opportunity for the Holy Spirit to work—maybe not right away, but eventually.

Fourth, depend on the Holy Spirit (11–12). Read verses 11–12. “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, for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say.” Later Jesus promises, “...for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict” (21:15). Someday our faith in Jesus might even lead us into dangerous waters. But his words are such a comfort. While we should be prepared, we can depend on the Holy Spirit's help. He gives the wisdom what to say, and the courage to say it.

May God help us confess our faith in Jesus to anyone, any time, relying on the Holy Spirit's help. May God drive out all our fear and help us trust his care.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.jesusfilm.org/blog/christian-evangelism-statistics/>