

Openly Confessing Christ

Don't be a "Closet Christian"

Light on the Rock

by Philip Shields July 07

Abstract: Openly acknowledging Christ in our lives. Have you ever had a "Matthew Party"? Is it time to "come out of the Christian closet"? How we must proclaim Christ by our changed lives as well as by our words. Scripture requires both. Making Christianity attractive without obnoxiously parading our beliefs.

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Greetings, disciples of Christ. Please turn with me to Mark 8:34-38 – as I ask, "Are you an open Christian or a 'closet Christian'?" By that I mean, are we trying to hide or diminish the fact we are believers? In this case, I'm urging Christians to come out in the open, quit hiding the fact you are a believer in the risen Christ, the son of God. Jesus defined this openness He wants in at least 2 ways:

Mark 8:34-38

"When He had called the people to Himself, with His disciples also, He said to them, "Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross [daily- Luke 9:23], and follow Me. 35 For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it. 36 For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? 37 Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? 38 **For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed** when He comes in [His own glory and – Luke 9:26] the glory of His Father with the holy angels." (also 2 Timothy 2:12 – if we deny Him, He will also deny us)

So the first way, Jesus says, "Don't be ashamed of Me". Don't be ashamed to be a Christian, to be identified with someone who goes by what the Bible says, someone who believes in a living God who created all things.

Secondly, Jesus said to be even more proactive than that. Let's read Matthew 10:32-33.

Matt 10:32-33 "Therefore whoever *confesses Me* before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. 33 But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven."

So Jesus makes it clear: it's more than just a matter of not denying Him, but we have a God-given obligation, as you will soon see, to openly *confess* Jesus Christ before others. People know you as a Christian. God wants us bravely acknowledging our allegiance and love for Him. That is why Paul said:

Romans 10:9-10 "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. 10 For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation."

This is Philip, your fellow believer in the risen Christ, Jesus the son of God, asking you now -- are we a "closet Christian" or not. That's our topic today: not keeping your belief in Christ a secret;

openly professing you are a believer by our holy and godly conduct, our new life in Christ 24/7 – backed up by words that openly and unashamedly confess Jesus is Lord in our lives.

A ‘closet Christian’ is one who has come to believe in Jesus as his Savior, and would claim to be a Christian “if push came to shove” – but is a secret believer. He/she may attend church, may privately pray and do Bible study, but aside from that – no one knows he/she is a believer in the living God or believes fervently in the risen Christ.

So this message is to encourage you to look squarely in the mirror and ask yourself if you’re a closet Christian or not. And if so, what to start doing to “come out of the Christian closet”.

We have **Joshua’s** famous statement in Joshua 24:15 when he challenges Israel to choose whom they’ll serve and obey, and ends with a public statement that leaves no ambiguity: “as for me and my household, we will serve the Eternal” (Joshua 24:15). With that leadership, the others answered they also would serve the true God, and it was so at least as Joshua was alive to lead them.

Who knows whom *you* could be influencing by your holy conduct – followed by a clear statement of what drives your holy conduct: your profession as a Christian.

Open Confession Done Right is Not Obnoxious

I am not speaking of those who are obnoxious, pushy, and “in your face” about their faith. I am not speaking of wearing a placard and shouting to passersby to repent. I am not talking about being a noisy clanging cymbal making a lot of noise, but without *agape* love. But I *am* talking about a person so full of the love of God, that when people are with you, they feel something special about us. Consistently. They feel the love of God. They experience how your life has been transformed.

I don’t care if you’re in prison hearing this – even an emotional prison, let alone a real prison – Jesus in you can make you 100% new. You must believe that, confessing your God and Jesus, believing God can make you new – and it will happen! I know from very personal experience this is true. Forget what people say about you and me. Just let Jesus shine in you – and then your words will mean something. In time, people will see that you have changed, that you are not what you once used to be. I sometimes say, “I know I’m not yet what I fully oughta be. I’m not yet what I’m fully going to be. But thank God, because through Jesus Christ, I’m no longer what I used to be.”

So - - without being obnoxious, be the light you’re called to be. Let Jesus shine from within you. Your changing life will speak volumes before you open your mouth. But don’t think that words are not necessary, as we’ll soon see. You’re not just to reflect Christ. You are His vessel, His temple, with Jesus inside you, shining forth HIS light instead of just somehow reflecting Him.

So I ask again: are you a closet Christian, a secret Christian? By “closet Christian”, I mean if it were a crime punishable by death to be a Christian, would there be plenty of evidence to easily convict you and me --- or have we hidden our faith in Christ so well that our friends and neighbors have no inkling we are a Believer?

One Reason we Have been Called – According to Peter

Peter, who so boldly confesses his Savior without regard to life after his conversion, *says our very PURPOSE is to proclaim Christ*. Be turning to 1 Peter 2. It's not enough to go to church, to sing in the choir, to read the Bible.

1 Peter 2:9 “But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, *that you may proclaim the praises of Him* who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;”

Is it enough to leave this to preachers and others?

Just as Joshua publicly and openly confessed and proclaimed who it is he was going to serve – so must we, unless I'm reading a different Bible from yours. I've been around believers who thought it was best to remain quiet, and let God do all the work, because they believed “there's no point in saying anything, because no one can come to God unless He first calls them”. That's true – but God often calls people through other people!

It's not just the minister's job.

Your Bible also says you won't be able to contain the excitement of the new life you're experiencing, if Christ is really in you. We're so pleased and proud of our Beloved, we just have to talk about Him. The story of Redemption is the supreme love story so profound that we become like an excited engaged young lady who has to introduce everyone to her beloved. We are engaged to marry King Jesus, after all. He has changed us, and our new lives make our words have meaning.

Why some may not be an open Christian

Some of us – really a big part of the topic today – don't openly profess our Christianity because:

- we're just not “that kind of person” who flaunts what they believe about anything
- we're perhaps very private by nature and wish everyone else would be more private too
- or worse, we truly are a little embarrassed about it and don't want to be thought of as a right-wing Bible-thumping lunatic, as liberal media may label some of us. Jesus has already said, if we're ashamed of Him, he will be ashamed of us.
- Some of us may be too concerned about what others think of us – more than we are concerned about being up front about our beliefs, and standing up clearly for God. I'll address this also later in the message.

Others have remained quiet because they're part of a church that is overdoing the “chosen people” bit, to the point they become exclusive elitists. They feel better than others, so don't want to be around others who aren't part of their special group.

Modern Pharisees – the “separated ones”

Don't be a Pharisee. Do you know what “Pharisee” means? It means “separated ones”. They were the ones who distanced themselves from others not worthy of their fellowship. But what did Jesus do? He ate and mingled freely with Pharisees, tax collectors, thieves, sinners, lepers, adulterers – and let His light shine in the darkness. Jesus in you and me will want to continue doing the same.

Sure, we are chosen, we are special, we are called out of the world – but let's get the point, we're not of it, but we're still in it, shining the light of good deeds and a changed life, so when we speak, our words have meaning and impact.

When our minds are filled with a particular topic, we can't help but talk about what's on our minds. Even Jesus said "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks" (Luke 6:45). Are our hearts overflowing with the things of God? If we're not brimming with God's way, is it perhaps not as exciting to us as we might think?

Brethren, remember we are disciples of Jesus. Jesus sent his disciples into the world – not to be of the world, but very much in it. We are not of Babylon, we are not of this world, our city is heavenly Jerusalem, our citizenship is heavenly Jerusalem, but we are sent as lights into this world, to proclaim the praises of Him who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light (Eph. 5:8; 1 Pet 2:9).

We just have to share it, when we understand it. There's plenty of God's love to go around. We just have to tell people the real secret – and that is the new life in Christ! Let your light so shine that men may see your good works (this has to come before your good words have any impact) and end up glorifying God (Matt. 5:14).

It's Jesus we are to be Talking About – Not the Church we attend

Let me make one thing clear from the start: I am not talking about bragging up the church you go to, or your pastor. Your church may be a wonderful place to learn. Your pastor may be an inspiring preacher or a man full of love for people. But when God says to confess Him, God means bringing people into relationship with *Christ* - - not to a preacher or church, though of course they have their place in the matter. Please hear that and grasp the difference. I know thousands of people whose allegiance is to their church. They think they're going to "a place of safety" in time of trouble because they attend a particular church body or are identified with a particular preacher.

God is our Rock, not a preacher. Jesus is the chief shepherd, the Cornerstone. He is everything, not our preacher, not our church. We make the mistake all too often of overemphasizing our human leaders or our church group. It is a mistake.

Paul says about himself: "who is Paul? Who is Apollos?" And fact, I thin in the Greek the wording is more "WHAT is Paul". And he implies he is just a tool, just a vessel, to help bring people into relationship with Christ! *It's never about us.* It's not about the church organization we attend with. It's not about our preacher. It's about how Jesus is the way into the kingdom of God. We emphasize human leaders way too much, I think.

THE POWER OF LETTING YOUR LIGHT SHINE

If we are the kind of light that Jesus wants, we will not be obnoxious – but neither will we be able to hide the light of Christ. In fact, we'll exude the light of Christ in us! "You are the light of the world. A city upon a hill cannot be hidden" – Matthew 5:14.

Matt 5:14-16

"You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in

the house. 16 ***Let** your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.*"

Early on in this message we need to see that it is our life, our good works –not all our words or even preaching - - which shine God's light and bring God glory. When people are attracted by what they see happening in our lives, the door is opened for conversations about how our lives were transformed by Christ. But notice several things: We need to be like a light on a hill that cannot be hidden. In fact Jesus says to let your light shine, don't hide it. When they see our lives transformed by the light of Christ, God is glorified.

(Example: **Santorini** – a Greek island with a city on the hill, visible for miles at night.)

Are you hiding the light of Christ in you? I think I often have. But we're to be like a city on a hill whose lights at night cannot be hidden. Even from miles away, a city on a hill looks like a brilliant crown on a hill at night. Is the light of Christ as evident in each of us as a city on a hill at night is? The light of God should be that obvious in us to anyone watching us. Is it?

WARNING: WE HOLD THE REPUTATION OF GOD AND HIS PEOPLE IN OUR HANDS

There's a warning here too. Our lights can also be shining negatively. People can stay away from Christ if they see negative things from a so-called Christian. If my neighbors feel my marriage is on the rocks, or if I have an all-out argument on the front lawn with my teenage son, or if I even just don't keep my lawn mowed and have a trash-filled yard in an otherwise beautiful neighborhood – and I'm professing to be a Christian – they see that "light" too! People would not glorify God for that kind of light, nor would they be attracted to it.

Why? Because people can say, "if that's what a Christian is like, I want nothing to do with it" – and then God is mocked. God's name is blasphemed. Whenever the news talks about a chain murderer having been a Christian who went to regular Bible studies at his church, or that he was a deacon or worse yet a preacher or televangelist, God's name is mocked.

I'm not pointing fingers, for I too, have caused God's name to be blasphemed and mocked in times past by my conduct. I've had to repent of bringing disrepute at times to God himself, to the ministry, to His people to His body, the church. But also be aware we can plant new seed, and in time, reap a new harvest. That's for a coming message.

This is the danger of coming out of the closet: Now whatever we do, impacts the way people think about God and His church. That is why Paul said "whatever we do, do to the glory of God"

If people know we are children of God, then in a way, we hold God's reputation and what people think of Christians, in our hands. Let's look at King David. You know the story of David murdering Uriah and the other men who were with him, to steal his wife - -Bathsheba (2 Sam. 11:17).

2 Samuel 12:13-14

"And Nathan said to David, "The LORD also has put away your sin; you shall not die. 14 However, *because by this deed you have given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme, the child also who is born to you shall surely die.*"

This sin became known. Even Bathsheba's grandfather – Ahitophel – who had been one of David's most trusted advisors was appalled by this. I'm personally certain that it was this incident that turned Ahitophel against David and made Ahitophel join with the rebel son Absalom. No doubt the relatives of the other men who were with Uriah who also died – eventually put two and two together. In any case, God says this incident caused the enemies of YHWH to blaspheme.

How many times have we been guilty of the same thing? Whenever we don't show agape love, wherever we are, people can end up saying, "If that's what a Christian is like, I want nothing to do with it". So we can also be denying Christ by our conduct that is not in synch with being a Christian. I've denied my Lord too many times this way – and so have you. It's time we stop this.

Titus 1:16 "They *profess* to know God, but *in works they deny Him*, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work."

On the other hand, the positive is also true. We can let God's light in us so shine that men glorify God. We can "adorn" the gospel of God by showing love and kindness to everyone.

Titus 2:9-10

"Exhort bondservants to be obedient to their own masters, to be well pleasing in all things, not answering back, 10 not pilfering, but showing all good fidelity, that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things." (NIV says "that they may make the teaching of God our savior attractive". This is what the sister had done in Eastern Canada.)

So ponder and ask yourself: if people knew I was a Christian, would that bring God glory – or shame? Then, if you have to repent and change course, you know what to do.

OUR LIVES SPEAK LOUDER THAN OUR WORDS

It comes back to the fact that our lives, with Christ in us, our lives are the message. It's not our words, but our very lives are the message, at least initially. How we live, how we inspire others by our lives – that's what makes people willing and eager to hear what we have to say. We win people's hearts by our Christian love first, and then they want to know more about us and how we came to be what we are.

You've heard the old expression – and I preach to myself as I say this: "Your actions speak so loudly that I can't hear what you're saying." Our actions – good or bad – will always have more impact than our words.

I've already read the verses in Titus that on one hand warn us about denying Christ by not living a life compatible with His teachings, and the other one about adorning the message by our lives.

When people are inspired by our marriages, by our example, by our happy children – then when they ask us "what's the secret to your happy marriage", we can tell them. The answer is simple: first we commit to marry Christ, and then we commit to marry the one who became our spouse. First we are faithful to God, and then we're able to be faithful to our spouse. When a child of God commits adultery, he or she has long ago already been unfaithful to their relationship to Christ. So the secret to a happy marriage is to love our spouse as Christ loves us.

Or, if people see how much we have grown and have changed – and want to know the secret to how we can change so dramatically – we tell them: we gave up living for just ourselves, and now live for a higher good, a higher cause, for a godly calling. It is then, that we can talk about “unless a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of Heaven.” It is then, that we can discuss how hard it was to really let the self die, and we still battle it every day. But we must first let the self die, give up our priorities and self-centered goals and now live for that which Christ has called us. Our actions must come first before the words. Our lives change dramatically before the explanation has impact.

If someone comments some day that you are “so loving”, in your own way reflect that back to God. “If I can love, it is because God first loved me”. Then in every interaction – on the phone, at work, wherever, we try to get our own self out of the way and let the love of God flow out in our actions, words, attitude – 24/7. Not at all easy, but that’s the goal. Then people experience the love of God in you and through you.

We are being lights also to our very own children. Are our own children being attracted to follow in our steps? I know God has to open their minds and call them too, but children of believers are “holy seed” (Mal. 2; 1 Cor.7:14). Sometimes church leaders and preachers are so busy trying to convert others that we can forget the power of our example, our lives, and our words – on our very own children.

Wives who have unbelieving husbands are admonished by Peter, for example, not to worry about preaching to their husbands, but to watch their own conduct.

1 Peter 3:1-2 “Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, **without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives** when they observe your chaste conduct...”

Want a husband to be impressed with Christianity? You can show him how much it has changed you. Ditto for us husbands with our unbelieving wives. In a word, it’s letting people see that we live our testimony – is what leads them to be able to have their own testimony.

Do we want our children to read the Bible? If they grow up knowing Mom and Dad daily study the word of God, what a witness and example and testimony that is, all by itself. If – when they wake up – they see us having our quiet devotional in the living room or quietly meditating on the front porch as the birds chirp and the day is still young.... What a witness.

Do we want our son to take care of his wife someday, and to love her as Christ loves the church? Hopefully our son is able to see you and me taking care of our wives, and giving of ourselves for them. And hopefully, if they are ever aware of a fight or argument, it’s not long that they’re also aware Mom and Dad are cuddling on the couch again. They have to see that we know how to forgive, how to reconcile, how to love – right here in our own homes.

The power of example, in our ability to witness to what Christ is doing, is what I’m talking about. It’s the very best way to teach. So I’m taking a while to say: come out of the closet, Christian, first by sharing a life of love. Then, when we speak, people will glorify God as they see and experience His love in our lives.

Talk is easy. But the power is in the living of it. Could you and I say, as Paul did, ‘be imitators of me, as I imitate Christ (1 Cor. 11:1)? Even Timothy was admonished to be a good example.

1 Timothy 4:12 “Let no one despise your youth, but *be an example* to the believers in **word**, in **conduct** [KJV-conversation], in love [charity-KJV], in spirit, in faith, in purity”

Now having said that, when we have the opportunity, we are to “proclaim the praises of him who called us” (1 Peter 2:9).

SOME REASONS WHY WE WANT TO COME OUT OF THE CHRISTIAN CLOSET

There are good reasons to come out of the Christian closet. How is the church to grow if we hide the source of our light and strength?

How do you think the church will grow? By having powerful televangelism? By spending millions on pamphlets and booklets and radio time? The early church grew rapidly without any of that media available. How did they do it?

They did it because the apostles learned from their mistake of initially abandoning and denying Christ. We are all aware of how Peter denied Christ 3 times. It wasn't just Peter. They all fled and abandoned him (Mark 14:50-52). Mark even fled naked, as in his panic to get away, let his outer garment be ripped off of him. At least Peter hung around and even defended Christ with a sword at first. Only John stayed at the cross with the women. I doubt we would have done any better. If we can't proclaim Christ in peaceful times, how would we fare in times of severe persecution?

In any case, after the resurrection these same cowardly disciples proclaimed their Savior boldly, and several soon were killed for doing so – Stephen and James. Dozens were imprisoned and tortured, even by the one who became Paul of the New Testament. They were not closet Christians anymore, but openly professed Christ. How would we have done?

How do you think the early Christian church actually grew?

We know that just before the day of Pentecost, there were only 120 believers willing to come together as followers of Christ, including all the men and women (Acts 1:14-15). All 120 men and women believers received God's Holy Spirit. All 120 spoke, as inspired by the spirit. Only 12 of them were ordained apostles or preachers, but all 120 spoke! Perhaps each one spoke to a small group of 5-6 who had come to investigate this sound and phenomenon. But all of them spoke. That's what the Bible says (Acts 2:3-4). They all began to speak by the Spirit, so much so that Peter even alluded to the fact that prophecy was being fulfilled that day as both men and women were speaking under inspiration of the Spirit (Acts 2:16-18).

They're now all “out of the closet” and openly proclaiming Christ. Peter takes the lead and addresses the entire crowd in his first public sermon after the resurrection, and in which He openly preaches the Christ. As a result, 3,000 are baptized. Now all 3,120 were openly proclaiming Christ.

Acts 2:46-47

“So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.”

If this were happening today, in your neighborhood, and you were there, would you and I be willing to be praising God, visiting house to house, and meeting together openly in the temple?

Some of us have been so indoctrinated into believing that confessing Christ is something only ordained preachers are to do – that no one where we work, and none of our neighbors, even *know* we are believers! Let's see what the scriptures say happens to this early group of believers who were so open about their faith and new found relationship with God:

Persecution begins, but undaunted, the disciples continued to be up front about their beliefs. In chapter 3, Peter and John are used by God to heal a lame man. Peter powerfully preaches that the healing was by the faith that comes through Jesus. A powerful witness! We come to Acts 4:1-4 – and even after being threatened, the apostles are so open about their faith, and God adds 5,000 more.

The disciples are warned to “shut up, or else” – but they increased all the more, even as they were beaten and whipped. Acts 5:12-16 speaks of great wonders and signs and healings – all which brought even more attention to God and His people. More people come to God, including priests!

Acts 6:7 “Then the word of God spread, and *the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith.*”

After this: Stephen's martyrdom. He was not an ordained preacher, but a deacon, and yet God did many wonders through him also and used him to preach a very open testimony about Christ.

Acts 8:1-2 “Now Saul was consenting to his death. At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and *they were all scattered* throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, *except the apostles.*” Then v.4--

Acts 8:4 “Therefore *those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word*”. V. 5 says Philip “preached *Christ*” in Samaria. Of course! He IS the Word (John 1:1-3).

Who's preaching the word? These were not the apostles, for they stayed in Jerusalem (Acts 8:1) remember. Brethren, let's “get” this! The regular new converts who were being persecuted and had to scatter for their own lives sake, moved out – but kept on talking about Jesus and the kingdom! Though forced out, they weren't about to shut up! The *brethren* were the ones who “went everywhere preaching the word”.

Would we have? You would know, by what you're doing today. Are you doing that today?

The seeds of God's truth simply spread all the more – now outside Jerusalem and all over the Roman world. Let's pick up in Acts 11 to see what happened as a result of what we've just read in Acts 8.

Acts 11:19-21

“Now those who were scattered after the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to no one but the Jews only. 20 But some of them were men from Cyprus and Cyrene, who, when they had come to Antioch, spoke to the Hellenists, preaching the Lord Jesus. 21 And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord” v.24 repeats how fast it grew.

These early brothers and sisters were like seeds of the gospel being scattered around the world. And when GOD plants and sends out His word, it shall not come back void, but shall accomplish what God purposed! **Isaiah 55:10-11**

Years ago, when I worked in eastern Canada as a pastor, the phone began to ring one night. On the other end was a worldly sister of one of God's new converts. Within minutes she was saying, "I'd like to come to your church, because ever since my sister started going, we've seen such a change in her. She's incredibly happy, and different.... and I want you to do for me what you did for her".

I laughed, and said, "I've done nothing but shared with her the life we can have now in Christ. If she's different, it's not because of me, but because of Christ living in her now. In any case, I'll see you next sabbath and welcome." When I hung up the phone, I thought, "what a wonderful testimony". Similar phone calls and messages came in from time to time just like that, in that area. And that church area doubled in size every 3 years.

Holding your own "MATTHEW LEVI PARTY"

Turn with me now to Luke 5:27-32. Have you ever thought of having a "Mathew Party"? Do you know what I'm talking about? Would you have done what Matthew did? You'll know, by what you're doing now! I think it's a great idea and I want to start doing this myself. Frankly – and sadly – it's a new concept to me and let me share it. I say "sadly" for I wish I had known it, and been doing it, much sooner.

Luke 5:27-32

"After these things He went out and saw a tax collector named Levi [Matthew], sitting at the tax office. And He said to him, "Follow Me." 28 So he left all, rose up, and followed Him.

[now notice what happens next. He is so excited he has to tell all his friends. His friends are people like him – sinners. Tax collectors. So when he invites Jesus and the disciples to the dinner, he puts on a feast where they can also meet Jesus and the disciples. Apparently the religious leaders – scribes and Pharisees – were also invited, or at least they showed up.]

29 Then Levi gave Him a great feast in his own house. And there were a great number of tax collectors and others who sat down with them. 30 And their scribes and the Pharisees complained against His disciples, saying, "Why do You eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?"

31 Jesus answered and said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. 32 I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance."

Have you ever thought of having a dinner with your co-workers from work – where you also have a few of your happy, balanced believer-friends attending, so each can be introduced to the other? Not to convert them all at once at that one dinner, but just so the light of Christ in us can shine and be shared with others. If your believer friends don't become foghorns and strobe lights, there is a chance that your work friends could be attracted to what they feel, experience and hear from your believer friends. Perhaps they will want the joy, the wonderful marriage, the light in their faces—the "something about them" that is hard to quantify – and as they become friends of your friends, who knows what God can do.

For that matter, would you have dinner with religious leaders from other church groups who believe differently than you do? Jesus did. Remember? He sat at dinner with Pharisees, who invited him more than once to dinner (Luke 7:36-42). These were the same people of whom Jesus also said, "you err, not knowing the scriptures". But Jesus mingled, ate, fellowshiped with religious leaders, tax collectors, repentant adulterers, the common man, priests – whatever and whomever.

Remember how our early brothers had to learn that God was calling people outside of Judaism? It was so hard for them to understand that the chosen people – Israel – were indeed chosen, but God had called them to share the light to the world, not just keep it to themselves. In the same way, we are spiritual Israel today – still the chosen ones – but in the same way we are to declare His praises to the spiritual Gentiles! We are to be open about our faith, our experiences, and of our Christ.

Praises of Men – more than the praises of GOD?

Why would we hide the light of God? There could be many reasons. All I know is that none of us can afford to have the Son of God say He is ashamed of us, because we were ashamed of Him! Remember, that's the passage with which I began this sermon (Mark 8:38). Could it be we are still too concerned what others think of us?

There's quite a story and lesson for us in the example of the blind man whom Jesus healed and gave back His sight. And as we read this story, I ask you – Christian – have you ever been healed, and when given the opportunity, have you given God the glory, or ignored the opportunity to proclaim the praises of God and His power to heal today?

Turn with me to John 9, where the full story is that Jesus healed a man who had been blind from birth. The Jewish leaders asked the parents and they identified the man as their son, but refused to really acknowledge Jesus as the healer. It's all there in John 9. Some interesting lessons here:

John 9:20-38

20 His parents answered them and said, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; 21 but by what means he now sees we do not know, or who opened his eyes we do not know. He is of age; ask him. He will speak for himself." 22 **His parents said these things because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had agreed already that if anyone confessed that He was Christ, he would be put out of the synagogue.** 23 Therefore his parents said, "He is of age; ask him."

24 So they again called the man who was blind, and said to him, "Give God the glory! We know that this Man is a sinner."

25 He answered and said, "Whether He is a sinner or not I do not know. One thing I know: **that though I was blind, now I see.**"

[Can you and I say openly – though I was once spiritually blind, now I see because of Jesus, the Son of God, who opened MY eyes!"] v. 26-34- big confrontation with the healed man, and v. 34 they throw him out of their church. For what? For confessing Christ! 35 **Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and when He had found him, He said to him, "Do you believe in the Son of God?"**

36 **He answered and said, "Who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?"**

37 **And Jesus said to him, "You have both seen Him and it is He who is talking with you."**

38 **Then he said, "Lord, I believe!" And he worshiped Him."**

So the blind man's parents missed the opportunity of a lifetime. They were well regarded in the church they attended and did not want to lose all that esteem of men. So they said nothing!

Could we be guilty of the same thing – loving the praise of our peers, more than God's praises, so we just shut up, and don't share with others the wonders of God's presence in our lives?

John 12:42-43

“Nevertheless even among the rulers many believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; 43 *for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.*”

I want you to think about that. I don't care if you're 15 or 55. This is about you now. Do your classmates know you pray; know you believe in a Creator instead of Evolution? Does your boss know you will put your job on the line rather than work on the Sabbath? Do your neighbors understand why you don't have Christmas lights or a Christmas tree in your house at Christmas time? Have you ever, ever one time, encouraged someone to find God, to pray, to read the Bible – as a solution to the woes and problems they are facing in their marriage, or in their life in general? Or did you keep silent, for you loved the praises of men more than the praises of God?

What were you called to do? Do you remember?

1 Peter 2:9-10

“But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you **may proclaim the praises of Him** who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; 10 who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.”

So Peter says it goes beyond keeping silent – but we must actively proclaim the praises of God. I haven't done that nearly as much as I want to, need to, and plan to – starting now. Even at work – conventions, seminars – I publicly tell other insurance agents that I'm successful because God has opened doors and blessed me, and I seek His guidance and direction at the beginning of each day.

GOD IS NOT ASHAMED OF US

How and why would we be ashamed to speak of the Creator and his message? But if you think about it, God could be ashamed of you and me. But His word says He isn't, when we are in Christ. Heb. 2:11 clearly says, “He is not ashamed to call them [believers] brethren.”

Wow! Jesus is perfect, and now He sanctified me in Him – so now He is not ashamed of me! Glory to God! I don't care if you're ashamed of me, God isn't! God is saying, when we become one in Him, we are all of One, of Him, and how on earth could He be ashamed of Himself? He can't! So since we are one in Him, if we are one in Him, He won't be ashamed of us.

Later, in **Hebrews 11:16**, speaking of the men and women of faith, God says, “therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.”

By the way, heavenly Jerusalem is the city for those being called now. It's our city. God is preparing it. Jesus promised that He was going to prepare a place for us. Heaven is that place. That is what our

home will be. Though in the Millennium we'll be working here on earth, our home is heaven above. That's *our* city.

But back to the point: God is not ashamed of me, so why should I be ashamed of Him? That's why I'm covering this point of God not being ashamed of us. God is perfect. We should be so proud of GOD as our father, so proud of Jesus our Beloved Redeemer, Husband, and Savior He is that we just can't CONTAIN the words that speak of Him. We are bursting! When you're really, really, really pleased and proud of something, you want to tell everyone about it, you show everyone! Be turning to John 17 please.

REDEMPTION IS A LOVE STORY! And we're in the play!

(Story of woman seated behind me at the track meet). We were at a track meet once and this woman behind us had her son running. He was clearly in the lead, and she jumped up in the grandstands, as he came around the bend. She was shouting, "That's my BOY, that's my BOY....".. After the race and the applause, I turned around quietly and asked, "was that your boy?" Ha! She couldn't contain herself. Are we at least as pleased with Jesus? Do we know Him and what he's done so well, and are we exhibiting what He's done so much, that we just can't contain it?

Jesus even said in His prayer of John 17:23, He said God the father loves us as He loves Jesus. Do you accept that? Do you believe Jesus?

Paul bravely told believers in Rome, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ" (Rom. 1:16). He admonished Timothy not at all to be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, and of the grace given us in Christ before time began (2 Tim. 1:8-10).

**THE TIME IS COMING WHEN GOD WILL TEST US ABOUT OPENLY CONFESSING
THE Christ – OR DENYING HIM BY OUR SILENCE!**

God is already testing us every single day in this matter of not being ashamed of Him or His gospel. But the time is coming – perhaps soon – when our very lives will be at stake if we identify ourselves as children of God. Some of us will be put to death for doing so – or a chance to deny Christ.

Daniel 8:24 speaks of an end-time king who will destroy the holy people for a time. Rev. 16:6 and 17:6 speaks of a great false church that will be drunk on the blood of the saints!

Brethren, Jesus died for you and me, and God has to know that we'd be willing to die for Him. If we were given a choice of proclaiming our allegiance to Jesus Christ – or watching our children killed before our very eyes – what would we do? When we were baptized, we proclaimed a love for God which would rise higher than our love for husband, wife, children, anyone or anything. We may be tested on those things, literally. I say let's practice expressing that allegiance now, while it's easier.

Remember Peter! No, I don't mean the pre-conversion Peter. I mean the Peter who boldly proclaimed his master. THIS is the Peter I want you to remember. Let's read it.

Acts 4:5-31

"And it came to pass, on the next day, that their rulers, elders, and scribes, 6 as well as Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the family of the high priest,

were gathered together at Jerusalem. 7 And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, "By what power or by what name have you done this?"

[Remember, these were the same priests who had crucified Jesus!]

8 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders of Israel: 9 If we this day are judged for a good deed done to a helpless man, by what means he has been made well, 10 let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands here before you whole. 11 This is the 'stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone.' 12 Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

Wow, brethren! Then vs. 13-18, they command them not to preach in Jesus' name.

*18 So they called them and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. 19 But Peter and John answered and said to them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. 20 **For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.**" 21 So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding no way of punishing them, because of the people, since they all glorified God for what had been done. 22 For the man was over forty years old on whom this miracle of healing had been performed.*

23 And being let go, they went to their own companions and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them. 24 So when they heard that, they raised their voice to God with one accord and said: [PRAYER] "Lord, You are God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them, 25 who by the mouth of Your servant David have said:

'Why did the nations rage, and the people plot vain things? 26 The kings of the earth took their stand, and the rulers were gathered together Against the LORD and against His Christ.'

27 "For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together 28 to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done. 29 **Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word,** 30 by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus."

31 And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness."

That is written for our admonition. The word of God is clear: Persecution is coming. Will we proclaim our allegiance openly at that time – or run to the hills, or by our actions live and act like a non-believer, to save our own skin?

We can practice now in the relative calm before the storm comes. But if we're silent now, what will we be like in the storm of persecution – with perhaps our lives on the line?

Recount the STORY OF POLYCARP, Bishop of Smyrna, martyred in 155 AD in the arena.

When ordered to pledge that he saw the emperor as god, and ordered to curse Christ, or be killed, his answer:

"Eighty and six years have I served him, and he has done me no wrong; how then can I blaspheme my king who saved me?"

And of course he was executed.

Would we have done the same?

If proclaiming Jesus and His way – both in our conduct and in our word -- is a WAY OF LIFE for us, wherever we are, whatever we are doing, it will be much more natural and automatic to continue to do so when times are much rougher than they are now.

I asked in the beginning if you are an open Christian – or a Closet Christian. I hope you've been convicted to come out of the closet – and proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light!

Congratulations, Christian. Starting today, people will know you are one of Christ's followers. Why? Because if the life and light of Christ is truly in you – you won't be able to contain Him. Christ will exude from you – in a life of love, and in words of His grace - - as Jesus walks the earth, in your body, as the temple of His spirit. Be open about Christ, Christian, and do what you are called to do: “proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light”.

Until next time, this is your fellow Christian, Philip. May God strengthen you in our Christian walk.

