

LESSON 7 — WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO CONFESS JESUS?

Big Question: If I believe in Jesus and have turned from my sin, what does it mean to openly acknowledge Jesus as my Lord?

Purpose of This Study

In the previous lessons we have seen that:

- Jesus is the Son of God and Lord.
- Jesus came to seek and save the lost.
- Sin separates us from God.
- Jesus calls us to follow Him.
- Genuine faith trusts Jesus and responds to His Word.
- Repentance means turning away from sin and turning toward God.

Now we come to another important response to Jesus: **Confession.**

What does it mean to confess Jesus? Is confession simply saying, “I believe in Jesus”? Is it something that happens once? Or does confession involve openly identifying ourselves with Jesus and acknowledging Him as **Christ, Son of God, and Lord**?

The Bible presents confession as more than words spoken with the lips. It is an open acknowledgment of who Jesus is and a willingness to identify ourselves with Him.

DISCUSSION STARTER — “SAYING IT OUT LOUD”

What is the last thing you recommended to someone else? Favorite book? Favorite restaurant? Favorite place for that special cup of java? Maybe it was something more important - let's say you found the cure for cancer. Better yet, you used the cure you're your cancer is gone. Now you meet that person who has cancer. Think about something you strongly believe is true. Is a difference between “**I think this is good.**” And “**I believe in this enough to recommend it to someone else.**” **Explain:**

Discuss:

1. Why can it sometimes be easier to believe something privately than to say it publicly?
2. Why do people sometimes remain silent about things they genuinely believe?
3. What can make people afraid to identify themselves with a particular belief or cause?
4. Is it possible for someone to believe something but be unwilling to publicly acknowledge it?
5. Why might Jesus care whether His followers openly acknowledge Him?

Transition: Following Jesus has never been presented in the Bible as merely a private belief. Jesus asks: “**Who do you say I am?**” That question requires an answer. And eventually, faith in Jesus must become something we are willing to **acknowledge.**

1. JESUS WANTS US TO ACKNOWLEDGE WHO HE IS

Matthew 16:13–17

Jesus asks His disciples: “Who do people say the Son of Man is?”

They give several answers. Then Jesus makes the question personal:

“But what about you? Who do you say I am?” Peter answers: “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”

Questions

1. What answers had other people given about Jesus?
2. Why does Jesus move from “What do people say?” to “Who do you say?”
3. What exactly did Peter confess about Jesus?
4. What is significant about the words **Messiah** and **Son of the living God**?
5. Why is Jesus asking for more than an opinion?
6. How does this connect with our first study, “Who Is Jesus?”

Key Thought

Eventually Christianity becomes personal. It is not enough to know: **“People believe Jesus is the Son of God.”**

The question becomes: **“Do I believe Jesus is the Son of God?”**

And then: **“Am I willing to acknowledge Him as such?”**

2. CONFESSION BEGINS WITH BELIEF IN THE HEART

Romans 10:9–10

Paul writes: “If you declare with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”

Then: “For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.”

Questions

1. First, the rules of biblical interpretation: Who is speaking? Who is receiving the initial message? What is the setting of the message?
2. What two things does Paul put together in these verses?
3. What does a person believe?
4. What does a person confess?
5. Why do you think Paul connects the **heart** and the **mouth**?
6. What does the confession “Jesus is Lord” actually mean?
7. Is this merely saying the correct words?
8. How does this passage connect belief and confession?
9. How does it connect with what we learned about faith in Lesson 5?

Important Observation

Biblical confession is not a magic formula. The words have meaning because they express what is happening in the heart.

A person does not confess: **“Jesus is Lord”**

while continuing to think: **“I am lord of my own life.”**

To confess Jesus as Lord is to acknowledge His authority.

The Progression

Hear → Believe → Repent → Confess

The gospel begins to move from information we have heard to a life we are willing to surrender to Jesus.

3. WHAT DOES “JESUS IS LORD” MEAN?

Acts 2:36

After preaching about Jesus' death and resurrection, Peter concludes: “God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah.”

Questions

1. What two titles does Peter give Jesus?
2. Why is “Lord” significant?
3. What does it mean for Jesus to be Lord?
4. How would recognizing Jesus as Lord change the way a person views his or her life?
5. Can Jesus be Lord only on Sunday?
6. What is the difference between saying “Jesus is Lord” and living as though Jesus is Lord?

Illustration — THE STEERING WHEEL

Imagine riding in a vehicle. You may be sitting in the passenger seat while repeatedly saying: **“This is my car.”** But the person actually controlling the vehicle is the one holding the steering wheel. Calling Jesus **Lord** means more than giving Him a title.

It means recognizing His authority.

Connect Back to Lesson 4

We already studied Jesus' words: “If you love me, keep my commands.”

Confession and discipleship belong together. **My lips acknowledge Him.
My life follows Him.**

4. JESUS EXPECTS US TO ACKNOWLEDGE HIM PUBLICLY

Matthew 10:32–33

Jesus says: “Whoever acknowledges me before others, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before others, I will disown before my Father in heaven.”

Questions

1. What contrast does Jesus make?
2. What does it mean to “acknowledge” Jesus?
3. What does it mean to disown Him?
4. Why might someone who believes in Jesus still be reluctant to acknowledge Him?
5. What does this teach us about the importance of publicly identifying with Christ?
6. Is confession merely something that happens before baptism, or is it an ongoing part of Christian life?

Important Thought

Confession is bigger than one sentence spoken at one moment.

A person who confesses Jesus says: **“Jesus is the Christ.”**

But the Christian life continues to say: **“Jesus is my Lord.”**

5. FEAR CAN KEEP PEOPLE FROM CONFESSING JESUS

John 12:37–43

John describes people who had seen Jesus' signs and yet did not openly acknowledge Him. Verse 42 says that even among the leaders, many believed in Jesus.

But: “They would not openly acknowledge their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue.”

Questions

1. What is striking about verse 42?
2. What did these people apparently believe?
3. What kept them from openly acknowledging Jesus?
4. What did they value more—God's approval or human approval?
5. Why is fear of other people such a powerful influence?
6. What does verse 43 say about loving human praise?
7. Can someone believe something but still be unwilling to act upon that belief?
8. How does this passage reinforce what we studied in Lesson 5 about genuine faith?

KEY THOUGHT: One of the greatest enemies of confession is **fear**. Fear of:

- What friends will think.
- What family will think.
- What coworkers will think.
- What neighbors will think.
- What we may have to give up.
- What people may say.

But Jesus asks us to decide whose approval matters most.

6. THE BLIND MAN WHO WAS WILLING TO IDENTIFY WITH JESUS

John 9:35–38

Jesus finds the formerly blind man He had healed. Jesus asks: “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” The man asks who He is. Jesus tells him. The man responds: “Lord, I believe.” And he worships Jesus.

Questions

1. What had happened to this man earlier in the chapter?
2. What had the religious leaders done to him?
3. Why might it have been difficult for him to identify openly with Jesus?
4. What did Jesus ask him?
5. What did the man say?
6. What did he do after declaring his belief?
7. What does this teach us about the relationship between belief and action?

Notice the Movement

The man: **heard** → **learned** → **believed** → **acknowledged Jesus** → **worshiped Him**.
That is very similar to the progression we have been following throughout this study series.

7. CONFESSION IS CONNECTED WITH THE GOSPEL

1 Corinthians 15:1–4

Paul reminds the Corinthians of the gospel he preached:

- Christ died for our sins.
- He was buried.
- He was raised on the third day.

Questions

1. What is the gospel message?
2. Why is the resurrection essential to Christian faith?
3. How does this connect with Romans 10:9?
4. What exactly are we confessing when we confess Jesus?
5. Why can't biblical confession be separated from the gospel?

Key Thought: Christian confession is not simply: “**I believe in God.**”

It is centered on Jesus:

Jesus is the Christ.

Jesus is the Son of God.

Jesus died for our sins.

Jesus was raised from the dead.

Jesus is Lord.

8. THE ETHIOPIAN OFFICIAL — A FAITH THAT RESPONDS

Acts 8:26–39

The Ethiopian official is reading Isaiah. Philip begins with the passage he is reading and: “told him the good news about Jesus.” Eventually they come to water. The Ethiopian asks: “Look, here is water. What can stand in the way of my being baptized?” He is then baptized.

Questions

1. What was the Ethiopian doing when Philip encountered him?
2. What did Philip begin with?
3. Where did Philip take the conversation?
4. What did Philip tell him?
5. What did the Ethiopian eventually want to do?
6. What does his response tell us about his faith?
7. Why is baptism immediately connected with his response to the gospel?

Textual Note

Some Bibles include a confession in Acts 8:37: “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.” Other modern translations either omit the verse from the main text or place it in a footnote because it is absent from some of the earliest manuscripts. That textual question is worth acknowledging, but it does **not** change the larger teaching of Scripture about confessing Jesus. The Ethiopian clearly responds to the gospel about Jesus, seeks baptism, and becomes identified with Christ.

For our purposes, the important point is:

The gospel was heard. Jesus was taught. Faith responded. The person wanted to follow Christ.

9. CONFESSION IS NOT JUST SOMETHING WE SAY BEFORE BAPTISM

We sometimes think of confession as a single event: “**I believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God.**” That is certainly a beautiful and important confession. But Scripture presents confession as something much larger.

Romans 10:9–10 - Jesus is confessed as **Lord**.

Matthew 10:32–33 - Jesus calls His followers to acknowledge Him before others.

Matthew 16:15–16 - Peter identifies Jesus as the **Christ, the Son of the living God**.

1 Timothy 6:12–13 - Paul reminds Timothy of his confession before many witnesses.

Questions

1. What do these passages have in common?
2. Why is Christianity not intended to be hidden?
3. What does public identification with Jesus communicate?
4. How might confession continue after baptism?
5. What are some everyday opportunities to acknowledge Jesus?

Everyday Confession

We confess Jesus when we:

- Tell someone what we believe.
- Give Jesus credit for the hope we have.
- Refuse to be ashamed of Him.
- Make moral decisions because He is Lord.
- Speak about what Jesus has done for us.
- Stand for truth because we belong to Him.
- Live differently because we follow Him.

Our words confess Him.

Our choices confess Him.

Our priorities confess Him.

Our lives confess Him.

10. WHAT HAPPENS WHEN JESUS IS CONFESSED AS LORD?

Go back to our central question: **What does it mean to confess Jesus?**

It means I acknowledge: **Jesus is the Christ.**

He is the promised Messiah. **Jesus is the Son of God.**

He is not merely a teacher or prophet. **Jesus is Lord.**

He has authority over my life. **Jesus died and was raised.**

My faith rests upon the gospel. **Jesus deserves my allegiance.**

I am willing to identify myself with Him.

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS (for you to think about privately)

Take a few moments to think about these questions.

1. What does it mean to you personally to say, “Jesus is Lord”?
2. Is there a difference between believing Jesus is Lord and allowing Him to be Lord of your life?
3. Why do you think people sometimes hesitate to openly acknowledge Jesus?
4. Have you ever been reluctant to talk about your faith because of what someone else might think?
5. What does Romans 10:9–10 teach about the connection between belief and confession?
6. Why is confession more than simply saying certain words?
7. How can a Christian confess Jesus through everyday actions?
8. What does Matthew 10:32–33 teach about publicly identifying with Jesus?
9. If someone genuinely believes Jesus is the Son of God and Lord, what should that belief lead him or her to do?
10. Considering all of this - what question(s) stand out prominently in your heart and mind right now?

THE BIG PICTURE — OUR JOURNEY SO FAR

Let's review where we have come.

LESSON 1 - Who is Jesus?

Jesus is the Son of God, the Word made flesh, Lord over creation, and head of His church.

LESSON 2 - Why did Jesus come?

He came to seek and save the lost, to serve, to give His life, and to reconcile sinners to God.

LESSON 3 - Why do I need Jesus?

Because sin separates us from God and leaves us unable to save ourselves.

LESSON 4 - What does Jesus ask of me?

He calls me to deny myself, take up my cross, follow Him, love Him, and obey Him.

LESSON 5 - What does it mean to believe in Jesus?

Genuine faith trusts Jesus and responds to His Word.

LESSON 6 - What does it mean to repent?

Repentance means turning away from sin and turning toward God.

LESSON 7 - What does it mean to confess Jesus?

Confession means openly acknowledging Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, and Lord—and being willing to identify ourselves with Him.

THE PROGRESSION

Put these words together:

HEAR

↓

BELIEVE

↓

REPENT

↓

CONFESS

↓
?

There is one major response we have not yet studied.

BAPTISM.

The next question naturally becomes: **“If I believe in Jesus, have repented of my sins, and confess Him as Lord, what does the Bible teach me to do next?”**

That will be the subject of Lesson 8.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

Take a few moments to think about these questions.

11. What does it mean to you personally to say, “Jesus is Lord”?
 12. Is there a difference between believing Jesus is Lord and allowing Him to be Lord of your life?
 13. Why do you think people sometimes hesitate to openly acknowledge Jesus?
 14. Have you ever been reluctant to talk about your faith because of what someone else might think?
 15. What does Romans 10:9–10 teach about the connection between belief and confession?
 16. Why is confession more than simply saying certain words?
 17. How can a Christian confess Jesus through everyday actions?
 18. What does Matthew 10:32–33 teach about publicly identifying with Jesus?
 19. If someone genuinely believes Jesus is the Son of God and Lord, what should that belief lead him or her to do?
 20. What question do you think naturally comes next in our study?
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FINAL THOUGHT

Imagine standing before Jesus and hearing Him ask the same question He asked His disciples:

“Who do you say I am?”

Peter answered:

“You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”

That question eventually comes to every person.

Not: **What does your family believe?**

Not: **What does your church believe?**

Not: **What do most people believe?**

But: **Who do you say Jesus is?**

If Jesus really is the Son of God...

If He really died for our sins...

If He really rose from the dead...

If He really is Lord... then the most important thing we can do is not merely **believe that truth.**

We must **respond to it** And that response continues to unfold:

Hear.

Believe.

Repent.

Confess.

And next we will ask: What does Jesus say about baptism?

LESSON 7 AT A GLANCE

Title: What Does It Mean to Confess Jesus?

Big Question:

If I believe in Jesus and have turned from my sin, what does it mean to openly acknowledge Jesus as my Lord?

Key Text: Romans 10:9–10

Supporting Texts:

- Matthew 16:13–17
- Acts 2:36
- Matthew 10:32–33
- John 12:37–43
- John 9:35–38
- 1 Corinthians 15:1–4
- Acts 8:26–39
- 1 Timothy 6:12–13

Key Definition:

Confession is openly acknowledging Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, and Lord, and being willing to identify ourselves with Him.

The Journey

HEAR → BELIEVE → REPENT → CONFESS → BAPTISM → NEW LIFE