

## **Introduction**

I'd like to begin with a statement and a question. Over the years, many Christians told me about a sin they committed, **"Pastor, I believe God forgave me, but I still feel guilty."** That's the statement. Here's the question. Did they really believe that? No, they didn't. It was lip service and that's what I'm going to preach about today.

## **The Lip Service of non-Christians**

In Isaiah 29, God addressed the people of Judah. In verse 14, He pronounced judgment against them in strong terms. He declared that He would **"deal marvelously with this people, wondrously marvelously."** He meant that He would punish their nation by doing something to it that only He could do. According to the last two lines of the verse, it would be something so dramatic, so big, that their wisest and most competent leaders wouldn't know what to do about it.

Yes, God would judge them and verse 13, which is linked to verse 14 reveals why. It was because of their posture toward Him. They **"drew near"** with their words. They **"honored Him with their lips."** They professed that Yahweh was God, in other words, by worshipping Him at the temple. But at the same time, they **"removed their hearts far from Him."** That means they didn't actually believe what they professed – that Yahweh was God. On the contrary, they believed He wasn't.

The people of Judah have their counterparts today. I'm talking about people who speak as if Jesus is Lord but believe He isn't. What they profess about Him, they actually disbelieve.

Timothy Lambesis is a Grammy nominated Christian heavy metal rock star turned atheist. In an interview with *Alternative Press*, he made the discomfiting claim that only 1 in 10 of the Christian bands he toured with was actually Christian. That claim of his, if it's true, reveals a contemporary expression of the posture God described in verse 13. People profess that Jesus is Lord but believe that He isn't.

Now, notice the term God used in verse 13 to describe that posture toward Him, "**lip service.**" Lip service, as our text implies, is a discrepancy or inconsistency between profession on the one hand and belief on the other. Our text and the claim of Lambesis address the lip service of non-Christians. Some profess that Jesus is Lord but believe that He isn't.

### **The Lip Service of Christians**

Lip service though is a Christian phenomenon as well. Christians profess Jesus is Lord and believe that. There are discrepancies, however, between some of their other professions and beliefs. They verbalize things about Him and His gospel they either doubt or disbelieve.

They do so for any number of reasons. Recall what Lambesis claimed. Only 1 in 10 of the Christian bands he toured with was actually Christian. The other bands professed Jesus is Lord but believed He isn't. Lambesis also explained why they did. It was either to make a living off of Christian crowds or not to "**let our fans down**" to quote one band.

Non-Christians have their reasons for professing to believe what they don't and so do Christians. A member of a small group had professed for the 15 years of her Christian life that the Bible is God's inerrant word. But then she confessed to the group one night that she actually doubted that. She also explained why she had professed to believe what she doubted. She feared her Christian friends would disrespect and reject her if she didn't. She illustrates the primary reason Christians profess things about Jesus and His gospel that they doubt or disbelieve. It's to fit in to their social setting or group.

Now, if we're attentive enough, we can detect the discrepancies between what other Christians and we profess and believe. That's because belief is a matter of tendencies to feel and act. If I believe my car is low on fuel, for instance, I'll feel concerned and go out of my way, if I must, in order to get some. It's true. People usually feel and act as if what they firmly believe is so. We stack up what we profess to

believe, therefore, against what we feel and do. If what we feel and do is inconsistent with what we profess to believe, then we probably don't believe it. Our profession is lip service.

So, the Christians I mentioned before profess that God forgave them when they repented. But do they believe it? We examine what they feel to determine that. Profession – God forgave me. Feeling – guilt. Conclusion – They don't believe what they profess.

Or Christians profess that it's safe and best to do what Jesus says. But do they believe it? We examine what they do to determine that. I once counseled a Christian who had an ongoing feud with a petty and vindictive co-worker of hers. I told her what Jesus says, "**Overcome evil with good.**" I also told her it's safe and best to do what He says. "**I know,**" she agreed, "**But my co-worker will run all over me if I do.**" So, she didn't do what Jesus says. Profession – It's safe and best to do what Jesus says. Practice – she didn't do what Jesus says. Conclusion - She didn't believe what she professed.

Stop for a moment and think of the many things we profess about Jesus and His gospel. Question - do we really believe them? If we don't, it's lip service, which displeases Jesus. So let's believe what we profess, which pleases Him.

I remind you though of something I've said before. Belief is an indirect freedom. We can't just choose to believe and simultaneously believe. We have to do something else first. Doing that something else first then enables the Holy Spirit to create belief in us. He does His primary work, in other words – gives us the gift of belief – when we do our secondary work.

### **Know About Jesus**

But what is that secondary work of ours? Verses 9-12 tell us. The subject of these verses is God's revelation of Himself and His word to the people of Judah and their response. Notice the vivid metaphors in verses 9-10: "**blind,**" "**drunk,**" "**deep sleep,**" "**shut eyes,**" and "**covered**

**heads.”** Two similes in verses 11-12 reinforce the message of those metaphors. In verse 11, the people of Judah are like a literate person who can't read a book because it's sealed. In verse 12, they're like an illiterate person who can't read a book even though it's unsealed. The message of those metaphors and similes is simple and clear. God revealed Himself and His word to the people of Judah but they were oblivious to both. They chose not to know either Him or His word.

That reveals what our secondary work is. It's knowing. That's what we have to do to believe what we profess about Jesus and His gospel. We have to know. Knowledge is the basis of our beliefs about Him and it. It enables the Holy Spirit to create firm life directing belief in us.

For the past 150 years, philosophers, including Bertrand Russell, have made a vital distinction between two kinds of knowledge. Let's examine and learn both of those. They teach us in practical terms how to know Jesus and His gospel.

### **Knowledge by Description**

The first kind is “**knowledge by description.**” Simply put, this is knowledge *about* some person or thing, including Jesus and His gospel. We gather information about Him and it and think logically about that information. We collect as many facts as we can about Him and it and infer as much as we can about Him and it from those facts.

Take the resurrection of Jesus, for instance. Do you believe that He rose from the dead? If so, why do you believe that? I believe that and I believe it because of what I know. I've said before that there is more historical evidence for the resurrection of Jesus than there is for the murder of Julius Caesar by Brutus and other Roman Senators. I gathered that evidence and thought logically and well about it. I then validly concluded from doing so that Jesus isn't a dead historical figure. He's my contemporary instead. His presence and action are always with me where I am and in what I'm doing.

That illustrates what knowledge by description is and how we get it.

It also implies what it does. It gives us a foundation for the second kind of knowledge that belief requires.

### **Knowledge of Acquaintance**

That second kind is “**knowledge by acquaintance.**” Knowledge by description is indirect. We know *about* some person or thing. So, we know something *about* Jesus. He rose from the dead. But knowledge by acquaintance is direct. We know the person or thing itself. In this case, we know Jesus Himself. This is the knowledge of firsthand interaction. We constantly act upon Him and are constantly acted upon by Him. We act upon Him in a variety of practical ways, some of which we learn as we go in our relationship with Him. Let me give you a sampling of those.

#1 - We speak to Him about what we’re experiencing or doing at the moment. We verbalize to Him (through thoughts or words) what we’re thinking and feeling about it. So, we bite into a Gold Rush apple and tell Him how good it is. Or we get a bargain at Ollies and comment to Him what a great buy it is. Or we see a sexually suggestive commercial and remark to Him how sad we are about the condition of our culture. You get the idea. In everything we experience and do, we tell Jesus what we’re thinking or feeling about it as we would anyone who was with us.

#2 - We purposefully obey Him in all things big and small. Someone criticizes us, tongue lashes us, outshines us, or slights us. Our car breaks down at an inopportune time, our hard drive crashes, or the emergency room makes us wait an hour before treating us. Whatever it is, we immediately place our minds on casting our allegiance for Jesus, not against Him and act to do that. We purposefully obey Him.

#3 – We spend time alone with Him as a lover does his or her beloved. We practice solitude and silence, go to our prayer closets, practice lectio divina, privately worship Him, and more.

#4 – We perceive and interpret things primarily in terms of Him and His words. So, people oppose us and we relate it to Romans 8:31. If He is for us, who can be against us? Or we go to our jobs and relate them

to Colossians 3:23. He's our boss and we're doing our work primarily for Him. Or we look at the stars and relate it to Psalm 147:4. He knows everything there is to know about each and every one. Or Christian loved ones are diagnosed with terminal cancer and we relate it to Philippians 1:21. For them to die and be with Jesus is **"very much better."**

Those are just samplings. But they illustrate well what we do in order to know Jesus by acquaintance. We constantly act upon Him and His words. This is what I called two week ago, **"Jesus-focus."** Dallas Willard sums it up well in these terms. We focus our whole being on our constant companionship with Jesus in the **"here's"** and **"now's"** of day-to-day life. We invoke, expect, and receive His presence and action where we are and in what we're doing.

That's what He wants us to do, and the good news is that we can, no matter how average or ordinary we are. Being Jesus-focused doesn't require possessing any special talents or gifts or being in any special place. The Christian mystic Calixto Sinidad was in his earlier years a lonely and abused plowboy. Yet, he testified about that, **"My eyes on the furrow, and my hands on the lines, but my thoughts on God."** You and I can do the same. We can be Jesus-focused. We can constantly act upon Him and His words no matter whom or where we are.

## **Conclusion**

We have the knowledge of acquaintance when we do. We know Him, not just about Him, because we have firsthand interaction with Him. That knowledge of Him then becomes the basis of our beliefs. What we believe about Him and His gospel becomes rooted in what we know. Because we know, we firmly believe. And because we firmly believe we eagerly profess. At that point, our profession is one with our belief. It isn't lip service, which displeases Jesus. It's heart service, which delights Him. So, let's not give Him lip service. Let's give Him heart service instead. Let's believe what we profess by knowing.