

Main Idea: In John 12:42-50 we see a vivid example of what the fear of man does to faith in Jesus. We’re also going to hear Jesus tell us two things regarding private faith.

- I. Jesus confronts the problem of private faith (42-46).
  - A. Here’s what it looks like (42-43).
    1. A person with private faith is afraid of what they’ll lose.
    2. A person with private faith is more interested in man’s approval than God’s.
  - B. Here’s what is missing (44-46).
    1. Faith in Jesus cannot be separated from faith in God (44).
    2. Faith in Jesus results in a genuine relationship with God (45).
    3. Faith in Jesus produces visible life-change (46).
- II. Jesus counsels the person with private faith (47-50).
  - A. He needs to think about salvation (47).
  - B. He needs to think about the coming judgment (48).
  - C. He needs to think about the source of Jesus’ words (49-50).
    1. The Father commanded Jesus what to say.
    2. The Father commanded Jesus how to say it.

Make It Personal: Let’s ask ourselves some bottom-line questions...

1. What do I fear most?
2. What do I love most?
3. What do I really believe?

There are some realities that we must face this morning.

-In 2008, approximately 1.21 million unborn children were aborted in the U.S.

-In 2009, 85% of all abortions were performed on unmarried women (CDC).

-In 2009, 55.3% of abortions were performed on women who had not aborted in the past

-50% of U.S. women obtaining abortions are younger than 25

-Black women are more than 4.8 times more likely than non-Hispanic white women to have an abortion, and Hispanic women are 2.7 times as likely (AGI).

Should we talk about the moral issue of abortion in church? How about during our lunch break at school, or at work? Is this a subject that should be on the lips of Jesus’ followers?

You say, “Well, it is the Sanctity of Human Life Sunday, so I guess it’s okay, but...” But what? Let’s be honest. We feel a little uneasy these days talking in public about issues of morality.

Of course, the human authors of Scripture don’t hesitate. They certainly address the sanctity of life. We read in Psalm 139, “For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be (verses 13-16).”

And then, of course, they speak concerning other morality issues, too, like homosexuality, for instance. Paul writes a letter to the church in the capital city of Rome and refers to homosexuality as “against nature” and an evidence of “worshipping the creature rather than the Creator” (Rom 1:24-27).

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\*\*Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

In contrast, in our society we're told that morality issues are personal, and that while we can have our own opinions, we should never suggest that what others choose to do is wrong.

*Believe whatever you want to believe, just don't make it public. And by all means, don't try to persuade others with what you believe to be right.*

And so, you'll hear someone say, "Well, I believe in God, but I also believe a woman has a right to do what she considers best with her body." End of conversation.

Or, "I, too, believe in God. In fact, I have a *personal relationship with Jesus*. Which is what yours should be too, *personal*. That's why I believe a person has the right to express their sexuality in the manner they consider best for themselves, and anyone who says otherwise is judgmental and bigoted." End of conversation.

So we could talk about the issues this morning (abortion, morality, sexuality), which we've done before. Today, however, we're going to talk about the issue behind the issues.

Is it true that faith is a private matter, that it's governed by nothing more than a person's own inner convictions, and that it should not be questioned by others? Is it also true that people of faith should keep their views on morality to themselves?

That's the issue behind the issues. And that's the issue that Jesus addresses at the end of John 12. To put it bluntly, if you answer those questions *yes*, you'll have trouble with what Jesus says at the end of John 12.

As we look at John 12:42-50 this morning, we're going to hear Jesus tell us two things regarding what I'm calling "private faith."

We've been walking together through the Gospel of John for some time now. We've seen what the people in first century Israel saw. We've seen Him turn water into wine, a sack lunch into a meal for 5,000 men, give sight to a man born blind, and even raise from the dead a man who'd been in his tomb four days. We've also heard His invitations. "I have come that you may have life and have it to the full (10:11)." "He who believes in me will live even though he dies (11:25)." And His last invitation in 12:36, "Put your trust in the light while you have it, so that you may become sons of light."

And how did people respond? Verse 37 says, "Even after Jesus had done all these miraculous signs in their presence, they still would not believe in him." Flat out *unbelief*. That's how the nation of Israel as a whole responded to Jesus.

But not everyone just flat out rejected Him. We're going to see in a moment that some believed in Him...sort of, with a very private faith. Let's take a look at what Jesus said to them.

### I. Jesus confronts the problem of private faith (42-46).

**A. Here's what it looks like (42-43).** Notice verses 42-43, "Yet at the same time many even among the leaders believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they would not confess their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved praise from men more than praise from God."

Let's break it apart. *At the same time*. As what? The same time that the crowd in verse 37 some refused to believe in Jesus. Not everybody concluded that Jesus was a fraud. *Many*, says John here, *believed in Him*. They heard His messages and saw His miracles and concluded that He indeed is the Messiah.

*Even among the leaders* there was this response. Nicodemus, a member of the ruling Jewish council, is a good example (3:1; 7:50, Joseph of Arimathea another, the two men who buried Jesus. Concerning the latter John 19:38 says, “Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jews.”

This raises an important question. What would cause a person to believe in Jesus, but remain silent about it? In other words, what drives private faith? Two things.

1. *A person with private faith is afraid of what they'll lose.* John says, “But because of the Pharisees they would not confess their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue.” They had a faith of sorts, but they wouldn't *confess* it. They wouldn't *speak the same*, which is what confess means. They tell themselves and perhaps a few close friends what they've concluded about Jesus, but they won't say the same thing to the general public.

Why not? *For fear*, says John. Fear of what? Fear of what the religious leaders called the Pharisees might do, namely excommunicate them from the synagogue.

It's not like America today. So you can't go back to one religious assembly? No problem. You just go to another. You didn't do that in Israel. Your local synagogue was the hub of community life. It's where you worshipped the Lord. It's also where you socialized with your friends and educated your kids. To be cut off from your synagogue meant you were going to lose some things, relationships, status, reputation... And heritage too, for this is where your parents worshipped, and your grandparents, and great-grandparents, for who knows how many generations.

Those things are important to all of us, but they drive a person with private faith. He's afraid of what he will lose if his private faith becomes public.

And of course, the more you *have*, the more you *might lose*. Think about Nicodemus and Joseph. They had a lot to lose. They were rulers.

Listen to John Calvin's observation, “We must also notice, that rulers have less courage and constancy, because ambition almost always reigns in them, and there is nothing more servile than that. To put it in a word, earthly honours may be called golden shackles binding a man so that he cannot freely do his duty.”<sup>1</sup>

That's it. For the person with private faith, the things we have are like *golden shackles*. There's another factor that's involved.

2. *A person with private faith is more interested in man's approval than God's.* “...for they loved praise from men more than praise from God.” The word “praise” is the same Greek word translated “glory” (*doxa*) that we've been seeing throughout John's gospel and particularly here in chapter 12 (verses 23, 28, 41). The ESV says, “For they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God.”

Life is about glory, and whose glory we're living for. Leon Morris remarks, “To love the glory of men above the glory of God is the supreme disaster.”<sup>2</sup>

Do you agree with that? If yours is a private faith, you won't. *The supreme disaster? Ah, that's an exaggeration. There are worse things than esteeming the glory of men above the glory of God, aren't there?*

No, there is nothing more disastrous than putting anything above the glory of God, and a person with genuine, saving faith affirms that. Which is why, Peter, after denying Christ before men wept bitterly and repented.

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<sup>1</sup> John Calvin, quote taken from Leon Morris, p. 606.

<sup>2</sup> Leon Morris, p. 606.

Faith in God, if it's real, means you have a gravitational center in your life, and it's not you, nor other people, but God Himself. Jesus asked this pertinent question back in John 5:44, "How can you believe if you accept praise from one another, yet make no effort to obtain the praise that comes from the only God?"

The truth is, it's so easy to be intimidated by what people think and say to us. According to Proverbs 29:25, "The fear of man will prove to be a snare." I've entitled this message, "What the Fear of Man Does to Faith in Jesus." What does it do? It exposes. It helps us see the true nature of our faith.

We've just seen a vivid example of what the fear of man did to some people who had a faith of sorts in Jesus. They *believed* in Him. But what? They didn't *confess* Him.

Did they have saving faith? What does Romans 10:9 say? "That if you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." Saving faith is evidenced by belief in one's heart and a confession with one's mouth that Jesus is the Lord.

Friends, if our primary concern is what we might lose in this world, and if man's approval means more to us than God's, then we need to pay very careful attention to what Jesus said next. He said something's missing.

**B. Here's what is missing (44-46).** Verse 44 begins, "Then Jesus cried out." That's interesting. Cried out to whom? According to verse 36, Jesus left the crowd on Palm Sunday and went into hiding. Now in verse 44 He speaks again, but John doesn't identify the particular audience.

So who heard these words? John doesn't specify, probably because Jesus confronted so many audiences that responded with either no faith or deficient, private faith. So here's a fitting, final message to them all.

Remember how the book began in John 1:10-11, "He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him."

That's what we're seeing here. John shows us Jesus wrapping up His public ministry at the end of chapter 12 with one final invitation. Leon Morris observes, "John finishes off his account of the public ministry of Jesus with one last appeal to men to believe...But his last word is not one of condemnation. It is one of tender appeal."<sup>3</sup>

We're going to see that in His final public message, Jesus repeats several key themes He's emphasized throughout His ministry, like faith, His identity as One sent by the Father, light and darkness, eternal life, and the coming judgment.<sup>4</sup>

Here's what He said in verses 44-46, "Then Jesus cried out, 'When a man believes in me, he does not believe in me only, but in the one who sent me. When he looks at me, he sees the one who sent me. I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness.'"

We learn three things here about faith in Jesus, real, *saving* faith.

1. *Faith in Jesus cannot be separated from faith in God (44).* "When a man believes in me," says Jesus, "he does not believe in me only, but in the one who sent me." Faith in Jesus and faith in God are inseparable. If there is one, there will be the other. As

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<sup>3</sup> Leon Morris, p. 607. Likewise, MacArthur points out, "John included them here [referring to Jesus' words in verses 44-50] to summarize Christ's public ministry to Israel, which had ended." MacArthur, p. 55.

<sup>4</sup> Observation by Leon Morris, p. 607.

Morris notes, “The man who puts his trust in Christ puts his trust not simply in the Man of Galilee but in God the Father.”<sup>5</sup>

Think of the implications. Is Jesus just one option on the shelf? Are there many legitimate roads that lead to the same God? Not according to Jesus. He said that if you believe in Him, then you’re also believing in the One who sent Him, the Almighty God, His Father. And you’re also believing in the Father’s assessment of Him. He sent His Son, Jesus the Messiah. That means that according to the Father, Jesus is the only one who can save you and me.

2. *Faith in Jesus results in a genuine relationship with God (45)*. “When he [the person who believes in me] looks at me, he sees the one who sent me.” You’re seeing Me, says Jesus to the people. But if you really see Me, then you’re also seeing the One who sent Me, which again is God the Father. I take “see” to mean “to perceive, to come to know.” It implies a relationship. If you believe in Jesus, that’s what you have with God. He’s no longer an unknown quantity to you, far off and distant. Having *seen* His Son, you know *see* Him.

3. *Faith in Jesus produces visible life-change (46)*. “I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness.” What does light do? It exposes what’s in the dark. It makes darkness go away. What does Jesus do? As the light of the world, He exposes sin and makes it go away.

That’s why He went to the cross. By His death, He makes our sin go away. It therefore follows that if we believe in Him, something is going to happen to our sin. It’s going to leave, positionally and practically.

There will be visible life-change. A person who truly believes in Jesus will not stay in the darkness. He will want what His Savior wants, and in fact, what His Savior died and conquered death to accomplish. He will want to leave his life in the darkness and from this point forward to walk in the light. To put it another way, to see his sin removed and replaced by righteousness.

To put it simply, there is no such thing as private faith. It’s a misnomer, a contradiction in terms. If a person really believes in Jesus, that person is going to shine forth the evidence of Jesus in his life for all to see.

Let me give you an example. Back in the 1930s, the Nazis put great pressure on the churches in Germany to affirm a very unbiblical view of man that says the German race is superior and that other races are sub-human and therefore expendable. So pastors and churches and followers of Jesus had a choice to make. They could keep quiet and have their little private faith inside the four walls of their church buildings, and if they did that, society would applaud them. Or they could really believe in Jesus and let everyone see they really believed, no matter what the cost. Most did the former. But a few believed what the Savior said.

One was Pastor Paul Schneider. In 1934 he was pastoring a 1,000 member church in Hochelheim, a church his father had pastored until he died of a stroke. Pastor Schneider preached a message called “Christ Crossing the Stormy Lake and Jesus’ Glory,” and made statements like these:

“I am certain no thinking and alert Christian has failed to notice that we in the Evangelical Church are being challenged to struggle and to witness and to confess our faith...”

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<sup>5</sup> Leon Morris, p. 607.

“The little boat of the church is traveling on stormy seas...”

“There no longer is a fence between saints and pagans...”

“We have tolerated the teachings of Balak, of liberalism that praises the goodness and freedom of men and women while minimizing the honor of God and letting the seriousness of eternity fade away into a misty haze...”

“We are auctioning away the forgiveness of sins, this most precious good of Christ’s church, like mass-produced pieces of junk that anyone can buy for a penny...”

“You must believe, trust, and abandon yourself to the miraculous power of the Lord in whom you believe. But perhaps you do not believe? Then never say that you are a Christian, for then you are only a Christian in name or in your head or maybe a hypocritical Christian...”

“I would rather die for my faith than live a cowardly and cultured life with the rest of the world.”

Which Pastor Schneider did. Schneider preached this sermon and others to pit the Christian worldview against the Nazi worldview, and to alert his congregation to the great danger of calling yourself a believer in Christ but not living in submission to Christ’s Word. Less than a month after he preached this, however, the Nazis and their supporters who were sitting in the church pews terminated his position. Three years later he was sent to Buchenwald concentration camp. Five years later he became the first Protestant martyr at the hands of the Nazis.

Interestingly, other prisoners referred to Schneider’s cell as a cell with “paper walls” because all he had to do to go home to his wife and six children was sign a paper saying he would not go back to his church and preach again. This he could not do. This his *faith* would not allow.

Jesus confronts the problem of private faith. But that’s not all. Next...

## II. Jesus counsels the person with private faith (47-50).

I love this about Jesus. He’s not so many today. Yes, He confronts, but He also counsels. That is, He doesn’t just expose the problem, but lovingly shows the solution. What does the person with private faith need? Jesus says he needs to give attention to three subjects.

**A. He needs to think about salvation (47).** “As for the person who hears my words but does not keep them.” Stop there. There’s a good description of the person with private faith. He hears Jesus’ words, is impressed with what he hears, and convinces himself that because he’s impressed, he truly believes in Jesus. The problem is, for reasons Jesus addressed, the person doesn’t *keep* the words he’s *heard*.

What does Jesus say to this person? He says, “I do not judge him. For I did not come to judge the world, but to save it.”

That’s interesting. *I do not judge him*. It sure sounds like Jesus is making a judgment in John 12 about this person with private faith. Why does He say, “I don’t judge him”?

I like the footnote in the *NIV Study Bible*: “It is not the purpose of the sun’s shining to cast shadows, but when the sun shines, shadows are inevitable.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> The *NIV Study Bible*, p. 1619.

When Jesus the Christ came to earth the first time, He did not come to judge and condemn, but to provide salvation. But in providing salvation, He also exposed the condition of those who need that salvation.

And so concerning the person with private faith, Jesus says, "I do not judge him." We might insert the word *now*, as in, "I do not judge him *now*."

Jesus, of course, is the Ultimate Judge, and all authority has been given to Him in heaven and on earth (Matt 28:18). The Bible says that in the final day, He will take His rightful seat on the judgment throne and He will judge (see John 5:22, 27, 30; 8:16, 26; 9:39).

However, in a very real sense men judge themselves by what they do with God and the revelation He gives them. Because men reject God's general revelation in creation, they are without excuse, says Romans 1:20, and therefore condemn themselves. And if men reject God's special revelation in the person of His Son, Jesus the Christ, they again condemn themselves. Jesus said in John 3:18, "Whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son."

So what's the Master's counsel to the person with private faith? He needs to give serious attention to why Jesus came to earth. And why is that? *I did not come to judge the world, but to save it.*

You see, the reason a person keeps his faith private is because he doesn't see himself as a saved person. Think about it. If you were helplessly lost in a burning house, and a fireman battled the inferno to save you, and succeeded, though it cost him his own life, would you keep that news quiet and to yourself?

Unthinkable. Saved people don't keep the story of their salvation to themselves. They think about it all the time, and share it with others. Their life is defined by it.

So what does Jesus say to the person who's in the grip of the fear of man? What does he need to do? He needs to give serious attention to the subject of salvation.

Let me ask something. Do you see yourself as a person who, because of your sin, desperately needs a Savior? If so, do you realize that's why Jesus came, to do something for you that you cannot do, nor can anyone else do for you. He came to save you from your sin and the divine wrath it elicits.

You say, "Okay, I admit I need a Savior, but I'm still struggling with what people might think of me." Okay, then think about this. Based on the counsel Jesus gave, a person with private faith needs to give serious attention a second subject.

**B. He needs to think about the coming judgment (48).** "There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; that very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day."

Let those words sink in. What does Jesus say is going to happen to the person who rejects Him and refuses to accept His words? At the final judgment, that person is going to be condemned. On the basis of what? Jesus says, "That very word I spoke will condemn him."

Warren Wiersbe ponders this sobering reality, "It is an awesome thought that the unbeliever will face at the judgment every bit of Scripture he has ever read or heard. The very Word that he rejects becomes his judge! Why? Because the written Word points to the Living Word, Jesus Christ (John 1:14)."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Warren Wiersbe, p. 343.

My unsaved friend, every time you hear Jesus' gracious offer and reject it, you're storing up evidence that will speak against you on judgment day. Please think about that this morning. If the fear of man is keeping you from repenting and confessing Christ publicly, then think about salvation and your need for it. And think about the coming judgment and how your rejection of Jesus' word today will condemn you then. But there's one more subject, according to Jesus.

**C. He (the person with private faith) needs to think about the source of Jesus' words (49-50).** "For I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it. I know that his command leads to eternal life. So whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say."

This is critical. So often you'll hear people say things like, "Well, how can I be sure? Sure, Jesus claimed to offer eternal life. But Mohammed made claims, too. So did a host of other religion founders. What makes Jesus' claims any different?"

Simply put, this does.

1. *The Father commanded Jesus what to say.* But not just *what* to say.

2. *The Father commanded Jesus how to say it.* That's what Jesus said. First, "I did not speak of my own accord." Even though Jesus is the Son of God, He didn't freewheel. He didn't invent His message. He spoke under orders. He says in verse 49 that God the Father told Him precisely what to say and how to say it. And then He repeats that point in verse 50, concluding, "Whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say."

The implication? If you reject *Jesus'* words, you're going to have to take it up with God Almighty Himself, for these are His words. So before you do that, before you write off Jesus, consider the source.

You say, "But I'm such a great sinner! Can God save me?"

Oh, my friend, look carefully at what Jesus said in verse 50. "I know that his command leads to eternal life." The NASB says, "His commandment *is* eternal life."

Think about that. When you hear the word *commandment*, don't think of something negative. Think of certainty. Jesus says that His Father's commandment *is eternal life*.

What's that mean? It means that God didn't send His Son into the world merely to make eternal life a possibility, but to make it a reality. If you have Jesus, you don't have the potential for eternal life. You have eternal life, and it/He will be yours forever.

It's not a question of whether you've been too bad in the past or can be good enough in the future. Eternal life is God's commandment. It's something God commanded His Son to provide for His people. So if you know Him, you have it, and you'll have it forever.

Leon Morris explains, "The Father's commandment...does not simply speak of life eternal...The commandment *is* life eternal. It is God's great love acting upon us, and acting upon us for our salvation."<sup>8</sup>

And so, as we come to the end of John 12, we see Jesus extending yet another offer, in fact, His final offer to Israel before He's nailed to a cross. While it contains a sober warning to those with a mere private faith, His words also extend such hope.

He says that if a person believes in Him, He also believes in and enters into an amazing relationship with His Father (44). He says if we see Him as He is, we will also see His Father, for indeed, He makes us fit to see His Father, which no man can do on his

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<sup>8</sup> Leon Morris, p. 609.



own and live (45). He says if we believe in Him, He will bring us out of the darkness and into the light (46). He says He came to save the world (47), which means, if we take His words to heart, He will save us. That means that the word that will condemn others at the day of judgment will *not* condemn us (48). And He makes it clear yet again in verse 50 that the Father's command leads to eternal life, which means that whoever believes in Him shall enjoy life forever with Him.

This is His offer. To those who to this point had lacked faith, or exhibited private faith, Jesus sums up what's needed. *Believe in Me. Believe in the One who sent Me, and this will be yours.*

So there's the issue behind the issues. Can we keep our faith to ourselves? Can we say we believe in Jesus, but keep it private? Can we fail to make known the words and will of the One who saved us? No.

We must make His word known to the world, even though it's unpopular and will bring ridicule. We must call sin what He calls it, not a matter of personal freedom, but *sin*, sin that enslaves, and sin that results in eternal condemnation. And to those who are condemned, as we once were and still would be apart from His grace, we must proclaim our Savior's invitation. *Believe in Me and be saved!*

Peter said it well in John 6:68, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life."

Make It Personal: Let's ask ourselves some bottom-line questions...

1. *What do I fear most?* Friends, fear is a powerful thing. It can keep us from making our faith in Jesus public through believer's baptism, as He commands. It can keep us from joining a local church, as the Bible instructs. And from witnessing, and taking a stand for righteousness' sake, and more. Fear. What do you fear most? People at work? Your parents? Your classmates? Or do you fear the One who truly deserves our reverence and fear, the Lord Almighty?

2. *What do I love most?* We just met some people in today's text who loved praise from men more than praise from God. What do you love most? A girlfriend or boyfriend? A boss you're trying to please. Your kids. Or the One who deserves our love, the One who so loved us that He gave His life for us?

3. *What do I really believe?* Not in pretense, not with lip-service, but for real. Do you really believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Lord of all?