

**Commentary Resource**  
**Matthew 10:26-33**  
**The New American Commentary**  
**Craig L. Blomberg**

*The Proper Reaction to Hostility: Fear God, Not People (10:26–31)*

<sup>26</sup> “So do not be afraid of them. There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. <sup>27</sup> What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roofs.

<sup>28</sup> Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

<sup>29</sup> Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. <sup>30</sup> And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. <sup>31</sup> So don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.

**10:26a** Verses 17–25 did not paint a pleasant picture. If Christians had to look forward only to a life of suffering and persecution, they might well despair or, more likely, abandon all Christian commitment (and rightly so—see 1 Cor 15:19). But the future holds much more for the believer. Judgment Day is coming when God will eternally compensate his people for their suffering and punish their enemies forever. Then the injustices of this world will disappear before the grandeur and glory of life in God’s presence (Rom 8:18). So Jesus can confidently encourage his followers, “Do not be afraid.” Matthew punctuates vv. 26–31 with this encouragement, repeating it again for emphasis in the middle (v. 28).

**10:26b–27** Jesus describes the coming judgment as a time for disclosing all the secrets of individuals’ lives. The sins people think they have committed with impunity (v. 26) will be revealed (cf. Luke 12:3). Indeed, the disciples will help out (v. 27) as they judge all unbelievers (1 Cor 6:2). Either or both of vv. 26–27 may also refer to the universal public declaration of the gospel, which will have previously received only a partial hearing.<sup>30</sup>

**10:28** Physical death thus pales in comparison with the prospect of eternal punishment. “Body” and “soul” point to a fundamental dualism in human beings.<sup>31</sup> In this life, of course, body and soul are closely united, and God will eventually reunite them in the resurrection body. But Scripture consistently teaches that the two are separated at death (see Luke 23:43; 2 Cor 5:1–10; Phil 1:23–24). “Kill,” like “destroy,” does not imply annihilation but eternal suffering, as the qualification “in hell” makes clear (on which, see comments under 5:27–30). The NIV rightly capitalizes “One” as referring to God and not the devil (cf. Jas 4:12).<sup>32</sup>

**10:29–31** To reassure the disciples of God’s fatherly love, Jesus contrasts their great worth with the comparatively insignificant value of sparrows, a cheap marketplace item sold for 1/32 of the minimum daily wage (“penny” is literally an *assarion*, which equaled 1/16 of a denarius).

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<sup>30</sup> J. Broadus, *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, AC (Valley Forge: American Baptist Publication Society, 1886), 229.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. J. W. Cooper, *Body, Soul, and Life Everlasting* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), against the prevailing fashion that speaks of humans as indissoluble wholes. The “trichotomist” view, which separates a person into body, soul, and spirit, misses the fact that in Scripture “soul” and “spirit” are largely synonymous.

<sup>32</sup> On this verse in general, see I. H. Marshall, “Uncomfortable Words: VI. ‘Fear Him Who Can Destroy Both Soul and Body in Hell’ (Mt 10:28 RSV),” *ExpTim* 81 (1969–70): 276–80.

So, too, God knows the very number of our hairs. If he is aware and in control of such minor details, “how much more” will he not care for his own people and vindicate them despite their present suffering? “The will of” in v. 29 does not appear in the Greek but is probably a correct interpolation,<sup>33</sup> although the parallelism with v. 30 could suggest the translation *apart from the knowledge of your Father*.<sup>34</sup> A clear perspective of a person’s finitude, of God’s coming justice, and of the expanse of eternity should encourage believers in the worst of circumstances and should instill terror in anyone who fails to take into account God’s future plans for the universe.

### *Only Two Options (10:32–42)*

When we understand how the world will end, the only question that ultimately matters is whose side we are on come Judgment Day. Jesus contrasts the two alternatives in three ways: Are we genuinely serving Christ as Lord (vv. 32–33)? Do we love God more than the closest of human friends and relatives (vv. 34–39)? Have we given those who are God’s true spokespersons an appropriate welcome (vv. 40–42)? As at the end of the Sermon on the Mount (7:24, 26), Jesus closes this discourse by no longer addressing just the disciples but “whoever” (vv. 32–33, 39) and “anyone” (vv. 37–38, 41–42). Jesus the healer and teacher is now the judge of all humanity.<sup>35</sup>

#### *(a) Acknowledging Jesus (10:32–33)*

**32 “Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. 33 But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven.**

**10:32** “Acknowledge” (*homologeō*) carries the sense of *confess* or *trust in*, i.e., to declare one’s allegiance to Christ. In the context of persecution (recall vv. 17–25), such acknowledgment means remaining faithful to Jesus even if one must die for him. This kind of commitment is not likely to be faked. For all who so acknowledge him, Christ will in turn acknowledge them before God (note the earth-heaven contrast as in 6:1–18) so that they may receive eternal life (cf. Rev 3:5). Noteworthy in both v. 32 and v. 33 is Jesus’ speaking of God as “my Father in heaven.” Most often it has been “your father” (5:16, 45, 48; 6:1, 4, 6, 8, 14–15, 18, 26, 32; 7:11; 10:20, 29) or “our Father” (6:9). Only here and in 7:21 does he use “my Father.” Note in both 7:21 and 10:32–33 the focus is on final judgment.

**10:33** “Disown” (*arneomai*) can also mean *deny* or *reject*. The word does not necessarily imply some previous kind of profession, though, as in 7:22–23, some may cry out, “Lord, Lord.” Such a person, Jesus proclaims, “has never belonged to Him.”<sup>36</sup> In close parallelism with v. 32, v. 33 maintains that God will deny or reject those people who reject Jesus and that he will exclude them from eternal life. Striking and profound Christology emerges here, as often not found in the Gospels except in John. One who can make such claims must be none other than the one who

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<sup>33</sup> B. Newman and P. Stine, *A Translator’s Handbook on the Gospel of Matthew* (New York: UBS, 1988), 317. T. Hirunuma (“ἀνευ τοῦ πατρὸς: ‘Without [of] the Father,’ ” *FNT* 3 [1990]: 53–62) argues that this meaning can be derived simply from the genitive without inferring an ellipsis.

<sup>34</sup> D. C. Allison, Jr., “Matthew 10:26–31 and the Problem of Evil,” *SVTQ* 32 (1988): 293–308; *idem*, “The Hairs of Your Head Are All Numbered,” *ExpTim* 101 (1990): 334–36. For a good survey and discussion of these and other options, see J. G. Cook, “The Sparrow’s Fall in Mt. 10:29b,” *ZNW* 79 (1988): 138–44.

<sup>35</sup> D. Patte, *The Gospel according to Matthew: A Structural Commentary* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 153–54.

<sup>36</sup> Ridderbos, *Matthew*, 208.

declares: “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). Nor does Jesus countenance any middle ground. Christians understandably ask questions about the fate of those who have not consciously accepted or rejected Jesus or who have not even had a chance to hear the gospel. There seems to be scriptural warrant both for excluding all who do not explicitly confess Christ and for accepting all who do not explicitly refuse him (cf., e.g., Matt 12:30 with Mark 9:40), but here such questions remain unaddressed.<sup>371</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> The former, however, seems better supported, and both views, of course, are to be distinguished from the popular modern heresy of universalism—the view that all people will one day be saved. It is also worth noting with F. Stagg (“Matthew,” in *The Broadman Bible Commentary*, vol. 8, ed. C. J. Allen [Nashville: Broadman, 1969], 138) that “presumably there is a distinction between willful denial and human weakness which is not equal to the demands of a crisis situation,” esp. in light of Peter’s later experience.

<sup>1</sup> Craig Blomberg, *Matthew*, vol. 22, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 177–179.