

JESUS MUST BE NUMBER ONE

Jesus said, "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me" (Mt.10:37). The first and great commandment is to "love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind" (Matt. 22:36-38). The Pharisees were fanatical at nitpicking the finer points of the law but overlooked "the love of God" (Lk. 11:42). Jesus said to those Jews not willing to come to Him, "you do not have the love of God in you" (Jn. 5:40-42). And again, He said, "If God were your Father, you would love Me" (Jn. 8:42). In John 14:23 Jesus said, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him."

Many want to claim that all things work together for good, but it actually only applies "to those who love God" (Rom. 8:28). By His Spirit God has revealed His truth which He "has prepared for those who love Him" (1 Cor. 2:9-10). Paul plainly said, "if anyone loves God, this one is known by Him" (1 Cor. 8:3). In 1 Corinthians 16:22 he said, "If anyone does not love the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed." Paul signed off the book of Ephesians with, "Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity" (Eph. 6:24). In James 1:12 the crown of life is promised "to those who love Him." In James 2:5 the kingdom is promised "to those who love Him". Peter says of Jesus, "whom having not seen you love" (1 Pet. 1:8; also see, 1 Jn. 2:15-17; cf. Neh. 1:5; Ps. 145:18-20; Dan. 9:4).

To true believers, Jesus is PRECIOUS!

There is some debate on how to understand the phrase in 1 Peter 2:7 "to you who believe, He is precious". However, the reading of the KJV/NIV at this point certainly rings true with the gospel according to Jesus.

Saving faith can be defined in various ways. To believe in Christ in a saving way according to the New Testament is to accept the TRUTH of Christ for ones' self. It must be PERSONAL. It involves appropriating the truth of WHO Christ is (Lord) and WHAT Christ has done in His work of propitiation (Savior). The theme of the gospel of belief (John) is the Deity/Lordship of Christ. The climax of the book is Thomas' confession of faith "My Lord and my God!" to which Jesus responds "Thomas, because you have seen me you have believed." (Jn. 20:27-29) To recognize Jesus as "My Lord and my God" is to believe. Of course, we must also believe in His all-sufficient payment for sin (cf. Jn. 1:29, Heb. 10). Lord and Lamb is an indissoluble unit of truth! (cf. Rev. 19)

For years, the debate has raged about whether saving faith must personally recognize Jesus as Lord and if so, exactly what that means.

Working from the premise that we must believe on Christ as Lord, we realize that this is not a work conjured up within ourselves. No one can say that Jesus is Lord but by the Holy Spirit (cf. 1 Cor. 12:3). This is a work of God's grace experienced by all true believers (cf. 1 Cor. 1:2).

So what does it mean to say Jesus is my Lord? Well, Jesus made this very clear in two critical passages (Mt. 10:32-39, and Mk. 10:17-22). In both contexts the issue is relationship with Christ and having eternal life.

Simply put, Jesus in these two passages shows that a saving faith embraces Him as more valuable than any one (cf. Matt. 10:34-37) and more important than any other thing (cf. Mk. 10:17-22). This is what it means to truly LOVE Jesus.

Saving faith sees Jesus as most important, most valuable, and most precious. Down deep in the heart of every believer this is a reality. It is the ultimate test of who is real and who is not. Jesus did not give us a legalistic list. He made the issue RELATIONAL! Of course, there are issues of immaturity and consistency. But the expectation for new believers is that they experience a FIRST LOVE that is intense (cf. Rev. 2:4). All believers battle the flesh – but that is the point: We battle! As Paul so passionately put it “what I hate, that I do.” (Rom. 7:15) So the point is we love Jesus, and we hate it when we fail Him. To a person, this is characteristically true for every genuine believer who has a new nature and the Holy Spirit living within (cf. 1 Jn. 3:9-10).

In Matthew 10, Jesus radically says He did not come to bring peace but a sword (cf. 10:34). He goes on to explain that He is talking about division over Him. Even households will be seriously divided to the point of enmity. Some will accept Christ, and some won't (cf. 10:35-36). **That is the essential issue!**

And Christ goes on to show that anyone who loves family more than Him is not worthy of Him (cf. 10:37). Christ clearly makes HIMSELF the issue and that He must be embraced as MOST IMPORTANT. Allegiance to Him must be supreme!

In Mark 10, the issue with the rich young ruler is ETERNAL LIFE. This emphasis of “eternal life” brackets this whole related section (cf. Mk. 10:17, 30). Three times in the context, Christ makes the issue, entrance into the

kingdom (cf. v. 23, 24, 25). The rich young ruler came as a religionist and yet felt something was lacking. He wanted to know what else He had to do.

Jesus in effect told him to jettison his possessions “god” and follow Him as God. He in effect told the young man to SELL OUT for Him. This became the test: Would he embrace Jesus as most valuable or cling to his earthly goods? What would be his Lord? **That was the essential issue.**

God is no respecter of persons – there is no partiality with Him (Acts 10:34). There was not one standard for the rich young ruler and another for others. No, the nature of saving faith is consistent across the board related to all people of all ages (cf. Heb. 11). A true saving faith embraces Jesus for WHO He is as Lord and Savior. It embraces Him as most important. Indeed, He is precious to those who truly believe. The rest are just pretenders.

1 Corinthians 16:22 (NKJV)

22 If anyone does not love the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed. O Lord, come!

“You will also have to change your mind about the Lord Jesus Christ. He is nothing to you now; but He will have to be everything to you if you are to be saved by Him”. – **Charles Haddon Spurgeon**