

“Do you love Me more than these?”

Dear Friends in Christ Jesus our Lord,

Isn't the title of this Teaching Email an apt and poignant question for our Lord Jesus to ask any of us? Certainly most Christians would promptly answer with a knee jerk response, “Of course I do!” Yet our Lord presents us a reference point by which we can evaluate just how much we love Him compared to loving others who are close to us:

“Anyone who loves their father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me” (Matthew 10:37).

Now, with these people who are precious to you serving as your point of reference for your love, how would you answer Jesus, “*Do you love Me more than these?*” What's key evidence among those who claim to be Christians that Jesus is NOT the center of their love? **They resist or shy away from using His Name in conversations with unbelievers and even with other Christians.** Most substitute the Name of Jesus with the more subtle and acceptable generic, “God.” There are several reasons for this, but first reflect on this question: Do I *deny Jesus* by omitting His Name in my conversations with anyone, unbeliever or believer?

Why is using the Name of Jesus with loving honor and appreciative respect such a hard thing for so many Christians to do?

👎 First, there's just plain **lukewarmness** in the hearts of many Christians. If you think that being lukewarm makes you “just right” — neither too hot like a fanatic or too cold like an unbeliever, take to heart our Lord's warning: “*So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I will vomit you out of My mouth!*” (Revelation 3:16). If lukewarmness in your relationship with Jesus plagues you, you may benefit from reading a Newsletter we sent out in October 1998, *The Almost Christian* <[https://restorationministries.org/download/199810thealmostchristian%20\(1\).pdf](https://restorationministries.org/download/199810thealmostchristian%20(1).pdf)>.

👉 Another hindrance to verbalizing the Name “Jesus” with other people is that you give in to your **sin nature-influenced soul** and/or **demonic strongholds** that deceptively entice you into not saying His Name. Don’t disregard this possibility too quickly. If the Spirit of our Lord Jesus isn’t ruling your soul, then you may likely fear being rejected by people who *are* controlled by their own sin nature and undemolished strongholds.

👉 Still another cause for not speaking Jesus’s Name in public is that you’ve been trained by your religious leaders to *not* fully trust our Lord Jesus or in the power and authority in His Name. Through what they emphasize or neglect in their teaching, you may be seduced away from trusting Jesus with the resolute determination He requires of His followers. Can this really be true? While we were writing our book *Restoring The Early Church*, a leader from a particular denomination told us, **“We can’t have our people trusting Jesus as you write about. That would cause mayhem! We need to *control and direct* the spiritual activities of the people in our congregation.”**

Have you ever considered that religious leaders would *fear* their congregants completely trusting in our Lord Jesus and how their trust might be enacted? You may think we’re exaggerating the point. But if you haven’t already, just start wholeheartedly trusting Jesus as Lord of your life and you’ll discover a *love-based boldness* in your relationship with Him that disturbs many religious leaders (see Acts 4:13).

Believing doesn’t threaten as much as trusting. Too often religious leaders try to mold “believers” to cling to their particular religious persuasion. We’ve had four decades of experience in having worked inside numerous religious systems. It’s with sorrow that we can say that followers of Jesus who wholly trust Him and live out their trust with obedient love and spiritual power are targeted as “troublemakers” by the leadership. That kind of resolute trust in Jesus *troubles* leaders who find they can’t control sheep who fully walk in Christ’s love and power and authority.

👉 There's also the multitude of Christians who **harden their heart toward our Lord** even while they still play at being "Christian. We've shared in many of our materials how essential it is for each person who follows Jesus as Lord of their life to be fully aware of this non-optional aspect of their life journey in Him: He uses suffering and trials to develop His character in us through perseverance (Romans 5:3,4). Our Father has precise objectives for you as His child, purposes which can't be formed in you by any other means than going through suffering and enduring trials.

"For the Lord disciplines those He loves and whips everyone He accepts as a son. If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? ... Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it" (Hebrews 12:6,7,11).

It's this specific area of our Lord using suffering and trials to develop His character in us that Hellenism denies and thereby has deceived so many within much of Christianity. If you've been Hellenized, then you expect personal happiness, a good measure of prosperity, and a certain level of ease to be provided you by your "Divine Benefactor" in the heavens, your personal "vending machine" of favor. "Heaven forbid", so to speak, that our Lord would ever bring suffering and trials to Christians! And the heartless response of some religious persuasions to people who endure suffering is that their faith is too weak.

This may help keep you from hardening your heart.

Our Lord's discipline of His beloved always has a divine purpose. He may be chastening you to develop deeper character in you, or He's preparing you for some future assignment He has for you. He also may be using your trials to develop the character of people who are close to you. Your trust in our Lord Jesus through the trial you're going through is being put on display for others to see what complete trust looks like in suffering. And yes, even when we fall short in our response, our Lord has a purpose for our failures – to increase our

humility and cause us to depend even more on the strength and love of Jesus. Peter is an example of this. Our Lord told him in advance that despite his voiced readiness to suffer with Jesus, he'd fail in his intention:

“Simon, Simon, listen! Satan begged earnestly to sift all of you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that that your trust might not fail. And you, once you have turned back in repentance, strengthen your brothers!” Simon said to Him, “Lord, I am prepared to go with you both to prison and to death!” Jesus replied, “I tell you, Peter, the rooster will not crow today until you have denied three times that you know Me” (Luke 22:31-34).

Peter indeed denied Jesus three times. But after the resurrection our Lord Jesus appeared to the humbled apostle and asked him about *his love* for Him: *“Simon son of John, do you love Me more than these?”* Following Peter's three affirmative responses our Lord told him his responsibility to those in His fold: *“Feed My lambs.” “Take care of My sheep.” “Feed My sheep”* (John 21:15-17). Through Peter's stumbling denials and crushed heart over what he had done, he was a chastened and prepared instrument to serve His Lord's purposes.

Think about what you may be going through now. If you don't allow your heart to become hardened through bitterness or rebellion toward our Lord, your trials will serve you in becoming a more effective blessing to other people.

Whether you're experiencing a trial yourself or someone you deeply care about is going through one, weigh this. When you're going through prolonged periods of suffering or trials, in His grace our Lord does give you the strength to endure like our persecuted family around the world — even though they have no hope that their conditions will improve. But the response of many Hellenized Christians in the US to suffering and trials is to harden their hearts against God rather than be strengthened in their loving trust in Him. You can recognize their hardening in their inability to appreciate the grace our Lord gave them during their trial.

They have no testimony to His faithfulness. Even if they once willingly spoke the Name of Jesus in front of unbelievers, they fizzle out in this because they feel He failed them. And after their suffering or trial is over, they speak more about the suffering they endured than the grace our Lord gave them to go through it. Many are like a mother who for years after she has given birth keeps recalling her pain in childbirth rather than celebrating the life she brought into the world.

If you can't speak victoriously about the trials or suffering you've endured or are going through even now, we encourage you to read David Wilkerson's letter, *Don't Waste Your Afflictions*

<<https://worldchallenge.org/newsletter/2021/dont-waste-your-afflictions>>

Loving appreciation for our Lord Jesus in the grace He's given to us even through His sacrifice on the cross is the only thing that will motivate us to not deny Him through silence, even while we claim to belong to Him. Jesus's Name, the Name above all names, should flow readily and sincerely from the mouths of those who love Him more than anyone else they love. If you fall short in this, repent and ask Jesus Himself for the grace and power to proclaim His Name in the spiritual darkness that's hovering over this land.

Mike & Sue