

Faith Pulpit

Lordship Salvation: Forgotten Truth or False Doctrine? Part 1

If you were Satan, which doctrine would you want to undermine? Which area of theology would you pervert, to prevent people from being saved? An individual may be wrong about the doctrine of the church or deny the millennial kingdom and yet doubtless be gloriously redeemed. However, if a person is wrong on the doctrine of salvation, specifically, the prerequisites for salvation, he misses the very heart of the gospel. One would expect Satan to attack in the area of soteriology. Indeed, he has! The informed and discerning believer soon realizes that there is a battle raging among evangelicals and fundamentalists over the matter of the conditions for salvation.

I. The Crucial Problem of Lordship Salvation:

A. The problem:

On the one hand there are those who insist that salvation is God's gift and that trust in Christ is the only requirement for salvation. On the other hand, there are respected pastors and theologians who teach that unless an individual submits also to the Lordship of Christ at the moment of salvation, he is not really saved.

B. The positions:

1. Salvation by grace through faith alone:
2. Curtis Hutson in his book, *Salvation Crystal Clear*, has a chapter entitled "Lordship Salvation, A Perversion of the Gospel." He begins with the following warning: "Lordship salvation is an unscriptural teaching regarding the doctrine of salvation and is confusing to Christians." Hutson calls Lordship salvation another gospel which contradicts the teaching of salvation by grace through faith" (p. 302).
3. Charles Ryrie cautions that "To teach that Christ must be Lord of life in order to be Savior is to confuse certain aspects of discipleship and confuses the gospel of the Grace of God with the

works of men.” (Balancing the Christian Life, p. 178).

4. Lewis Chafer writes that Lordship salvation is a seemingly pious but subtle error that in addition to believing in Christ “the unsaved must dedicate themselves to the will of God” (Systematic Theology, III, 384).
5. Zane Hodges clearly distinguishes between salvation and discipleship. Eternal life is free. Discipleship is immeasurably hard. The former is attained by faith alone; the latter by a faith that works (The Hungry Inherit. p. 114, underscore in the original).
6. Lordship Salvation:
7. J. I. Packer rejects the idea that all men “have to do is to trust Christ as sin bearer . . . they must also deny themselves and enthrone him as their Lord.” (Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God, p. 89).
8. Walter J. Chantry says that salvation without Lordship is impossible: “Practical acknowledgment of Jesus’ Lordship, yielding to His rule by following, is the very fibre of saving faith. It is only those who ‘confess with the mouth the Lord Jesus’ (Romans 10:9) that shall be saved . . . Without obedience, you shall not see life! Unless you bow to Christ’s sceptre, you will not receive the benefits of Christ’s sacrifice.” (Today’s Gospel Authentic or Synthetic? p. 60, underscore in the original). His words concerning those who preach simple faith in Christ are very strong: “This heretical and soul-destroying practice is the logical conclusion of a system that thinks little of God, preaches no law, calls for no repentance, waters down faith to ‘accepting a gift,’ and never mentions bowing to Christ’s rule or bearing a cross.” (p. 68).
9. John R. Stott suggests “that it is as unbiblical as it is unrealistic to divorce the Lordship from the Saviorhood of Jesus Christ” (Eternity, Sept. 1959, p. 37).
10. A. W. Tozer labels the view of salvation by grace alone a notable heresy and a false teaching (I Call It Heresy! p. 9,19).
11. James Montgomery Boice calls the concept of salvation through faith alone A defective theology. This kind of faith is directed to one who is a false Christ (“The Meaning of Discipleship”, Moody Monthly, Feb. 1986, p. 34, 36).
12. John MacArthur champions Lordship salvation in his recent book, The Gospel According to Jesus. He attacks dispensationalists in general and Chafer, Hodges, and Ryrie in particular for “wrongly dividing the Word of Truth” (p. 197). “No one can come to Christ on any other term” than full commitment (p. 197). In his book, The Parables of the Kingdom, MacArthur writes that “there is a transaction made to purchase salvation, but it’s not with money or good works. The transaction is this: You give up all you have for all He has” (p. 108). How does one receive salvation? “You give up all that you are and receive all that He is . . . A person becomes saved when he is willing to abandon everything he has to affirm, that Christ is the Lord of his life” (p. 109). Even in our Regular Baptist circles, Lordship salvation has become an issue.
13. John Baylo equates the saviorhood of Christ with His Lordship. He holds that “saving faith properly understood always involves trusting Christ with one’s life. . . confidence in Christ to both save and manage one’s life . . . superficial faith never saved anyone” (Baptist Bulletin, February, 1987, p. 7).

In contrast, Paul Tassell pleads that we not confuse “the instantaneous act of salvation with the long process of sanctification . . . we must not make saviorship and lordship synonymous” (Baptist Bulletin, February 1989, p. 46). Ernest Pickering in his incisive review of MacArthur’s book states that “Well over 100 times in the New Testament we are told that salvation is by faith or through believing. It is a very serious matter to add an ingredient to the gospel of salvation which is not found in the New Testament” (Lordship Salvation, Central Baptist Seminary, p. 7).

Ryrie cautions that the message of faith only and the message of faith plus commitment of life cannot both be the gospel; therefore, one of them is a false gospel and comes under the curse of perverting the gospel or preaching another gospel (Gal. 1:6–9). As far as sanctification is concerned, if only committed people are saved people, then where is there room for carnal Christians? (p. 170).

Which of these positions is right, which is wrong? They cannot both be scriptural. In theology we do not count noses. In many areas, such as this controversy, able men can be marshalled to support either position. The correctness of a position must be substantiated by a clear grammatical exegesis of the Biblical text.

II. The Crucial Prerequisite for Salvation.

What is the necessary condition for salvation, faith in Christ as Savior or faith plus commitment of life? It is true that some believers dedicate their lives to the Lord at the moment of salvation. The Apostle Paul immediately asked the question: Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? (Acts 9:6). With most believers, dedication takes place after a fuller understanding of their spiritual responsibility. Key soteriological passages such as Acts 16:31 and Ephesians 2:8,9 teach that faith in Christ alone is the prerequisite for salvation.

Ideally, every saint should recognize the Lordship of Christ from the moment of salvation, but there is a great difference between being a saint and a disciple. It costs absolutely nothing to be a Christian. It costs everything to be a disciple. In Luke 14 the Lord distinguishes between salvation and discipleship while teaching two parables, side by side. In Luke 14:16–24, he related the parable of the great supper into which the entrance was free and unrestricted for all who followed the invitation. In Luke 14:25–33, Christ taught that discipleship was only for those who gave up all.

Being a Christian means following an invitation. Being a disciple means forsaking all. To confuse these two aspects of the Christian life is to confound the grace of God and the works of man, to ignore the difference between salvation and sanctification. The gospel of grace is Scriptural. The Gospel that adds the works of man to salvation is a counterfeit Gospel.

If it was ever necessary for believers to rightly divide the word of truth, it is now, and it is in this area!

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