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C0540 – 10/19/2005 – The Terms of Salvation
Lordship Salvation-Part 2

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I. WHAT IS LORDSHIP SALVATION?

“the view that for salvation a person must trust Jesus Christ as his Savior from sin and must also commit himself to Christ as Lord of his life, submitting to his sovereign authority.”

II. HOW DO I DETECT LORDSHIP SALVATION?

What are the buzz words for detecting Lordship Salvation or Reformed Soteriology?

- 1. Easy believism
- 2. Cheap grace

The opposite side of the coin of course, is that Lordship and Reformed teachers are teaching “hard believism” and “expensive grace” both of which seem to look at the whole question from the human side rather than from God’s side. Biblically a person can’t believe because he won’t believe unless God the Father draws him through the convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit. Biblically, grace is not cheap because Jesus Christ paid the ultimate price. This kind of charge against free grace is just putting up a straw man so it can be knocked down.

III. WHAT IS FUELING THE DEBATE?

What seems to be the big concern for Lordship adherents is many people profess Christ but do not practice Christianity. MacArthur says, “This new gospel has spawned a generation of professing Christians whose behavior often is indistinguishable from the rebellion of the unregenerate.” As a pastor I can empathize with their concern. Our practice ought to be consistent with our profession. However, the Lordship answer to this dilemma is to propose a gospel (one they say is the ‘old gospel’) that demands *up front* an exclusive commitment to an obedient lifestyle in hopes of minimizing these problems (Bing).

IV. WHAT THEOLOGICAL ISSUE STARTED THE MODERN CONTROVERSY?

Lordship and Reformed theologians reject several dispensational distinctions (Carnal and Spiritual Christians, Discipleship and Salvation, The Church and the Kingdom, Age of Law and the Age of Grace). The one that MacArthur argues is the basis of a whole new way of looking at the gospel is the distinction of Carnal Christians and Spiritual Christians. These theologians reject that Christians can be carnal by nature. Thus, they hold to one-naturism. But this is problematic because then there is no source for sin other than the regenerate nature in which case Christ’s life in us must be the source of sin. But “in Him there is no sin” (1 John 3:4). One naturism logically leads to sinless perfection which is one of the charges against Lordship and Reformed theologies.

V. WHAT ARE THE ISSUES?

There are many issues but I have narrowed them down to six major issues. Comparing and contrasting the free grace and lordship/reformed positions on these six issues should help you clarify and crystallize some of the doctrines of salvation.

1. Faith and Salvation

Both sides agree that faith is necessary to salvation but what is the nature of faith? Free grace advocates argue that faith is simple “reliance”, “trust”, or “confidence” in someone or something? Lordship and Reformed adherents argue that faith is complex, involving “absolute submission”, “obedience”, “forsaking oneself”, “unconditional surrender”, and “complete resignation of self”?

2. Repentance and Salvation

Both sides agree that repentance is necessary to salvation but what is the nature of repentance? Free grace advocates argue that repentance is an inner “change of mind”. Lordship and Reformed adherents argue that it *always* includes “turning from sin”?

3. Christ’s Lordship and Salvation

Both sides agree that Christ is Lord meaning that Christ is God but must one submit to Christ’s Lordship in order to be saved? Free grace adherents say no, one must simply believe that Jesus Christ is God? Lordship and Reformed adherents say yes, one must subjectively submit to Christ’s sovereign rule over his life in order to be saved.

4. Discipleship and Salvation

Both sides agree that discipleship is costly and important. Is the call to discipleship the call to salvation? Free grace adherents say no, the call to discipleship follows salvation. Lordship and Reformed adherents say yes, the call to discipleship is the same as the call to salvation.

5. Perseverance of the Saints and Eternal Security

Both sides agree that genuine Christians are eternally secure. However, can a genuine Christian utterly fail? Free grace adherents say yes, a Christian may sin and not recover. Thus, a Christian may sin a sin unto physical death. Complementary to this is the truth that a Christian has a sin nature. But this does not violate the truth that the Christian is eternally secure. Lordship and Reformed adherents say no, a Christian may sin but he will always recover and advance. One who does not recover is not a genuine Christian but a professing Christian. Passages which speak of a sin unto death are speaking of mere professors who dead spiritually and go to hell. The Christian may have sinful behavior but he has no sin nature. The genuine Christian will persevere.

6. Justification and Sanctification

What is the relationship between justification and sanctification? Free grace advocates say that justification is by faith alone and is the basis of sanctification. Lordship and Reformed advocates say “we are justified not without, and yet not by works”?

VI. REPENTANCE AND SALVATION

The free grace has produced two views regarding the relationship of repentance to salvation. Some say repentance is not required for salvation (e.g., Hodges). Others, such as myself and many others say that repentance is required but it is not a separate act from believing, it is included in believing and could not be separated from it. The only repentance a dead man can effect is a “change of mind” regarding the person and work of Christ and that not without the pre-conversion work of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, I use the term “repentant faith” to describe what takes place when a person is saved by Christ.

Lordship and Reformed adherents say that repentance always includes “a turning from sin” or at least a *willingness* “to turn from sin”. This shows how subjective this requirement is. Is an actual turning from sin required or is just a willingness to turn from sin required. Those are light years apart. One is actual and the other is desire.

Since we have spent so much time on the question of repentance (cf Lesson 4 Repent and Believe and Lesson 5 Repent and Believe – Part 2) I will not spend any more time on this subject except to say two things. First, lexically and biblically the word repentance means nothing more than “a change of mind”. Second, the real question is not what is repentance but “repent about what?” The answer to this question is determined by the context. There are three different contexts involving repentance.

1. Non-Saving Repentance
2. Believer’s Repentance
3. Saving Repentance

Sometimes the believer is to repent about his sin(s) but it is impossible to support the contention of Lordship and Reformed advocates that repentance always involves a turning from sin”. For example, MacArthur says repentance

“*always* speaks of a change of purpose, and specifically a turning from sin”

This is hard to maintain when the Bible says that God “repented”. It would then have to mean that God “turned from sin”! Pink says, “They who leave out repentance, are preaching ‘another gospel’ (Gal 1:6).” Again, this is an extreme statement, extremely wrong for if it were true then Jesus (Luke 8:12), Peter (1 Pt 2:6-7), Paul (Rom 3:22ff), James (Js 2:23), and Jude (1:5) all preached a false gospel. Enough said about repentance and salvation. Yes, it is required but it is included in belief and could not be separated from it but the only repentance a dead man can effect is a change of mind about the person and work of Jesus Christ. Such always results in salvation. Thus, a repentant faith is required for salvation but the biblical authors most commonly used simply the word “believe” for the human requirement and the result was always “you will be saved”.

VII. CHRIST’S LORDSHIP AND SALVATION

Let’s state the issue once more for the sake of clarity. Both sides agree that Christ is Lord meaning that Christ is God but what must be the response of an unsaved person to the fact that Jesus is Lord? Must one submit to Christ’s Lordship in order to be saved? Free Grace adherents say no, one must simply believe that Jesus Christ is God? Lordship and Reformed adherents say yes, one must subjectively submit to Christ’s sovereign rule over his life as a condition for attaining eternal life. Lest you doubt this, MacArthur says,

“No promise of salvation is ever extended to those who refuse to accede to Christ’s lordship. Thus, there is no salvation except “lordship” salvation.” (GATJ, 34)

Lordship and Reformed advocates use lexical implications and biblical passages to support their view. First, the lexical meaning of the word “Lord”.

A. The Greek Word

The Greek word for “Lord” is *kurios*. Lordship and some Reformed advocates argue that the word *kurios* denotes “ruler” and therefore a person must submit to Christ as Ruler in order to attain eternal life. They make “rulership” the essence of the word “Lord”. However, “rulership” really carries no absolute authority unless Jesus is God. Even Reformed theologian B.B. Warfield claimed “the title ‘Lord’ becomes in Paul’s hands almost a proper name, the specific designation for Jesus conceived as a divine person in distinction from the Father.” Turner said, “In Biblical Greek,...*kurios* is a divine title...” To say that Jesus was Lord or to refer to the Lord Jesus Christ was to identify Jesus as God.

For “rulership” to have any meaning it must be derived from the fact that Jesus is God. Of course, that Jesus is God has many implications, one of which is that Jesus is ruler, but also that He is creator, Jewish Messiah, redeemer, judge, etc. The real issue is not what the implications of this title are but whether a person must submit to any of these implications as a condition for receiving eternal life!

B. Key Passages

There are several passages used to support the Lordship and Reformed view that a person must submit to Christ as ruler as a condition for receiving eternal life (Luke 2:11; Phil 2:5-11; 2 Pt 1:11; 3:18; Acts 2:36; 10:36; 16:31; 2 Cor 4:5; Rom 10:9-10; 1 Cor 12:3; John 20:28). We can’t evaluate them all so let’s just look at a few major ones.

Luke 2:10-11 But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; ¹¹ for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

This only asserts “who” He is. It does not make submission to Christ’s Lordship a requirement for eternal life! That has to be read into the text (eisegesis). The point Luke is trying to make is that the Savior is God Himself!

Philippians 2:5-11 Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, *and* being made in the likeness of men. ⁸ Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹ For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

This passage is written to those who are already genuine believers. They are being commanded to have an attitude of humility, the archetype of which is Jesus Christ who humbled himself by taking to Himself true humanity. Verse 11 certainly says that Jesus is Lord, once again asserting His deity for only God is worshipped. But notice, who will ultimately confess that Jesus Christ is Lord? Is it just the saved or is it the saved and the unsaved? Thus, it is obvious that the confession that Jesus Christ is Lord does not save.

Those who are unsaved will not willingly confess that Jesus Christ is Lord but will do so under forced submission.

2 Peter 1:11 for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you.

2 Peter 3:18 but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him *be* the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.

Again, Jesus is Lord and Savior. Nobody denies that. But the context of both of these passages is not eternal salvation. Both books are written to believing Jews of the diaspora (1 Pt 1:1; cf 2 Pt 3:1). The issue in 1:11 is abundant entrance into the kingdom not initial entrance into the kingdom. The issue in 3:18 is clearly sanctification, growth in grace and knowledge, not eternal salvation.

Acts 16:31 They said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household."

MacArthur says, "All these passages [Acts 2:21; 2:36; 16:31; Rom 10:9-10] include indisputably the lordship of Christ as part of the gospel to be believed for salvation...it is clear that people who come to Christ for salvation must do so in obedience to Him, that is, with a willingness to surrender to Him as Lord." By way of response, yes, Jesus is Lord but there is nothing in this context that speaks of surrender or submission to Christ as Lord! That must be inferred from their concept of believe which we have already shown to be without merit (cf Lesson 10 What is Faith?). Paul is merely identifying the object of faith as God Himself. Nothing is said here of submitting to Christ's rule in every area of life. It is hard to imagine that the Philippian jailer would be able to understand all this simply by saying "Lord Jesus". Ryrie said, "...why is it that those who teach that you cannot receive Jesus without receiving His personal mastery over the years of one's life do not also insist that we must receive Him as Messiah (the meaning of Christ) with all that the concept of Messiah entails? That would mean, for starters, that in order to be saved one must believe that Jesus is Israel's promised deliverer, the One who fulfills many Old Testament prophecies, and the One who is the coming King over the earth. Is the acknowledgement of all that Messiah means part of the necessary content of faith for a genuine salvation experience?" To be consistent Lordship adherents would have to add all the implications of the name Jesus which means Savior, Christ which means Messiah, and Lord which means God. The implications of these names and titles are enough to produce a series of teachings that could last for weeks.

C. A Biblical Understanding of Christ's Lordship

The Bible teaches unabashedly that Jesus Christ is Lord. The essential meaning is that Jesus is God. It is more of a title than a name and was used to identify the object of faith, Jesus as God Himself. In order to save the Savior must be God. In order for the Savior to Rule He must be God. All the implications of this title depend on the fact that first of all, Jesus is God. The point is that a person must place his faith in the proper object and that object is Jesus Christ who is God.

Rulership or mastery is not the issue in salvation; it is the issue in sanctification. Showers says,

The functions of a "savior" and a "master" are not the same. A savior saves, but a master rules. When it comes to the issue of being saved from the penalty of sin and divine wrath, a person needs Christ's function as Savior, not His function as ruler over all areas of a person's life.

One of the biggest problems with applying Lordship requirements to initial salvation is the subjectivity involved. When a person takes his eyes off the person and work of Jesus and places them on his own degree of submission, assurance of salvation falls victim to the subjectivity of human experience. When does one ever know if or when he has submitted enough or if he is willing enough? Stott says,

We must surrender absolutely and unconditionally to the lordship of Jesus Christ. We cannot make our own terms. What will this involve? In detail I cannot tell you. In principle, it means a determination to forsake evil and follow Christ.

If Stott cannot tell us then how can he know that he has fully surrendered his life and is therefore saved?

It seems to me that a cold hard fact of Scripture is that Jesus saves sinners. Initially He saves them from the penalty of sin and as they grow in grace and knowledge, they learn to overcome sin by depending on the Holy Spirit as they submit to Jesus as Master. Romans 6 makes this connection clear. Mastery is for those who are already set free from the bondage of sin, not for those still enslaved by it. Romans 5:9 is the end of justification by faith alone. From 5:9-8:

Romans 6 What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase?

² May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?

¹⁰ For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God.

¹¹ Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. ¹² Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts,

¹³ and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin *as* instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members *as* instruments of righteousness to God.

These are believers who have been justified by faith alone. The next logical step then is to follow the logic of being justified. Verse 11 says we are to reckon or consider ourselves dead to sin. This is the way you ought to think. You are dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. You are no longer in bondage to sin but set free to righteousness. Verse 12, “therefore”, in other words, if this is true, and it is then verse 12 is the result, “do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts, and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as weapons of unrighteousness;” It is a command not to let sin reign over you. Verse 13b is the kicker for Lordship. Notice the words “present yourselves to God”; the verb “present” is an aorist imperative. The aorist signals urgency and decisive once for all action. What Paul is saying is that as soon as you are justified you ought to make a decisive once for all action to come under the Lordship of Christ. The way you do this is by “presenting” yourself to God as alive from the dead, and presenting your members as weapons of righteousness to God. What is abundantly clear is that this decision follows justification and is not required for justification. Thus, it is logical and important for one who has already been justified (Rom 5:1) to submit their life to Christ’s Lordship but it is not required for initial salvation.

The statement that there is no salvation but lordship salvation is totally absurd if when what is meant is initial salvation. The sole condition for eternal life is faith in the Son of God!

It is difficult to see how a commitment to submit to Jesus as Master could not be seen as a meritorious work that earns salvation (Bing).

Fruchtenbaum says, “salvation requires faith alone discipleship requires obedience.”ⁱ

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ⁱ Arnold Fruchtenbaum, *Book of Romans Class Notes* (Tyndale Theological Seminary, note on Rom 6:13).

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