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Lordship Salvation

Forgotten Truth or a False Doctrine?, Part 2

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Several days ago my wife and I were discussing the matter of Lordship salvation. Our eleven-year-old daughter, Christa, overheard us and asked, "Daddy, what is Lordship salvation?" I replied that it is the view that believing in Christ as Savior is not enough. A person also needs to let Christ control every thought and action to be truly saved. Christa's perceptive reply was, "Well, Daddy, then no one can be saved, can he?"

And so it is. If God expects total submission of our body, soul, spirit, heart and mind for salvation, no one can possibly be saved. Total submission like complete sanctification is only achieved when the believer enters the presence of Christ.

It is difficult to conceive of a more crucial question in Christianity than this: What is the condition for salvation? What do I need to do to be saved? The answer that Paul gives to that question in Acts 16:31 is "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." Over one hundred times in the New Testament faith is mentioned as the only condition for salvation. Yet a controversy is raging in evangelical circles. Shrill voices are telling us that individuals are not genuinely saved unless they believe and submit. In other words, salvation is dependent on faith plus dedication. One cannot be a Christian, we are told, without being a disciple. Salvation by faith alone is called "a notable heresy" (Tozer, *I Call It Heresy!* p. 9). It is labeled a "heretical and soul destroying practice" (Chantry, *Today's Gospel Authentic or Synthetic?* p. 68). Men who teach that salvation is by faith alone are "wrongly dividing the Word of Truth" (MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus*. p. 197).

In Part 1 we discussed I. The Contemporary Problem of Lordship Salvation, and, II. The Crucial Prerequisite for Salvation. Now let us note:

III. Some Compelling Proofs against Lordship Salvation:

MacArthur continually stresses the idea that the call to salvation is "a call to discipleship under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. To respond to that call is to become a believer. Anything less is simply unbelief" (p. 30). This position is easily refuted by Biblical examples.

A. The Example of Uncommitted Believers:

1. Lot:

The life of Lot affords an illustration of a life-long rejection of the Lordship of God. If it were not for the references to Lot as a just man in 2 Peter 2:—8, one could seriously question his salvation. His continuous disobedience, compromise, and carnality did not prevent him from being positionally righteous.

2. The Ephesian believers:

The saints at Ephesus were unyielding at the time of salvation. As Christians they continued their pagan practices for at least one and a half years before they were willing to submit to the Lordship of Christ and burn their books of magic (Acts 18:19).

3. Peter:

The Apostle Peter demonstrates a definite lapse from total dedication. His words in Acts 10:14, “Not so Lord” were a sign of unyieldedness after he had been Spirit filled at Pentecost (Acts 2:4).

Lot, Peter, and the Ephesians are examples of carnal individuals who nonetheless were genuinely saved. In contrast, MacArthur says that “those unwilling to take on this yoke cannot enter into the saving rest He offers” (p. 112). He insists that “‘Faith’ that rejects His sovereign authority is really unbelief” (p. 28). MacArthur not only denies that carnal believers are genuinely saved, but he further accuses dispensationalists of inventing “this dichotomy carnal/spiritual Christian” (p. 30). “Contemporary theologians have fabricated an entire category for this type of person—‘Carnal Christian’” (p. 129).

In fact the Bible speaks of carnal believers. In I Corinthians 3, Paul addresses the Corinthian brethren as “carnal,” as “babes in Christ” who are “yet carnal . . . and walk as men” (vv. 1, 3). Genuine believers are called carnal and described as walking like the unsaved in envyings, strife, and division. Similarly, Peter says that genuine Christians can be guilty of gross crimes (1 Peter 4: 15).

Why would MacArthur label this Biblical concept a contemporary invention? Is the category of carnal Christians really one of the “unwarranted divisions of truth” (p. 27) set up by dispensationalists?

B. The Exhortation of Romans 12: 1–2:

The Apostle Paul pleads with believers to submit to the Lordship of Christ. These individuals had been justified by faith (Rom. 5:1), were being led by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:14) and would never be separated from the love of God (Rom. 8:39). Yet these saints were enjoined to “present their bodies a living sacrifice” (Rom. 12:1) rather than to serve sin or let sin rule them (Rom. 6:6). According to the Lordship Salvation view, these individuals were never genuinely saved. MacArthur says “Salvation is for those who are willing to forsake everything” (p. 78).

“Forsaking oneself for Christ’s sake is not an optional step of discipleship subsequent to conversion: it is the *sine qua non* of saving faith” (p. 135).

Paul says that submission, sacrifice, and service are incumbent upon every believer after salvation. MacArthur says they are indispensable for salvation. Proper exegesis and personal experience do not support Lordship salvation. Thomas L. Constable is correct in observing that while “surrender is certainly God’s desire for every Christian, it is not a condition of salvation. If it were, it would be a work” (*Walvoord: A Tribute*. “The Gospel Message” p. 209).

C. The Meaning of the title ‘LORD’:

The term “Lord” can indeed mean Master, but in the New Testament it has various meanings. When used in the salvation passages, Lord especially emphasizes the deity of Christ.” Paul’s statement in Romans 10:9–10 is “misunderstood when it is made to support the claim that one cannot be saved unless he makes Jesus Lord of his life by a personal commitment . . . Paul is speaking of the objective lordship of Christ, which is the very cornerstone of faith” (Everett F. Harrison, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*. Vol. X, 112).

Those who insist on Lordship salvation maintain that our position is one of “easy believism” or “cheap grace.” Ryrie rightly objects to this charge by noting that “it is not easy to believe, because what we ask the unsaved person to believe is not easy. We ask that he trust a Person who lived 2,000 years ago, whom he can only know through the Bible, to forgive his sins. We’re asking that he stake his eternal destiny on this” (*Basic Theology*, p. 339, emphasis in the original). Salvation is free. Lordship is very costly. Faith is a gift bestowed by God upon unbelievers. Discipleship is a commanded work of obedience for believers. Both faith and discipleship are absolutely important, the one for salvation, and other for sanctification. To deny the difference between saviorhood and lordship is to distort the gospel—and that is dangerous!