

**Modern Theological Issues in the Church**  
**Lesson 2 – Lordship Salvation**  
Valley Bible Church Adult Sunday School  
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A theological issue that has been raised to the forefront of evangelicalism in the last ~25 years is Lordship Salvation. A simple statement of the issue would be, “Does one have to submit to Jesus’ lordship to be saved?”. Yet the issue is more complex dealing with the meaning of faith, repentance, discipleship, and perseverance. While some see this issue as new, it has been around for many years.

There are some who seem willing to accept Christ as Saviour who will not receive Him as Lord. ... How sad it is that some talk about their faith in Christ yet their faith is not proved by their works! ... I cannot conceive it possible for anyone truly to receive Christ as Saviour and yet not to receive Him as Lord. Charles H. Spurgeon, "The Royal Saviour," *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, Vol 56, 1910, p. 617.

There are three main beliefs on this issue espoused by John MacArthur (Lordship Salvation), Zane Hodges (a “Radical” Non-Lordship Salvation), and Charles Ryrie (Non-Lordship Position, but thought of as a more middle ground between the two “extremes”). Unfortunately, some on each side of the argument have sought to vilify the other by labeling. Lordship salvation advocates have been labeled as believing in “means salvation”. Non-lordship advocates have been labeled as believing in “easy-believism” or “cheap grace”. Then there are many who view the differences as simply semantics. However, ...

"It should be obvious that these are real doctrinal differences; the lordship controversy is not a semantic disagreement. The participants in the debate hold widely differing perspectives." (Faith Works, MacArthur)

There are many points of theology that are agreed to by both sides of this argument:

- All are sinners and cannot earn Gods favor through good works. God requires no pre-salvation reformation. We are saved before our faith produces righteous deeds.

<sup>6</sup>For all of us have become like one who is unclean, And all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment; And all of us wither like a leaf, And our iniquities, like the wind, take us away. Isa 64:6

<sup>23</sup>for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup>being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; Rom 3:23-24

<sup>7</sup>For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. <sup>8</sup>But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. <sup>9</sup>Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath {of God} through Him. Rom 5:6-9

- Christ’s death purchased salvation from sin.

<sup>16</sup>For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. <sup>17</sup>For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. John 3:16-17

<sup>6</sup>For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Rom 5:6

- Eternal life is a free gift from God and we are justified by grace through faith in Christ alone.

<sup>23</sup>For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. Rom 6:23

<sup>8</sup>For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, {it is} the gift of God; <sup>9</sup>not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. Eph 2:8-9

- Christians can and do sin, sometimes horribly.

<sup>15</sup>"If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. <sup>16</sup>But if he does not listen {to you,} take one or two more with you, so that BY THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY FACT MAY BE CONFIRMED. <sup>17</sup>If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Matt 18:15-17

The different sides of the argument agree on many Christian beliefs, but disagree on what constitutes saving faith in Jesus Christ. ... Each of these men would agree with basic evangelical doctrine such as that Christ's death paid the full penalty for our sins, salvation is by grace alone through faith in Jesus Christ, sinners cannot earn salvation or favor with God, and Christians can and do sin. The debate concerns exactly what entails saving faith in Jesus Christ. THE TRUE GOSPEL: A BRIEF SURVEY OF THE LORDSHIP SALVATION CONTROVERSY by Eric W. Zeller, 1998.

## Repentance

One of the differences in the Lordship / Non-lordship debate is repentance.

False additions to faith: Repentance – This is a valid condition for salvation when understood as a synonym for faith. It is a false addition to faith when understood as a prerequisite, requiring the cleansing of the life in order to be saved. Ryrie Study Bible, Page 1960, Moody Bible Institute, Chicago, 1978 (Rewritten for quotation.)

However, this does not match the usage in Scripture. Since usage in context determines meaning, we should look at what the Scripture says.

Repent [Metanoia] – to change one's mind or purpose, always in the NT involving a change for the better, an amendment, and always, except in Luke 17:3,4 of repentance from sin. Vines Expository Dictionary of NT Words.

"Repentance (metanoia, 'change of mind') involves a turning with contrition from sin to God; the repentant sinner is in the proper condition to accept the divine forgiveness." (F. F. Bruce. The Acts of the Apostles [Greek Text Commentary], London: Tyndale, 1952, p. 97.)

<sup>46</sup>and He said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, <sup>47</sup>and that **repentance for forgiveness of sins** would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. Luke 24:46-47

<sup>9</sup>The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for **any to perish but for all to come to repentance.** 2 Pet 3:9

<sup>9</sup>I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to {the point of} repentance; for you were made sorrowful according to {the will of} God, so that you might not suffer loss in anything through us. <sup>10</sup>For the **sorrow that is according to {the will} {of} God produces a repentance without regret, {leading} to salvation,** but the sorrow of the world produces death. 2 Cor 7:9-10

<sup>21</sup>solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of **repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ**. Acts 20:21

<sup>1</sup>Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of **repentance from dead works and of faith toward God**, Heb 6:1

<sup>21</sup>I am afraid that when I come again my God may humiliate me before you, and I may mourn over many of those who have sinned in the past and **not repented of the impurity, immorality and sensuality** which they have practiced. 2 Cor 12:21

<sup>20</sup>The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not **repent of the works of their hands**, so as not to worship demons, and the idols of gold and of silver and of brass and of stone and of wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk; <sup>21</sup>and they did not **repent of their murders nor of their sorceries nor of their immorality nor of their thefts**. Rev 9:20-21

<sup>11</sup>and they blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores; and they did not **repent** of their deeds. Rev 16:11

Clearly, repentance is not synonymous with faith, but that faith is joined with repentance. We turn from our sins toward God and trust completely in Christ for salvation.

### **Object of Faith**

Faith (noun) and to believe (verb) is the means by which salvation is appropriated to the repentant sinner. Grace as well as faith are both gifts of God.

<sup>8</sup>For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, {it is} the gift of God; <sup>9</sup>not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. Eph 2:8-9

<sup>16</sup>"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. John 3:16

<sup>40</sup>"For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day." John 6:40

<sup>47</sup>"Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life. John 6:47

Now faith is the assurance of {things} hoped for, the conviction of things not seen (Heb 11:1). But what is saving faith? For clearly not all belief/faith saves.

<sup>19</sup>You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder. James 2:19

### Follow

<sup>27</sup>"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they **follow Me**; <sup>28</sup>and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. John 10:27-28

### Obey

<sup>8</sup>Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. <sup>9</sup>And having been made perfect, He became to all those who **obey** Him the source of eternal salvation, Heb 5:8-9

<sup>36</sup>"He who **believes** in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not **obey** the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him." John 3:36

## Deny Self

<sup>23</sup>And He was saying to {them} all, "**If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me.**" <sup>24</sup>For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it. <sup>25</sup>For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits himself? <sup>26</sup>For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when He comes in His glory, and {the glory} of the Father and of the holy angels. Luke 9:23-26

## Forsake All

<sup>16</sup>And someone came to Him and said, "Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may obtain eternal life?" <sup>17</sup>And He said to him, "Why are you asking Me about what is good? There is {only} One who is good; but if you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments." <sup>18</sup>{Then} he \*said to Him, "Which ones?" And Jesus said, "YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER; YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY; YOU SHALL NOT STEAL; YOU SHALL NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS; <sup>19</sup>HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER; and YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF." <sup>20</sup>The young man \*said to Him, "All these things I have kept; what am I still lacking?" <sup>21</sup>Jesus said to him, "**If you wish to be complete, go {and} sell your possessions and give to {the} poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.**" Matt 19:16-21

## Confess Jesus as Lord

<sup>9</sup>that if you **confess with your mouth Jesus {as} Lord**, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; <sup>10</sup>for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. Rom 10:9-10

Clearly saving faith is faith in the Lord of all. Saving faith is not merely giving assent to the facts of the gospel, but encompasses following, obedience, self-denial, forsaking all, and confessing Jesus as Lord. Non-lordship proponents assert:

False additions to faith: Surrender to the lordship of Christ. Christ must be Lord in the sense of Jehovah in order to be a qualified Savior (Rom 10:9), but Christ's personal lordship over the individual's life is not a condition for salvation. It should be the consequence of salvation and is a condition for dedication in full discipleship. Ryrie Study Bible, Page 1960, Moody Bible Institute, Chicago, 1978 (Rewritten for quotation.)

## **Result of True Saving Faith**

Can a true believer lose their salvation? The Scriptures declare that nothing can separate the believer from the Christ (Rom 8:28-39). All true believers once saved are kept by God's power and are always saved (John 5:24; 6:37-40; 10:27-30; Rom 5:9-10; 8:1, 31-39; 1 Cor 1:4-8; Eph 4:30; Heb 7:25; 13:5; 1 Pet 1:5; Jude 24). When a professor of Christ turns away it shows that true salvation never took place (1 John 2:19). True saving faith causes a change in the sinner.

<sup>17</sup>Therefore if anyone is in Christ, {he is} a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. 2 Cor 5:17

<sup>20</sup>"I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the {life} which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me. Gal 2:20

<sup>4</sup>Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. <sup>5</sup>For if we have become united with {Him} in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be {in the likeness} of His resurrection, <sup>6</sup>knowing this, that our old self was crucified with {Him,} in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; <sup>7</sup>for he who has died is freed from sin. Rom 6:4-7

The saved sinner then loves Jesus.

<sup>8</sup>and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, <sup>9</sup>obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls. 1 Pet 1:8-9

<sup>22</sup>If anyone does not love the Lord, he is to be accursed. Maranatha. 1 Cor 16:22

The true believer will seek to keep Jesus' commands.

<sup>23</sup>Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him. John 14:23

<sup>15</sup>"If you love Me, you will keep My commandments. John 14:15

<sup>3</sup>By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. <sup>4</sup>The one who says, "I have come to know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; <sup>5</sup>but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him: <sup>6</sup>the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked. 1 John 2:3-6

<sup>3</sup>For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome. 1 John 5:3

The Scriptures teach that it is possible for a believer to sin and to sometimes sin very badly. The result of sin in the believer's life is loss of fellowship (1 John 1:6); church discipline (Matt 18:15-20; 1 Cor 5:4-5); the Lord's discipline (Heb 12:6); and sometimes physical death (1 Cor 11:30). However, extended periods of carnality exhibit evidence that the individual never really had saving faith. And a denial of Christ is evidence that salvation never took place.

<sup>33</sup>"But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven. Matt 10:33

### **Conclusion**

The Scriptures are clear that mere intellectual assent to facts concerning the gospel is not saving faith. True saving faith encompasses repentance – a turning away from sin and toward God through faith in Jesus. True saving faith also includes following Jesus, obedience, self-denial, forsaking all, and confessing Jesus as Lord. True believers will exhibit fruit in keeping with repentance. Though believers may sin, prolonged periods of sin and denial of Christ is evidence that true saving faith never existed.

## From “A Grace Community Church Distinctive” – Lordship Salvation

First, Scripture teaches that the gospel calls sinners to faith joined in oneness with repentance (Acts 2:38; 17:30; 20:21; 2 Pet. 3:9). Repentance is a turning from sin (Acts 3:19; Luke 24:47) that consists not of a human work, but of a divinely bestowed grace (Acts 11:18; 2 Tim. 2:25). It is a change of heart, but genuine repentance will effect a change of behavior as well (Luke 3:8; Acts 26:18-20). In contrast, easy-believism teaches that repentance is simply a synonym for faith and that no turning from sin is required for salvation.

Second, Scripture teaches that salvation is all God’s work. Those who believe are saved utterly apart from any effort on their own (Titus 3:5). Even faith is a gift of God, not a work of man (Eph. 2:1-5, 8). Real faith therefore cannot be defective or short-lived but endures forever (Phil. 1:6; cf. Heb. 11). In contrast, easybelievism teaches that faith might not last and that a true Christian can completely cease believing.

Third, Scripture teaches that the object of faith is Christ Himself, not a creed or a promise (John 3:16). Faith therefore involves personal commitment to Christ (2 Cor. 5:15). In other words, all true believers follow Jesus (John 10:27-28). In contrast, easy-believism teaches that saving faith is simply being convinced or giving credence to the truth of the gospel and does not include a personal commitment to the person of Christ.

Fourth, Scripture teaches that real faith inevitably produces a changed life (2 Cor. 5:17). Salvation includes a transformation of the inner person (Gal. 2:20). The nature of the Christian is new and different (Rom. 6:6). The unbroken pattern of sin and enmity with God will not continue when a person is born again (1 John 3:9-10). Those with genuine faith follow Christ (John 10:27), love their brothers (1 John 3:14), obey God’s commandments (1 John 2:3; John 15:14), do the will of God (Matt. 12:50), abide in God’s Word (John 8:31), keep God’s Word (John 17:6), do good works (Eph. 2:10), and continue in the faith (Col. 1:21-23; Heb. 3:14). In contrast, easybelievism teaches that although some spiritual fruit is inevitable, that fruit might not be visible to others and Christians can even lapse into a state of permanent spiritual barrenness.

Fifth, Scripture teaches that God’s gift of eternal life includes all that pertains to life and godliness (2 Pet. 1:3; Rom. 8:32), not just a ticket to heaven. In contrast, according to easy-believism, only the judicial aspects of salvation (e.g., justification, adoption, and positional sanctification) are guaranteed for believers in this life; practical sanctification and growth in grace require a post-conversion act of dedication.

Sixth, Scripture teaches that Jesus is Lord of all, and the faith He demands involves unconditional surrender (Rom. 6:17-18; 10:9-10). In other words, Christ does not bestow eternal life on those whose hearts remain set against Him (James 4:6). Surrender to Jesus’ lordship is not an addendum to the biblical terms of salvation; the summons to submission is at the heart of the gospel invitation throughout Scripture. In contrast, easy-believism teaches that submission to Christ’s supreme authority is not germane to the saving transaction.

Seventh, Scripture teaches that those who truly believe will love Christ (1 Pet. 1:8-9; Rom. 8:28-30; 1 Cor. 16:22). They will therefore long to obey Him (John 14:15, 23). In contrast, easy-believism teaches that Christians may fall into a state of lifelong carnality.

Eighth, Scripture teaches that behavior is an important test of faith. Obedience is evidence that one’s faith is real (1 John 2:3). On the other hand, the person who remains utterly unwilling to obey Christ does not evidence true faith (1 John 2:4). In contrast, easybelievism teaches that disobedience and prolonged sin are no reason to doubt the reality of one’s faith.

Ninth, Scripture teaches that genuine believers may stumble and fall, but they will persevere in the faith (1 Cor. 1:8). Those who later turn completely away from the Lord show that they were never truly born again (1 John 2:19). In contrast, easy-believism teaches that a true believer may utterly forsake Christ and come to the point of not believing.

Most Christians recognize that these nine distinctives are not new or radical ideas. The preponderance of Bible-believing Christians over the centuries have held these to be basic tenets of orthodoxy. In fact, no major orthodox movement in the history of Christianity has ever taught that sinners can spurn the lordship of Christ yet lay claim to Him as Savior.

This issue is not a trivial one. In fact, how could any issue be more important? The gospel that is presented to unbelievers has eternal ramifications. If it is the true gospel, it can direct men and women into the everlasting kingdom. If it is a corrupted message, it can give unsaved people false hope while consigning them to eternal damnation. This is not merely a matter for theologians to discuss and debate and speculate about. This is an issue that every single pastor and lay person must understand in order that the gospel may be rightly proclaimed to all the nations.