

## The Lordship of Jesus Christ

Jesus is Lord. No one who believes the Bible denies that. But what does that mean and how does Christ's lordship apply to our salvation and our Christian life?

### The Meaning of *Lord*

The word usually translated *Lord* in the New Testament is the Greek word *Kyrios*. It is sometimes used as a title of respect, much as we would call someone *sir*. We see this in Acts 16:30 when the Philippian jailor addresses Paul and Silas as "Sirs" (the plural, *kyrioi*).

*Lord* is also commonly used as a title with the name Jesus Christ. As a title, it not only shows respect, but also reflects who Jesus is. He is *the* Lord. When the Hebrew Bible was translated into the Greek Septuagint, the Hebrew name for God, *YHWH*, was usually translated *Kyrios*, or Lord. *YHWH* conveyed first of all deity, but implied all the other aspects unique to deity such as Creator, Owner, Ruler, Judge, Redeemer, and Savior.

### The Lordship of Christ in Salvation

The Lordship, or deity of Jesus Christ, is essential to our salvation. Consider some of the things that Jesus did for our salvation only because He is the Lord God:

- He became the perfect sacrifice for our sins, without spot or blemish.
- He gave His life as a sacrifice for all mankind—past, present, and future.
- He rose from the dead to live and offer us eternal life.
- He promises, provides, and secures the eternal life of all who believe in Him.

It is only because Jesus is in the position of Lord God that He can save us and gives us eternal life.

While *Lord* speaks of His position of deity, the name *Jesus* speaks of His humanity and role of Savior, because *Jesus* means *Savior*. In the name Jesus Christ, *Christ* means *Messiah*, the One anointed or chosen by God to be the Savior and King.

So *Lord* is a title that primarily conveys Jesus' deity. What this means for salvation is that Jesus has the power and authority to save sinners because He is God. What this does *not* mean is that sinners can only be saved if they submit to Him as the Ruler of their lives. Ruler is only one subset of deity, and it is arbitrary to make that one divine function and position into a subjective demand. As the word implies, *salvation* requires a *Savior*. Jesus came to save sinners (1 Tim. 1:15; 4:10) and He can because He is God. Sinners need a *divine* Savior.

It is one thing to say that to be saved a sinner must acknowledge the divine authority that Jesus has as God or as the Son of God. It is quite another thing to say that to be saved a sinner must submit to Jesus as the Ruler of his life. The first acknowledges Jesus' objective position and power as God, the second demands a person's subjective response to Him as Ruler. The Bible has examples of unsaved sinners who addressed Jesus as *Lord* without submitting to Him (e. g., John 4:11, 15, 19; 9:36). To further illustrate, we could say that during World War II General Douglas MacArthur saved the Philippines. He was able to save them because he had the position and power of a four star general of the United States Army. To the people of the Philippines, however, MacArthur was not their general, nor were they required to submit to him as their general. They only needed to accept the "salvation" that he offered them.

### The view called Lordship Salvation

There is a view that teaches a sinner must submit to Jesus as Ruler of his life in order to be saved.

Proponents of this view call it Lordship Salvation, though it should be called Commitment Salvation or Submission Salvation since it emphasizes the unbeliever's subjective response to Jesus Christ as Ruler.

Lordship Salvation confuses the objective position of Jesus as Lord with the subjective response to one aspect of His lordship—rulership. Not only does this view reflect poor theological method—soteriology should not be built merely on titles, but it contradicts the Bible's teaching of salvation by grace through faith. The grace that saves us is the free, unmerited, unconditional gift of God. Making a sinner's submission to Jesus as the Ruler of his life a condition for salvation destroys the grace of God which makes salvation a free gift that can only be received through faith (Rom. 4:4-5; 11:6; Eph. 2:8-9).

Lordship Salvation is also arbitrary because it only emphasizes rulership in the divine title *Lord Jesus Christ*. To be consistent, they should require sinners to accept Jesus as the Creator, Sustainer, Judge, Prophet, Priest, and King, because all these and more are aspects of His deity. Furthermore, they should demand acceptance of all that the name *Jesus* means, and all that the title *Christ* means.

Teachers of Lordship Salvation often derogatorily refer to those who believe in the freeness of grace in salvation as *no-lordship*, or *non-lordship*. Of course, this is incorrect and deliberately misleading. Their error comes from confusing the objective position of Jesus as *the Lord* with one's subjective response to Jesus as *their Lord* and making it a requirement for salvation. Those who believe in the freeness of grace believe that Jesus must be the Lord (God) to be Savior. The response required of an unbeliever is simply to believe the gospel—who Jesus is, what He has done for our salvation, and what He promises us. There is no lexical or biblical basis for defining *believe* as *submit*. *Believe* simply means to be convinced of something or persuaded that it is true. There are even biblical examples of those who had submitted to Jesus as their Ruler but were not saved (Matt. 7:21-23), and those who were saved when not submitted to Jesus as their Ruler (Acts 5:1-10; 19:18-19).

We are not saying a person who comes to Jesus as Savior deliberately rejects the rulership of Jesus Christ. We are saying that to demand a sinner to submit to Him as Master is simply not the issue in salvation, much less is it reasonable to demand this of one who is spiritually dead.

## **The Lordship of Christ and Sanctification**

While we reject Lordship Salvation and its requirement that sinners must submit to Jesus as the Ruler of their lives, we enthusiastically embrace the term *Lordship Sanctification* or *Lordship Discipleship* because submitting to Jesus as our Ruler is what the Christian life is all about. Once we know Jesus as Savior, we must learn to relate to Him as our new Master.

Many passages admonish us who have believed in Jesus as Savior to now relate and submit to Him as Lord. The point of Romans 6 is that now that we have a new Master in Jesus Christ, we should submit ourselves to Him. Romans 12:1 urges us to present ourselves as “living sacrifices.” We live and die to the Lord (Rom. 14:8-9). As believers we are told to “sanctify the Lord God” in our hearts (1 Peter 3:15) and to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18). Such admonitions would not be needed if we had already done all that in order to be saved.

## **Conclusion**

We can not make Jesus Lord; He is the Lord! We can only submit to Him as servants. As our divine Savior He saves us; as our divine Master He sanctifies us. To keep the grace of the gospel free we must not confuse the faith required of an unbeliever for justification with the many aspects of submission required of believers for sanctification.