

Why Is Lordship Salvation So Popular?

A question often asked by those who hold the Free Grace position is *Why is Lordship Salvation so popular?* The Free Grace position teaches salvation by grace through faith alone in Christ alone, meaning that an unsaved person cannot do anything or make any commitment (such as submitting to Jesus as the Master of one's life) in order to be saved, and that *believe* means to be convinced or persuaded of the truth of the gospel. The Lordship view stands in opposition to the Free Grace position by teaching that an unsaved person must believe in Jesus Christ as Savior *and* submit to Him as Lord (or Master) of his life. They teach that *believe* includes submission, commitment, and obedience. Though specific biblical answers could be given (see past *GraceNotes*), here we simply state some reasons why Lordship Salvation is so popular.

Misinterpreted Scripture. Failure to distinguish between the passages in the Bible that pertain to salvation and those that pertain to the Christian life (or discipleship) lead many to a Lordship view. They confuse justification and sanctification issues, which makes the Lordship "gospel" include many conditions of commitment and obedience. Unfortunately, this adds human merit to the gospel. Preaching these texts as conditions for salvation may produce more outward commitment, but it also induces guilt and doubt.

Law versus Grace. Lordship theology often comes from confusing law and grace. Transferring the moral laws of the Mosaic Law to the age of grace after Jesus Christ has fulfilled the Law makes law-keeping an important part of salvation--if not at the front end as a condition for salvation, then at the back end as proof of salvation. Lordship adherents believe those who are truly saved will keep the moral laws of the Old and New Testaments demonstrating that Jesus is the Master of their lives. But this view not only ignores the change of dispensations between Law and grace, that is, the difference between God's program for Israel and His program for the church, it also ignores the reality that no one keeps all the laws perfectly.

New-old Calvinism. There has been a great resurgence of strong deterministic Calvinism, especially among young adults. Lordship theology is a necessary result of this theology, because in this view God elects some to salvation and gives them faith to believe. That divine gift of faith cannot fail, therefore it guarantees a persevering life of submission to Jesus as Lord if one is truly saved. This view of Christianity preaches the necessity of a full commitment to Jesus Christ, which is commendable in itself, but not if it is a test of salvation. The preaching of commitment attracts many young adults who respond to such challenges. Unfortunately, it is very likely that many or most of these "young, restless, and Reformed" Calvinists do not understand the whole package that makes commitment the condition for salvation.

An Unrealistic View of Sin. An unwillingness to admit that Christians can sin severely or continuously leads many to a Lordship view, because they are not willing to concede that such people are saved since they have not made Jesus their Lord. While it is grievous when Christians sin, a more biblical approach is to recognize that this reality is reflected throughout the Bible. Grace gives people the freedom to serve God or their own selfish desires. Unfortunately, not all choose to serve God, but the solution is not to make the gospel more difficult with additional conditions. Labeling these people as unsaved ignores or deals insufficiently with the Bible's teaching about God's discipline and the church's discipline for sinning Christians and their loss of temporal and eternal rewards. It is also possible they never really understood the simple gospel to begin with and are not saved.

A Cure for Worldliness. A sincere and legitimate concern about the worldliness of modern Christians also causes many to adopt a Lordship position. They conclude that worldliness results from a gospel that makes salvation too "easy." They believe that if salvation is available only to those who are fully committed to the

lordship of Christ, then godliness is guaranteed. To them, *believe* is not sufficient as the condition for salvation; it must be *believe* and *submit* or *believe* and *commit*. Unfortunately, this changes the condition of the gospel from faith alone to faith plus something the sinner must do.

Human Nature. Our natural human aversion to grace feeds the Lordship view. Since creation, humans have wanted to contribute to their salvation in their own way. This appeases the ego that craves significance, even if it is only the feeling that “I helped” or “I am fully committed,” therefore I am saved. This appeals to the subtle sinful tendency of all humankind toward legalism—the self-inflating attitude that I can do something on my own to become acceptable to God. The prevalent legalism in almost all religious systems welcomes this Lordship theology.

Misleading Rhetoric. Lordship adherents have influenced many by their derogatory rhetoric and misrepresentation of Free Grace views. For example, the Free Grace position is sometimes called the “no-lordship” position even though its adherents believe that the lordship of Jesus Christ is essential to His provision of salvation and godly sanctification. The difference is that Free Grace adherents don’t think commitment to Jesus as the Master of one’s life is the issue in salvation. The issue is believing in Jesus as the One who died for one’s sin, rose again, and guarantees eternal salvation. Commitment to Christ as Master is an issue of sanctification (that is, the Christian life or discipleship). Lordship adherents also make charges of “easy believism,” which is misleading since no one says believing is easy. It is *simple*, but not necessarily easy. Another derogatory charge is that the Free Grace view is “antinomian” (lawless) and gives believers a license to sin. While Free Grace adherents do not believe Christians are under the Old Testament Law, they do recognize the New Testament commands with the understanding that these commands makes Christians Christlike, but they don’t bring or prove salvation. The Free Grace position teaches that good works and holiness are God’s desire for every Christian.

Hear-say. People tend to repeat the language and rhetoric passed on to them without evaluating it theologically or biblically. Sayings like “Receive Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior” and “If He is not Lord of all, He is not Lord at all” have become part of popular Christian lingo. Usually, little thought goes into these phrases before they are used and repeated. Using such language does not confirm someone as Lordship, but is certainly pushes them that way.

Censorship. Frankly, those who hold a Lordship position, especially the Reformed Calvinists, have a lot of influence. That position dominates the publishing industry and academic institutions, and holds large conferences popular with young adults. As ugly as it sounds and is, that control purposely excludes the Free Grace perspective from the academic and popular forums, institutions, and publications, so Lordship Salvation flourishes. So-called “academic freedom” is not always so.

Conclusion

All these reasons can be reduced to one: Failure to comprehend the full riches of God’s free gift of grace leads many Christians into Lordship Salvation. Their perspective implies that such grace is too good to be true, so it requires from a person either commitment to the lordship of Jesus Christ to be saved, stay saved, or prove that one was ever saved. Free Grace, on the other hand, accepts the amazing and undeserved nature of God’s saving grace and therefore teaches that eternal life can only be received through the response of faith apart from any merit on the sinner’s part.