

What is Wrong with Lordship Salvation?

Lordship Salvation is the idea that an unbeliever must commit all areas of his life to Christ as a condition for being saved. Another way of articulating Lordship Salvation is, "if Jesus is not Lord of all then He is not Lord at all." Lordship Salvation began to significantly enter the American evangelical community in the 1980's through the ministries of various prominent theologians and pastors. The movement began with the well-intentioned concern to address too much carnality in the Christian world. However, the proposed solution to this legitimate concern was to increase the sole requirement for salvation in an attempt to argue that carnal Christians were never really saved in the first place since they had never initially yielded to Christ's Lordship. Sugar Land Bible Church does not believe in or teach Lordship Salvation. For example, Position Statement #6 in our church constitution says, "...repentance, as in a person willfully turning from sin, cannot be a condition for salvation." Many people look at the Lordship controversy as merely semantics. They believe that this issue has no real significance for practical living or ministry. In actuality, Lordship Salvation introduces at least five problems into the life of a church.

First, Lordship Salvation changes the very heart of the Gospel, which only requires a child-like faith. There are probably somewhere between 150 to 200 New Testament passages which singularly condition a lost person's salvation upon belief alone in Christ (John 3:16; 6:28-29; Acts 16:31; Rom 1:16, etc...). Belief is a synonym for faith or confidence or trust in God's provision. The moment a lost person exercises trust in Christ is the moment he is saved. Lewis Sperry Chafer, Theologian and founder of Dallas Theological Seminary, entitled this biblical phenomenon: "Belief: God's One Condition of Salvation." Why has God made salvation so simple? God has designed salvation as a free gift (Rom 4:4). If there were some human action to be performed beyond belief then salvation becomes something that we do rather than what God does. Such a human insertion reduces salvation's free gift status by making it something we earn. In other words, under the Lordship Salvation model, surrender or commitment becomes a work that one does to earn salvation despite the fact that the Scripture is clear that salvation is not by works (Eph 2:8-9; Isa 64:6). Also, God has specifically designed salvation so that the principle of human boasting is eliminated (Rom 3:27; 4:2). Yet, if the unsaved could do anything to merit salvation beyond simple belief, such as commit or surrender, then he has contributed to the salvation process and thus has something to boast over. God cannot allow this to happen given His aversion to pride of any sort. Lordship Salvation perverts this divine order by making salvation something we do for God rather than something He does for us. It is Christ who saves us rather than our surrender or commitment to Him.

Second, Lordship Salvation places an impossible requirement upon the unsaved. The unsaved person is dead in his trespasses and sins (Eph 2:1) and thus incapable of doing anything of spiritual value, such as obey, submit, forsake, etc...By making these other things the conditions of salvation rather than simply believing, obstacles are placed in front of the unbeliever that he or she is incapable of fulfilling. The lost

are capable of doing only one thing that is pleasing to a holy God: trusting in His provision for salvation. What then shall we make of the numerous biblical commands for the lost to repent (Acts 2:38; 17:30; 2 Pet 3:9)? The Greek word translated repent is *metanoēō*. It comes from two Greek words *meta* and *noeō*. *Meta* means change, as in metamorphosis. *Noeō* means "to perceive." From the word *noeō* we get the English word notion, which refers to an idea emanating from the mind. Thus, repent or *metanoēō* means to change one's mind about Christ rather than to change one's behavior in order to come to Christ. In this sense, repentance is a synonym for faith. Position Statement # 6 captures this idea when it says, "With respect to salvation, repentance is a change of mind regarding the Person and work of Christ."

Third, Lordship Salvation ignores the possibility of a carnal Christian. If complete commitment and yielding to Christ is an initial prerequisite for salvation, then there is no such thing as a believer who is carnal or not completely surrendered to Christ. Yet the Bible contains numerous examples of carnal believers. For example, Lot, who is called "righteous" three times (2 Pet 2:7-8), exhibits perpetual unrighteous behavior (Gen 19:30-38). Similarly, the Corinthians are called saints (1 Cor 1:2) yet the rest of 1 Corinthians reveals their un-saintly behavior. Thus, Paul refers to them as carnal believers (1 Cor 3:1-3). While carnal Christianity is obviously not God's perfect will for His children, such a categorization is a legitimate possibility.

Fourth, Lordship Salvation confuses sanctification with justification. After coming to Christ, God issues another call for His children to pursue practical sanctification or discipleship. For example, those whom Christ called to be His disciples, like Peter, were already believers (Matt 16:24-25). We see the same salvation pattern at work through Old Testament Israel. First, the nation was redeemed through the Passover Lamb and then, sometime later, the nation was put under the Mosaic Law for purposes of sanctification (Exod 19:1ff). Thus, submission to Christ's Lordship is a prerequisite for this second step of sanctification rather than for the initial step of justification. Therefore, the Scripture teaches Lordship Sanctification rather than Lordship Salvation. Lordship Salvation confuses this two-step approach by reading the principles for sanctification back into what is required for justification. In other words, what is the result of salvation mistakenly becomes the initial requirement for salvation. This mistake is tantamount to putting the cart before the horse.

Fifth, Lordship Salvation destroys the believer's assurance of salvation. Lordship advocates never precisely define what kind of commitment to Christ is necessary in order to become a Christian. How much surrender is required? How long is this surrender to last? How much fruit must this surrender produce? Because these questions are never precisely answered, the believer spends the rest of his Christian life wondering if he truly made enough of a commitment to become a Christian. Because of the believer's potential for "backsliding," the Christian can never really know until his dying day if he is a committed Christian. Thus, Lordship Salvation steals the joy that accompanies the knowledge that

one's eternal destiny is sealed. Far from such a guessing game, Christ gives all believers instantaneous assurance of salvation at the point of justification (John 5:24; 6:47).

In sum, although Lordship Salvation represents the right diagnosis of a problem, it holds out as the solution the wrong cure. The remedy for carnal Christianity is preaching more aggressively on the manifold blessings that accompany the sanctified life and the importance of the Spirit-filled life (Eph 5:18) so as to avoid the prospect of forfeiting rewards at the Bema Seat (1 Cor 9:24-27; 2 John 8; Rev 3:11). Let us hold out these genuine cures for carnal Christianity rather than embrace the false cure of Lordship Salvation. Such a false cure fundamentally alters the Gospel, which is the best news that God ever gave man.