

Wrongly Dividing the Word

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Let's look a little more closely at the dispensationalist tendency to make unwarranted contrasts between related or parallel truths ([see yesterday's post for the background on this](#)). It is important that we delineate carefully between essentially different biblical axioms (2 Tim. 2:15). But it is also possible to go overboard. The unbridled zeal of some dispensationalists for making dichotomies has led to a number of unfortunate impositions on the gospel.

For example, Jesus is both Savior and Lord (Luke 2:11), and no true believer would ever dispute that. "Savior" and "Lord" are separate offices, but we must be careful not to partition them in such a way that we divide Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 1:13). Nevertheless, loud voices from the dispensationalist camp have historically put forth the teaching that it is possible to reject Christ as Lord yet receive Him as Savior.

Indeed, there are those who would have us believe that the norm for salvation is to accept Jesus as Savior without submitting to Him as Lord. They make the incredible claim that any other teaching amounts to a false gospel "because it subtly adds works to the clear and simple condition set forth in the Word of God."**[1]** They have tagged the view they oppose "lordship salvation."

Lordship salvation, defined by one who labels it heresy, is "the view that for salvation a person must trust Jesus Christ as his Savior from sin and must also commit himself to Christ as Lord of his life, submitting to his sovereign authority."**[2]** It is astonishing that anyone would characterize that truth as unbiblical or heretical, but a chorus of voices still continues to echo the charge. The implication is that acknowledging Christ's lordship is a human work. That mistaken notion is backed by volumes of literature that speaks of people "making Jesus Christ Lord of their lives."**[3]**

We do not "make" Christ Lord; He *is* Lord! Those who will not receive Him as Lord are guilty of rejecting Him. "Faith" that rejects His sovereign authority is really unbelief. Conversely, acknowledging His lordship is no more a human work than repentance (cf. 2 Tim. 2:25) or faith itself (cf. Eph. 2:8-9). In fact, surrender to Christ is an important aspect of divinely produced saving faith,

not something added to faith.

The two clearest statements on the way of salvation in all of Scripture both emphasize Jesus' lordship: "Believe in the *Lord* Jesus, and you shall be saved" (Acts 16:31); and "If you confess with your mouth Jesus as *Lord*, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved" (Rom. 10:9).[4] Peter's sermon at Pentecost concluded with this declaration: "Let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him *both Lord and Christ*--this Jesus whom you crucified" (Acts 2:36, emphasis added). No promise of salvation is ever extended to those who refuse to accede to Christ's lordship. Thus there is no salvation except "lordship" salvation.[5]

Opponents of lordship salvation have gone to great lengths to make the claim that "Lord" in those verses does not mean "Master" but is a reference to his deity.[6] Even if that contention is granted, it simply affirms that those who come to Christ for salvation must acknowledge that He is God. The implications of that are even more demanding than if "Lord" only meant "Master"!

The fact is, "Lord" *does* mean "God" in all those verses. More precisely, it means "God who rules,"[7] and that only bolsters the arguments for lordship salvation. No one who comes for salvation with genuine faith, sincerely believing that Jesus is the eternal, almighty, sovereign God, will willfully reject His authority. True faith is not lip service. Our Lord himself pronounced condemnation on those who worshiped Him with their lips but not with their lives (Matt. 15:7-9). He does not become anyone's Savior until that person receives Him for who He is--Lord of all (Acts 10:36).

A. W. Tozer said:

The Lord will not save those whom He cannot command. He will not divide His offices. You cannot believe on a half-Christ. We take Him for what He is--the anointed Saviour and Lord who is King of kings and Lord of all lords! He would not be Who He is if He saved us and called us and chose us without the understanding that He can also guide and control our lives. [8]

NOTES:

[1] Livingston Blauvelt, Jr., "Does the Bible Teach Lordship Salvation?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* (January-March 1986), 37.

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] *Ibid.*, 38.

[4] Some dispensationalists would confine the application of Romans 10:9-10 to unbelieving Jews. It is true that Romans 9-11 deals with the question of Israel's rejection of the Messiah and the nation's place in God's eternal plan. But the soteriological significance of those verses cannot be limited to Israel alone, because of verses 12-13: "There is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call upon Him; for whoever will call upon the name of the Lord will be saved."

[5] I do not like the term "lordship salvation." It was coined by those who want to eliminate the idea of submission to Christ from the call to saving faith, and it implies that Jesus' lordship is a false addition to the gospel. As we shall see, however, "lordship salvation" is simply biblical and historic evangelical soteriology. I am using the term here (and have done so through the years) only for the sake of argument.

[6] Ibid., 38-41. See also G. Michael Cocoris, *Lordship Salvation--Is It Biblical?* (Dallas: Redencin Viva, 1983), 13-15.

[7] Proper understanding of any biblical term depends on etymology, context, and history. Etymologically, *kurios* comes from a Greek root that means "rule, dominion, or power." Contextually, taking Peter's use of *kurios* in Acts 2:36, it is important to note that verses 34-35 quote from Psalm 110, a messianic Psalm of rule and dominion ("Rule in the midst of Thine enemies," Ps. 110:2). Peter was not saying merely that "God has made Him ... God"; he was affirming Jesus' right to rule. Historically, Peter's sermon addressed the Jews' role in crucifying their Messiah (v. 23). At the trial of Jesus before Pilate and the Jewish mob, the issue was clearly his kingship, mentioned at least a dozen times in John 18:33-19:22. Clearly, careful historical-grammatical exegesis of Acts 2:36 can lead to only one conclusion: Jesus is the divine King who rules in the midst of both friends and foes. Having thus identified Christ as Lord of all, Peter makes his gospel appeal. Note carefully that Paul preached Jesus in exactly the same way (2 Cor. 4:3-5): Jesus is our sovereign Lord, and we are His servants.

[8] A. W. Tozer, *I Call It Heresy!* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Christian Publications, 1974), 18-19.

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