Lordship Salvation
Scripture: Selected Scriptures
Code: DD07

A GRACE COMMUNITY CHURCH DISTINCTIVE

The gospel that Jesus proclaimed was a call to discipleship, a call to follow him in submissive obedience, not just a plea to make a decision or pray a prayer. Jesus' message liberated people from the bondage of their sin while it confronted and condemned hypocrisy. It was an offer of eternal life and forgiveness for repentant sinners, but at the same time it was a rebuke to outwardly religious people whose lives were devoid of true righteousness. It put sinners on notice that they must turn from sin and embrace God's righteousness.

Our Lord's words about eternal life were invariably accompanied by warnings to those who might be tempted to take salvation lightly. He taught that the cost of following him is high, that the way is narrow and few find it. He said many who call him Lord will be forbidden from entering the kingdom of heaven (cf. Matt. 7:13-23).

Present-day evangelicalism, by and large, ignores these warnings. The prevailing view of what constitutes saving faith continues to grow broader and more shallow, while the portrayal of Christ in preaching and witnessing becomes fuzzy. Anyone who claims to be a Christian can find evangelicals willing to accept a profession of faith, whether or not the person's behavior shows any evidence of commitment to Christ. In this way, faith has become merely an intellectual exercise. Instead of calling men and women to surrender to Christ, modern evangelism asks them only to accept some basic facts about Him.

This shallow understanding of salvation and the gospel, known as "easy-believism," stands in stark contrast to what the Bible teaches. To put it simply, the gospel call to faith presupposes that sinners must repent of their sin and yield to Christ's authority. This, in a nutshell, is what is commonly referred to as lordship salvation.

The Distinctives of Lordship Salvation

There are many articles of faith that are fundamental to all evangelical teaching. For example, there is agreement among all believers on the following truths: (1) Christ's death purchased eternal salvation; (2) the saved are justified by grace through faith in Christ alone; (3) sinners cannot earn divine favor;

(4) God requires no preparatory works or pre-salvation reformation; (5) eternal life is a gift of God; (6) believers are saved before their faith ever produces any righteous works; and (7) Christians can and do sin, sometimes horribly.

What, then, are the distinctives of lordship salvation? What does Scripture teach that is embraced by those who affirm lordship salvation but rejected by proponents of “easybelievism”? The following are nine distinctives of a biblical understanding of salvation and the gospel.

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.

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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, easy-believism 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, easy-believism 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, easy-believism 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.

Adapted from John MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994); John MacArthur, *The Gospel According to the Apostles* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 2000); and John MacArthur, “Getting the Gospel Right,” *Masterpiece,* Fall 1988, 6-10. For a fuller treatment of lordship salvation, consult these resources.

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