

Jesus' Lordship and Our Salvation: Unpacking the Gospel Truth

By Bob Nyberg¹

In 1628, the Swedish warship Vasa set sail on its maiden voyage, only to capsize and sink within minutes due to a combination of design flaws and poor communication among the shipbuilders and the king's advisors. The ship was top-heavy, with too much weight in the upper structure and insufficient ballast to stabilize it. Despite concerns about its stability, political pressure from King Gustavus Adolphus pushed for its immediate launch. On the day of the voyage, a critical decision to sail with the gun ports open proved disastrous. When a strong gust of wind hit the ship, it capsized, and water poured in through the open gun ports, causing the ship to sink rapidly.

This tragic event, caused by unclear directions and miscommunication, serves as a compelling reminder of the catastrophic consequences that can arise from a lack of clarity. Similarly, the importance of communicating a clear gospel message cannot be overstated. Just as the Vasa's fate was sealed by unclear instructions, the eternal destiny of lost souls hangs in the balance when the gospel is presented in an unclear manner. Ensuring that the message of salvation is conveyed clearly is essential, as it directly impacts the ability of people to understand and respond to the good news of Jesus Christ.

A crucial element in presenting a clear gospel message relates to the lordship of Jesus Christ. Is Jesus Lord of all? What does that really mean? Does a person have to make Jesus Lord of their life to be saved? These questions have significant ramifications for how we present the gospel.

According to God's Word, Jesus **is** indeed Lord of all. Peter made this clear as he presented the gospel to Cornelius. In Acts 10:36, we read, "He sent the message to the Israelites, proclaiming the good news [*εὐαγγελίζω*; to announce the gospel] of peace through Jesus Christ—He is Lord of all" (HCSB).

Dr. Constable elaborates on the significance of this verse:

... this verse is a kind of caption for what Peter proceeded to announce to Cornelius and his guests. Its three main emphases are: first, that the message to follow was a presentation of revelation that God had sent to the Jews. Second, it was a message resulting in peace that comes through Jesus Christ. Third, Jesus Christ is Lord of all for both Jews and Gentiles.²

Peter announced or proclaimed the gospel to this group of Gentiles. What exactly did he mean when he stated that Jesus is Lord of all? The phrase "Lord of all" was a title for deity used by Gentiles such as Cornelius. Christians adopted the phrase as an appropriate title for Jesus Christ. But that brings up an important question. When Peter used this phrase with his Gentile audience, was he asking them to make Jesus Lord of their lives to be saved? Furthermore, how can mere human beings make Jesus Lord of all?

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² Constable, Tom. *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible*. Galaxie Software, 2003. Print.

Actually, God is the One who made Jesus Lord. People do not make Him Lord. This is affirmed in Acts 2:36: “Therefore let all the house of Israel know with certainty that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah” (HCSB).

Eventually everyone, saved and unsaved alike, will acknowledge that Jesus is Lord. That is His position. Philippians 2:10–11 emphasizes this truth: “So that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (NASB).

Lordship Salvation teaches that a person must make Jesus Lord to be saved. But people cannot make Jesus Lord, when in fact God has already made Him Lord. This concept is often encapsulated by the trite cliché: “Either Jesus is Lord of all, or He is not Lord at all.” However, this tired saying is contrary to God’s Word.

In the book of Acts, God had to prepare Peter’s heart before sending him to present the gospel to Cornelius. We read:

But he became hungry and was desiring to eat; but while they were making preparations, he fell into a trance; and he saw the sky opened up, and an object like a great sheet coming down, lowered by four corners to the ground, and there were in it all kinds of four-footed animals and crawling creatures of the earth and birds of the air. A voice came to him, “Get up, Peter, kill and eat!” But Peter said, “By no means, Lord, for I have never eaten anything unholy and unclean” (Acts 10:10–14).

Notice Peter’s response: “By no means, Lord.” According to Lordship Salvation, if Jesus is not Lord of all, then He is not Lord at all. In other words, if a person does not make Jesus Lord, then that person cannot be saved. If this is true, then the only conclusion is that Peter could not possibly be saved since he was not submitting to the lordship of Christ.

The problem with Lordship Salvation is that a person can never know with absolute certainty that they are saved since they can never be sure that they have submitted 100% to the lordship of Christ. This uncertainty not only results in a lack of assurance of salvation but also greatly hinders spiritual growth in sanctification.

Free Grace teaches that Jesus is Lord of all. This is His position, regardless of whether individuals “make” Him Lord of their lives. How can a person “make” Jesus Lord when He already is Lord?

Lance Latham wrote,

Surely we must recognize WHO HE IS, or we will die in our sins (John 8:24). But this is vastly different from making Him your Lord in your life, in other words, promising to obey the rest of your life. This latter is preaching “works.” His mercies, with all His graciousness to us, WILL LEAD us to making Him Lord, and that out of a heart of love and appreciation of Him. We feel that those who propose this way of salvation change the obvious meaning of Romans 10:9 to justify this.

That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. This CANNOT be made to say, “make Him Lord of your life.” Believing on Christ is distinctly not “turning the direction of your life over to Him.” It is looking in faith to our Saviour crucified for our

sins on Calvary! It is not of works, devotion or full surrender. It is His work and His death that avails.

The self-reliant man feels that he must add something to Calvary in order to be accepted by God. He must be either self-denying, quite sorry for his sins, determined to live differently, or “do something” to fix up all his past. However, we find in Scripture that salvation is “not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy,” (Titus 3:5), “not of works, lest any man should boast” (Eph. 2:9). We cannot add a thing to Calvary as our hope... Therefore, we must not frustrate the grace of God by adding works to grace.³

William R. Newell wrote,

... to preach full surrender to an unsaved man as the way of salvation will just make a hateful Pharisee out of him.⁴

Harry Ironside wrote,

When anyone comes promising salvation to those “who make full surrender” of all that they have to God, and who “pay the price of full salvation” he is preaching another gospel, for the price was paid on Calvary’s cross and the work that saves is finished. It was Christ Jesus who made the full surrender when He yielded His life on Calvary that saves us, not our surrender in any way to Him.⁵

Salvation is by grace through faith in the finished work of Christ. It is totally apart from good works, commitment to future obedience or making Jesus Lord. Salvation is about what Christ did for us. It is not about what we do for Christ.

Those who teach Lordship Salvation set up a straw man argument by labeling Free Grace as the “no lordship position.” Free Grace Theology rejects Lordship Salvation but absolutely acknowledges the Lordship of Christ. Furthermore, Free Grace teaches Lordship Sanctification rather than Lordship Salvation. This means that while Free Grace Theology affirms Jesus’ lordship, it distinguishes between the moment of salvation and the process of spiritual growth.

Lordship Salvation blurs the distinction between “justification” and “discipleship.” In contrast, Free Grace recognizes the difference between “justification” and “discipleship.” Discipleship is a component of sanctification. Justification refers to the act of God declaring a sinner righteous through faith in Christ alone. It is a one-time event that occurs at the moment of salvation. Discipleship, on the other hand, involves the believer’s ongoing growth and commitment to following Christ, which is part of the sanctification process.

Sanctification is the process by which believers are gradually transformed into the likeness of Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit. This process involves learning, growing, and maturing in faith. Free Grace Theology emphasizes that while discipleship is crucial for spiritual growth and maturity, it is not a requirement for salvation. Salvation is based solely on faith in the finished work of Christ, not on the believer’s commitment to follow Christ.

³ Lance B. Latham, *The Two Gospels* (Rolling Meadows, IL: Awana, 1984), p. 46.

⁴ William R. Newell, *Romans Verse-by-Verse* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1938), p. 253.

⁵ Harry A. Ironside, *Another Gospel?* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1919).

By making this distinction, Free Grace Theology seeks to uphold the biblical teaching that salvation is a free gift of God's grace, received through faith alone, while also recognizing the importance of discipleship in the believer's life. This approach avoids the confusion and potential legalism that can arise from conflating justification with discipleship, ensuring that the gospel message remains clear and focused on God's grace.

Although there are numerous differences between these two positions, this highlights some of the key distinctions between Free Grace Theology and Lordship Salvation. Free Grace Theology firmly acknowledges the Lordship of Christ and emphasizes that salvation is by grace through faith in the finished work of Christ, independent of good works or future obedience. It also teaches Lordship Sanctification, recognizing the importance of discipleship as part of the sanctification process, but not as a requirement for salvation.

On the other hand, Lordship Salvation conflates justification with discipleship, potentially leading to confusion and legalism. By maintaining a clear distinction between justification and discipleship, Free Grace Theology ensures that the gospel message remains focused on God's grace, while also encouraging believers to grow and mature in their faith through discipleship.

This approach upholds the biblical teaching that salvation is a free gift, received through faith alone, and underscores the ongoing journey of sanctification as believers are transformed into the likeness of Christ.