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**C0539 – 10/12/2005 – The Terms of Salvation**  
**Lordship Salvation-Part 1**

Last week, we looked at the question, “What is faith?” and in so doing we entered in upon the Lordship Salvation/Free Grace controversy. Today I thought it would be useful if I gave you an overview of the controversy and had some time for Q & A but first, let’s review the question “What is faith?” since that is what I have concluded in our series is the sole condition on the human side for justification. By way of proof what you want to tell people who disagree is the following:

1. There are over 150 passages in the NT that condition salvation on faith alone
2. If the condition is not faith alone then all 150 passages are only partial gospels and would not result in salvation
3. Jesus (Luke 8:12), Peter (1 Pt 2:6-7), Paul (Rom 3:22ff), James (Js 2:23), and Jude (1:5) all preached a truncated false gospel that would not save if the human requirement is more than faith.

As you can see this is a completely untenable position. Now, to the Lordship/Free Grace controversy and the issue of faith; both sides agree that faith is necessary to salvation. The real issue is what is the nature of faith? Is faith to be defined as “reliance”, “trust”, or “confidence” in someone or something? or is faith more complicated, involving “absolute submission”, “obedience”, “forsaking oneself”, “unconditional surrender”, and “complete resignation of self”?

**I. THE GREEK WORDS**

Three Greek words are involved: *pistis*, *pistos*, and *pisteuo*. These two nouns and one verb convey the meaning “trust”, “reliance”, or “confidence” in or upon someone or something.

**II. WHAT IS FAITH?**

The lexical use of the words shows that biblical faith is “having confidence in and entrusting one’s eternal salvation to the person and work of Jesus Christ alone.” The Bible does not complicate faith by including elements such as “absolute submission”, “obedience”, “forsaking oneself”, “unconditional surrender, etc. Nor does the Bible support the distinction between “faith” and “saving faith” or “true faith”. In other words, the Bible does not distinguish between different kinds of faith; saving and non-saving (in this respect the controversial Js 2 must be understood properly). But the Bible does distinguish quantities of faith. For example, a little faith will not move mountains but faith the size of a mustard seed will (Matt 17:20). Jesus would not entrust Himself to those who simply believed because of the miracles. This did not mean they were not true believers. It simply meant they were not prepared for Christ to disclose Himself to them on a deeper level (John 14:21). Their faith was shallow but it nevertheless did save (John 2:23-25). The issue is not the *kind of faith* but whether a person has *a measure of faith* in the proper object, namely, Jesus Christ. How much faith is enough to save? Lightner said, all the faith you have. Bing said, “a small faith is not inferior in quality, but in amount...Our salvation does not depend upon the strength of our faith...Weak faith will not remove mountains, but there is one thing at least that it will do; it will bring a sinner into peace with God.”<sup>i</sup> If we focus on the kind of faith we have rather than the object of faith then one begins to put faith in faith rather than Christ. This leads inevitably to lack of assurance in salvation. Did I have the right kind of faith? Belief in Christ no matter how strong results in salvation. Thus, either a person believes in Christ or he does not. The Bible keeps faith simple. It is simply relying on the person and work of Jesus Christ alone for eternal salvation.

### III. PRECONDITIONS OF FAITH

1. General revelation of God in creation and conscience (Rom 1:18ff; 2:14ff)
2. Convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit (John 16:8-11)
3. Drawing ministry of the Father (John 6:44-45)

On this note, Charles Bing, graduate of Dallas Theological Seminary, in his doctrinal dissertation wrote these accurate words,

God the Spirit convicts people of sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8-11) by His revelation of the truth about Jesus Christ in the gospel (2 Cor 4:6). In this way God stirs people to respond and draws them to Himself (John 6:44), but in the end faith is a person’s own responsibility. It is not necessary here to harmonize this human side of salvation with the doctrine of divine election, but only to note that

the Bible clearly teaches both, and a person must accept both whether or not the mystery can be fathomed.<sup>ii</sup>

#### **IV. FAITH ITSELF**

Faith then is not what saves. The object of our faith, Jesus Christ, saves. Thus, faith is merely the instrument or means through which Christ saves us. Faith is non-meritorious. Machen said,

The efficacy of faith...depends not upon the faith itself, considered as a psychological phenomenon, but upon the object of the faith, namely Christ. Faith is not regarded in the New Testament, itself, as a meritorious work or a meritorious condition of the soul; but rather, it is regarded as a means which is used by the grace of God. The New Testament never says that a man is saved *on account of* his faith, but always that he is saved *through* his faith or *by means of* his faith; faith is merely the means which the Holy Spirit uses to apply to the individual soul the benefits of Christ's death.<sup>iii</sup>

As you can see faith is non-meritorious, therefore it can originate with man. Machen said,

...faith means receiving something, not doing something or even being something.<sup>iv</sup>

#### **V. ISN'T FAITH A GIFT OF GOD?**

##### **1. Faith is a gift of God.**

This view says faith is the direct gift of God. God gives a person faith in seed form in regeneration and the person gives it back to God. This view places regeneration before faith so that we have the dilemma of an unbeliever being saved. This is simply an unbiblical doctrine as well as having no support in the Bible. Yet, many Christians hold this view because they've been taught it. The first problem is that this is an unscriptural view of total depravity. Total depravity does not mean corpse-like. These very theologians teach that an unbeliever must read the divine word, pray, etc. If total depravity means corpse-like then how can they do these things? If they can do these things then they are not corpse-like and if they are not corpse-like then maybe they can believe! The second problem is that this view has an unscriptural view of faith. They view faith as a work. Therefore, if faith originates with man then man has a hand in his salvation. The problem with this is that, biblically, faith is non-meritorious. As John Calvin said, it strips a man of *all*

commendation. Faith is the antithesis of works (Rom 4:1-6) and is in accordance with grace (Rom 4:16). If it were a work then it would have to originate with God but since it is not then it can be the responsibility of man. All this does not preclude the fact that for faith to result in justification God must initiate the process. Bing says,

“Faith as a divinely prompted yet human response in no way makes it a meritorious work that earns salvation.”<sup>v</sup>

## **2. Faith is a gift of God and responsibility of man<sup>vi</sup>**

This view is a little better but it still lacks firm biblical support.

## **3. Faith is the responsibility of man**

This view states that the whole “by grace through faith salvation” is a gift God. Grace is the basis, God is the source, and faith is the means. Faith as the means of salvation is a gift. God did not have to provide such a simple and non-meritorious means of salvation being imparted to men. But He did and that is a gift of God. The faith itself however, still must come from man. Once again though, this does not preclude the fact that for faith to result in justification God must initiate the process.

Finally, I read to you a gospel presentation by one who holds to Lordship Salvation to demonstrate how radically different the gospel is presented. The Christian was literally giving the unbeliever reasons not to believe by challenging him to give up all his sins, etc.

We concluded by saying, whatever happened to the simple childlike definition of faith (Mark 10:15; Luke 18:16)? Is it too hard to understand what Jesus meant? Did Jesus not mean simple trust, reliance, confidence in Him was enough for Him to save?

## **I. INTRODUCTION TO LORDSHIP SALVATION**

For the rest of the evening, I want to give you an overview of the reason Lordship Salvation adherents are so concerned and the major areas of dispute. That Lordship adherents find this to be a crucial area of study is apparent.

“There is no more important issue...than the question of what gospel we ought to believe and proclaim. Other controversies have generated more heat and spawned more print...But those are peripheral to the real issues. The gospel is not. It *is* the

issue...I am convinced that our lack of clarity on the most basic matter of all—the gospel—is the greatest detriment to the work of the church in our day.” (MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus*, hereinafter GATJ, xviii-xix)

In recent years Lordship Salvation has been popularized by the teaching and writing ministry of John MacArthur, pastor of Grace Bible Church in California and president of the Master’s Seminary. This teaching did not originate with MacArthur but with Puritan theologians of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. It now enjoys widespread acceptance. I want to be clear on several facts related to this controversy and I want to be as gentle as possible but I think there are some real and serious distortions of the gospel in this teaching. By way of introduction the three major sources I have studied are...

1. *The Gospel According to Jesus*      John MacArthur
2. *So Great Salvation*                      Charles Ryrie
3. *Absolutely Free!*                          Zane Hodges

Each of the books differs in some respects but *The Gospel According to Jesus* differs significantly from both *So Great Salvation* and *Absolutely Free!* to the point that I think only Ryrie and Hodges have presented a free gospel. I think MacArthur presents a works salvation. I have labeled these three views as follows:

1. Lordship Salvation View
2. Change of Mind View
3. Free Grace View

## **II.      WHAT IS LORDSHIP SALVATION?**

“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.”

## **III.     WHAT IS FUELING THE DEBATE?**

What seems to be a big concern for Lordship adherents is many people’s claim to be a Christian with no change in their behavior. MacArthur says, “This new gospel has spawned a generation of professing Christians whose behavior often is indistinguishable from the rebellion of the unregenerate.” Chantry says, “All of this is related to the use of a message in evangelism that is unbiblical...Evangelicals are swelling the ranks of the deluded with a perverted gospel.” The Lordship concern is therefore a very good one. They desire a

genuine Christianity that demonstrates consistency between profession and conduct. In other words, they desire those who profess Christ to press on to maturity and fruitfulness. Their answer has been that there are many who profess Christ but are just that, mere professors (Matt 7:20-23). Those who preach a gospel like myself (Ryrie or Hodges) are giving these professors a false and damning assurance. So, we have become the center of attack. It is our fault there are so many people who profess Christ but don't walk like Christ. The Lordship answer to this dilemma is to propose a gospel (one they say is the 'old gospel') that demands *up front* an exclusive commitment to an obedient lifestyle in hopes of minimizing these problems (Bing).

#### **IV. HOW DO I DETECT LORDSHIP SALVATION?**

1. Easy-believism (xxi, 27, 37, 44, 281)
2. Cheap grace (xxi, 43, 60)

#### **V. WHAT THEOLOGICAL ISSUE STARTED THE MODERN CONTROVERSY?**

I do not think this is a matter of semantics because all three of these men are theologically astute enough to recognize distinctions. Speaking of distinctions, John MacArthur begins *The Gospel According to Jesus* with a diatribe against some of the distinctions dispensationalists have made. While he affirms a distinction between Israel and the Church and claims to be a pre-millennial dispensationalist himself, MacArthur rejects the following distinctions.

1. Carnal and Spiritual Christians
2. Discipleship and Salvation
3. The Church and the Kingdom
4. Age of Law and the Age of Grace

Of prime importance is the first distinction between carnal and spiritual Christians. He says,

“In 1918 Lewis Sperry Chafer published *He That is Spiritual*, articulating the concept that 1 Corinthians 2:15-3:3 speaks of two classes of Christians: carnal and spiritual... That was a foreign concept to most Christians in Dr. Chafer's generation, but it has become a central premise for a large segment of the church today. Dr. Chafer's doctrine of spirituality, along with some of his other teachings, have become the basis of a whole new way of looking at the gospel.” (GATJ, 30)

It may bewilder you to find that someone would deny that Christians still have a carnal or sin nature. Yet a large segment of evangelical Christianity denies that Christians have a sin nature. For example, MacArthur says,

“Christians can be carnal in their behavior; they are never carnal by nature. That is the distinction I have tried to make.” (GATJ, 280)

This is a key statement to understanding Lordship Salvation. MacArthur does not hold to two natures in the believer. He holds that the believer has only one nature, a regenerate nature. Thus, he does not hold that believers still have a sin nature. He believes Christians can still sin but there is no real explanation for why we still sin. If he is right then I have to ask him, “If believers do not have a sin nature but only a regenerate one then from whence does sin come?” If the believer has only a regenerate nature then carnal behavior must originate in the regenerate nature! But this is contrary to 1 John 2:28-3:10a and 5:18 which both teach that the born-again self, the regenerate nature is not able to sin, it can only produce holiness. Further, if we have only one nature then why aren’t we perfect?

This belief sets up the Lordship and Reformed theology which is then used to interpret other passages. All their interpretations must fit with this theological truth. Thus, in many justification and sanctification passages, their theology is guiding their exegesis rather than the grammar and historical context.

## **VI. WHAT ARE THE ISSUES?**

Since the controversy is over many things, I have narrowed down our study to six major issues.

### **1. Faith and Salvation**

Both sides agree that faith is necessary to salvation but what is the nature of faith? Is faith to be defined as simple “reliance”, “trust”, or “confidence” in someone or something? or is faith complex, involving “absolute submission”, “obedience”, “forsaking oneself”, “unconditional surrender”, and “complete resignation of self”?

### **2. Repentance and Salvation**

Both sides agree that repentance is necessary to salvation but what is the nature of repentance? Is repentance an inner “change of mind” or does it also include “turning from sin”?

### **3. Christ’s Lordship and Salvation**

Both sides agree that Christ is Lord meaning that Christ is God but must one submit to Christ’s Lordship in order to be saved? What does the title “Lord” mean? Does it mean more than Jesus Christ is God? Does it also mean that a person must subjectively submit to Christ’s sovereign rule over his life as a condition of salvation? Or does it simply mean that the object of one’s faith must be Jesus Christ who is God and thereby able to save?

### **4. Discipleship and Salvation**

Both sides agree that discipleship is costly and important. Is the call to discipleship the call to salvation? Is the Great Commission in Matt 28:19-21 a call to salvation? or a call to discipleship? or is it both? Christ is looking for disciples but just what is a “disciple” and what does it mean to “follow” Christ? What is the relationship between being a disciple, following Christ and salvation?

### **5. Perseverance of the Saints and Eternal Security**

Both sides agree that genuine Christians are eternally secure. However, is perseverance of the saints the same as eternal security? Is the doctrine of perseverance of the saints biblical? Can a genuine Christian utterly fail in the Christian life or is a failure not a genuine believer? Can a Christian work against the Holy Spirit? Does a Christian have a sin nature?

### **6. Justification and Sanctification**

What is the relationship between justification and sanctification? Is a man justified by faith alone or are works necessary as well? What of the Reformed statement that “we are justified not without, and yet not by works”? Are good works a necessary result of saving faith? If so, how many “good works”?

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Agreement</b>	<b>Disagreement</b>	<b>Free Grace</b>	<b>Lordship</b>
	<b>t</b>	<b>t</b>		



<b>Faith</b>	Required for salvation	What is the nature of faith?	“reliance, trust, confidence”	“absolute submission, obedience, forsaking oneself, unconditional surrender, complete resignation of self”
<b>Repentance</b>	Required for salvation	What is the nature of repentance?	“change of mind”	“change of mind and turning from sin”
<b>Christ’s Lordship</b>	Christ is “Lord” meaning He is God	Must a person submit to Christ’s Lordship in order to be saved?	No. A person must only place their faith in Christ who is Lord	Yes. A person must submit to Christ’s Lordship in order to be saved
<b>Discipleship</b>	It is costly and important	Is the call to discipleship the call to salvation?	No. The call to discipleship follows salvation.	Yes. The call to discipleship is the same as the call to salvation.
<b>Perseverance of the Saints and Eternal Security</b>	Genuine Christians are eternally secure	Can a genuine Christian utterly fail?	Yes. A Christian may sin and not recover. There is a sin unto physical death. The Christian has a sin nature. The Christian is	No. A Christian may sin but he will always recover and advance. One who does not recover is a professing

			eternally secure.	Christian. There is no sin unto physical death. The Christian has no sin nature.
<b>Justification and Sanctification</b>		What is the relationship between justification and sanctification ?	Justification is by faith alone. and is the basis of sanctification .	No one is justified <i>without</i> works and yet no one is justified <i>by</i> works.

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<sup>i</sup> Charles Bing, *Lordship Salvation, Chapter 2*, p. 25. <http://www.gracelife.org/library/LS-chap2.htm>

<sup>ii</sup> Charles Bing, *Lordship Salvation, Chapter 2*, p. 23. <http://www.gracelife.org/library/LS-chap2.htm>

<sup>iii</sup> Charles Bing quoting J. Greshem Machen, *What Is Faith?* in his dissertation *Lordship Salvation, Chapter 2*, p. 26. <http://www.gracelife.org/library/LS-chap2.htm>

<sup>iv</sup> Charles Bing quoting J. Greshem Machen, *What Is Faith?* in his dissertation *Lordship Salvation, Chapter 2*, p. 26. <http://www.gracelife.org/library/LS-chap2.htm>

<sup>v</sup> Charles Bing, *Lordship Salvation, Chapter 2*, p. 26. <http://www.gracelife.org/library/LS-chap2.htm>

<sup>vi</sup> Charles Ryrie, *Basic Theology* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1999), 376.

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