

THE HERESY OF LORDSHIP SALVATION: A GREAT PERVERSION OF THE GRACE GOSPEL

When we were in Ephesus, I could not help but be reminded of the last meeting Paul had with the Elders of that church. He called for them to meet him in Miletus, which is about 28 miles south of Ephesus and he gave them a warning. The warning was they needed to be on the lookout for people outside the church and inside the church who would rise up and present perverse and faulty doctrine (**Acts 20:28-31**). At this meeting, he specifically said the Gospel I have solemnly preached is a Gospel of pure grace (Acts 20:24; Ephesians 2:8-9).

Back during the days of the apostles, many religious people were surfacing who were presenting many false doctrines. Eusebius, the church historian, said that there was a heretical group that the first Christians called the “Ebionites.” He said the reason they were given this name was because of “the poor...opinions they held about Christ.” They believed that in order for one to be saved, they must “observe every detail of the Law” and they taught that “by faith in Christ alone...they would never win salvation” (*Eusebius, The History of the Church*, pp. 136-137).

Two millenniums later, an offshoot of this heresy has surfaced again. **It is a belief that simple faith alone in Jesus Christ is not enough to save. It is a belief that one must commit himself to a certain level of works or obedience or discipleship to really be saved. The name of this grace-polluting heresy today is called “Lordship Salvation.”**

In **Galatians 1:6-9**, the Apostle Paul said that if any person came preaching another Gospel other than the pure grace of God, he was to be accursed. Paul does not specifically state what “another of a different kind” Gospel is, but we know what he meant. He meant any Gospel message that contradicts his grace Gospel of grace which is salvation by faith in Jesus Christ.

The specific grace Gospel that Paul preached was a Gospel of justification by faith alone apart from any works (Gal. 2:16). Paul taught that salvation was by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone and he also taught that any additions or subtractions to this grace message was a damnable heresy that actually would “nullify the grace of God” (Gal. 2:21). Salvation is not by grace and works, it is all grace apart from any works.

Paul was so convinced of this grace message that he said if you mix works in any way, shape or form into grace, it is no longer grace (**Rom. 11:6**). In fact, he said that if someone believed in Jesus Christ for salvation he would be completely justified even if he did not do one good work ever (**Rom. 4:5**). He totally and completely believed and taught that any sinner was saved by grace through faith apart from any works, commitments or promises (**Ephesians 2:8-9**). Paul was so focused on this point that twice he said if anyone comes preaching another Gospel, a different Gospel other than this, let him be accursed (**Gal. 1:8, 9**).

It appears to me that a strange thing is happening in these days in which we live and that is if one comes and preaches a pure Pauline grace Gospel of salvation by faith alone in Christ alone, the vast majority of the religious world will curse and ridicule the one who preaches Pauline grace. **Instead of targeting one who pollutes grace, many target one who preaches grace.**

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Let me cite one example. One of the great grace theologians that God ever permitted to spend time on this earth was Lewis Sperry Chafer, the founder and former President of Dallas Theological Seminary. Dr. Chafer's close friend and mentor was C.I. Scofield and before Dr. Scofield died in 1921, he requested that Dr. Chafer research and write on the theme of "the grace of God." In 1922, Dr. Chafer published his monumental work, *Grace, The Glorious Theme*. In fact, when Dr. Chafer introduced his book, he wrote these words: "This book is affectionately dedicated to the late Cyrus Ingerson Scofield, D.D., for many years my friend, counselor, teacher, who in his generation excelled as champion and exponent of grace." Dr. Chafer's study on the grace of God is very powerful and very dispensationally accurate to true Pauline doctrine. It is a masterpiece. Dr. Chafer was a great preacher and defender of God's grace. He clearly understood grace, he clearly taught grace and he defended grace.

Now jump ahead in time to 1988 and "Heeere's Johnny." The Johnny to whom we are referring is John MacArthur, Jr. who wrote a very dispensationally confused book called "The Gospel According to Jesus." In his book, he promoted his Lordship salvation concepts, which he claimed were supported by all of Church history (which we will prove is not true).

In the introduction to his book, he immediately starts attacking Lewis Sperry Chafer for preaching pure grace (i.e. Introduction, pp. 15-16). He actually has the arrogant and ignorant audacity to suggest that the pure grace Gospel taught by Dr. Chafer is another Gospel, when in fact, Dr. Chafer is the one presenting the true Pauline Gospel.

Fifteen years later, when he writes again, he attacks Dr. Chafer again. Here is what he says: "The pedigree of no-lordship doctrine at Dallas Seminary is traceable back to founder Lewis Sperry Chafer. The doctrine apparently stemmed from Chafer's misguided attempts to develop a uniquely dispensationalist soteriology. Chafer (together with other dearly dispensationalists, including C.I. Scofield) was so zealous to eliminate every vestige of law from the dispensation of grace that he embraced a kind of antinomianism. That was the seed from which the no-lordship gospel sprouted" (John MacArthur, *A 15-Year Restrospective on the Lordship Controversy*).

It is very obvious that John MacArthur is on a rampage against Lewis Sperry Chafer. The fact is Dr. Chafer was not the source of the "no-lordship" doctrine; Jesus Christ was the source because He is the one who revealed the Gospel of grace to Paul, and Dr. Chafer is simply presenting the truth of that Gospel. Since Dr. Chafer is now with the Lord (since 1952), it is up to true dispensational teachers of God's Word who know Pauline grace truth and know Dr. Chafer's teaching to set the record straight. I am one such teacher and this is what we will do in this study.

If MacArthur were just confused, it would be one thing; but when he attacks Dr. Chafer, as far as I am concerned he has started a theological war. Perhaps in heaven God will make MacArthur sit in C.I. Scofield's or Dr. Chafer's class and listen to their lectures on grace. If nothing else, he will offer them an apology. Actually, this is not about MacArthur versus Dr. Chafer; this is about grace truth versus distorted doctrine. There is much at stake because one's concept of grace is biblically accurate and the other is heresy.

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The fact is we will prove that John MacArthur and those who have his view are very confused. In his Lordship salvation book, he rambles about a Gospel he thinks he sees in the synoptics (Matthew, Mark, Luke) which frankly is not there. The grace Gospel wasn't even in existence until Jesus Christ gave it to Paul, and Paul was the apostle commissioned to write it by Jesus Christ, Himself (Galatians 1:11-12).

MacArthur is confused about many things. He confuses being a disciple with being a Christian; he misses many critical differences between a program with Israel and the program for the Grace Age and he says things that are not actually true, such as the Church has always historically believed in his Lordship salvation gospel (*Ibid.*, p. 222).

He is so dispensationally naive that I began to wonder what systematic theology he even studied. I called his school and was told that he relied heavily upon the theologies of Louis Berkhof and Wayne Grudem. That to me explains it perfectly. Those guys were and are very fuzzy on differences between Israel and the Church. The saying is true "birds of a feather tend to flock together."

Having analyzed many of MacArthur's works, it is obvious to me that even though he is, generally speaking, a good verse-by-verse Bible expositor (some expositions are better than others because of his dispensational ineptness—his commentaries on John and some parts of Hebrews are theologically lame), he truly is at a junior level in being a theologian. In fact, Christian Temple said, in his opinion, MacArthur is guilty of "poor exegesis" (*Lordship Salvation: Is it Biblical*, p. 6).

In my opinion, it is good he is named John MacArthur, **Junior** because he is at a junior theological level in his grasp of many things. But the real problem here is that his naïve and inaccurate conclusions have affected and confused many people since 1988, including some of the people who have been affiliated with this teacher's churches.

I doubt seriously that there has ever been a time in history when it is so critical that God's people know the truth on the doctrine of God's grace versus the distorted and perverted heresy known as Lordship salvation. I make no apologies about this point—I was saved by pure grace and I live and enjoy my life by pure grace. I defend pure grace. **The message I believe, live and preach, which comes straight out of Scripture, is a grace plus nothing message.** That message has changed my life.

The night God saved me in 1976, I did acknowledge I was a sinner and I did invite Jesus Christ into my life to be my Savior. I did not make any promises to turn from sin. I did not promise to become a disciple who would follow Him. I did not say I was going to do a bunch of works. I did not promise I was going to go to church. I did not promise I was going to make Him Lord of every area of my life. I simply believed on Jesus Christ and the moment I did, I had a relationship with God.

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I became a child of God at that moment, no matter what I did or said from that point on (**John 1:12**). You could not ever take away my Son-ship status, even if I would have lived my life wallowing in the world like a pig.

If you try to tell me God's grace includes my works, I will tell you and show you that you are dead wrong. In fact, Paul in **II Corinthians 1:9-10** makes it very clear that God wants us trusting only in Him to deliver us from the death penalty. He does not want us trusting in anything about ourselves. Lordship salvation is another Gospel that Paul did not preach. It does not matter to me who a person is or how many books a person has written. I personally know and have experienced what God's pure grace is, and MacArthur's teaching borders on being a heretic.

When I get to heaven, I will stand beside C.I. Scofield and Dr. Chafer and their grasp of God's grace any day because they understood it and saw it clearly and accurately and this study will prove that.

QUESTION #1 – What are the actual terms of our salvation from a human perspective?

When we were on the island of Patmos, I asked our Greek tour guide if he had believed on Jesus Christ as his Savior, since Christ had actually appeared to John on this very island where he was conducting tours. His response was, "I don't always closely follow His teachings." My response was, "You must have misunderstood the question, because I did not ask you if you followed His teachings, I asked you have you believed in Him to save you from your sins?"

Had some Lordship salvation proponent been witnessing to this guy he would have said, "If you don't follow his teachings then you could not possibly have really believed on Jesus Christ." Our tour guide apparently thought that in order to go to heaven, you must follow the teachings of Jesus. But the Scriptures teach that in order to go to heaven, you must simply believe on Jesus Christ.

Before we left that island, we made sure this tour guide knew that salvation was by believing in Christ alone to save from sin. We clearly and accurately witnessed to this man and when we left the island he had heard a pure grace Gospel. But this does raise an interesting point; **most people are very confused about what actually saves them from sin.**

It has been said that the Gospel is so simple that even a child may understand it and accept it. When it actually is a presentation of the true grace Gospel, this statement is absolutely true. The problem arises with a concept like Lordship salvation because the simplicity of the Gospel becomes obscured and many people are becoming very confused about what they need to do or believe to be saved.

Dr. Curtis Hutson said, "Lordship salvation is an unscriptural teaching regarding the doctrine of salvation and is confusing to Christians" (*Salvation Crystal Clear*, Vol. 1, p. 301). Any teaching that confuses many adults is certainly going to confuse little children.

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There is nothing more important in this life for a person to know than what one must do to be saved from their sins, so that when he/she dies the person is guaranteed everlasting life. This certainly is the one question in this life about which you do not want to be confused.

When the Apostle Paul was asked that very question “What must I do to be saved?,” his answer was **“believe in the Lord Jesus and you shall be saved”** (Acts 16:30-31). Apparently Paul had not matured to the theological level of junior John MacArthur.

Paul did not say you need to believe and follow Jesus; or you need to believe and make Him Lord of your life; or you need to believe and promise you’ll try not to sin; or you need to believe and become His disciple; or you need to believe and obey; he said you need to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved. That is all he said.

The Bible is very clear and specific in many passages to point out and reveal that all a person must do to be saved, the only thing a person must do to have everlasting life **is to trust and believe completely, totally and only in Jesus Christ and his work on the cross to save him.**

Paul believed that faith in Jesus Christ was enough to save a sinner. Faith in Jesus Christ, plus no works, promises, commitments or acts is exactly what God says saves a person. It produces an immediate and instant positional change.

From the human side, there is only one way to get into a right relationship with God and that is to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. From the human side it is by faith alone in Christ alone and the moment one believes on Jesus Christ he enters into the eternal status and eternal glories of an eternal salvation. **The moment one believes on Jesus Christ he is positionally and, from that moment on, forever a child of God, no matter how he behaves.**

For many people, however, there is a real confusion on this point. This simple message that a child could understand gets all twisted and tangled in a maze of theological concepts that ends up presenting a very confusing and even a very different Gospel. To prove the point of how confusing some are concerning the Gospel, here are some things you are likely to hear:

1. If you are to be saved, repent, believe, and confess your sins to God and then come forward and confess before men.
2. If you are to be saved you must deny yourself and take up your cross and follow Christ.
3. If you are to be saved you must raise your hand and walk an aisle and follow Christ in baptism. This is called motional regeneration.
4. If you are to be saved you must humble yourself and repent of all your sins.
5. If you are to be saved you must believe in Jesus and make Him Lord of your life.
6. If you are to be saved you must be willing to give up everything for Him and follow Him.
7. If you are to be saved you must give everything to Jesus.
8. If you are to be saved you must ask Jesus to come into your heart.
9. If you are to be saved you must repent of sins and then you must believe.
10. If you are to be saved you must believe and then you must confess that you have believed.

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11. If you are to be saved you must believe and then be baptized.
12. If you are to be saved you must believe and surrender and turn from all sin.

Although there are bits and pieces of things that may be true, one must admit this does get a little confusing, especially when it is presented in a context of being a term of salvation. The big problem for people is that there is a lack of precise understanding about what truly does save them from sin.

One pastor told the story of a revival meeting he had in his first church back in the 70's, which featured a legalistic Lordship salvation preacher. This pastor had seen a husband come to faith in Christ under his ministry, but his wife had not but would occasionally visit the church. So the church prayed for the woman and she decided to come to one of the revival meetings. The Lordship salvation preacher gave an invitation and the woman responded. The Lordship salvation preacher noticed that she wore slacks to the service, so he informed her that if she were really going to be saved, she had to "quit cursing, smoking, lying and above all stop wearing pants." The woman put on a dress and came to the remainder of the meetings. The Lordship preacher would point out how she was saved and she was there wearing a dress. About a month after the revival meetings, the woman was totally disillusioned and stop going to church and she went back to wearing slacks and the Lordship preacher concluded and convinced others she wasn't really saved (*Repentance Is Not A Resolution To Transform One's Life*, p. 1).

This poor woman's problem is a major problem all over. People are confused about what actually makes them right with God. This confusion does not come from the Bible. **The Bible is very clear to state that we are saved solely on the basis of faith in Jesus Christ and not by any works or any promises or any commitments we make.**

One of the key principles of Bible interpretation is that you always interpret a minority odd passage by the majority of clear passages. In other words, you do not use one obscure statement in the Bible to form a theological conclusion; you use multiple statements to form your conclusions. If, for example, you have fifty statements in the Bible that say one thing and five that seem to suggest something else, you interpret the five by the fifty, not the fifty by the five.

Dr. Andy Woods said, "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...)" (*What is Wrong with Lordship Salvation?*, p. 1).

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Dr. Chafer said: "...the New Testament declares directly and without complication in about 150 passages that men are saved on the sole principle of faith. ...it is not a matter of believing and repenting, of believing and confessing Christ, of believing and being baptized, of believing and surrendering to God, of believing and confessing sin, or of believing and pleading with God for salvation, but it is believing alone. Such belief is apart from works (Rom. 4:5); it is a committal of one's self to Christ (II Tim. 1:12); and it is a definite turning—an act of the will—to God from every other confidence (I Thess. 1:9). This is well summarized in Paul's words to the Philippian jailer, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved" (Acts 16:31) (*Terms of Salvation*, Vital Theological Issues, p. 139).

This message of believe on the Lord Jesus for salvation is stated far more than fifty times; it is stated or implied nearly 200 times and it is so clear that even a child can understand it.

QUESTION #2 – What is Lordship Salvation?

Lordship salvation is the teaching which says that in order for one to actually be saved, he/she must trust in Jesus Christ as Savior and then commit himself to Christ completely, making Him Lord of his/her life by submitting to His sovereignty in every aspect of life.

Dr. Andy Woods defined it this way: "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."** (*What Is Wrong with Lordship Salvation?*, p. 1)

Dr. Curtis Hutson said that "those who teach Lordship salvation say that it is not enough to trust Jesus Christ; you must also make Him Lord of your life in order to be saved" (*Salvation Crystal Clear*, Vol. 1, p. 302).

Another theologian writes: "Lordship Salvation emphasizes that submitting to Christ as Lord over your life goes hand-in-hand with trusting Christ to be saved. It also focuses on a changed life as the result of salvation."

Lordship salvation is a very dangerous/devilish doctrine and belief that actually attacks the doctrine of justification by faith alone, which is the basis of grace salvation. "The Lordship Salvation proponents believe that the condition of eternal life is more than trusting in Christ" (Christian N. Temple, *Lordship Salvation: Is it Biblical?*, p. 1).

John MacArthur said that he believed that salvation was by grace alone, but then he said this: "I am...certain that no one can be saved who is either unwilling to obey Christ or consciously rebellious against the lordship of Christ" (*The Gospel According to Jesus*, p. xiv).

Just this statement is confusing, so it is no wonder that people are so fuzzy on this point.

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QUESTION #3- What are some of the problems with Lordship salvation?

There are many, many problems with the Lordship salvation position. Here we specifically list thirteen major problems with Lordship salvation, which we will discuss later.

Problem #1 - Lordship salvation changes the very nature of the grace Gospel.

Problem #2 - Lordship salvation presents impossible prerequisites on the lost for salvation.

Problem #3 - Lordship salvation ignores the possibility of a carnal, backslidden Christian.

Problem #4 - Lordship salvation confuses sanctification with justification.

Problem #5 - Lordship salvation confuses salvation and discipleship.

Problem #6 - Lordship salvation destroys the believer's assurance of salvation.

Problem #7 - Lordship salvation makes the promise of good works part of free grace salvation.

Problem #8 - Lordship salvation confuses faith with obedience.

Problem #9 - Lordship salvation confuses faith and works.

Problem #10 - Lordship salvation is not biblically logical, provable or believable.

Problem #11 - Lordship salvation was not the universal belief of Church history.

Problem #12 - Lordship salvation promotes a sanctimonious pride.

Problem #13 - Lordship salvation prompts one to look at self for salvation, not God's grace found in Jesus Christ.