

## The Cost of Discipleship

In previous chapters we have touched on Jesus' call to discipleship. Here we will examine it more closely. Let me say again unequivocally that Jesus' summons to deny self and follow Him was an invitation to salvation, not an offer of a "higher life," or a second step of faith following salvation. The contemporary teaching that separates discipleship from salvation springs from ideas that are foreign to Scripture.<sup>1</sup>

Every Christian is a disciple.<sup>2</sup> The Lord's Great Commission was to go into all the world and "make disciples . . . teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19–20). That means the mission of the church, and the goal of evangelism, is to make disciples. Disciples are people who believe, those whose faith motivates them to obey all Jesus commanded. The word *disciple* is used consistently as a synonym for *believer* throughout the book of Acts (6:1, 2, 7; 11:26; 14:20, 22; 15:10). Any distinction between the two words is purely artificial. Though introduced by sincere and well-meaning men, it has given birth to a theology of easy-believism that disposes of the hard demands of Jesus.

<sup>1</sup>Cf. Zane C. Hodges, *The Hungry Inherit* (Portland: Multnomah, 1980), pp. 83–84, where Hodges writes, "How fortunate that one's entrance into the kingdom of God [does] not depend on his discipleship. If it did, how few would ever enter that kingdom!" Yet isn't that exactly what Jesus Himself taught, by saying that the gate was small and the road narrow? "Few are those who find it" (Matthew 7:14).

<sup>2</sup>It is apparent that not every disciple is necessarily a true Christian (cf. John 6:66). The term *disciple* is sometimes used in Scripture in a general sense, to describe those who, like Judas, outwardly followed Christ. It certainly is not restricted to higher level believers. The disciple in Matthew 8:21–22, for example, was anything but committed.

When Jesus called disciples, He carefully instructed them about the cost of following Him. Half-hearted people unwilling to make the commitment did not respond. Thus He turned away those reluctant to pay the price—like the rich young ruler. He warned all who thought of becoming disciples to count the cost carefully. In Luke 14:28–30, He said, "For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost, to see if he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation, and is not able to finish, all who observe it begin to ridicule him, saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.'"

About those verses, John Stott has written penetratingly, "The Christian landscape is strewn with the wreckage of derelict, half-built towers—the ruins of those who began to build and were unable to finish. For thousands of people still ignore Christ's warning and undertake to follow him without first pausing to reflect on the cost of doing so. The result is the great scandal of Christendom today, so-called 'nominal Christianity.' In countries to which Christian civilization has spread, large numbers of people have covered themselves with a decent, but thin, veneer of Christianity. They have allowed themselves to become somewhat involved; enough to be respectable but not enough to be uncomfortable. Their religion is a great, soft cushion. It protects them from the hard unpleasantness of life, while changing its place and shape to suit their convenience. No wonder the cynics speak of hypocrites in the church and dismiss religion as escapism."<sup>3</sup>

A Christian is not one who simply buys "fire insurance," who signs up just to avoid an unpleasant afterlife. A Christian, as we have seen repeatedly, is one whose faith expresses itself in submission and obedience. A Christian is one who follows Christ, one who is committed unquestionably to Christ as Lord and Savior, one who desires to please God. His basic aim is to be in every way a disciple of Jesus Christ. When he fails, he seeks forgiveness and wants to move forward. This is his spirit and his direction.

The call to Christian discipleship explicitly demands just that kind of total dedication. It is full commitment, with nothing knowingly or deliberately held back. No one can come to Christ on any other terms. Those who think they can simply affirm a list of gospel facts and continue to live any way they please should examine themselves to see if they are really in the faith (2 Corinthians 13:5).

In Matthew 10:32–39, Jesus told His disciples: "Every one therefore who shall confess Me before men, I will also confess him

<sup>3</sup>John R. W. Stott, *Basic Christianity* (London: Inter-Varsity, 1958), p. 108.

before My father who is in heaven. But whoever shall deny Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven. . . . He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who has found his life shall lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake shall find it."

There is no more definitive statement on discipleship than this one from our Lord. He spells out in the clearest possible language the cost of discipleship. The words are addressed to the twelve in particular (Matthew 10:5), but they are principles of discipleship applicable to all of us. Verse 24 in Matthew 10 says, "A disciple is not above his teacher." "A disciple" here means any disciple, and the words that follow, to the end of the chapter, apply to discipleship in general.

Those who see disciples as a separate class of more dedicated believers will point out that the twelve—or at least eleven of them—were already believers in Christ. Thus they needed no instruction on what it means to come to Christ with saving faith. It is true that most of the disciples were undoubtedly already true believers, but that does not negate the impact of these words for them. The fact is, these men were already called *disciples*, too (10:1). This was not an invitation to a higher kind of relationship, but a reminder of what was already established when they believed. Our Lord still taught them the implications of their faith and salvation, and constantly reminded them of the commitment they had made when they chose to follow Him.

These words also apply to us. Luke 14:25–35 contains similar words—in even stronger language—which Jesus spoke not just to the twelve but to the multitudes that came to hear Him.

Matthew 10:2 refers to the twelve as "apostles." That means "sent ones." Their basic training being complete, Jesus sent them out to preach. In this parting charge to them, however, He uses the word *disciple*, not *apostle*. His words apply to every disciple, and they serve as a signpost as well to every potential follower of Jesus.

### *Confessing Christ Before Men*

Verses 32–33 are reminiscent of the awesome judgment scene in Matthew 7:21–23. "Every one therefore who shall confess Me before men, I will also confess him before My father who is in heaven. But whoever shall deny Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven." Does that mean confession before men is a

condition of becoming a true Christian? No, but it means that a characteristic of every genuine believer is that he or she *will* confess Christ before men. Paul wrote, "I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation" (Romans 1:16).

The heart of real discipleship is a commitment to be like Jesus Christ. That means both acting as He did and being willing to accept the same treatment. It means facing a hostile world and doing it fearlessly. It means confessing before others that Jesus is Lord, and being confident that He will also speak on our behalf before the Father.

"Confess" means to affirm, to acknowledge, to agree. It is a statement of identification, faith, confidence, and trust. One can confess Christ with the mouth, as Romans 10:9 says, and also confess Him through righteous behavior, as Titus 1:16 implies. We are told to confess Christ "before men." This emphasizes the public character of the confession, and its meaning cannot be avoided. In Romans 10:10 we read, "For with the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation." If the heart truly believes, the mouth will be eager to confess. The confession is human work; it is prompted by God, subsequent to the act of believing but inseparable from it. Again, it is a characteristic of true faith, not an additional condition of salvation.

First John 4:15 says, "Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God." What is the mark of a true Christian? He confesses Jesus as the Son of God.

This does not mean a disciple will always stand up for the Lord. Peter denied the Lord three times on the night He was betrayed. Then there was Timothy, perhaps the finest of Paul's disciples, the pastor of the church at Ephesus. This dedicated young man with such marvelous pastoral gifts was a model disciple. But he may have experienced a temporary spiritual malfunction, or perhaps he was susceptible to fear. Paul had to write to him, "Do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord" (2 Timothy 1:8). A moment of failure does not invalidate a disciple's credentials. We have all failed to confess Christ before men more often than we would like to admit. But if we are true disciples, we will not purposely and in a calculated way keep our faith hidden from everyone all the time.

Christ says He will confess us before the Father in heaven (Matthew 10:32). What does that mean? Christ will say on the day of judgment, "This one belongs to Me." He will affirm His loyalty to those who have affirmed their loyalty to Him. The other side of it is also stated: "But whoever shall deny Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven" (10:33). This does not speak

primarily of open rejecters—people who would deny Christ flagrantly, despise and hate Him, speak against Him, or blaspheme His name. The truth certainly applies to people like that, but here our Lord is talking specifically about false disciples, people who claim to be Christians but are not.

When put to the test, they consistently deny the Lord either by their silence, by their actions, or by their words. In fact, the idea here encompasses all those things. It speaks of someone whose entire life is a denial of Christ. He may claim to believe, but everything about his way of living exudes denial (cf. Titus 1:16). Churches are filled with such people masquerading as disciples, but denying the Lord in some very disturbing ways. Christ will deny them before God.

Matthew 25:31–46 details what will happen in the judgment. This, of course, describes in particular the separation of the sheep and goats at the end of the Tribulation, the judgment of the nations. But its principle applies to individuals in every phase of God's judgment. Here the Lord puts the sheep (those who have confessed Him) on His right hand, and the goats (those who have denied Him) on His left, and ushers the sheep into the kingdom. These are the righteous people who have confessed Him, for He says, "I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me" (25:35–36). Once again, we see that the pattern of their lives reveals the reality of their claim to know Christ. Those who fail to live in a way that is consistent with faith in Christ are sent to eternal punishment (25:46).

### *Getting the Priorities Straight*

A second hallmark of a true disciple is that he loves Christ even more than his own family (Matthew 10:34–37). Verse 37 in particular is very strong: "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me." The parallel passage in Luke 14:26–27 is even more forceful: "If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple."

To be a disciple, then, must we literally hate our family? Obviously this does not call for hatred in any sense that would violate the clear commandments of God such as, "Honor your father and your mother" (Exodus 20:12), and, "Husbands, love your wives" (Ephesians 5:25). The key to this passage is the phrase "yes, and even his own life"

(Luke 14:26). The Lord is saying that we must be unquestioningly loyal to Him, even above our families—and especially above ourselves. Scripture teaches us to deny self (Matthew 16:24), consider ourselves dead (Romans 6:11), lay the old self aside (Ephesians 4:22), and in a sense, treat the selfish aspect of our beings with the utmost contempt (cf. 1 Corinthians 9:27). That is the same attitude we are to have toward our possessions and even toward our own family.

Why is this language so severe? Why does Christ use such offensive terms? Because He is eager to chase the uncommitted away and to draw true disciples to Himself. He does not want half-hearted people deceived into thinking they are in the kingdom. Unless He is the number one priority, He has not been given His rightful place.

### *Taking up the Cross*

One who is not willing to lose his life by taking Christ is not worthy of Him (Matthew 10:38). That person cannot be a disciple (Luke 14:27). These statements cannot be made to accommodate the kind of casual approach to conversion that is in vogue in our generation. Jesus does not ask people to add Him to the milieu of their lives. He wants disciples willing to forsake everything. This calls for total self-denial—to the point of willingly dying for His sake.

When Matthew 10:38 says, "He who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me," it does not mean bearing the "cross" of a difficult situation, a chronic disease, or a nagging spouse. We have all heard devotional sermons spiritualize this passage to interpret the cross as everything from a cranky mother-in-law to a leaky roof to a 1957 Chevy. But that is not what the word *cross* meant to Jesus' first-century audience. It did not call to their minds the idea of long-term difficulties or troublesome burdens. It did not even evoke thoughts of Calvary, since the Lord had not yet gone to the cross and they did not understand that He would. When Jesus said, "take up your cross" to them, they thought of a cruel instrument of torture and death. They thought of dying in the most agonizing method known to man. They thought of poor, condemned criminals hanging on crosses by the roadside. Doubtless they had seen men executed in that fashion. They understood He was calling them to die for Him. They knew He was asking them to make the ultimate sacrifice, to surrender to Him as Lord in every sense.

Jesus adds a final paradoxical thought on the meaning of discipleship: "He who has found his life shall lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake shall find it" (Matthew 10:39). "He who has found his

life" seems to refer to a person who has guaranteed his physical safety by denying Christ under pressure, or someone who clings to life rather than taking up the cross. Because his first concern is securing his physical life, this person loses his eternal soul. Conversely, those who are willing to forfeit their lives for Christ's sake will receive eternal life.

The Bible does not teach salvation by martyrdom. The Lord was not advising the disciples to *try* to get themselves killed for Him. He is referring again to a pattern, a direction. He simply says that genuine Christians do not shrink back, even in the face of death. To express it another way, the true disciple tends to follow the Lord, even at the expense of his own self.

Again, this is not absolute in the sense that it disallows temporary failures like that of Peter. But Peter did ultimately prove himself to be a true disciple. The time came when he willingly gave His life for Jesus' sake.

Luke 9:23 records similar words of Jesus: "If any one wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me." Notice the addition of the one word "daily." The life of a disciple invites persecution and therefore must be a life of daily self-denial. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "I protest, brethren, by the boasting in you, which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily" (1 Corinthians 15:31).

The idea of daily self-denial does not jibe with the contemporary supposition that believing in Jesus is a momentary decision. A true believer is one who signs up for life. The bumper-sticker sentiment, "Try Jesus," is a mentality foreign to real discipleship—faith is not an experiment, but a lifelong commitment. It means taking up the cross daily, giving all for Christ each day with no reservations, no uncertainty, no hesitation. It means nothing is knowingly held back, nothing purposely shielded from His lordship, nothing stubbornly kept from His control. It calls for a painful severing of the tie with the world, a sealing of the escape hatches, a ridding oneself of any kind of security to fall back on in case of failure. A genuine believer *knows* he is going ahead with Christ until death. Having put his hand to the plow, he will not look back (Luke 9:62).<sup>4</sup>

That is how it is when you sign up to follow Jesus Christ. That is the stuff of true discipleship.

<sup>4</sup>Notice that in this same verse our Lord says the one who *does* look back is unfit for the kingdom of God.

## The Lordship of Christ

Recently I read a magazine article inveighing against lordship salvation. It began with the question "Must a person make Christ Lord as a condition for salvation?" No less than ten times in the brief two-page piece the author spoke of "making Christ Lord" of one's life.<sup>1</sup> That terminology has become so familiar in our generation that some Christians are tempted to think of it as biblical. It is not.

Scripture never speaks of anyone "making" Christ Lord, except God Himself, who has "made Him both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36). He *is* Lord of all (Romans 14:9; Philippians 2:11), and the biblical mandate for both sinners and saints is not to "make" Christ Lord, but rather to bow to His lordship. Those who reject His lordship or give mere lip service to His sovereignty are not saved (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:3; Luke 6:46–49). We observed from Jesus' words in Matthew 7:22 that many who verbally or intellectually admit the lordship of Christ will be turned away from heaven, because they do not do the will of the Father in heaven. All who believe the Word of God will agree that Jesus is Lord. He is ever and always Lord, whether or not anyone acknowledges His lordship or surrenders to His authority.

Nevertheless, some contemporary evangelical writers have questioned the place of Christ's lordship in the gospel message. While not denying that Christ is Lord, they suggest it is a truth best kept out of the good news we proclaim to unbelievers. The article I referred to earlier said this: "It is imperative to trust Christ as personal Saviour and be born again. But this is only the first decision. Acknowledging Jesus as Lord is made by believers [sic]. . . . The decision to trust

<sup>1</sup>Rich Wager, "This So-Called 'Lordship Salvation,'" *Confident Living* (July–August 1987), pp. 54–55.

Christ as Saviour and then make Him Lord are two separate, distinct decisions [sic]. The first is made by nonbelievers, the second only by believers. The two decisions may be close or distant in time. But salvation must always precede lordship. It is possible, but miserable, to be saved without ever making Christ Lord of your life.”<sup>2</sup>

Does that sound like the gospel according to Jesus? It certainly is not. We have seen that Jesus frequently made His lordship the central issue with unbelievers. Everything He said to the rich young ruler in Matthew 19, for example, demanded recognition of His lordship. In Matthew 7:21–22 and Luke 6:46–49, He challenged the bogus profession of those who called Him Lord but did not really know Him, and He made it clear that obedience to divine authority is a prerequisite of entry into the Kingdom. Clearly, His lordship is an integral part of the message of salvation.

Scripture reveals a number of eternal attributes encompassed in the name “Lord.” They are all part of the body of truth to be believed for salvation.

### *Jesus Is God*

To say that Jesus is Lord is first of all to acknowledge that He is almighty God, the Creator and sustainer of all things (Colossians 1:16–17). This is a profound declaration of truth. There is little question that the Bible teaches that Jesus is God. Only cultists and unbelievers dispute this truth. Scripture declares Him to be God (John 1:1, cf. v. 14). God the Father addresses Him as God (Hebrews 1:8). He displays the attributes of deity—He is omnipresent (Matthew 18:20), omnipotent (Philippians 3:21), unchanging (Hebrews 13:8), He forgives sins (Matthew 9:2–7), receives worship (Matthew 28:17), and He has absolute authority over all things (v. 18). Christ encompasses the fullness of God in human flesh (Colossians 2:9). He is one with the Father. In John 10:30, He said plainly, “I and the Father are one.”

We see God in action when we read of the works of Christ. When we hear His words as recorded in the New Testament, we hear the words of God. When we hear Christ express emotion, we listen to the heart of God. And when He gives a directive, it is the commandment of God. There is nothing He does not know, nothing He cannot do, and no way He can fail. He is God in the fullest possible sense.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 55.

### *Jesus Is Sovereign*

As Lord God, Jesus Christ is sovereign. He claimed, for example, to be Lord of the Sabbath (Matthew 12:8), meaning that His authority as Lawgiver superseded even the authority of the law. In John 5:17, Jesus defended His right to violate the Pharisees’ man-made Sabbath laws: “My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working.” He thus claimed equal authority with God, and the Jewish leaders were so incensed at Him for it that they tried to kill Him (5:18). When Jesus encountered opposition like that, He never engaged obstinate unbelievers in dialogue. He didn’t bother to try to argue theology. He simply appealed again to His own inherent authority as God (vv. 19–47; cf. John 10:22–42).

The fact that the Jews could not kill Him before His time was further proof of His sovereignty: “I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again” (John 10:17–18). The influence of His authority extends to every person. In fact, all judgment has been committed to Him: “For not even the Father judges any one, but He has given all judgment to the Son” (John 5:22). Jesus is given all judgment “in order that *all* may honor the Son, even as they honor the Father” (5:23, emphasis added). Likewise, those who dishonor the Son also dishonor the Father.

In the final judgment every knee will bow and every tongue will confess Christ as Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:11–12). That does not mean, of course, that all will be saved, but that even those who die in unbelief will be forced to confess the lordship of Jesus. His sovereignty is limitless. Dr. Marc Mueller, of The Master’s Seminary, has expressed the breadth of Jesus’ sovereignty with these words: “He is the Almighty God, the Matchless Cosmic Sovereign, who as Creator and Redeemer (Jn. 1:9–13) has the right and power to demand compliance and submission to His imperial, veracious authority.”<sup>3</sup>

### *Jesus Is Savior*

Although He is sovereign God, Jesus took on Himself the limitations of human flesh and dwelt personally among men (John 1:14). While on earth, He experienced all the sorrows and tribulations of humanity—except that He never sinned (Hebrews 4:15). He walked on earth, showed His love, demonstrated His power, and

<sup>3</sup>Marc Mueller, “Jesus Is Lord,” *Grace Today* 81 (August 1981): 6.

revealed in His behavior the righteousness of God. Yet His demeanor was that of a servant. Scripture says He "emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:7-8).

In other words, though He is sovereign Lord of all, He surrendered everything, even to the point where He willingly died the most painful, humiliating death known to man. He did it on our behalf. Though He was sinless, and therefore not worthy of death (cf. Romans 6:23), He suffered the guilt of *our* sin: "He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness" (1 Peter 2:24).

The death of Christ for us was the ultimate sacrifice. It paid the penalty of our sin in full, and opened the way for us to have peace with God. Romans 5:8 says, "While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. . . . Having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him."

Even in death Christ was Lord. His resurrection was proof of that. Paul writes that Christ "was declared to be the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead" (Romans 1:4). Philippians 2:9-11 describes the Father's response to the humility and death of Christ: "Therefore also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

Therefore, when we invite men to receive Christ as Savior, we ask them to embrace One who is Lord and who was declared to be so by God the Father, who also demands that every knee bow to His sovereignty. Salvation belongs to those who receive Him (John 1:12), but they must receive Him for all that He is—"the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of Kings and Lord of lords" (1 Timothy 6:15).

### Jesus Is Lord

Jesus is Lord. Consistently Scripture affirms the lordship of Christ in every way. He is Lord in judgment. He is Lord over the Sabbath. He is Lord over all (Acts 10:36). He is called Lord (*kurios*) no less than 747 times in the New Testament.<sup>4</sup> The book of Acts alone refers

<sup>4</sup>For an excellent lexical analysis of the New Testament usage of *kurios*, see Kenneth L. Gentry, "The Great Option: A Study of the Lordship Controversy," *Baptist Reformation Review* 5 (Spring, 1976): 63-69.

to Him 92 times as Lord, while calling Him Savior only twice. Clearly in the early church's preaching, the lordship of Christ was the heart of the Christian message.

The centrality of Jesus' lordship to the gospel message is clear from the way Scripture presents the terms of salvation. Those who dichotomize between believing on Christ as Savior and yielding to Him as Lord have a difficult time with many of the biblical invitations to faith, such as Acts 2:21: "Every one who calls on the name of the *Lord* shall be saved"; or Acts 2:36: "Let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him *both Lord and Christ*—this Jesus whom you crucified"; or Acts 16:31: "Believe in the *Lord* Jesus, and you shall be saved"; and particularly Romans 10:9-10: "That 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" (emphases added).

All of these passages include indisputably the lordship of Christ as part of the gospel to be believed for salvation. We saw that Jesus' lordship includes the ideas of dominion, authority, sovereignty, and the right to govern. If those things are implicit in the phrase "confess . . . Jesus as Lord" (Romans 10:9), then it is clear that people who come to Christ for salvation must do so in obedience to Him, that is, with a willingness to surrender to Him as Lord.

Not surprisingly, the opponents of lordship salvation have made Romans 10 a focus of their attack. Much has been written in recent years attempting to explain how one can confess Jesus as Lord, yet continue to rebel against His authority. Some take the position that the term *Lord* when used by Scripture in connection with the gospel does not mean "sovereign master," but rather "deity." Charles Ryrie is the most articulate of those who have used this argument. He writes,

To be sure, Lord does [often] mean Master, but in the New Testament it also means God (Acts 3:22), owner (Luke 19:33), sir (John 4:11), man-made idols (I Cor. 8:5), and even one's husband (I Peter 3:6). . . .

. . . In I Corinthians 12:3 Paul said, "No man can say that Jesus is the Lord [literally, Lord Jesus], but by the Holy Ghost." Lord in this sense must mean Jehovah-God for the simple reason that unsaved people can and do say Lord, meaning Sir, in reference to Christ, before they even have the Spirit of God. . . .

Why is Lord Jesus (meaning God-Man) such a significant statement that it can only be said by the Spirit of God guiding a person? It is because this is the essence of our salvation since it focuses on the uniqueness of the Saviour. Almost all "saviours" claim mastery over the lives of their followers. . . . But what religion, other than Christianity, has a saviour

who claimed to be both God and man in the same person? *If Lord in the phrase means Master, then the claim to uniqueness is absent.* If Lord in the phrase means Jehovah-God, then Jesus is unique, and this is the very heart of the message of salvation in Christianity. . . .

. . . This same emphasis is seen in Romans 10:9: "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus . . . thou shalt be saved." It is the confession of Jesus as God and thus faith in the God-Man that saves from sin (emphasis added).<sup>5</sup>

In other words, Dr. Ryrie claims those who argue that "Lord" means "sovereign master" divest the call to faith of its significance with regard to the deity of Christ. But that is a straw argument. It is not necessary to eliminate the concept of deity from the word *Lord* in order to understand that it means "master." Ryrie is correct to say that when Scripture refers to Jesus as "Lord" it means He is God. But if anything, that only strengthens the view that absolute rulership is inherent in the word. "God" must mean sovereign Master. What kind of god would He be if He were not sovereign?

Certainly when Thomas said to Jesus, "My Lord and my God" (John 20:28), he was using "Lord" as more than an expression of deity. He was not saying, "My God and my God"; he was affirming that Jesus is both God and Master.

Look, for example, at the context of Romans 10:9. Verse 12 uses the phrase "Lord of all" to describe the Savior. It means He is Lord over all, Jews and Gentiles, believers and non-believers alike. Any interpretation that attempts to rid the term of its meaning of sovereign dominion makes no sense at all. Reading that truth into verse 9 results in an even stronger statement: "If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord [of all] . . . you shall be saved."<sup>6</sup>

Certainly the word *Lord* means deity wherever Scripture calls Jesus "Lord" in connection with the gospel message. That Christ is God is a fundamental component of the gospel message. No one who denies the deity of Christ could be saved (cf. 1 John 4:2-3). But inherent in the idea of deity is authority, dominion, and the right to

<sup>5</sup>Charles C. Ryrie, *Balancing the Christian Life* (Chicago: Moody, 1969), pp. 173-175.

<sup>6</sup>This calls into question Darrell Bock's declaration that Romans 10 "provides no clear definition of Paul's understanding of the term 'Lord.'" Darrell L. Bock, "Jesus as Lord in Acts and in the Gospel Message," *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 143 (April-June 1986): 147. On the contrary, it is clear from Romans 10:12 that Paul placed no limits on the extent of Christ's authority as Lord. Bock goes on to conclude that the term 'Lord' as it relates to the gospel means "the divine Dispenser of salvation" (*Ibid.*, p. 151). In other words, "Lord" means little more than "Savior," except that it conveys the idea of deity. Thus Bock's view is very similar to Ryrie's.

command.<sup>7</sup> A person living in rebellion against Christ's authority does not acknowledge Him as Lord in any sense (cf. Titus 1:16).

The signature of saving faith is surrender to the lordship of Jesus Christ. The definitive test of whether a person belongs to Christ is a willingness to bow to His authority. In 1 Corinthians 12:3, Paul wrote, "Therefore I make known to you, that no one speaking by the Spirit of God says, 'Jesus is accursed'; and no one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit."

This does not mean that it is impossible for unsaved people to utter the words, "Jesus is Lord," for obviously they can and do. Jesus Himself pointed out the paradox of those who called Him Lord but did not really believe it (Luke 6:46). Even the demons know and admit who He is (cf. James 2:19). Mark 1:24 records that as Jesus was teaching in the synagogue, a demon-possessed man stood and cried out, "What do we have to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!" Mark 3:11 says that "whenever the unclean spirits beheld Him, they would fall down before Him and cry out, saying, 'You are the Son of God.'" One demon inside a man possessed by legions of unclean spirits called out, "What do I have to do with You, Jesus, Son of the Most High God?" (Mark 5:7).

First Corinthians 12:3 cannot refer to just saying the words "Jesus is Lord." It must mean more. It includes acknowledging Him as Lord by obeying Him, by surrendering one's will to His lordship, by affirming Him with one's deeds as well as one's words (cf. Titus 1:16).

This in no way establishes a gospel of human works.<sup>8</sup> Notice that it is the Holy Spirit who enables a person to confess Jesus as Lord: "No one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit." Surrender to Jesus as Lord is no more a meritorious human work than believing on Him as Savior. Neither act is a good deed done to earn favor with God. Both are the sovereign work of God in the heart of everyone who believes. And one is impossible without the other. Jesus could not be Savior if He were not Lord. Furthermore, if He were not Lord, He could not be King, or Messiah, or our great High Priest. Apart from His lordship, every aspect of His saving work is impossible.

When we come to Jesus for salvation, we come to the One who is Lord over all. Any message omitting this truth cannot be called the gospel according to Jesus. It is a crippled message that presents a

<sup>7</sup>See note 21, p. 29.

<sup>8</sup>Cf. Wager, p. 54: "But the lordship of Christ as a prerequisite for salvation places the emphasis on works rather than grace. God does not need anything from man. His salvation is an unconditional gift. Man's role can be no more than that of a recipient who believes the gift to be sufficient payment for his sins."

savior who is not Lord, a redeemer who does not demonstrate authority over sin, a weakened, sickly messiah who cannot command those he rescues.

The gospel according to Jesus is nothing like that. It represents Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, and demands that those who would receive Him take Him for who He is. In the words of John Flavel, a 17th-century English Puritan, "The gospel offer of Christ includes all his offices, and gospel faith just so receives him; to submit to him, as well as to be redeemed by him; to imitate him in the holiness of his life, as well as to reap the purchases and fruits of his death. It must be an entire receiving of the Lord Jesus Christ."<sup>9</sup>

A. W. Tozer wrote in the same vein, "To urge men and women to believe in a divided Christ is bad teaching for no one can receive half of Christ, or a third of Christ, or a quarter of the Person of Christ! We are not saved by believing in an office nor in a work."<sup>10</sup> Any message that presents a savior who is less than Lord of all cannot claim to be the gospel according to Jesus.

He is Lord, and those who refuse Him as Lord cannot use Him as Savior. Everyone who receives Him must surrender to His authority, for to say we receive Christ when in fact we reject His right to reign over us is utter absurdity. It is a futile attempt to hold onto sin with one hand and take Jesus with the other. What kind of salvation is it if we are left in bondage to sin?

This, then, is the gospel we are to proclaim: That Jesus Christ, who is God incarnate, humbled Himself to die on our behalf. Thus He became the sinless sacrifice to pay the penalty of our guilt. He rose from the dead to declare with power that He is Lord over all, and He offers eternal life freely to sinners who will surrender to Him in humble, repentant faith. This gospel promises nothing to the haughty rebel, but for broken, penitent sinners, it graciously offers everything that pertains to life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3).

<sup>9</sup>John Flavel, *The Works of John Flavel* (London: Banner of Truth, reprint), 2:111.

<sup>10</sup>A. W. Tozer, *I Call It Heresy!* (Harrisburg, PA: Christian Publications, 1974), pp. 10-11.

## PART FIVE

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## APPENDIXES