



# Old Error Rediscovered

Issue 6

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# The Founders Journal

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The star of South Africa

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confession of faith that Southern Baptists produced, [\*The Abstract of Principles\*](#).

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# Old Error Rediscovered

*[Tom Ascol](#)*

Recently, when surveying the scene of contemporary American Christianity, one of evangelicalism's foremost theologians made the following confession:

If, ten years ago, you had told me that I would live to see literate evangelicals, some with doctorates and a seminary teaching record, arguing for the reality of an eternal salvation, divinely guaranteed, that may have in it no repentance, no discipleship, no behavioral change, no practical acknowledgment of Christ as Lord of one's life, and no perseverance in faith, then I would have told you that you were out of your mind. Stark, staring, bonkers, is the British phrase I would probably have used.[\[1\]](#)

What J. I. Packer found unthinkable ten years ago, has become a tragic, pervasive reality within American evangelicalism today. Through the influence of erudite theologians and eloquent preachers the view that one may own Jesus as Savior and not own him as Lord has gained wide currency in conservative, evangelical churches. Challenges to this perversion of the gospel have given rise to the modern "Lordship Debate."

Basically, the debate may be framed by the following questions: Must Jesus be Lord of one's life in order to be Savior of one's life? Is it possible to believe savingly in Christ without submitting to his Lordship? Are receiving Christ as Savior and receiving Christ as Lord two separable experiences in the life of the believer? How you answer these questions reveals on which side of the debate you stand.

The issue is an important one. Nothing less than the gospel itself is at stake. If the "non-Lordship" proponents are right, then the "other side" is guilty of adding to the gospel of salvation by grace through faith. If advocates of the "Lordship" position are correct, then those who oppose it are guilty of cheapening grace and reducing faith to little more than a mental exercise.

Nearly 200 years ago Andrew Fuller was drawn into a debate which, at its heart, had the same issues at stake. His chief opponent was the Scottish Baptist leader, Archibald McLean. McLean learned his views on the nature of saving faith from Robert Sandeman, who, along with his father-in-law John Glas, taught that the faith which saves is nothing other than the "bare belief of the bare truth." Though the father-in-law was the primary architect of this view, it was the son-in-law who was its chief propagandist. Hence, "Sandemanianism" is the name which is usually identified with this movement.

McLean separated from Glas and Sandeman and became a Baptist. He retained, however, the Sandemanian view of faith and salvation.

Through his work with the Baptist Missionary Society Fuller established friendships with McLean and other Scottish Baptists. He had no desire to enter into public debate with McLean over their theological differences concerning faith and salvation. Only after "observing the nature and tendency of the [Sandemanian] *system*" for several years did he finally publish a treatise against it.[\[2\]](#)

His *Strictures on Sandemanianism in Twelve Letters to a Friend* (1810) is a formidable refutation of the errors of that system. Martyn Lloyd-Jones writes, "it is generally agreed that Fuller more or less demolished Sandemanianism in those twelve letters."[\[3\]](#)

Fuller argues convincingly from the Scriptures that saving faith involves more than the mere assent of the mind to the facts of the gospel. Since faith is a duty, it must necessarily involve the will. Since it is a grace (imparted by the Holy Spirit), it

cannot be restricted to the intellect. It must be the result of the Spirit's operation in the heart. It must involve the whole man or it is not saving faith.

Sandemanianism (in its ancient and modern forms) fails at precisely this point--distinguishing the nature of saving faith from its many counterfeits. McLean and his followers demonstrated this error by claiming that there is no essential difference between saving faith and the "devils' faith." Fuller's opponents contended that, "whosoever among men believes what devils do, about the Son of God, is born of God, and shall be saved."[\[4\]](#) Faith, in the Sandemanian scheme, is the acknowledgment of the facts.

Modern proponents of "non-Lordship salvation" have simply resurrected the errors of Glas, Sandeman, and McLean. Not only do they fail to distinguish between saving faith on the one hand, and faith which is merely temporary (Luke 8:13), vain (1 Cor. 15:2), or dead (James 2:17, 26) on the other, but they also regard any effort to do so as illegitimate (cases like that of Simon Magus notwithstanding -- Acts 8:13, 18-24). Saving faith, according to contemporary Sandemanians, consists of "merely 'believing facts.'" It is simply "taking God at His Word" (bare belief of the bare truth!).[\[5\]](#)

In Fuller's day as in our own, a misapprehension of the nature of saving faith brings deadly results. If salvation is nothing more than a bare assent to the bare facts, then evangelism is reduced to little more than the dispensing of those facts. Further, the converts of this type of system need not be acquainted with a "felt Christ." Belief, according to Sandemanianism, does not touch the affections.

Neither does it concern the will. So it is improper to expect all those who become "believers" to live holy lives. Some may pursue holiness. Others may live lawlessly. Which way one goes is neither dependent upon nor demonstrative of his faith. Consequently, where such teaching prevails it is not surprising to find churches whose memberships are comprised of large numbers of unholy "believers."

Modern ingenuity has led to the development of a complete "carnal Christian theory" to explain this condition.[\[6\]](#) Rather than entertaining the possibility that such believers may not possess genuine saving faith, this theory suggests that what is needed is some sort of second work of grace. Once this work is effected, *then* the believer will be enabled to live a life which approximates the biblical pattern of Christianity.

This second work of grace is variously labeled. Not infrequently is it described as "making Jesus Lord of your life" (the idea being that prior to this, through faith, He had only been Savior of your life). This second step is not necessary for salvation, and the believer who does not make Jesus Lord of his life is no less assured of heaven than the one who does. At the very worst, the former may lose out on some of the rewards which the latter will receive in the life to come. But salvation is equally certain in both cases.

The non-Lordship scheme of salvation inevitably leads to these theological and practical aberrations. It is a perversion of the gospel and a blight on the Church of Christ. It is incumbent upon every Christian -- especially those whose calling it is to shepherd the flock of God -- to understand the issues involved.

The design of this issue of the *Founders Journal* is to assist in this effort. In the articles that follow, the significance of Christ's Lordship for evangelism and salvation is examined from the perspectives of biblical exegesis (Terry Chrisope), theology (Ernest Reisinger), and Baptist history (Tom Nettles).

May God be pleased to bring a great host of this generation to bow savingly before our exalted and enthroned Lord Jesus Christ.



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<sup>1</sup>J. I. Packer, "Understanding the Lordship Controversy," *TableTalk* (May 1991):7.

<sup>2</sup>*The Complete Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller*, ed. J. Belcher, 3 vols. (Philadelphia: American Publication Society, 1845), 2:561. Reprinted by Sprinkle Publications in 1988.

<sup>3</sup>*The Puritans, Their Origins and Successors* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1987), 173.

<sup>4</sup>Fuller, 2:584.

<sup>5</sup>Zane Hodges, *Absolutely Free!* (Dallas: Redencion Viva, 1989), 37, 32.

<sup>6</sup>An excellent pamphlet on this is by Ernest C. Reisinger, *What Should We Think of the Carnal Christian?* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1978).



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# Jesus Is Lord

*Terry A. Chrisope*

There is found in the New Testament an appellation of Jesus which at once defines both his person and his relationship to the Christian believer. This appellation was so widely used among early Christians that it became the instantly recognized and universally acknowledged description of Jesus in every geographical location where Christianity spread. It so aptly summarized Christian belief about Jesus and his achievement that it became the predominant form of Christian confession by the time of the apostle Paul. This appellation was the simple title "Lord" (in Greek, *Kyrios*), which was utilized in the common Christian confession, "Jesus is Lord."

New Testament scholars are generally agreed that the confession "Jesus is Lord" occupied a prominent place in the churches of the New Testament era, and indeed was probably the prevailing confession of faith within first-century Christianity. Robert H. Mounce has declared that "Jesus is Lord" was the "earliest single-clause Christological confession of primitive Christianity." And while Vernon H. Neufeld questions whether it was the earliest, he does claim that it is the basic confession in the Pauline epistles and that Paul did not originate it but likely received it from the primitive tradition of the church. With such conclusions George E. Ladd agrees: "The heart of the early Christian confession is the Lordship of Christ."[\[1\]](#)

The prevalence and significance of this confession loom so large throughout the New Testament that it is in some respects a matter of surprise that the term "Lord" as it is applied to Jesus has become the center of theological and practical controversy among modern evangelical Christians.[\[2\]](#)

There is, however, no lack of clarity or certainty in the New Testament witness to the Lordship of Jesus Christ and to the place occupied by the confession of Jesus' Lordship in the life of the early church. Indeed, it seems beyond question that the fundamental confession of apostolic Christianity was "Jesus is Lord." This confession concisely expressed both the objective fact of Jesus' sovereignty and the subjective relationship of the risen Jesus to the Christian believer and the Christian community. For the sake of convenience this confession will be examined under two headings: its theological meaning and its ecclesiastical significance.

## The Theological Meaning of the Confession

When the early Christians referred to or confessed Jesus Christ as "Lord" (as occurs scores of times in the New Testament) what did they mean? What was the theological content of this appellation or confession? The root meaning of the Greek term *kyrios* was "legitimate authority," and this meaning carried into New Testament usage. An examination of the New Testament application of this term to Jesus yields at least four affirmations implied by the confession "Jesus is Lord."[\[3\]](#)

### *Jesus Is Divine*

First, this confession meant that Jesus is divine or Jesus is God. The term *kyrios*, applied to Jesus in the New Testament, was the word used in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) to represent the Hebrew name of God, YHWH or Jehovah. It is striking that this term is used without hesitation or qualification in the New Testament to refer to Jesus as well as to God. For example, the angelic announcement of Jesus' birth refers to him as "Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:14), and Paul can apply Old Testament passages which speak of God to Jesus (e.g., Rom. 10:13). New Testament scholars commonly recognize that the ascription of Lordship to Jesus implies acknowledgment of his essential deity.[\[4\]](#)

### *Jesus Is Exalted Savior*

Second, confession of Jesus' Lordship meant acknowledging him as exalted Savior. The New Testament uses the title "Lord" to refer to a new and distinctive phase of Jesus' ministry, one marked by exaltation (beginning with his resurrection) and entry into the exercise of kingly prerogatives in contrast to his earlier (pre-resurrection) state of humiliation. A crucial passage here is Acts 2:36. In this first public proclamation of the gospel following Jesus' ascension, the Apostle Peter drew attention to Jesus' death, resurrection, and exaltation to the right hand of God (Acts 2:22-35), and then declared that "God has made Him both Lord and Christ" (v. 36). That God had "made" Jesus the Christ is somewhat problematic. It most likely means that upon his resurrection and exaltation Jesus entered a new phase of his messianic ministry. George Ladd states, "Jesus has entered upon a new function of his total messianic mission . . . In his exaltation Jesus becomes the Messiah in a new sense: he has begun his messianic reign as the Davidic king." A similar meaning is attached to the title "Lord," as used here. It obviously cannot constitute a mere assertion of Jesus' deity, for as Peter used the term it is inapplicable to Jesus: he cannot be "made" God, for as the Son he always was God. Rather, it refers to the installation of the God-man Jesus in the position of divinely-exalted Redeemer and his entrance into the exercise of such authority as that position entails (such as bestowing the Holy Spirit, v. 33). As New Testament scholar Donald Guthrie observes, "Lordship here is undoubtedly an ascription of sovereignty in vivid contrast to the crucified Jesus." Certainly Peter's call for repentance (v. 38) demanded of his Jewish hearers no less than an acknowledgment that the Crucified One had now been raised from the dead and exalted to God's right hand.[\[5\]](#)

Other passages which similarly express or imply a contrast between Jesus' exalted state and his previous condition of humiliation include Romans 1:4, which declares "Jesus Christ our Lord" to be appointed "Son of God in power" through his resurrection from the dead, and Matthew 28:18, where Jesus claims for himself "all authority in heaven and on earth" in his resurrected state.[\[6\]](#)

### *Jesus Is Supreme Authority*

The last passage cited above, Matthew 28:18, with its claim of universal authority for Jesus, leads to a third aspect of the confession "Jesus is Lord." It involves the recognition that Jesus is the supreme authority in the universe, under God the Father. An important passage in this regard is the much-discussed Philippians 2:9-11. Here Paul draws a sharp contrast between Jesus' state of humiliation and death (Phil. 2:6-8) and the subsequent state of exaltation into which he entered (vv. 9-11). After his humiliation God "highly exalted" Jesus and "bestowed on Him the name which is above every name," that at his name "every knee should bow" and "every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." A persuasive case can be made that the name which the Father bestowed on Jesus at his exaltation is the title "Lord," the name contained in the universal confession of verse eleven ("Jesus Christ is Lord"). This confession will eventually be offered by every personal being in the universe, which suggests that for some it will not be a confession arising from faith but an acknowledgment compelled by undeniable fact: Jesus has been made absolute sovereign of the universe, God's mediatorial agent in exercising his own divine rule. "The confession," writes Guthrie, "involves the acknowledgment of the universal sovereignty of Jesus."[\[7\]](#) That confession which believers now make by the aid of the Holy Spirit, "Jesus is Lord" (cf. I Cor. 12:3), shall one day be on the lips of all, even those who now reject his Lordship.

### *Jesus Is My Rightful Sovereign*

Fourth, the confession of the Lordship of Jesus includes the willing acknowledgment that Jesus Christ is the rightful sovereign of the Christian believer. At this point the confession moves beyond the recognition of objective facts to the subjective application of those facts. In the very act of making this confession--if it expresses a genuine exercise of faith--the Christian assumes his rightful place before him who is the divine and exalted Savior and sovereign of the universe. Since the concept of Lordship signifies legitimate authority, then as Baptist theologian Millard Erickson writes, "accepting Jesus as Lord means making him the authority by which we conduct our lives."[\[8\]](#)

This insistence upon recognition of the subjective implications of Jesus' Lordship must not be construed as the injection of human works-righteousness into the believer's relationship with God as a ground of justification. It is nothing of the sort. Rather, it simply means acknowledgment *in principle* of the Lord Jesus' rightful authority and sovereignty over the Christian believer. The working out of the implications of Jesus' Lordship *in practice* will require the lifetime process

known as sanctification in order to be accomplished, and this in no way serves as the ground of the believer's justification before God. Understood in this way, confession of Jesus' Lordship is simply the equivalent of repentance: it constitutes the giving up or relinquishing of one's rebellion against God and the assumption of one's rightful place before him who is Creator and Ruler of the universe.

The establishment of Jesus' Lordship over believers seems to have been one of the purposes of God in the death and resurrection of Christ, according to Paul's statement in Romans 14:9. Paul there declares, "For to this end Christ died and lived again, that He might be Lord both of the dead and of the living." John Murray has shown that Paul's statement in this context should be understood as applying to Christian believers, and that the Lordship to which Paul refers was not Christ's inherent Lordship of creatorhood but the acquired sovereignty of redemption. It is a sovereignty which believers are bound to recognize and honor, for, as verse eight declares, "whether we live or die, we are the Lord's."[\[9\]](#)

## The Ecclesiastical Significance of the Confession

If the confession "Jesus is Lord" bore such full and weighty content within the context of primitive Christianity, then the question next arises, what was the practical significance of this confession for the life of the church? What place did it occupy in the lives of early Christian believers and worshipping communities? The New Testament makes several points clear.

### *The Central Confession*

First, "Jesus is Lord" was the central confession of early Christianity. Thus Paul writes in Romans 10:9, in a passage which many scholars regard as a pre-Pauline formulation of the gospel, "if you confess with your mouth 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (NIV). The confession and belief referred to, of course, imply trust in Jesus as the crucified and risen Savior and constitute an explicit acknowledgment of him as the exalted Lord. Another embodiment of this early confession is found in I Corinthians 12:3, where Paul writes, "no one can say, 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit." Here Paul seems to assume that "Jesus is Lord" is the basic confession of the Christian fellowship. A passage already examined, Philippians 2:9-11, incorporates this confession as that which will be offered by the whole universe on that day when all must stand before God and acknowledge that "Jesus Christ is Lord." Such strong indications as these leave little room to doubt that the confession "Jesus is Lord" occupied a prominent place as the central Christian confession of the New Testament era: it was that affirmation to which every Christian gave assent and which distinguished the Christian community from the unbelieving world. British scholar A. M. Hunter concludes from the New Testament evidence, "the confession of [Jesus'] Lordship--probably at baptism--made up the earliest Christian confession."[\[10\]](#)

### *A Personal Confession*

Second, the confession of Jesus' Lordship was a personal confession. It was an expression of the individual believer's convictions and trust. The Apostle Paul makes this confession pointedly personal when he writes, "If *you* confess with *your* mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in *your* heart that God raised him from the dead, *you* will be saved" (Rom. 10:9, NIV). The personal nature of the confession was also perfectly captured by the believing Thomas when he exclaimed upon seeing the risen Savior; "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28). George Ladd has again summed up the New Testament position quite well: "The Christian confession of the Lordship of Jesus means the recognition of what God has done in exalting Jesus, and personal submission to and acceptance of his Lordship." While this element may not be explicit in every instance of faith observed in the New Testament, the evidence warrants the conclusion that it was implicit and that no one could be considered a Christian or admitted to the Christian community while rejecting the Lordship of Jesus.[\[11\]](#)

### *A Corporate Confession*

Third, "Jesus is Lord" was a corporate confession of the Christian community. One of the most striking but overlooked

features of the New Testament is the frequency and simplicity with which Jesus is referred to as "the Lord" or "our Lord", suggesting that he is the commonly acknowledged Lord of the entire Christian community. Two random examples will suffice to illustrate this phenomenon. Observe how Paul opens his letters to the Roman and Corinthian Christians. In Romans, his greeting includes an extended description of the gospel, which concerns "Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 1:4), and he wishes them grace and peace "from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 1:7). The former of these phrases is particularly emphatic in the Greek, which literally reads "Jesus Christ the Lord of us." Paul simply assumes that all Christians in fact acknowledge Jesus as Lord. Again, in I Corinthians 1:2 Paul extends greetings to "those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours." Here Paul virtually defines Christians as those who "call on the name of the Lord of us Jesus Christ," then most explicitly identifies Christ as the Lord "of them and of us." It is particularly striking, in view of the lack of practical holiness in the Corinthian church, that Paul refers to the believers there as those who have acknowledged *in principle* that Jesus is Lord, even if they were imperfectly working out the implications of his Lordship in their personal lives and in congregational matters. All this simply underlines the fact that Christians were those who acknowledged the Lordship of Jesus and that this common confession served to identify them as a people and to distinguish them from the world. Christians together adhered to and found their corporate identity in the confession "Jesus is Lord."

### *An Eschatological Confession*

Fourth, "Jesus is Lord" was an eschatological confession. By means of this confession the early Christian community was expressing two closely-related convictions: that God had inaugurated a new era--the kingdom of God--with the life, death, and exaltation of Jesus; and that Jesus would return in glory to bring God's kingdom to its consummation. Such was the sentiment of the Aramaic exclamation in I Corinthians 16:22, "*marana tha*," meaning "[our] Lord, come." The ascription of Lordship to Jesus spoke with confidence of God's final victory over sin, death, and all that opposed God's rule.

## **Application: "Jesus is Lord" Today**

When we move from the New Testament to the twentieth-century church and the meaning of the confession "Jesus is Lord" for today, three points of application emerge.

First, we may well ask whether the situation that prevailed in the apostolic churches ought not be the case today. That is, if confessing Jesus' Lordship was central to the thinking and life of apostolic Christianity, should it not also be central for the twentieth-century church? What better way to set forth the meaning of Christ's redemptive accomplishment, his authority over the believer and the church, and the expectation of his final victory than to make this confession central once again?

Second, in our presentation of the gospel, may it not be the case that the demands of Jesus' Lordship should have primacy? Is not the typical biblical order that of repentance and faith rather than the reverse (Acts 20:21)? When Jesus is described as both Lord and Savior is it not always in that order (II Peter 1:11; 2:20; 3:2; 3:18; cf. also Acts 5:31, "a Prince and a Savior")? Does not God call on all men everywhere to repent (Acts 17:30)? Would it not be expected that a rebel approaching his sovereign seeking forgiveness should be required to give up his rebellion as he casts himself on his lord's mercy? If so, then it may well be that this element of the message ought to have preeminence as we present the truth to men. The gospel makes demands as well as promises.

Third, it is necessary that those who proclaim Jesus' Lordship should seek to live out the implications of that Lordship in their own lives. "So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him" (Col. 2:6, N1V). For those who declare the message, as well as for those who hear it, the confession must become a living reality: Jesus is Lord.



## Confessing Christ

"If I profess with the loudest voice and clearest exposition every portion of the truth of God except precisely that little point which the world and the devil are at that moment attacking, I am not confessing Christ. Where the battle rages, there the loyalty of the soldier is proved, and to be steady on all the battlefield besides, is merely flight and disgrace if he flinches at that point."

-Martin Luther



<sup>1</sup>Robert H. Mounce, *The Essential Nature of New Testament Preaching* [(Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960), p. 94; Vernon H. Neufeld, *The Earliest Christian Confessions* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963), pp. 51, 56; George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), p. 339. Some of the themes considered in this essay are treated more fully in the author's volume, *Jesus is Lord* (Welwyn, England: Evangelical Press, 1982).

<sup>2</sup>For a recent, though not comprehensive, survey of the controversy, see Millard J Erickson, "Lordship Theology: The Current Controversy," *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 33 (Spring 1991): 5-15. It is gratifying to see the position recently taken by several Southern Baptist publications, including the articles in the above-mentioned issue of the *Southwestern Journal of Theology*; Robert L. Hamblin and William H. Stephens, *The Doctrine of Lordship* (Nashville: Convention Press, 1990); and Bailey E. Smith, *The Grace Escape* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1991).

<sup>3</sup>For studies of *kyrios*, see G. Kittel and G. Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964-76): *Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975-78) 2:508-520.

<sup>4</sup>Ladd, *Theology of the New Testament*, p. 336; Guthrie, *New Testament Theology* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1981), pp. 295, 299; Archibald M. Hunter, *Introducing New Testament Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1957), p. 71.

<sup>5</sup>Ladd, *Theology of the New Testament*, p. 336; Guthrie, *New Testament Theology*, p. 294.

<sup>6</sup>On Romans 1:4, see the Greek, and John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, New International Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959, 1965) 1:7-10.

<sup>7</sup>Guthrie, *New Testament Theology*, 297.

<sup>8</sup>Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, one-volume edition (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983-85), p. 20.

<sup>9</sup>Murray, *Romans*, 2:182-83.

<sup>10</sup>Hunter, *New Testament Theology*, p. 79.

<sup>11</sup>Ladd, *Theology of the New Testament*, p. 339.



<sup>1</sup>Robert H. Mounce, *The Essential Nature of New Testament Preaching* [(Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960), p. 94; Vernon H. Neufeld, *The Earliest Christian Confessions* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963), pp. 51, 56; George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), p. 339. Some of the themes considered in this essay are treated more fully in the author's volume, *Jesus is Lord* (Welwyn, England: Evangelical Press, 1982).

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# Behind the Lordship Controversy

*Ernest Reisinger*

One old Puritan said that the dangers in controversy are greater than the dangers of women and wine. I do not know if this is true or not but I do know every true Christian loathes controversy, and all the more when it is among the family of God. Yet we must not forget that most, if not all, the great creeds and confessions were born out of religious controversy.

One respected theologian recently said, "When the book *The Gospel According to Jesus* by John MacArthur appeared the fat was in the fire." He was referring to what has come to be known as the "Lordship Controversy."

This is the first in a series of articles which will address vital issues that are related to this ongoing debate.

What is behind the Lordship controversy? I can answer with one word -- THEOLOGY. However, this answer needs some explanation, and I hope to provide it in these studies.

*The Gospel According to Jesus* has provoked pamphlets, books, sermons, conference themes, etc., in response. Two books that stand out in the controversy were written by champions of the Dispensational school of theology: *So Great Salvation* by Charles Ryrie and *Absolutely Free* by Zane Hodges. Together they contend for the non-Lordship position.

This is one controversy I am happy to see because it is bringing some theological skeletons out of the closet. Now men are in print, thereby revealing themselves and their twisted theology.

It is not my aim or design in these studies to vindicate or apologize for the theological or non-theological errors of the non-Lordship people. Proponents of this view are not in the historical and biblical stream of theology held by the reformers and the great teachers in the church. These men seem to have no regard for the great creeds and confessions of the historic churches.

Every body of Christians is not equally corrupt in doctrine and practice, yet none is so pure that if its character were examined by the great head of the church, He would not have somewhat against it.

The great Apostle was certainly in earnest, and he resisted error wherever he found it. Yet, he did not castigate those who built on the right foundation, even though some things in their superstructure were not exactly perfect and some of the superstructure will ultimately be consumed. He did not treat them as enemies if their foundation was Christ the Lord. His conduct even to the enemies of our Lord was not seeking to turn upon them the contempt of all mankind. Rather, his treatment of them was calculated to do them good. I pray that such may be my own efforts.

## **The Lordship Controversy Does Not Stand Alone**

The Lordship issue will never be solved in addressing it by itself because it is inseparably connected to a theological system that cannot be divided (in spite of the claims to "rightly divide the word of truth").

The Lordship issue is just a small child, and every child has a father, a mother, and usually, some brothers, sisters, and maybe even some cousins. The Lordship issue has a father and his name is Arminianism. The Lordship issue has a mother and her name is Dispensationalism (who has a sister called Antinomianism), and they are not in the process of divorce yet.

Let me just name some of Lordship's brothers and sisters. Later I will deal with some of them individually and show that they are all spawned by the same parents. Before I name some of the Dispensational Family let me state again that behind this Lordship child is Father Arminian, Mother Dispensationalist and her sister Aunt Antinomian. We must correct the Father and Mother or we will never affect the children.

The children are related to each other and none can be separated from their parents. The difference between the non-Lordship teachers and the so-called Lordship preachers is not just the subject of Lordship. There are differences on many other important biblical doctrines as well. Such as:

1. Who Jesus really is and where He is
2. The nature of saving faith
3. Regeneration
4. Repentance
5. Justification
6. Sanctification
7. The inseparable relationship between justification and sanctification
8. The biblical doctrine of assurance
9. The condition of man
10. The character of God (sovereign in creation, sovereign in redemption and sovereign in providence.)
11. The relationship of the Ten Commandments to evangelism and to the Christian life.

I hope to address some of these doctrines in their relationship to the Father and Mother and the twisted theological system of Dispensationalism.

## **Lordship Is Taught in the Bible**

Let me draw your attention to a few passages of scripture that should put to rest the Lordship question. These texts would put it to rest if the issue were not tied to that warped, twisted system of Dispensational theology.

At our Lord's birth the angels announced Him as LORD. Luke 2:11: "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour who is Christ the LORD." His Saviorhood is within His Lordship, not apart from it.

The New Testament preachers preached Him as LORD. 2 Cor. 4:5: "For we preach not ourselves but Christ Jesus the LORD." See the book of Acts, the sacred manual of evangelism. The word "Savior" only occurs two times and "Lord" 92 times and "Lord Jesus Christ" 6 times and "Lord Jesus" 13 times. This should tell us something about their evangelism.

In the New Testament sinners received Him as LORD. Col. 2:6: "As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the LORD so walk ye in Him."

The dying thief found out who He was -- Luke 23:42: "LORD remember me . . ."

The adulteress woman in John 8 found out who He was. When Jesus asked her "Where are your accusers?" Her answer tells us clearly who He was: "No one, LORD."

Doubting Thomas found out who He was in John 20:28. He said, "My LORD and my God."

Jesus Himself confirmed this point in John 13:13: "Ye call me Master and LORD and you say well for so I am."

Paul tells us that the very reason Jesus died and rose again is that He might be LORD. Romans 14:9: "For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be LORD both of the dead and living."

In Philippians 2:5-8 the great Apostle gives us the steps of our Lord's humiliation and then in 2:9-11 he speaks of His exaltation. We are assured in these passages that all men will bow the knee and that every tongue will confess -- confess what? "That Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father." Please note the words "every knee" and "every tongue" -- some in restitution but all in recognition. In the light of the above scriptures, which trace Him from the cradle to the cross, to the resurrection, to a throne, how could there even be a question, let alone a controversy, about His Lordship?

The first apostolic sermon should settle the question. Acts 2:36: "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ."

Peter makes it clear in no uncertain terms that Jesus is LORD by God Almighty's decree.

## **The Lordship Controversy Has Serious Implications**

It is a great comfort for Christians to know that He is Lord regardless of what men say or think. Further, it is a comfort to know that we have placed our hand in that sovereign nail-pierced hand to lead us through sorrow, sickness and death. And if you have not experienced these things yet, be patient -- you will.

Let me point out some of the implications of this truth:

1. Lordship implies entire submission at the outset. It is a strange salvation that knows nothing about daily submission to Christ the Lord.
2. Lordship implies willing service. The most outstanding conversion in the history of the church -- the great Apostle Paul -- is recorded in Acts 9. It is interesting to note his two questions in verses 5, 6: "Who art thou, Lord?" and, "What would you have me to do?" He was a willing servant.
3. Lordship implies obedience. Jesus said in Luke 6:46: "Why call me Lord, Lord and do not the things that I say?" Obedience.
4. Lordship implies ownership. If He is my Lord He owns me lock, stock and barrel. When sinners bow to His Lordship they not only get saved but their pocketbook gets saved also. The Bible says we are bought with a price. He owns us (I Cor. 6:19, 20).

Charles Ryrie, the champion of the non-Lordship position, in his long-term opposition to the Lordship teaching has

made some strong and shocking statements in his book *Balancing the Christian Life*. He makes the following statement: "The importance of this question cannot be overestimated in relation to both salvation and sanctification. The message of faith only and the message of faith plus commitment of life cannot both be the gospel; therefore, one of them is false and comes under the curse of perverting the gospel or preaching another gospel" (p. 170).

Another Dispensationalist, Dr. Ray Stanford, while he was president of a large Dispensational Bible College, wrote a book with two of his colleagues entitled, *Handbook of Personal Evangelism*. Here are some quotes from the book:

"Lordship salvation contradicts scripture."

"This message [Lordship Salvation] cannot save."

"This message is accursed of God."

"The person who preaches such a message is also accursed of God."

"It, in effect, makes God a liar and the Bible untrue."

"It hinders the growth of the body of Christ -- this will stop the growth of the local churches . . ."

The quotes from these two Dispensationalist authors should cause serious Christians to shed their grave clothes of Dispensationalism.

It is because of the havoc Dispensationalism has caused in American Christianity that I have an increasing conviction and a deep concern. Some who read this article may think we just have a semantic problem, or that this is just nit-picking, or unnecessarily making too much about the issue, or that perhaps what we have is just a failure in communicating with each other.

Listen carefully to my response. It is none of the above. It is not minor, rather, it goes to the very heart of the gospel -- the champion of the non-lordship issue said, "It is another gospel." *Christianity Today* did not think it was something minor. They described it as a "volcanic issue" (Sept. 22, 1989, p. 21).

The issue of Lordship goes to the very root of biblical Christianity. I firmly believe that Dispensational Antinomianism is spiritually bankrupt. The Lordship issue is vitally related to the very foundation of biblical, historical Christianity.

We might ask, "Just what effect will the true biblical Lordship position have on real Christians?" Here are some:

1. It will provide and provoke that which will keep us coming to Christ for fresh forgiveness and fresh assurance.
2. It will kill spiritual pride -- there will be no more so-called "spiritual Christians" as a super-class.
3. It will exalt Christ to His Throne Rights.
4. It will prove helpful and hopeful, to saint and sinner alike, to know a Christ who is Lord of *all*, and to know that as Lord He has power to save and power to sanctify.
5. It will have a profound effect upon our evangelism. No more of this wicked huckstering off this poor, impotent, pathetic Jesus. No more getting votes for Jesus. It will box sinners up to the power of Christ and

the mercy of the *One* who is able and willing to save *all* who will come to God by Him.

Behind the Lordship controversy is a warped, twisted, unbiblical theology of Dispensationalism.

[See the author's review of a new book by Dr. John H. Gerstner *Wrongly Dividing The Word Of Truth.*]



# Early Baptists and Easy-Believism

[Tom J. Nettles](#)

## Introduction

The term "easy-believism" carries such pejorative overtones that none openly defends it. Zane Hodges sees it as a term used to disparage the idea that "eternal life can be obtained by a simple act of trust in Christ." Hodges understandably resists the terms "intellectual assent" and "cheap grace" also. In fact no one wants such epithets attached to his theology, especially on the basis of the other fellow's definitions.

Certain aspects, however, of each of those terms have the ring of truth and can't be avoided in any biblical understanding of saving grace. Sinners are saved "freely," as a gift, and that by grace. Though this is free it certainly isn't cheap. Grace comes only because the Father spared not his own Son, and those to whom it comes are called to forsake final affection for every temporal thing. Also, saving faith certainly involves both the *intellect* and *assent*. The gospel consists of propositional truth--the "form of sound words," the "deposit"--which must be grasped by the intellect to some degree; and saving faith cannot exist without assent, for if one did not assent to the truths he could not believe. The gospel, however, does not remain simply an object to be mastered by our minds but is also a subject that acts upon, masters, and subdues us. Furthermore, in one sense belief is "easy." It comes as a gift of God; it is sovereignly bestowed; it can neither be gained by hard work nor resisted. Nothing could be easier than to be the recipient of a gift that omnipotent love is determined to bestow. But again, true faith does not remain easy because it calls us to conquer the flesh, the world, the evil one, and death itself; not as an option, but as a necessary demonstration of genuineness. This is impossible, as the disciples, to their astonishment, learned from Jesus himself.

The determination, therefore, of whether a soteriology, and consequently an evangelistic methodology, encourages mere "cheap" and "easy" cerebralism must come from looking at its views of regeneration, repentance, assurance, and self-examination. Let us concede that the front entrances of all evangelical systems have written above the door:

To him that worketh not, 'tis gracious and free;  
Only believe and the Lord you will see.

That some belief saves and other doesn't is obvious. The manner and content of the preacher's message lets us know whether the door really leads into a house that separates from the world outside or whether it is just a facade with the world on both sides of the hinges.

Easy believism fails to give full weight to Jesus' words, "With man this is impossible" (Mark 10:23-27) by attributing to the unregenerate nature sufficient holiness to produce evangelical repentance and faith. As a result, it leaves all professions of faith virtually unchallenged as to genuineness. The normal and inevitable fruit of true Christian life then becomes regarded as an optional next step.

Great confusion dominates discussion of this issue in Southern Baptist life today. I have heard several pastors and evangelists manipulate congregations into frenzied decisions by warning against the deceit of an "easy-believism" gospel. Their preaching, however, offered no solution and demonstrated a complete lack of understanding of the issues involved.

Early Southern Baptists avoided this error. Their foundation in the theology of the Philadelphia Confession via Charleston and the long continuance of the Edwardsean theology of the First Great Awakening made their preaching and evangelism not only fervent, but searching and uncompromising. The generation which flourished prior to 1845, and in some instances straddled that pivotal date, erected a style of ministry and churchmanship which sustained Southern Baptists into the early decades of the twentieth century. An examination of their lives and ministries reveals several strengths which would serve as a positive instruction to any generation. These areas are: 1. The depth of personal conversion, 2. The applicatory emphasis of their preaching, 3. Their insurances on human responsibility, 4. Their clear grasp of the doctrine of election and its implications, and 5. Their practice of self-examination.

## Deep Personal Conversion

Both the experience and description of conversion reveal a balanced and biblical theology of law and gospel and the necessity of regeneration. Richard Furman's description of Edmund Botsford's conversion is instructive. Botsford (1745-1819), called by C.D. Mallery "one of the fathers of the Baptist denomination in the southern states," exhibited a sacrificial zeal as a preacher in South Carolina and Georgia.

At age 20 he arrived in Charleston, South Carolina, where he was directed to the ministry of Oliver Hart. Botsford found in Hart "a faithful man of God" whose "preaching directed him to the Saviour." His efforts at personal reformation led him to find "much complacency in the change which was produced both in his temper and conduct" while remaining "a stranger to the corruptions of his own heart, to the imperfections of his own righteousness, and to the purity, spirituality, extent, and strictness of the divine law."

His views changed, however, when the text, "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them" was pressed to his conscience. "It was then he saw his righteousness wholly defective; his heart corrupt, and his whole nature polluted. He saw that the curse was levelled at his devoted head, and feared that his eternal condemnation was inevitable. He felt now more than ever, his need of a Saviour."

God soon delivered him from his fears and terrors by granting to him faith in Christ. Furman quotes from Botsford's memoirs where the latter reflects upon the day of his conversion.

"It was," says he, "a day of light, a day of joy and peace. On that day I had clearer views than formerly, of sin, of holiness, of God, and of Christ; and different views from all I had ever before experienced. I think I was enabled to devote my whole self to God, as a reconciled God. I think I then so believed in Christ as to trust in him, and commit my all into his hands. At that time and from that time, I considered myself as not my own, but his; his, not the world's; his, and no longer Satan's; his for time, and his for eternity.

"In the morning of that day I considered myself far, yea farther from God, more odious to him, and to myself, than ever I had seen myself before; I was depressed by sin, and concluded I never should be converted. But a text which had often given me hope, now came to my mind and encouraged me to pray -- 'Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me,' and that, 'come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest,' together with several other encouraging words; at length these words made the greatest impression, 'my grace is sufficient for thee.' These words were as apples of gold in pictures in silver. I saw the grace of God in Christ was sufficient for every purpose, respecting the salvation of a sinner, from first to last. My guilt was removed; my sorrow turned into joy; and I had peace through believing in the freeness and fulness of this great salvation. I was indeed like a new man; everything in me; all around me, appeared new.

A new song was put into my mouth, even praise to my God and Saviour. I could not but express my joy to the family where I lived, though they were strangers to every thing of the kind; and some of them really thought I was deranged. This unspeakable happiness continued without any intermission for two whole weeks, and I then thought it would continue forever" (Richard Furman, *The Crown of Life* [Charleston: Wm. Riley, 1822], pp. 23-25).

This same Edmund Botsford was very active in witnessing, preaching in the open, and giving to the destitute. Largely through his faithful ministry in speech and letter the young William B. Johnson, an irreligious young man, was converted. Johnson later became the first president of the Southern Baptist convention.

Botsford also took very seriously the obligation to preach to the slaves and talk to them individually about their eternal interests. In one of his published works, he produces a conversation between two slaves, Sambo and Toney. Sambo has been converted and seeks the salvation of Toney. The conversation rests on Botsford's theology of evangelism, sin, conviction, conversion, and repentance.

Sambo's earnestness about the infinite importance of eternal life induces Toney to plead, "I wish, Sambo, you would tell me how I must pray and how I must repent and believe the gospel; for I never think upon these things in my life before." Sambo responds:

I have no much time now for talk with you Toney; I must go to the boat and see about unloading the cotton. But I would advise you, Toney, for pray the Lord for direction, and as for you must pray, just pray as you can, and the Lord will hear you when you pray with all your heart. I can stay no longer, but I beg you for think seriously upon what I have said to you. Sit down, Toney, and think over your whole life and think which the best--that you go on in sin and at last go to hell, or turn to God and believe in the Lord Jesus, and so be happy in your soul while you live, and be prepared for heaven when you die.

At the encouragement of another friend, Toney attends a meeting where the sermon text is, "God be merciful to me a sinner." After a very clear and strong presentation of the person and work of Christ and the necessity of an efficacious work of the Holy Spirit, the minister exhorted his hearers to close with Christ.

Toney relates the content of the sermon to Sambo. Specifically, he tells Sambo how the minister exhorted his hearers to pray to the Lord for mercy. The following conversation ensues:

Sambo - And did you do as the minister tell you?

Toney - Yes, over and over again.

Sambo - And did you find peace?

Toney - No, I no find for twenty times.

Sambo - Well, what you do then? Had you mind to leave off for prayer?

Toney - Yes, a hundred times.

Sambo - And how come you no leave it off?

Toney - O Sambo, I can't leave it off, because I believe the word the minister tell me, he say without faith or believing in Christ all the world could not save me. So I think with myself, If I leave off prayer, I loss for true, and I can but be loss if I pray. I go to Uncle Davy and tell him all my trouble, and beg him pray for me.

Sambo - And what did Davy say to you?

Toney - He tell me that nobody could help me, that I must believe in Jesus Christ, or I would be



damned; but he say, the word of the Lord is in your favour, for it say, "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest."

Sambo - Well, what you do then?

Toney - Do? I know not what for do. I looked upon myself as a poor loss sinner. I had no body for blame but myself, and I often think I should drop into hell. However, I continue for pray and begging for mercy, till one day the Lord enable me to believe in Jesus Christ, and give me peace in my soul.

Toney's preacher reveals quite a bit about Botsford's understanding of depravity and the way of repentance. After a full display of the work of Christ, Botsford has the preacher describe the nature of true sorrow for sin.

Then you say why are not all poor sinners saved. I will tell you, before they can be saved, they must come to the Lord Jesus Christ; this they will never do while they love sin, nor till they feel themselves in a lost ruined state, and this they will never see till the Spirit of God shew them their sin, and this he does many ways, sometimes by preaching sometimes by a godly friend talking... but I will tell you how you may know if the Spirit of God is at work with you -- If you feel sorry for sin and hate it, if your hearts are full of trouble about your soul, full of guilt and shame, and fear, and like the poor man in the text [you] are smiting your breast and crying God be merciful to me a sinner.

The avoidance of attaching efficacy to a form of words is quite remarkable. As Botsford's story demonstrates, a deep ploughing of sin in the human heart and the necessity of genuine spiritual change dominate the morphology of conversion among early Baptists in the South.

## **Very Applicatory in Preaching**

Baptists in these years had an appropriately exalted view of preaching and were greatly influenced by the applicatory preaching of the Puritans and Jonathan Edwards. In one of his admonitions to preachers, Furman urged them to read Baxter, Bunyan, Boston, Doddridge, Edwards, and John Newton. C. D. Mallary commended Owen, Watts, Whitefield, Fuller, Scott, and, again, Edwards. They learned much about applicatory preaching from such spiritual bibliography and were sincerely zealous in seeking to reach the consciences of their congregations. In a sermon on the "Constitution and Order of the Church," Furman's call to the unconverted is remarkably impassioned:

Without a breach of charity, I conclude, this large assembly may be divided, into saints and sinners; and it cannot be supposed that, having been describing, with an eye intent on the sacred volume, the duties of gospel ministers, I can feel indifferent to those obligations which are indispensable to the servant of Christ; or unconcerned for my hearers according to their states and characters. Permit me then, if there be such in the hearing of my voice, who have never sincerely turned to God, never felt the pangs of pious grief, or been awakened to a due sense of eternal things; to call on you by every argument, which humanity, reason and religion, can suggest; to attend seriously to the calls of the gospel, and apply to Christ for salvation! You are now in time, and under the sound of grace, but while I am speaking, time is rapidly passing away, and eternity as fast advancing. Should the king of terrors arrest you in your impenitent and unhallowed state; how certain and awful must your ruin be? How will you answer for the neglect to your own conscience, in the world of spirits; or appear in the presence of your offended and injured God; of the neglected and slighted Savior? Where will you appear, in that tremendous day, "when the heavens shall pass away with a great noise;" the earth be thrown into convulsions and wrapped in flames; the sun extinguished and the stars dissolved? O!

hearken now to the voice of Christ; it calls you to salvation: On this important errand he has sent his ministers; "As though God did beseech you by us, we pray you, in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God! Lay down your arms of rebellion; touch the golden sceptre of grace, and live."

None in early Baptist congregations was exempt from close and searching scrutiny. Intensely aware that unbelief often appeared in congenial and benign form, preachers gave sober warning against a sense of security built on false principles. The obviously profligate, carelessly "on the road to eternal ruin" make easy targets for warning and admonition. The self-righteous likewise overtly manifest a spirit and belief contrary to the gospel and "must be effectually turned if they are ever admitted to the Saviour's heavenly rest." The "self-deceived hypocrite," however, cannot as clearly and easily be convinced of his condition. He rests in apparent safety and seems well-satisfied with his profession of faith and with his subsequent adherence to the principles of Christian faith. They may be members of the "most pure and regular Church on earth," take advantage of all opportunities and ordinances of divine worship, possess much knowledge, be eminent for "intellectual endowments" and even "spiritual gifts," and "be very confident of their interest in the Divine fervour;" they may demonstrate zeal in religion and yet "be strangers to regenerating grace." What can be said to rouse one so sure of his safety to flee from the wrath to come? The examination must be close and uncomfortable.

But there are self-deceived hypocrites, who have never suspected themselves to be guilty of hypocrisy, but who notwithstanding possess not that simplicity and godly sincerity which the gospel calls for. They will perhaps be zealous for the most orthodox doctrines of Christianity; for its spirituality and experimental nature, as far as these are considered in theory; while in spirit and conduct, they are quite the reverse of what the Christian should be, and really is: they bring in truth, influenced by carnal, worldly motives, and at heart, more concerned to obtain the approbation and praise of men, or to provide for their present ease and indulgence, than to be interested in the favour of God, or to serve and glorify him; so blinded are they by self-love, and a good opinion of themselves, that the glaring inconsistency of their conduct, though perhaps evident to everyone else is not discovered by themselves, or if discovered . . . is set down by them to the account of human imperfection, the corruption of nature, and the force of temptation -- while in fact, imperfection is not sincerely lamented by them, corruption not mortified, and temptation not truly resisted. . . . They ask for blessings which they never sincerely desired, and give thanks for mercies which they do not prize, nor improve.

These professors of faith, so dangerously deceived, must be converted or perish for "without holiness, no man shall see the Lord."

Applicatory preaching of this nature is far removed from two current errors. One, conveniently called easy-believism refuses to call into question the salvific status of virtually any profession. The second engages in a harangue against the consciences and spirits of church members and seeks second professions of faith. Its content focuses on the doubts of church members, ridicules their lack of assurance, and demonstrates a woeful lack of apprehension of the true nature of searching preaching which is based on a grasp of the effects of regeneration, the inevitable and observable increase in holiness and in love of Christ and the gospel.

## **Deeply Committed to Human Responsibility**

The early Baptist understanding of human responsibility was two-pronged: 1) the responsibility of the minister to use all legitimate means for the progress of the gospel and, 2) the responsibility of saints and sinners to love God and hate sin. Basil Manly Sr. makes this clear in his message "Divine Efficiency Consistent with Human Activity."

Insistent always that "if their ministry were rendered effectual to any, it is because God opens the hearts of such persons," they nevertheless recognized the propriety of appointing to this service creatures who are, themselves, the subjects of redeeming grace: who "like the rest of mankind, have been held under the power of sin, but have also experienced deliverance from that state of thralldom." It is a service, not committed to angels, but to men.

This commitment brings the sober responsibility of personal discipline and public ministry. In personal discipline the minister must work for God's glory, place the business of the gospel ministry before any other business or interest, attend to the improvement of mental powers, and cultivate a gratitude to God and jealousy for the truths of the gospel.

Responsible faithfulness is the subject of Furman's message "Rewards of Grace Conferred on Christ's Faithful People." It highlights the unity between efficacious grace and human faithfulness. Furman defines faithfulness as the "conscientious and regular discharge of the duties incumbent upon us." In true disciples, Furman insists that "holiness and fidelity are necessarily connected." Mallery says that "God will not people his Kingdom with the lovers of sin, and the despisers of his Son." True regeneration always bears spiritual fruit and causes one to do what he is responsible to do. Though faith and repentance "do not precede regeneration but are the fruits of it," they are "the acts of the creature: it is man that believes and not God; it is man that repents and not his Maker" (Mallery, *Christian Index*, 1843 p. 59).

The permeation of Edwardsean theology into Baptist life is quite remarkable. One of its major impacts appears in the acceptance of the distinction between natural inability and moral inability. This distinction justified their conscientious and fervent calls for sinners to do what they were "unable" to do. "Nothing hinders a compliance with the requisitions of the gospel but the sinner's rebellious will," says Mallery. C.F. Bremley contends with the sinner, "You know you are under no constraint to sin against God; it is your own wilful and deliberate act and God holds you responsible for it." Another writer says, "Free agency consists in liberty to act according to our will, without restraint short of the limit of our natural powers." Mallery again, "The want of power is the want of will," and again, "It is certain that all men possess those natural faculties, the right use and proper use of which would enable them to walk in the way of God's commandments: it is very easy for that person to do right, who is willing to do right." This theology led to a high sense of the responsibility of fallen man.

They also greatly admired Edwards's personal life. Mallery said, "Modern times cannot boast of a more holy man than President Edwards." Edwards's profound appreciation and contemplation of the sovereignty of God "contributed much to the amazing depth, the delightful symmetry and perfection of his purity" (Mallery, *Christian Index* 1943, p. 78). Such an appraisal could hardly fail to be accompanied by an emulation of Edwards's view of the holy character of saving faith.

## **Relationship of Election to Faith**

The commitment among these Baptists to the doctrine of election could be multiplied greatly. This doctrine has no tendency to destroy morality when seen in harmony with the full revelation of God. Reduced to an abstraction and ripped from its proper connections in Scripture, it has been a part of the malady of antinomianism. However, in disengaging from one error we must be careful not to rush to another. We must not, in the words of C.D. Mallery, "fritter down the doctrines of grace, and give countenance, by our faith and teaching, to self-righteous presumption." When one sees how election serves the production of holiness and the construction of the image of Christ in believers he can see clearly that no one "has any further evidence of his election of God, than he mortifies the deeds of the body, becomes crucified to the world, and possesses the mind that was in our Lord Jesus Christ." In this way our forefathers' commitment to the doctrine of election was an antidote to the so-called easy-believism.

## Duty of Self-Examination

Early Baptist ministers were not mere mechanics putting together machinery in accordance with instructions, but were themselves both subject and object in the vital warnings, admonitions, and instructions they sought to give to others. Since so many professing Christians, in the light of truth, appear destitute of an experimental acquaintance with conversion, "it becomes us," Furman advised, "to maintain a holy jealousy over ourselves, lest we should be deceived; and to feel a tender concern for others" ("Conversion," p. 19). The sixth applicatory point made by Furman in his funeral oration for Oliver Hart concerned "the necessity of strictly examining ourselves that we may not indulge a presumptuous hope, nor suffer at last the fearful disappointment of those who will be disowned by Christ in the day of his appearing."

How serious we would be in our preparation and how eager to do everything to attain an acquittal if we were to stand before an earthly judge in the cause of life and death. How much more should our minds be affected, Furman reminds us, when we realize we are to stand before the "judge of all the earth, whose eyes are as pure flames, piercing into the secret recesses of the soul." In light of this, we must look with the utmost care into the state of our souls and let nothing deceive us. Conscience must be armed with the word of God as we conduct the examination.

Part of self-examination consists of an inventory of progress in the knowledge of God and a candid evaluation of one's zeal for God's glory. Oliver Hart, in his laborious self-examination, illustrates the profit gained for himself and others in the fulfilling of this duty. The following entry to his diary came August 5, 1754, in a period of time just before "the power of divine grace was eminently displayed" in the church at Charleston.

Monday, August the 5th, 1754. I do this morning feel myself oppressed under a sense of my barrenness; Alas, what do I for God? I am indeed employed in his vineyard, but I fear to little purpose. I feel a want of the life and power of religion in my own heart: This causes such a languor in all my duties to God: This makes me so poor an improver of time. Alas! I am frequently on my bed when I ought to be on my knees -- to my shame. Sometimes the sun appears in the horizon, and begins his daily course, before I have paid my tribute of praise to God; and perhaps, while I am indulging myself in inactive slumbers. Oh! wretched stupidity! Oh! that, for time to come, I may be more active for God! I would this morning resolve, before thee, O! God, and in thy name and strength, to devote myself more unreservedly to thy service than I have hitherto done: I would resolve to be a better improver of my time that I have heretofore been: To rise earlier in the morning, to be sooner with thee in secret devotions, and Oh, that I may be more devout therein! I would be more engaged in my studies. Grant, O, Lord! that I may improve more by them! And when I go abroad, enable me better to improve my visits; that I may always leave a savour of divine things behind me. When I go to thy house to speak for thee, may I always go full fraught with things divine, and be enabled faithfully and feelingly to dispense the word of life. I would begin and end every day with thee: Teach me to study thy glory in all I do: And wilt thou be with me also in the night watches; teach me to meditate of thee on my bed: may my sleep be sanctified to me, that I may thereby be fitted to thy service, nor ever desire more than answers this important end. Thus teach me to number my days, that I may apply my heart unto wisdom.

When the reformation of these days comes, or as it progresses, it will be evidenced in a recovery of these vital aspects of gospel truth which so efficaciously undergirded the ministry of our early Baptist forefathers in America.



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# News

## New Journal

The publication of a new journal under the editorial leadership of Dr. John Armstrong has recently been announced. *Reformation and Revival* will be published quarterly beginning in January 1992. Its purpose is to "encourage *reformation* in local Christian churches" and to "promote the cause of *revival* and spiritual awakening internationally." For subscription information write Reformation and Revival Ministries, Box 88216, Carol Stream, IL 60188.

## 1991 Southern Baptist Founders Conference Held

The 1991 Southern Baptist Founders Conference convened for the first time on the campus of Samford University in Birmingham, AL, last July 23-26. The facilities at the new venue were excellent. Reid Chapel was the site for the main meetings. The spacious auditorium was more than adequate for the 182 registrants.

Timothy George is Dean of the Beeson Divinity School which is located on the campus. He and his staff were extremely helpful in assuring that our transition to a new location went as smoothly as possible.

The focus of the conference was upon "A Savior Who Is Christ the Lord." Geoff Thomas from Wales preached three times on the personality of Jesus, bringing to light challenging and encouraging aspects of the Savior's humanness. These messages were particularly applicable to pastors, who were exhorted to make God's incarnational ministry through His Son a pattern for their own ministries. The other sermons and papers served to keep the conference balanced with doctrinal strength and devotional life. Tapes may be secured from Sound Word Associates, Box 2035, Michigan City, IA 46360.

## Missionaries Arrive in Ukraine

Steve and Marilyn Haines, missionaries under the Foreign Mission Board, have arrived at their new assignment in Ukraine, Soviet Union. Steve's responsibilities include establishing a theological training center for Ukrainian Baptists. They may receive correspondence at the following address: Dr. Steve & Marilyn Haines \* do Paul Thibodeaux \* Eastern Europe Division, FMB \* Dommayergasse 7/16 \* A-1130 Vienna, AUSTRIA.

## Gates Resigns from Planning Committee

Mr. R. F. Gates has resigned his position as a member of the Southern Baptist Founders Conference planning committee. Scheduling difficulties which arise from his itinerant ministry led to the decision. His preaching ministry continues to have a wide usefulness in local churches and Bible conferences. The committee which he leaves is thankful to the Lord for his faithful service through the years and looks forward to his continued participation in future conferences. He may be contacted for special meetings at P. O. Box 52101, Shreveport, LA, 71135.



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# Book Reviews

*Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth* by John H. Gerstner; 1991, 275 pp., Wolgemuth & Hyatt

Reviewed by [Ernest Reisinger](#)

The long awaited, long-expected, and much-needed work on Dispensationalism has arrived.

I am most happy to write this little review, one reason being that I was held in the jaws of this warped system of theology for the first ten years of my Christian life. During that period I wore out three Scofield Bibles and was working on my fourth! For years I taught it with charts and maps.

Dr. J. I. Packer commends Gerstner's work in the following way: "In this book a clear-headed classical Calvinist challenges contemporary Dispensational Theology. Pussyfooting is not Dr. Gerstner's style; he values controversy as a way of clearing the air, and conducts it with bracing vigor. With skill and thorough knowledge he maps the geography of the gulf that lies between the two positions, and invites the reader to agree that Dispensationalism is seriously astray. All readers will be grateful to the author for clarifying the issues more precisely than any previous book has done. He sets out to show that Calvinism and Dispensationalism are radically opposed, and he proves his point."

Dr. Gerstner points out how Dispensationalism infiltrated the United Presbyterian Church of the North. Indeed this seems incredible because the Dispensational warped system of theology is diametrically opposed to covenant theology. He clearly points out the grave dangers of this system that has so many fine Christians and teachers deceived.

The Southern Presbyterian Church was not affected as much. Men like Robert Dabney wrote against this theology (See Dabney's *Discussions*, Vol. 1, p. 214, Banner of Truth Trust).

One of the many facets that Dr. Gerstner clears up is the claim of many, if not all, Dispensational teachers who tell us that they are four-point Calvinists. This book will prove beyond any reasonable doubt that they are not Calvinistic at all -- not even on one point -- rather they are Arminian to the core on every point.

The author addresses the contemporary Lordship controversy. He gives the historical context of the controversy and clarifies the terms of the debate. He crumbles the Dispensational house on this point. I think it is fair to say that, by reading the whole book, one must conclude that "non-Lordship salvation" is only a child of two dangerous parents -- the father is Arminianism and the mother is Dispensational Antinomianism.

When the open-minded reader finishes this book he will agree with Charles Ryrie's statement in his *Balancing the Christian Life*: "The importance of this question cannot be overestimated in relation to both salvation and sanctification. The message of faith only and the message of faith plus commitment of life cannot both be the gospel; therefore, one of them is false and comes under the curse of perverting the gospel or preaching another gospel" (Gal. 1:6-9). It is another gospel. The question is, Which one is the biblical gospel? Which one is the apostolic gospel?

Many Calvinists will not agree with Dr. Gerstner on every point of his view of the atonement where he disagrees with some of the great men of the Westminster Theological Seminary.



I wish he would have given more pages to the doctrine of assurance and to the Dispensational perversions of it. I feel the same way in regard to the moral Law and Dispensationalism. What is said is very helpful but since these are two areas where Dispensationalism is in complete opposition to all the respected creeds and confessions, they could have warranted a bit more emphasis. This book is an absolute must for all serious Bible teachers and preachers.

This book may be secured from Cumberland Valley Bible Book Service, P.O. Box 613, Carlisle, PA 17013.

*A Layman's Guide to the Lordship Controversy* by Richard P. Belcher; 1990, 106 pp., Crowne Publications, \$6.95

Reviewed by [Ted Manby](#)

Are you too busy to keep up with the current debate in American Christianity? Scores of Christian radio stations have dropped programs that stand on one side of this issue. Certain Christian conference centers have replaced the speakers they invite because of their views on this matter. Church boards have shifted their support from one ministry to another in response to this contention: the place of the *Lordship of Christ* in the salvation of sinners. Indeed, Christians should be concerned. For, as Richard Belcher has stated, "the nature of the gospel itself is at stake."

In this book, Dr. Belcher has simplified and defined this Lordship debate for busy pastors and laymen in the local church. This comes as no surprise, for he had also clarified and expounded the inerrancy issue in two of his earlier books back in the 1980's. Because this debate affects the decisions they make and the ones that are made for them, Christians need readable accounts such as this in order to understand the current theological shuffling and realignment in Christian ministries, organizations, and churches.

This short book clarifies the two sides of the Lordship issue into basic principles taken from two books that kicked off the present controversy: John MacArthur's *The Gospel According to Jesus* which teaches Lordship salvation and Zane Hodges' *Absolutely Free* which defends non-Lordship salvation. Each chapter ends with a summary of each side's principles for an easy comparison by the reader. In a short time, the reader will understand the key differences between the two schools of thought. Furthermore, these two positions are compared in the areas of theology and in their handling of Scripture. In the remaining chapters, Dr. Belcher critiques the theological straw men built on logical fallacies, the theological weaknesses, and the Scripture-twisting of the non-Lordship position.

The structure of this work could hardly be improved. It is a well-written, fair, and gracious handling of a difficult issue. Nevertheless, this kind and fair approach does not prevent Dr. Belcher from clearly defending the historic Christian faith. Jesus is Lord and His Person cannot be divided to make salvation more attractive to men and women who are still in love with their sins. Likewise, the author's fairness does not prevent his wit from surfacing at times, and this adds significantly to the flow of the book.

However, there is one warning in regards to this work. It will whet your appetite to read the aforementioned book by John MacArthur--an excellent work on this subject. The gospel is truly at stake. Make sure your gospel is the same as Christ's, Peter's, Paul's and all those who have followed the Word of God for the last 2,000 years.

*Jesus is Lord* by Terry Alan Chrisope, 1982, 122 pp. Evangelical Press

Reviewed by [Tony Mattia](#)

In 1991 Southern Baptists focused their annual doctrinal study on the Lordship of Christ. Terry Alan Chrisope has written an excellent book on the subject, entitled *Jesus Is Lord*. The author is a Southern Baptist Professor of History at Missouri Baptist College in St. Louis.

Dr. Chrisope carefully examines all the important scripture references on this most vital subject. Then, as calmly and cleanly as a surgeon, he diagnoses the situation and defines the meaning of biblical words in their contextual usage. He meets the subject squarely and with clarity, dispensing with the arguments that would make Christ's Lordship optional.

Jesus is Lord. The fact that the new believer does not understand all of the ramifications of this doctrine at the time of regeneration does not nullify its truth. The author explains how the new heart, as the believer yields to Christ, is made more aware of the demands of Christ. As he submits himself to the Lordship of Christ and as the Scriptures are opened up to him, he will become more conformed to the image of Christ. The relationship of experience to biblical truth is dealt with clearly and concisely.

The book is divided into four chapters. In the opening chapter, the author presents a thorough word study of *kyrois*. In Chapter Two, six major Scripture passages are examined pertaining to Christ's resurrection and exaltation as Lord.

In Chapter Three, the author shows the prominence of this doctrine in the teaching of the early church, as exemplified in the Book of Acts. He then relates that the implications of the early confession acknowledges four related but distinguishable elements: 1) Jesus' position as exalted Lord, 2) The rightful authority of Jesus Christ over the believer, 3) The deity of Christ, 4) Personal trust in Jesus Christ. Finally, objections are considered.

Chapter Four, "The Practical Significance of the Confession of Jesus as Lord," is worth the price of the book. The author lists the results of ignoring the Lordship of Jesus in preaching and evangelism, and suggests corrective measures for more evangelical proclamation.

In a day of pragmatism, where methodology is more important than theology, this book is a must for every Christian. In the face of "easy believism," the author's careful exegesis reveals to the reader the seriousness of this issue. To err at this point is to err in the gospel itself. Jesus IS Lord!



### **Preach Doctrine**

Brethren, we must preach the doctrines; we must emphasize the doctrines; we must go back to the

doctrines. I fear that the new generation does not know the doctrines as our fathers knew them.

-John A. Broadus

