

CHIEF MINISTRIES

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The Worship of Christ is not an option.

The book of Acts is very clear. The new birth normally produced an immediate and radical change in behavior;

Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" v38 And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. v39 For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself." v40 And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation." v41 So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. v42 And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. v43 And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. v44 And all who believed were together and had all things in common. v45 And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. v46 And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, v47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved. (Acts 2:37-47ESV) Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common. v33 And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. v34 There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold v35 and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need. (Acts 4:32-35 ESV) While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. v45 And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles. v46 For they were hearing them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter declared, (Acts 10:44-46 ESV) And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." v32 And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. v33 And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family. v34 Then he brought them up into his house and set food before them. And he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God. (Acts 16:31-34 ESV)

Note especially 1 Thessalonians 1:9 with the broader context of 1:2-10. "They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God."

So often this does not occur today.

Why is that?

I believe a major reason is because in many Christian circles, months and often many years will pass by in the lives of new Christians before they respond to the Lordship of Christ. In fact, those involved in witnessing are warned against making any connection between Jesus being Savior and Jesus being Master. The expectation is that eventually the convert might hopefully decide to dedicate his life to Christ. I am absolutely sure this was not so in the early church. And because this was not so, the radical change in behavior was the norm rather than the exception.

Well then, is the solution simply to add the word “Lord” to whatever plan of salvation we might follow? Hardly. The real issue is not the word, the issue is the character of God.

It is very easy for us to forget that those first Jewish Christians did not begin at ground zero as so many converts do today. Through their Jewish background they already had a solid concept of the character of God. They already realize that He was a person of absolute, transcendent holiness, authority, and majesty - they knew their Bibles! If therefore, they were forgiven they saw that forgiveness over against the holiness of God. If Jesus was Lord - Deity - then He could be nothing less than Master in the most unconditional sense.

By contrast, many individuals who are converted today may know next to nothing about God. Therefore, the Holy Spirit is to that degree limited in leading them into the experiential realities which are the by-products of truth. And Jesus said, “*you shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free.*” Scanty truth may well produce a scanty sense of deliverance, worship and joy.

Can we even begin to imagine the instant, spontaneous joy of someone converted to Christ from a life under the old covenant? The endless remembrance of sin, the absence of a clean conscience, the impenetrable barrier between the God of Mount Sinai and sinful man and then then it was all gone! All of it! And in that context of truth the Holy Spirit was free to lead them to look vertically and cry “Abba, Father!” and “Jesus is Lord”. And then to look horizontally at their brothers and say, “I love you”! They were filled with the Spirit! Their spiritual eyes were opened to understand the Scriptures, because they already knew the Scriptures.

Without any question, the New Testament expectation of a regenerated individual is one to whom Jesus is not only Savior, but also Lord. Lord not only in the sense of His Deity, but Lord in the relational sense of being one’s Master, one’s Sovereign, one’s absolute Despot – (only 5 times in the New Testament is the Greek word properly translated “despot” and used as a title for God. It conveys the idea of “unrestricted power and absolute domination”.) In view of their Old Testament frame of reference, no early Christian would have ever thought of separating those two aspects of Lordship. Only demons would do that and they shudder at the horror of the implication. “*You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that - and shudder*” (James 2:19).

The very name JEHOVAH (YAHWEH) underlined the fact that a man must always view his God as a relational being. He is the God of the covenant; He is the God who would be to His people everything He was. Any question concerning this should have been settled once and for all by Jesus’ statement of the greatest commandment; “*love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.*” (Matthew 22:37)

At last some little mysteries fall into place. We can understand why with little children their act of receiving the Savior is almost humdrum. What do they know of the holiness of God and utter despicable nature of sin? What do they know of the implications of Deity?

On the other hand, it is reasonable for someone who has groveled in his own depravity to experience a momentous conversion. Though he may know little of the Scriptures, he knows much about sin! Does that sound like you and I? And it is truth the Spirit uses as a catalyst. If all that man knows is that God loves him, while knowing next to nothing about the nature of sin as seen over against the righteousness of God, what truth does the Holy Spirit have to work with? Can he understand what God's love really means? Can he even begin to appreciate the wonder of the grace of God? Spiritual understanding will not grow in a vacuum!

I believe that in view of the phenomenal ignorance and misconceptions concerning God that most people have today we should take far more seriously Paul's pattern of evangelism before the pagans in Athens. They had no education in the Old Testament at all. Therefore, he first built a foundation of facts concerning God before he encouraged his listeners to make any commitment to the gospel (Acts 17:24-29). A similar problem is encountered when someone is encouraged to find security and affection in God's title "Father" when the only image that word brings to his mind is his own cruel and unreliable father whom he learned to hate.

What is the average non-Christians mental image of the word "God" when you say, "God has a wonderful plan for your life?" Is it not strange that we so readily can talk of their need of a "personal relationship with Christ" when we have utterly failed to fill them in on even the elementary facts about God? It was only in light of Paul's description of God that he could speak to the Athenians of the need of repentance. This God was "Lord of heaven and earth", the One to whom they owed their very existence and the One before whom some day they would stand in judgment. It was He who commanded repentance.

A Christian is a person to whom Jesus is Lord – God and Master. To mistakenly read something less than that into Romans 10:9 is to ignore the inseparable demands of "Lordship".

It is simply impossible, unless one has lost his rationality, to say, "Abba! Father!" And at the same time reject the Lordship of Christ. John Stott states it so clearly:

"The bent knee is as much a part of saving faith as the open hand. Faith is commitment to Him as a whole Person, not a particular role. Faith may not choose to be committed to Him in the role of Savior and not in the role of Lord."

I am absolutely baffled by the resistance of this truth among Christians today. We are warned by some that if Lordship is made a part of the message of salvation we are adding works to the gospel of grace. Not only is that perplexing, it's hogwash!

On the one hand, we respond to the Holy Spirit's convicting work which leads us to trust Christ as Savior. And we call that grace. On the other hand, we respond to that same Holy Spirit in the same context concerning God's exclusive, holy demand of allegiance. And we call that works?

To become a Christian is to become part of the Kingdom of God. And remember, it was the "Kingdom of God" that Christians preached throughout the entire book of Acts. (8:12, 19:8, 20:25, 28:23, 31). How can one assume he is entering the Kingdom of God and at the same time reject the King - the rule of Christ? If Jesus is not Lord, then the new believer has no prayer to pray. Out of this humanism, he might as well call his God "Santa Claus" to whom will he speak? To God? A God before whom he will not bow?

You may be satisfied with an intellectual grasping of the deity of Christ. You may agree with the fact that he died for you and that God loves you and has accepted you. But the moment you pray to Him you are assuming a relationship. At that point the issue of Lordship is unavoidable, unless we are simply playing a game with words.

In my foray into Horticulture. I noticed when planting a row of pole string beans that soon after a seed sprouts in damp spring soil, it's tendrils begin to reach upward. Moving back and forth. Searching. Groping for something that will direct its climb. Eventually, if it finds nothing, it will collapse to the dirt. Continuing to twist and turn it will often grab hold of itself in a desperate attempt to find some support for climbing. Ultimately it will become a tangled confusion with a pittance of the harvest it might have had.

But if it finds a pole.....it will become artistry in motion. Climbing higher and higher. Lush foliage, blossoms. And long, crisp string beans.

Biblical truth concerning God - His Lordship - is that pole, the object around which the Spirit will entwine God's child. By nature he reaches upward; by the Word of God he finds direction.

But because so many converts begin at ground zero as to God's truth, they may for years not only the depression and frustration of attempting to reach upward (for "reaching upward" is characteristic of their truest nature, [Romans 7:18-22]) only to fall back in defeat and introspection. After a few stabs at reaching out for whatever comes along, they may, out of sheer desperation to climb upon themselves through legalism or self-created experience. And then one day - perhaps very suddenly - they at last grasp those things they should have known long before - the precious things from God and they cry out "Jesus is Lord!" Sincere looking for some scriptural title to their new-found jubilation, they might call this "the baptism" or "the filling" or "the anointing." Or any number of other titles which may or may not stand the test of the Scriptures. But something did happen and life would never be the same again. Christ is Lord.

I tend to think that it is this distinction more than anything else that explains the marvelous, transforming, and often profoundly emotional "second work of grace" in the lives of many believers. Even though perhaps they had grown up in a Bible believing church, their conversion was still in a vacuum concerning Lordship. Assuming their conversion was actual, then it was at that time they received the Holy Spirit. But, there finally came a time when this truth and the encouragement of others as to the sovereignty of the Spirit would set them experientially free.

In view of the division of the body of Christ today over the issue of the baptism of Spirit, it might be a major step in dissolving the barrier if we could first realize the common ground that there can be no regeneration apart from receiving the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9) and that second, the apostles used the term "baptism in the Spirit" and "receiving the Spirit" (or the "gift of the Spirit") as describing the same event (see Acts 1:5; 8:15-17; 10:44-45 and especially 11:15-17). Hopefully on that basis we might be able together to look more objectively at the multitude of examples of previously regenerated believers who later on experienced a realization of the Spirit's presence and power and to assume that they were not only valid, but a major significance as to their future life for God.

I think you have a right to ask why am I making such a point of this.

Consider for a moment where we are in much of today's evangelism. It seems as though we are so eager not only to convert people but to give them "assurance" of their salvation that they end up with a very self-centered, humanistic package that is really a perversion of the gospel. I am afraid that due to the guilt feelings most of us get for not witnessing like we should, that good old American ingenuity has come to our rescue. Loaded with our well-memorized super salesmanship pitch - "easy open" "snap-in-place", "instant this or that" philosophy - we venture forth with our product, convinced that it beats all other religious products on the market. How many times have you heard "just repeat after me" followed by "don't let anyone tell you you aren't saved". We load ourselves with well-rehearsed answers to every possible question and a neat way to "close the sale" we at last discover we have found deliverance from our guilt - our customer signed on the dotted line! And why shouldn't he sign? Hell's no fun. If Jesus had

used this approach you can be sure the rich young ruler never would have gone away sorrowing, would he? (Luke 18:18-23)

(Certainly, it would be wrong to conclude that this type of evangelism never produces true regenerate people. In fact, I would imagine that some of you who are reading this date your salvation from such an encounter. We worship a wonderfully merciful God who sometimes brings about His regenerating miracle in spite of our methodology)

Unless somehow our witness leads to repentance in view of an awareness of the holiness of God, we have failed to provide a truly biblical, informational basis for the convicting work of the Spirit. And unless we share in some way the prospect of a relationship with Jesus as Savior and Lord, regeneration may not take place at all. And if it doesn't then there is no corresponding gift of the Spirit and no Spirit produced witness of assurance, "Jesus is Lord!" "Abba! Father!" Apart from the gift of the Spirit no one is regenerated no matter what a person may say he believes - "*If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ*" (Romans 8:9). This fact is fundamental to new covenant conversion.

Sadly in our sincere zeal for converts we have made assurance a very academic, (just repeat after me....worship service after worship service) non-experiential, non-encounter thing totally in contrast with the repeated biblical explanations as to how assurance is realized.

How is it realized?

The greatest little book on assurance is 1 John (I challenge you to read 1st 2nd and 3rd John at least 50 times in a row to get an understanding of God and His love). And what does John say? He begins by emphasizing that salvation is not primarily a product or a proposition but an institution of a relationship - "fellowship with God." We may be confident we have this fellowship by the presence of several things: by keeping "his commands" (2:3), which includes loving one's brother (2:9-10; 3:14, 18-19), walking in the "same manner" as Jesus walked (2:6), plus a radical change in one's attitude toward sin in general (2:15; 3:4-9). Not only that, but we can enjoy assurance because we are aware that God "has given us of His Spirit" by whom we confess that "Jesus is the Son of God" (4:13-15) and that "we remain in Him" (that last phrase certainly underlines that the gospel points to a relationship which in turn affects behavior.)

In view of the varying shades concerning evangelistic methods today, we should be thankful to God that those prominent in mass evangelism - Luis Palau, Reinhard Bohnke, Greg Lauri, The Call, Passion, Louie Giglio, - are bold in speaking of repentance and the Lordship of Christ.

I would imagine that this last mentioned basis for assurance is the most foundational. Assurance is realized through one's awareness and response of the Lordship of Christ. That is a fact that any believer must acknowledge unless he is either very ignorant or very irrational. If he is either of these, what he needs is not experience (though I'm pretty sure he could use a true one of these too); he needs knowledge in order to get a proper perspective and to break out of either his ignorance or his temporary insanity. Nevertheless, the awareness of Lordship eventually brings experience - Philippians 4:6-7 cannot properly be prayed from the heart of one who is at odds with total dedication of life (or Lordship).

Though I am tempted to put this in a footnote since it is a digression: it's simply too important to miss: it is absolutely necessary for Christians to distinguish between security and assurance. The Bible is clear that one is eternally secure IF he is truly born-again (Hebrews 10:39, etc.) even though at times one's experience may provide him with no basis of assurance. But I am convinced that the personal pleasure of having assurance was never given by God to gently soothe the anxieties of an individual who is at odds with the Lordship of Christ. God's promises are to believers - to those who want to follow the Lord and

whose lives belong to Him - not to rebels who have chosen sin and rejected His Lordship. There is not a single promise anywhere in the Bible that God will bless us with eternal life if we ultimately reject Him and choose rebellion, and we give people false assurance when we make that claim. Without a doubt you'll find many verses promising mercy and forgiveness to those who turned back (thank God!), And you'll find many verses assuring us of God's keeping power, but note clearly that the promises are given to Jesus' sheep - to those who know His voice and follow Him (John 10:27) - rather than to those who reject His voice and walk away from Him.

So, on a practical level it comes down to this: if you have put your trust in the Lord and desire to serve Him, He has given you absolute assurance that He will never leave you or forsake you, that He will keep you safe to the end, and that no one and nothing can separate you from His love. Rest secure in Him. He is the Author and Finisher of your Faith!

But if you believe that since you were once saved, even if you reject Him and live in unrepentant sin you are still saved, then you have deceived yourself and are in danger of falling under God's judgment (that's why Jesus and Paul often warned us not to be deceived.)

Tragically, I have encountered professing believers who were in willful rebellion against the holiness of God and knew it. Yet they would say they were not concerned that much because after all, they had been saved and at least heaven was a certainty even though admittedly they would have to pay a price for what they had chosen to do. In such cases the shoddy teaching of the doctrine of security becomes like grease on the skids of their spiritual rebellion!

Remember, Simon the sorcerer "believed" and was baptized just like the rest of the Samaritans. But there was something critically wrong with his belief. To him, believing in the fact of the gospel was a nifty gimmick to get what he wanted for himself - a new act he could put together that was better than the one he had. Certainly with him there was no response to the convicting work of the Spirit leading to repentance and saving faith which would in turn be manifested by the fact that he had received the Spirit.

Who knows how many "Simons" are "believers" and members of our churches who are either watching out for their own skins (with the attitude, "who wants to go to hell, anyway?") or are seeking some new experience that will put some zest into life. Evaluate how Jesus handled the rich young ruler who sincerely desired eternal life. Jesus told him that before he could have eternal life there had to be a radical change of mind (repentance) involving or rejecting of where he thought meaning in life was to be found - riches - in order to open to discover where meaning truly was - in Jesus (Mark 10:17-21)

I am sure right now someone is saying that to hold to such a view of evangelism is to insert "works" into the gospel of grace. Please think for a moment; if one assumes that saving faith is a work of the Spirit and therefore not a human self-effort, why should one cry "works!" if the same Spirit brings conviction which leads to repentance.

There are only two explanations the Bible gives us for the absence of active commitment to Jesus' Lordship on the part of professing believers: either they are not true believers or they are out of touch with reality.

The first reason is expressed in 2 Corinthians 13:5, "*Examine your selves to see if you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Jesus Christ is in you? - unless of course, you fail the test!*"

The second reason (being out of touch with reality) can happen to any true believer whenever he loses sight of the majesty and heart of God or his own spiritual identity. The repeated expression "*do you not know*" in 1 Corinthians illustrates this reason. For example, "*Do you not know that your body is the*

