

Danger

By Dave Breese

[**Note from the Editor:** In the week prior to his homegoing, Dave was working on an update of the following article. It is hereby presented in fulfillment of his wishes.

—Dave Weeden]

One of the animated discussions which is now in the evangelical Christian scene is one which, surprisingly, concerns the very issue of salvation itself. The question, therefore, of "*What must I do to be saved?*" is now being answered in a more complicated fashion than simply, "*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved*" (*Acts 16:31*). Traditional fundamentalism and most evangelicals have long held to the doctrine of salvation by faith alone. The answer has now become more elaborate than that, as Christians newly discuss whether salvation is by faith alone or by faith plus some other things.

Stated very simply, the view that is now called "Lordship Salvation" (which view is rarely defined to the satisfaction of anyone) holds that the offer of salvation by grace alone through faith (belief) alone in Christ alone is false, for faith includes good works.

There are a number of deficiencies involved in this view which should be noted:

1. It improperly understands justification by faith. Justification does not mean to be "made righteous" or to "progressively become righteous." Rather, it means to be "declared righteous." The credentials by which we are saved are declared to be ours by God on the basis of the work of Christ on the cross.

Faith is belief. It is the simple fact that we believe something, we "believe in" or trust someone. It is improper to define faith as "commitment," "dedication," "surrender," or any other expression which suggests a kinetic response on the part of the soul which, until saved, is "*dead in trespasses and sins*" (*Eph. 2:1*). When we simply believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and that He died for our sins on the cross, rising again the third day, we "have been saved" by grace alone.

2. It ignores imputed righteousness. We are not saved by imparted, infused, or earned righteousness. No indeed, we are righteous by imputation. We are accepted before God by reason of the fact that the righteousness of Christ was credited to our moral account. One cannot profess to understand and believe in imputed righteousness and still hold to any form of salvation by the continued practice of goodness. He who says A must say B. If we are declared righteous by imputation of the righteousness of Christ, which we are, then Lordship Salvation is false.

3. It confuses justification and sanctification. As we have stated, justification means to be declared righteous before God. Sanctification is to be "set apart" by the Lord. The Christian, the instant that he believes, has "positional sanctification."

The life that he lives is to be characterized by “progressive sanctification,” but progressive sanctification is not the basis of salvation from sin’s penalty. To say that progressive sanctification is an “inevitable result” of salvation is also the evidence of doctrinal confusion. The works that are done subsequent to salvation are the result of the intelligent human will responding affirmatively to the will of God. In each Christian, there is a varying degree of spiritual intelligence, as also there may be at times a varying degree of affirmation to the leading of the Lord.

4. It misrepresents salvation itself. Salvation is presented in the Scripture in three tenses or three aspects. When I accept Christ, I have instant and eternal salvation in the sense of deliverance from the penalty of sin. As I live my life in commitment to Christ under the leadership and empowering of the Holy Spirit, I am delivered from the power of sin. Some Christians are insufficiently delivered from the power of sin, even to the extent of sickness (I Cor. 11:30) and physical death (I Tim. 1:20).

In the future, I am promised deliverance from the presence of sin. The Christian’s future in heaven is vouchsafed because of salvation by imputation and positional sanctification. When he believes, he is already seated in the heavenlies with Christ (Eph. 2:6), he is promised that he will never perish (John 10:28).

5. Lordship Salvation diminishes the value of New Testament truth for the Christian. A very high percentage of the epistles of the New Testament are written as instructions to believers. These instructions have produced conviction and commitment in millions of Christians down through the history of the Church. Lordship Salvation cancels the value of these admonitions, in that it declares that if one does not obey these instructions (i.e., perfect obedience), one is not a Christian. Therefore, the answer to Christian imperfection (obvious in the character of many Christians) is that this person was never saved and needs to be saved. So evaporates the value of all instructions to grow in grace.

6. It holds the impossible doctrine of salvation by perfect commitment. If one is saved by submission to the Lordship of Christ, this doctrine cannot admit to the possibility of imperfect commitment. For, from a logical point of view, imperfect commitment is not, in fact, commitment. In that most honest Christians will admit to imperfect commitment, they are thereby admitting that they are not Christians. The necessity but the impossibility of “perfect commitment” is a troublesome problem to the Lordshipists. So “Semi-Lordship Salvation” is what this notion is at best. We await word as to what percentage of commitment produces salvation. (Hint&30151;the scriptural answer is zero, for salvation is by “unmerited favor,” i.e., the grace of God.)

7. Therefore, Lordship Salvation makes assurance tenuous or impossible. Submission to the Lordship of Christ as the basis of salvation holds open the possibility that at some future date one may be less than perfectly submissive. If one holds to the Lordship Salvation view, one’s basis of assurance of salvation is gone. Who can be sure of his own salvation if he holds to salvation

by perfect faithfulness rather than salvation by faith, which itself may be imperfect, in a perfect Savior?

8. It diminishes the value of Calvary. In the Lordship view, Christ becomes less the Savior and more the helper. Under this view, I cannot “cast my helpless soul on Him,” but rather I must cooperate with His helpfulness. By this view, one wonders why Calvary was necessary at all.

9. Lordship Salvation ignores “the Synoptic Problem.” It makes the earthly ministry of Christ normative for the Christian under grace. It, therefore, becomes a theology which is really a hodge-podge of concepts that relate to the kingdom, the Law, Israel, and the Church, and one misses the clear discernment which is imperative to know the difference between these things. Christ addressed His hearers in the Gospel of Matthew with the introduction, “*The kingdom of heaven is at hand.*” From this point, He restated the Law in most emphatic fashion. It is not until Calvary that we have the Gospel that “*Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the scriptures.*” (I Cor. 15:3-4). To ignore this clear truth is to evidence a fundamental imperception as to proper Biblical exegesis.

10. Lordship Salvation misunderstands “kurios.” This is the word for “Lord” used in the New Testament. It is used in the LXX more than six thousand times in translating the name for God: “Jehovah.” Clearly then, “kurios” means more than the English word “Lord.” It properly means “the God-man.” The word “Lord” in the New Testament is therefore not merely a word of title or relationship—it is more ontological than this. It denotes the essential being of Christ, the God-man. When the seeker understands “kurios,” he is not merely obedient, he is overwhelmed.

11. It ignores the importance of the message to Israel. Of primary consideration in the Gospels, especially the Synoptics, and in the early chapters of Acts, is the nation of Israel. The requirements which were placed against Israel were most demanding. For the believer in our time, there is but one requirement, namely “*faith in His blood.*” (Rom. 3:25).

12. It equates discipleship and salvation. The advocates of salvation by commitment to Christ uncritically (and with profound lack of discernment) view the many calls of Christ to His own to come and be His disciples as the call to believe the Gospel. Consequently, the expression “*Follow me*” becomes the way of salvation. Hence, except one becomes a disciple, he is not a Christian. The call to become disciples of the King, extended to Jewish individuals, is very different from the call to believe and therefore be saved by grace and become a member of the body of Christ.

The Lordship view might therefore rather be called “Neo-Judaism.” It really represents little more than Christ’s call to Israel to repent. It is, upon examination, Roman Catholic theology in that it believes in imparted or infused righteousness rather than imputed righteousness.

13. It misunderstands repentance. To translate “metanoia” as “repentance” has been most unfortunate. “To do penance” is not its meaning. It means “a change (meta) of mind (noia).” Too often this will be thoughtlessly defined as “a turning about,” “sorrow for sin,” “being sorry enough to quit,” “a complete change of character,” or “making restitution”—all such definitions are falsehoods. By these inaccurate definitions, “The faith of Christ” is freighted with burdens impossible to bear. Such defective epistemology has demoralized many a Christian.

14. It disorganizes the Christian mind. Lordshipists often affirm everything and then deny everything. Salvation is either by grace or by works. They cannot be mixed (Rom. 11:6). Works produce no standing before God or merit for heaven. Mixing grace and works, confusing Israel with the body of Christ, equating salvation and discipleship (what a heavy, difficult-to define word), seeing “the kingdom of heaven” as the Church, denying that a Christian may be concomitantly carnal and spiritual—these all overly strain the Christian mind. With all these inchoate ideas (exhumed doubtless from the vicinity of Rome) who can say with assurance “*I know whom I have believed.*” (II Tim. 1:12). Paul could!

These and many other considerations should be kept in mind when one examines the various ways of salvation being offered in the evangelical scene in our time. Much of the confusion of these days would be instantly resolved if we would remember that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone. To redefine these words is not permitted, for they have real, changeless, and eternal meaning. Let us then remember...“*Now to him that works is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that works not, but believes on Him that justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.*” (Rom 4:4-5).

I hope by this time in your Christian life you are sensing, “There are fantastic things that God wants me to find out about, that reach out into the wideness of eternity, and touch the edge of the universe.”

I was thinking about this once upon a time, and took the time to write some of my thoughts which ended up in a full-length book called, “Discover Your Destiny.” That is what I would like to invite you to do, and to learn that that’s a great possibility in your life. We know that we are people of eternal consequence because we were made in the image of God. We were redeemed by the most precious substance in the universe, and that is the blood of Jesus Christ. We were called by the Holy Spirit into a life of great purpose.

I hope that you are saying by this time, “Boy, I’d like that to be true about me. I’d like to discover my destiny. Is there a possibility of that?” Yes, there is. God is willing to take you in His hands. And He’s willing to take your talent, your ability, your wisdom, your insight, your capability, your strength, and He’s willing to multiply it and tie it to Heaven’s capability. And then, watch the world become amazed at what you are able to do.