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# The Lordship Salvation Debate

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My spiritual pilgrimage was typical of many raised in a Christian family. One of my earliest memories was of my older sister explaining to me at the age of five how to pray and invite Jesus to come into my life. Although I prayed to receive Christ at that time, it was not until my second year of High School that I began to understand the true meaning of discipleship. While attending a youth con-

ference, I asked Christ to become the Lord and master of my life. After that decision I was baptized in our local church and began to have an intense hunger to study the Bible and a strong desire to share my faith with others. The dramatic change in my life caused me to doubt whether I was truly saved when I had prayed earlier as a child. I began to ask the question, 'Does salvation require submission to Christ as Lord as well as trust in Christ as Saviour?' I soon discovered that many have asked the same question spawning one of the most hotly debated controversies within twentieth-century Evangelicalism.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Earlier examples include B. B. Warfield's critical review of L. S. Chafer's book entitled *He That Is Spiritual* (New York: Our Hope, 1918) in the *Princeton Theological Review* 17 (April 1919), pp. 322-27. On the significance of this early clash in setting the tone for the Lordship debate see Randall Gleason, 'B. B. Warfield and Lewis S. Chafer on Sanctification', *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 40 (June 1997), pp. 241-56. Other important examples include John Murray's review of Steven Barabas's book entitled *So Great Salvation: The History and Message of the Keswick Convention* (London: Marshall, Morgan, and Scott, 1952) reprinted in *The Collected Writings of John Murray* vol. 4 (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1982), pp. 281-86.

The brief exchange in *Eternity* magazine in 1959 between two well-known evangelicals helped to define the key points of the 'Lordship Salvation' debate. To the question, 'Must Christ be Lord to be Saviour?' Everett F. Harrison answered 'No' by demonstrating the difference between saving faith and discipleship and the danger of basing assurance of salvation upon complete surrender.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, John R. W. Stott maintained that Jesus must be accepted as both Lord and Saviour by emphasizing the inseparable connection between saving faith and repentance, obedience, and newness of life.<sup>3</sup> The recent defence of the 'Lordship' view by well-known Bible teacher, John MacArthur, brought new life to the controversy. The publication of his book *The Gospel According to Jesus*<sup>4</sup> in 1988 drew immediate responses from Charles C. Ryrie and Zane C. Hodges, both former professors of Dallas Theological Seminary defend-

ing the non-Lordship position.<sup>5</sup> Since then many have written on this controversial subject.<sup>6</sup> Along the way the Campus Crusade for Christ booklet entitled *Have you made the wonderful discovery of the Spirit-filled Life?* has often been presented as an example of the non-Lord-

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<sup>5</sup> Charles C. Ryrie, *So Great Salvation: What it Means to Believe in Jesus Christ* (Wheaton: Victor, 1989) and Zane C. Hodges *Absolutely Free!: A Biblical Reply to Lordship Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989). Also noteworthy is the *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* published 'to promote the clear proclamation of God's free salvation through faith alone in Christ alone, which is properly correlated with and distinguished from issues related to discipleship' (see vol. 3 [Spring 1989], p. 2).

<sup>6</sup> Others advocating Lordship salvation include Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr. *Lord of the Saved: Getting to the heart of the Lordship Debate* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1992) and Ernest C. Reisinger, *Lord and Christ: The Implications of Lordship for Faith and Life* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1994). Also see MacArthur's important rejoinder to Ryrie and Hodges provocatively entitled *Faith Works: The Gospel According to the Apostles* (Dallas: Word, 1993) and his article 'Faith According to the Apostle James' (*Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 33 [March 1990], pp. 13-34) with responses by Earl D. Radmacher (*ibid.*, pp. 35-41) and Robert L. Saucy (*ibid.*, pp. 43-47). For a detailed and generally balanced critique of the debate see the multi-authored work edited by Michael Horton, *Christ the Lord: The Reformation and Lordship Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992).

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<sup>2</sup> Everett F. Harrison, 'Must Christ Be Lord to be Savior? NO!', *Eternity* (September, 1959), pp. 14,16,48.

<sup>3</sup> John R. W. Stott, 'Must Christ be Lord to be Savior? YES!', *Eternity* (September, 1959), pp. 15,17-18,36-37.

<sup>4</sup> John F. MacArthur, Jr. *The Gospel According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988). The enthusiastic forwards in his book by J. I. Packer and James Montgomery Boice identify him as the leading spokesman for the Lordship view (see pages ix-xiii).

ship view.<sup>7</sup> To commemorate Dr Bright's worldwide impact through his 'Holy Spirit' booklet, I offer this summary and critique of the Lordship debate. Rather than an endorsement of either side, Dr Bright provides a helpful biblical balance that has often been missed in the rhetoric of the debate.

### 'Lordship Salvation' Defined

Advocates of 'Lordship Salvation' object to the preaching of a gospel that 'encourages people to claim Jesus as Savior yet defer until later the commitment to obey Him as Lord'.<sup>8</sup> They reject the assumption that faith is simply giving intellectual assent to 'some basic facts about Christ' claiming that it has produced a generation of 'professing Christians' with a false sense of assurance.<sup>9</sup> They renounce such a notion as a distortion of the gospel similar to that which Paul warns against in Galatians 1:6-8:

I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you, and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we

have preached to you, let him be accursed.<sup>10</sup>

They call for a return to the true demands of the gospel, which includes a willingness to submit to the Lordship of Christ in every aspect of one's life. MacArthur states, 'People who come to Christ for salvation must do so in obedience to Him, that is, with a willingness to surrender to Him as Lord.'<sup>11</sup> Thus, saving faith should not be distinguished from the true marks of discipleship including 'repentance, surrender, and the supernatural eagerness to obey'.<sup>12</sup> MacArthur concludes, 'No promise of salvation is ever extended to those who refuse to accede to Christ's lordship. Thus there is no salvation except "lordship" salvation.'<sup>13</sup>

Lordship advocates are often accused of promoting a salvation by works. Their opponents maintain that to make works of obedience the inevitable result of faith is to make works a condition of salvation. Hodges makes this allegation:

In may even be said that lordship salvation throws a veil of obscurity over the entire New Testament revelation. In the process, the marvelous truth of justification by faith, apart from works, recedes into shadows not unlike those which darkened the days before the Reformation. What replaces this doctrine is a kind of faith/works synthesis which differs only insignificantly from official Roman Catholic dogma.<sup>14</sup>

However, MacArthur emphatically

<sup>7</sup> Anthony A. Hoekema, *Saved by Grace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), pp. 20-23; Michael Horton, 'Union with Christ', in *Christ the Lord*, pp. 112-13; Jonathan Gerstner, 'Legalism and Antinomianism: Two Deadly Paths off the Narrow Road', in *Trust and Obey: Obedience and the Christian*, ed. D. Kistler (Morgan: Soli Deo Gloria, 1996), pp. 144-45; Reisinger, *Lord and Christ*, pp. 81-84.

<sup>8</sup> MacArthur, *Gospel According to Jesus*, p. 15.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 207.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 30-31.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 28-29 (see footnote 20).

<sup>14</sup> Hodges, *Absolutely Free!*, pp. 19-20.

denies works-salvation:

Let me say as clearly as possible right now that salvation is by God's sovereign grace and grace alone. Nothing a lost, degenerate, spiritually dead sinner can do will in any way contribute to salvation. Saving faith, repentance, commitment, and obedience are all divine works, wrought by the Holy Spirit in the heart of everyone who is saved. I have never taught that some pre-salvation works of righteousness are necessary to or part of salvation. But I do believe without apology that real salvation cannot and will not fail to produce works of righteousness in the life of a true believer.<sup>15</sup>

MacArthur claims that works of obedience are both the inevitable product and necessary evidence of genuine faith. Notice that the cause and effect relationship is only in one direction (i.e., faith producing works of obedience not works of obedience resulting in salvation). To insist that any cause and effect relationship between faith and works necessarily implies 'works-salvation' is to commit the fallacy of mistaking the effect for the cause. Bock correctly observes that, 'For a person to hold to works-salvation he must say, "Because I have done a specific act God is obligated to save me."' <sup>16</sup> This is clearly not what MacArthur and other Lordship advocates claim. Therefore, the accusation of works-salvation is unwarranted and a misrepresentation of the 'Lordship' position.

### The Meaning of Saving Faith

The nature of genuine faith is acknowledged by all as one of the most fundamental issues in the 'Lordship' controversy. Those opposed to Lordship salvation emphasize saving faith as an intellectual response to the truth of the gospel. This is clearly seen in Zane Hodges' claim that saving faith is simply 'believing the facts' about Christ.<sup>17</sup> Though Ryrie acknowledges a volitional aspect of faith, he explains it as 'an act of the will to trust in the *truth* which one has come to know'.<sup>18</sup> Hence, his examples of faith call sinners to believe 'that Christ can forgive his sins', 'that He can remove the guilt of sin and give eternal life', and 'that His death paid for all your sin'.<sup>19</sup> In each case his emphasis is clearly upon believing truths *about* Christ. Non-Lordship advocates also stress the simplicity of faith and reject the tendency to distinguish between authentic faith and insufficient faith (e.g., counterfeit faith, temporary faith, dead faith).<sup>20</sup> Moreover, the genuineness of a person's faith should not be questioned even if he comes 'to the place of not believing'.<sup>21</sup>

Lordship advocates offer a very different understanding of faith. They emphasize the enduring quality of saving faith in the person of Christ

<sup>17</sup> Hodges, *Absolutely Free!*, pp. 37-39.

<sup>18</sup> Ryrie, *So Great Salvation*, p. 121. (my emphasis)

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 119-21.

<sup>20</sup> Radmacher, pp. 37-38.

<sup>21</sup> Ryrie, *So Great Salvation*, p. 141. See also Hodges, *Absolutely Free!*, pp. 107-111.

<sup>15</sup> MacArthur, *Gospel According to Jesus*, p. xiii.

<sup>16</sup> Darrell L. Bock, 'A Review of *The Gospel According to Jesus*', *Bibliotheca Sacra* 146 (Jan-Mar 1989), p. 24.

evidenced by submission and obedience to him. Kenneth Gentry explains, 'When one believes in Christ, he is bound to Him in an obedient, vital relationship. Commitment is an essential element in the act of believing. Faith is not merely intellectual assent.'<sup>22</sup> Following Louis Berkhof's definition of faith, MacArthur reasons that genuine faith includes three components:

An intellectual element (*notitia*), which is the understanding of truth; an emotional element (*assensus*), which is the conviction and affirmation of truth; and a volitional element (*fiducia*), which is the determination of the will to obey truth.<sup>23</sup>

The volitional element implies that 'Obedience is the inevitable manifestation of true faith'.<sup>24</sup> MacArthur is correct to conclude that any faith failing to produce obedience is 'dead' and therefore according to James insufficient for salvation (James 2:14–26).<sup>25</sup> However, his assertion that 'Obedience is ... an integral part of saving faith'<sup>26</sup> blurs the distinction between faith and obedience. His further claim that 'faith encompasses obedience'<sup>27</sup> is clearly in conflict with Paul's point that we are justified by grace through faith—not through

obedience (Romans 4:2–16). Unfortunately it is necessary here to distinguish between what MacArthur says and what he really means. His point is that the 'desire to obey' is the volitional part of faith and not obedience itself. He makes this distinction when he explains how the desire to obey can remain present in the believer even though he is disobedient:

Because we all retain vestiges of sinful flesh, no one will obey perfectly (cf. 2 Corinthians 7:1; 1 Thessalonians 3:10), but the desire to do the will of God will be ever present in true believers (cf. Romans 7:18).<sup>28</sup>

Jonathan Edwards' concept of 'Religious Affections' offers a proper emphasis upon the volitional element of faith. For Edwards, 'true religious affections' include the inclination and will to obey God evidenced in obedience.<sup>29</sup> MacArthur echoes this when he clarifies, 'Those who believe *will* desire to obey, however imperfectly they may follow through at times. So-called "faith" in God that does not produce this yearning to submit to His will is not faith at all.'<sup>30</sup>

Lordship proponents also insist on the enduring nature of true saving faith. They support this claim through the use of the present tense of the verb 'believe' (*pisteuō*) indicating continuous action and the abiding quality of faith as a gift bestowed

<sup>22</sup> Gentry, *Lord of the Saved*, p. 20.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* See also Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1939), pp. 503–505 and Henry C. Thiessen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology*, rev. by V. D. Doerksen (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), pp. 271–3.

<sup>24</sup> MacArthur, *Gospel According to Jesus*, p. 175.

<sup>25</sup> MacArthur, 'Faith according to the Apostle James', pp. 26–28.

<sup>26</sup> MacArthur, *Gospel According to Jesus*, p. 174.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 173.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections*, ed. J. M. Houston, (Portland: Multnomah, 1984), pp. 8–9.

<sup>30</sup> MacArthur, *Gospel According to Jesus*, p. 176. (his emphasis)

by God (Eph. 2:8-9).<sup>31</sup> They are correct to conclude that the 'orthodox faith' of the demons (James 2:19), 'superficial faith' of the multitude (John 2:23-25), and 'temporary faith' of the rocky soil (Luke 8:13) are insufficient for salvation. However, the complex lists of ingredients Lordship advocates include in genuine faith allow little room for immature faith. For example, MacArthur offers the following definition of 'saving faith':

It clings to no cherished sins, no treasured possessions, no secret self-indulgences. It is an unconditional surrender, a willingness to do anything the Lord demands. ... It is a total abandonment of self-will, like the grain of wheat that falls to the ground and dies so that it can bear much fruit (cf. John 12:24). It is an exchange of all that we are for all that Christ is. And it denotes obedience, full surrender to the lordship of Christ. Nothing less can qualify as saving faith.<sup>32</sup>

However, Scripture is filled with examples of believers with weak faith. Even to his disciples Jesus said, 'You men of little faith' (Matt. 8:26). Faith is frequently presented in Scripture as something that grows and matures (Jam. 1:2-4). Yet Lordship proponents often fail to include this idea in their understanding of faith. MacArthur uses the example of child-like faith (Matt. 18:3) to illustrate obedient humility<sup>33</sup> yet how mature and full-blown can the faith of a child be? A child is often disobedient and requires the training and discipline of a loving father to bring him to maturity. MacArthur asserts,

'Faith obeys. Unbelief rebels. ... There is no middle ground.'<sup>34</sup> Yet examples abound throughout Scripture of genuine faith mixed with unbelief. The genuine faith of the Israelites departing from Egypt (Exod. 4:30-31; 14:30-31; cf. Heb. 11:29) is confirmed both by their worship (Exod. 15:1-18) and by their obedience (Exod. 12:28, 50) yet they were still guilty of rebellion (Num. 14:9; Deut. 9:23-24) and unbelief (Num. 14:11). Likewise, Moses was a man of great faith yet he committed the same sins of unbelief and rebellion (Num. 20:12, 24) thereby forfeiting his right to enter the land like the others. Unfortunately, believers often do rebel. Initial faith is always less than perfect. However, God does not leave it there. He uses the process of discipline (Heb. 12:4-13) and trials (1 Pet. 1:6-7) throughout the believer's life to bring his faith to maturity.

### Repentance and Salvation

Some who oppose Lordship theology deny repentance is necessary for salvation.<sup>35</sup> Others limit the meaning of repentance to 'a change of mind' about Christ thereby making it virtu-

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 172-73.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 140.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 178.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> For example, Zane Hodges declares, 'Though genuine repentance *may* precede salvation ..., it *need not* do so. And because it is not essential to the saving transaction as such, it is in no sense a condition for that transaction' (*Absolutely Free!*, p. 146, his emphasis).

ally synonymous with faith.<sup>36</sup> Ryrie affirms both approaches when he declares, 'It is faith that saves, not repentance (unless repentance is understood as a synonym for faith or changing one's mind about Christ).'<sup>37</sup> Lordship advocates object to such a narrow definition of repentance. They define repentance as a turning to God from sin that 'involves a change of heart and purpose' inevitably resulting 'in a change of behavior'.<sup>38</sup> MacArthur explains:

*Intellectually*, repentance begins with a recognition of sin, understanding that we are sinners, that our sin is an affront to a holy God, and more precisely, that we are personally responsible for our own guilt. ... *Emotionally*, genuine repentance often accompanies an overwhelming sense of sorrow. ... *Volitionally*, repentance involves a change of direction, a transformation of the will.<sup>39</sup>

In other words, repentance requires a willingness to forsake sin in order to obey God. Furthermore, repentance is regarded as inseparable from saving faith. MacArthur explains, 'Genuine repentance is *always* the flip side of faith; and true faith accompanies repentance.'<sup>40</sup>

Hence, repentance is no less essential for salvation than faith and therefore must be included in the gospel message.

The Lordship understanding of repentance is essentially correct for the following reasons. First, though it is true that 'repentance' (*metanoia*) primarily means 'a change of mind',<sup>41</sup> its use throughout the New Testament often denotes a decision to change one's behaviour (e.g., Acts 26:20; 2 Cor. 12:21; Rev. 2:21–22). Most Evangelical scholars acknowledge this understanding of repentance.<sup>42</sup> However, we should be careful to remember that repentance is the decision to change our life, not the actual behaviour that results from the decision. Grudem clarifies, 'We cannot say that someone has to actually live that changed life over a period of time before repentance can be genuine, or else repentance would be turned into a kind of obedience that we could do to merit salvation for ourselves.'<sup>43</sup>

Second, repentance is clearly a part of the gospel message throughout the New Testament. Jesus charged his disciples just before his ascension: 'Repentance for forgive-

<sup>36</sup> Thomas L. Constable, 'The Gospel Message', in *Walvoord: A Tribute*, ed. D. Campbell (Chicago: Moody, 1982), pp. 207–8; Livingston Blauvelt, Jr. 'Does the Bible Teach Lordship Salvation?' *Bibliotheca Sacra* 143 (Jan-Mar 1986), pp. 41–42; and Robert P. Lightner, *Sin, the Savior, and Salvation* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1991), p. 212.

<sup>37</sup> Ryrie, *So Great Salvation*, p. 99.

<sup>38</sup> MacArthur, *Faith Works*, p. 88. See also Gentry, *Lord of the Saved*, pp. 46–47.

<sup>39</sup> MacArthur, *Gospel According to Jesus*, p. 164.

<sup>40</sup> MacArthur, *Faith Works*, pp. 90–91.

<sup>41</sup> Frederick W. Danker, et al. eds., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature* 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2000), pp. 640–41.

<sup>42</sup> E.g., Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), pp. 935f; Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), p. 713; Thiessen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology*, pp. 269–70, and Bock, 'Review', p. 28.

<sup>43</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), p. 713.



ness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all the nations—beginning from Jerusalem’ (Luke 24:47). Peter and Paul responded by preaching repentance to unbelievers throughout the book of Acts (Acts 2:38; 3:19; 5:31; 8:22; 11:18; 17:30; 20:21; 26:20). Therefore, repentance must be preached as part of the gospel at all times to all nations.

Third, repentance is often linked with faith in the New Testament (Mark 1:15; Acts 11:17–18; 19:4; 20:21; Heb. 6:1). Though sometimes only faith is mentioned as necessary for salvation (John 3:16; 6:28–29; Acts 16:31; Rom. 10:9), other times only repentance is mentioned (Luke 24:47; Acts 2:38; 3:19; 5:31; Rom. 2:4; 2 Cor. 7:10; 2 Tim. 2:25). And often those who repent are considered believers (Acts 2:38–47; 3:19; 11:17–18). Hence, the biblical concept of repentance is no less important for salvation than faith.

Those opposed to a Lordship understanding of repentance often echo the claim of Lewis Sperry Chafer, the founder of Dallas Theological Seminary, that ‘the New Testament does not impose repentance upon the unsaved as a condition of salvation’.<sup>44</sup> However, most fail to understand properly Chafer’s comments in their historical context. Dallas Seminary professor, Darrel Bock explains:

What Chafer argued is that repentance alone without the positive side of faith, is

not good enough. Regret or sorrow for sin is not enough if it is not wedded to trust. When Chafer affirmed that repentance alone is inadequate for salvation, he had in mind the idea of sorrow associated with the ‘anxiety benches’ in the tent revivals of his day.<sup>45</sup>

A true repentance tied to faith was indeed included in Chafer’s understanding, for in writing the Dallas Seminary doctrinal statement he stated, ‘We believe that the new birth of the believer comes only through faith in Christ and *that repentance is a vital part of believing*, and is in no way, in itself, a separate and independent condition of salvation.’<sup>46</sup>

### The Meaning of ‘Lord’: God or Master?

The Lordship of Christ is often tied to salvation in the New Testament. For example, ‘Every one who calls on the name of the *Lord* shall be saved’ (Acts 2:21) and ‘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’ (Romans 10:9). Lordship teachers regard such passages as indisputable evidence that salvation requires the willingness to submit to Christ as ‘sovereign master.’<sup>47</sup> However, opponents of Lordship salvation object, pointing to the fact that the term ‘Lord’ (*kurios*) has a variety of meanings in the New Testament

<sup>44</sup> Bock, ‘Review’, 29. A careful reading of Chafer confirms this (*Systematic Theology*, vol. 3, pp. 372–73).

<sup>46</sup> James H. Thames, ed. *Dallas Seminary 1999–2000 Catalog* (Dallas, Texas), p. 156.

<sup>47</sup> MacArthur, *Gospel According to Jesus*, pp. 206–10 and Gentry, *Lord of the Saved*, 59–65.

<sup>44</sup> Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology* vol. 3 (Dallas: Dallas Seminary, 1949), p. 376.

including 'God' (Acts 3:22), 'owner' (Luke 19:33), or 'sir' (John 4:11).<sup>48</sup> When used in passages dealing with salvation (e.g., Rom. 10:9) they claim 'Lord' functions primarily as divine title meaning 'God.' As such, 'Jesus is Lord' (1 Cor. 12:3) is a confession of Jesus Christ's deity rather a commitment to submit to his rule.  
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It is true that the divine name *Yahweh* is frequently translated 'Lord' (*kurios*) thereby providing an important proof for the deity of Christ when applied to Jesus (Acts 2:36; cf. Isaiah 40:3). This does not mean, however, that the divine meaning of 'Lord' should be distinguished from his sovereign right to rule. The deity of Christ naturally includes his authority to rule as sovereign God. Therefore, to confess 'Jesus as Lord' implicitly acknowledges his divine right to exercise dominion over one's life.

Confusion arises, however, when the question of how much submission is enough to validate the genuineness of that confession. To demand that Christ be 'Lord of all' as evidence of genuine faith diminishes the interplay between a commitment to Christ's Lordship and the life-long process of 'being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord' (2 Cor. 3:18, NIV).

<sup>48</sup> Ryrie, *So Great Salvation*, p. 70 and idem, *Balancing the Christian Life* (Chicago: Moody, 1969), pp. 173-76.

<sup>49</sup> Ryrie, *So Great Salvation*, p. 73 and Lightner, *Sin, the Savior, and Salvation*, p. 209.

## Faith and Discipleship

Non-Lordship proponents are careful to distinguish between the gift of salvation and the cost of discipleship.<sup>50</sup> They insist that since discipleship requires great effort and salvation is a free gift, the two should not to be confused.<sup>51</sup> They conclude that discipleship is the responsibility of believers, not unbelievers, and therefore should not be included in the demands of the gospel.<sup>52</sup> Lordship theology makes no such distinction. MacArthur asserts that 'Every Christian is a disciple' by noting that the word 'disciple' is used as a synonym for 'believer' throughout the book of Acts (6:1,2,7; 11:26; 14:20,22; 15:10). Furthermore, the goal of evangelism according to the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19-20) is to make disciples, not merely believers.<sup>53</sup> He is correct to stress that discipleship is not something to be entered into subsequent to conversion.

However, when MacArthur claims that 'The call to Christian discipleship explicitly demands ... total dedication', he fails to make the important distinction between entrance into discipleship and the process of growth within discipleship.<sup>54</sup> Total dedication is the goal of discipleship

<sup>50</sup> J. Dwight Pentecost, *Designed for Discipleship* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971), pp. 11, 14.

<sup>51</sup> Hodges, *Absolutely Free!*, pp. 67-76.

<sup>52</sup> Lightner, *Sin, the Savior, and Salvation*, p. 211.

<sup>53</sup> MacArthur, *Gospel According to Jesus*, pp. 196f.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 197.

and not a pre-condition for becoming a disciple. MacArthur often gives the impression that there are only committed disciples who practise total obedience to Christ.<sup>55</sup> Though he admits that true disciples sometimes do sin, he insists that they 'inevitably return to the Lord to receive forgiveness and cleansing'.<sup>56</sup>

The Lordship portrait of a genuine disciple seems to ignore the biblical examples of those who did not always live lives worthy of a disciple.<sup>57</sup> Peter denied Christ and John Mark turned back on his first missionary journey and yet both remained true disciples. The Scriptures give other examples of poor disciples who hesitated to follow Christ (e.g., Joseph of Arimathea—John 19:38). True believers will always struggle with the demands of discipleship and therefore we should not doubt the genuineness of their faith when they do.

### Assurance of Salvation

While both sides of the Lordship debate equally affirm the unconditional security of all true believers, they offer two distinct approaches to

assurance. Lordship teachers offer an assurance available to all believers based upon the promises of Scripture but conditioned upon the pursuit of holiness and the fruit of the Spirit.<sup>58</sup> They note that believers are commanded regularly to examine themselves (1 Cor. 11:28) to see if they are 'in the faith' (2 Cor. 13:5). 'Full assurance' (Heb. 6:11; 10:22) is, therefore, not automatic but requires diligence 'to make certain about his calling and choosing you' (2 Pet. 1:5–7). This is achieved by 'making every effort to add to your faith goodness, ... knowledge, ... self-control, ... perseverance, ... godliness, ... brotherly kindness, ... [and] love' (2 Pet. 1:10).

Some Non-Lordship proponents reject any conditions to assurance. They claim that all believers should be completely assured of their salvation beginning the moment they believe apart from any evidence of a transformed life.<sup>59</sup> They argue that to tie assurance to obedience is to compromise the free grace of salvation by making it partly dependent upon works. Other non-Lordship teachers emphasize that assurance is based primarily upon the promises of God's word but secondarily on the transformation of life.<sup>60</sup>

All are correct to affirm that all true believers can immediately be assured of their salvation based upon the promises in God's word. However,

<sup>55</sup> In a footnote MacArthur makes mention of the 'disciple' distracted by his father's death (Matthew 8:21–22) and the 'disciples' who withdrew (John 6:66), but maintains that they were not a true Christians (*Ibid.*, p. 196). This would indicate that in the gospels 'disciple' does not always mean a true believer. However, MacArthur is correct in asserting that Jesus' call to discipleship (e.g., 'Follow Me') was basically a call to believe in Him.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 104.

<sup>57</sup> Paul's repeated exhortation in his epistles 'to walk worthy of your calling' (Eph. 4:1; Col. 1:10; 1 Thess. 2:12) suggests some within those churches were not walking worthy.

<sup>58</sup> MacArthur, *Faith Works*, pp. 202–212.

<sup>59</sup> Zane Hodges, *The Gospel under Siege* (Dallas: Redencion Viva, 1981), p. 10. See also Hodges, *Absolutely Free!*, pp. 93–99.

<sup>60</sup> Lightner, *Sin, the Savior, and Salvation*, pp. 244–47; Ryrie, *So Great Salvation*, pp. 143–44.

this might not be 'full assurance' (Heb. 6:11), namely, an assurance completely absent of any doubt. Peter clearly states that growth in obedience and the practice of the spiritual disciplines can strengthen our assurance (2 Peter 1:10-11). Believers often grow in their assurance as they experience the grace of God worked out in their lives over a period of time. Those who divorce assurance from any change of life overlook the danger of false professions. Paul warns of those who 'profess to know God, but by their deeds they deny him' (Tit. 1:16). To them the Lord will say, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you who practise lawlessness' (Matt. 7:23).

Furthermore, while 'assurance' is founded upon 'eternal security,' the two must be distinguished in meaning. On the one hand, eternal security speaks of the absolute certainty of the believer's salvation from God's perspective. Assurance, on the other hand, refers to the conscious awareness of salvation from the believer's perspective. As such 'full assurance' of salvation may not be the privilege of a believer living in deliberate disobedience to God. At the same time, to doubt the salvation of every believer who seriously struggles with disobedience in his life leaves him vulnerable to the accusing work of Satan (Rom. 8:33-32; Rev. 12:10).<sup>61</sup>

<sup>61</sup> In counselling a doubting believer, I would use 1 John 5:13 to show him that he can know 'now' that he has eternal life based upon his profession of faith in Christ. However, I would also explain that doubts often accompany a sinful lifestyle. If he is living in sin, repentance is an effective way to remove those doubts.

## The Polemic Tone of the Debate

Many points of difference in the debate have been confused by the polemic style of the leading spokesmen on both sides. Both MacArthur and Hodges are guilty of two tendencies that have overheated the discussion.<sup>62</sup> The first is the creation of 'straw men' that project inaccurate caricatures of opposing views. Ryrie wisely cautions against this:

Realize that a straw man usually is not a total fabrication; it usually contains some truth, but truth that is exaggerated or distorted or incomplete. The truth element in a straw man makes it more difficult to argue against, while the distortion or incompleteness makes it easier to huff and puff and blow the man down.<sup>63</sup>

Such misrepresentation limits the possibility of mutual understanding and fruitful discussion. An example of this is Hodges' gross misrepresentation of the Lordship view when he writes: 'Those who feel unable to inspire lives of obedience apart from questioning the salvation of those whom they seek to exhort, have much to learn from Paul!'<sup>64</sup> Such an unfair characterization overlooks the Lordship emphasis upon the confident assurance of victory rather than doubt as the primary inspiration for every Christian to obey God and overcome temptation. J. I. Packer expresses this best when he writes,

<sup>62</sup> See Bock, 'Review', pp. 39-40 and Paul Schaefer, 'A Royal Battle', in *Christ the Lord: The Reformation and the Lordship*, ed. M. Horton (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), pp. 179-93.

<sup>63</sup> Ryrie, *So Great Salvation*, p. 29.

<sup>64</sup> Hodges, *The Gospel under Siege*, p. 97.

Nobody has much heart for a fight he does not think he can win. ... But the Christian is forbidden such disastrous pessimism. God obliges him to expect success when he meets sin. For Scripture tells him that at conversion the Spirit united him to the living Christ. This was his regeneration. It made him a 'new creation' (2 Cor. 5:17), and ensured his permanent superiority in the conflict with sin.<sup>65</sup>

A second tendency creating misunderstanding is the widespread use of rhetorical hyperbole. Both sides are guilty of frequent overstatements designed primarily for rhetorical effect. For example, MacArthur states that 'A place in the kingdom is not something to be earned'. But later on the same page when speaking of the rich young ruler he asserts, 'Christ set the price for eternal life, but he refused the terms'.<sup>66</sup> Such unguarded statements may grab the attention of the reader but ultimately they confuse MacArthur's position. Bock correctly summarizes MacArthur's book as 'a mixed bag of good observations and significant overstatements'.<sup>67</sup> The negative fallout of such rhetorical hyperbole is that in order to properly understand the different viewpoints the reader is often required to distinguish between their forceful rhetoric and what they actually mean. This not only adds needless friction to the dialogue but also blurs their true points of differences.

## The Carnal Christian

The term 'Carnal Christian' has become a lightning rod issue within the debate. Non-Lordship proponents explain the diversity of spiritual maturity among Christians by appealing to Paul's contrast between the 'spiritual' and 'carnal' (1 Cor. 3:1-3). For example, Ryrie declares,

There were carnal or fleshly Christians in Paul's day. ... Paul says they walk as mere men (verse 3), this is like unsaved people. That does not mean that they were in fact not believers; Paul addresses them as believers. But it *does* indicate that believers may live like unsaved people.<sup>68</sup>

Lordship teachers strongly condemn Ryrie's notion of two categories of Christians. Anthony Hoekema warns, 'The concept of the "carnal Christian" as a separate category of believers is not only misleading but harmful'.<sup>69</sup> Using even stronger terms, Reisinger denounces the theory as 'one of the most perverse teachings in our generation'.<sup>70</sup> This conflict is rooted in two distinct models of sanctification.

### *Reformed Model (Lordship View)*<sup>71</sup>

Although the believer's sanctification is perfect in Christ positionally, it is not perfect in this life experientially. After the believer accepts Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord he continues to struggle with sin and temptation. However, because of the

<sup>65</sup> J. I. Packer, *God's Words: Studies of Key Bible Themes* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1981), p. 185.

<sup>66</sup> MacArthur, *Gospel According to Jesus*, p. 146.

<sup>67</sup> Bock, 'Review,' p. 37.

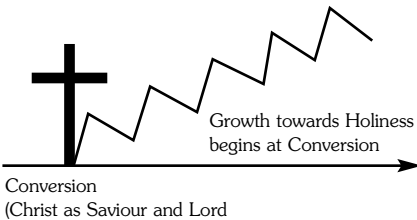
<sup>68</sup> Ryrie, *So Great Salvation*, p. 31.

<sup>69</sup> Hoekema, *Saved by Grace*, p. 21.

<sup>70</sup> Reisinger, *Lord and Christ*, p. 79.

<sup>71</sup> Reformed theologians including B.B. Warfield, J.I. Packer, R.C. Sproul, J.R.W. Stott commonly advocate this view.

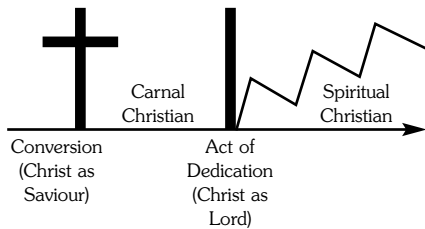
transforming effects of regeneration the believer is free from sin's dominion and will progressively grow towards greater holiness throughout his life. Through the process of sanctification the old sin nature is progressively subdued, but never entirely abolished in this life. Yet, due to his new identity in Christ and superiority over the sin nature, the believer will inevitably experience greater conformity to the image of Christ throughout his life until death.



### Chaferian Model (Non-Lordship View)<sup>72</sup>

The believer is positionally sanctified when he is set apart from sin to God at the moment of conversion. However, experiential sanctification often does not begin until after a subsequent act of dedication when the believer commits himself to the Lordship of Christ. This single act of dedication initiates the growth process which occurs gradually through the

counteraction of the new nature (new man) of the believer against his old nature (old man). The degree of growth is determined by the believer's yieldedness to God, confession of sin, and the practice of the spiritual disciplines empowered by the Holy Spirit. Those who do not take the step of dedication are 'carnal Christians' and fail to grow.



A comparison reveals several important differences between these two models.<sup>73</sup> First, the Reformed model expects spiritual growth immediately to spring forth following conversion while the Chaferian model allows for a delay of growth resulting in two types of Christians: spiritual and carnal. Second, the Reformed view anticipates gradual victory in the context of an ongoing struggle for all Christians while the Chaferian model stresses the need for an additional crisis of dedication necessary for 'carnal Christians' in order to break their cycle of defeat.

<sup>72</sup> This label is given to the position associated with Lewis S. Chafer by Charles C. Ryrie, 'Contrasting Views on Sanctification', *Walvoord: A Tribute*, ed. D. K. Campbell (Chicago: Moody, 1982), p. 191. See also Ryrie's chart in *The Balanced Christian Life*, p. 187.

<sup>73</sup> For a comparison between the Reformed and Chaferian views see my article, 'B. B. Warfield and Lewis S. Chafer on Sanctification,' pp. 241-56.

Third, contrary to the Lordship view the Chaferian model suggests some believers may choose a life-long pattern of carnality virtually no different from the unconverted.

Lordship proponents reject the Chaferian model for the following reasons.<sup>74</sup> First, they claim that the idea of a carnal Christian implies 'a true believer can continue in unbroken disobedience from the moment of conversion'.<sup>75</sup> Such a notion is incompatible with the unfailing work of God that transforms the life of every true believer. MacArthur explains,

If ... salvation is truly a work of God, it cannot be defective. It cannot fail to impact an individual's behavior. It cannot leave his desires unchanged or his conduct unaltered. It cannot result in a fruitless life. It is the work of God and will continue steadfastly from its inception to ultimate perfection (Philippians 1:6).<sup>76</sup>

Second, they claim that to promote a second distinct and necessary step (i.e., act of dedication) beyond conversion reveals a defective understanding of the unity of salvation. Such an emphasis drives an unhealthy wedge between justification and progressive sanctification. Third, they reject the categorization of Christians into two types as harmful because such a notion opens the way for 'depression on the part of those ... on the lower level of the Christian life, and pride on the part of those who ... have reached the

higher levels.'<sup>77</sup>

Lordship theology is correct to reject certain aspects of the Chaferian model of 'carnal Christian'. Though Paul declared the Corinthians were 'still carnal' (1 Cor. 3:3), he did not mean that they constituted a distinct class of Christians whose lives were no different than unbelievers.<sup>78</sup> To divide Christians into categories of spirituality (i.e., carnal/spiritual) seems contrary to Paul's very point against making divisions in the body (1 Cor. 1:10-12; 3:4). Even the 'carnal' Corinthians were experiencing some measure of spiritual growth for Paul later includes them in his claim, 'We all ... *are being transformed* into the same image from glory to glory' (2 Cor. 3:18). To suggest that a believer can genuinely be a 'new creation' (2 Cor. 5:17) and yet remain a 'carnal Christian' with little change of character diminishes the transforming effects of regeneration.<sup>79</sup> Paul exhorted the Corinthian believers to grow by 'perfecting holiness in the fear of God' (2 Cor. 7:1) not to move from one level of spirituality to another.

Lordship advocates are also right to challenge the Chaferian emphasis upon a distinct act of dedication.

<sup>77</sup> Hoekema, *Saved by Grace*, p. 20.

<sup>78</sup> For a helpful analysis of 1 Cor. 3:1-3 see D. A. Carson, 'Reflections on Assurance', in *The Grace of God, The Bondage of the Will*, vol. 2 eds. T. R. Schreiner & B. A. Ware (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), pp. 390-93.

<sup>79</sup> Even Ryrie admits, 'If a believer could be characterized as carnal all his life, that does not mean that he or she is carnal in all areas of life. ... Every believer will bear some fruit' (*So Great Salvation*, pp. 31-32).

<sup>74</sup> MacArthur, *Gospel According to Jesus*, pp. 24-25; Gentry, *Lord of the Saved*, pp. 6-8.

<sup>75</sup> MacArthur, *Gospel According to Jesus*, p.

178 (footnote 22).

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74.

According to the Chaferian model, Paul's exhortation to 'present yourselves to God as ... instruments of righteousness' (Rom. 6:13; cf. 12:1) refers to 'the initial act of recognizing the lordship of Christ and the right of the Holy Spirit to control and direct the life of a believer'.<sup>80</sup> John Walvoord, Charles Ryrie, and Dwight Pentecost all claim with Chafer that this dedication is 'accomplished once for all' by appealing to the aorist tense of the verb 'present'.<sup>81</sup> However, most Greek grammarians dispute their use of the 'aorist'.<sup>82</sup> Rather than a command for a once-for-all dedication of one's self to God, Paul's exhortation is better understood as a call to the continuous presentation of oneself for service in a manner similar to the repeated presentation of the free-will offerings in the Old Testa-

ment.<sup>83</sup> Many Christians experience sudden turning points that lead to dramatic changes in their lives (e.g., rediscovery of a neglected truth, greater awareness of the cost of discipleship, recovery from backsliding, unique fillings of the Holy Spirit). However, the Bible says nothing about a specific decision of commitment every believer must make subsequent to conversion to reach a new plane of Christian living categorically different from his life before.

However, the wholesale rejection of the notion of 'carnal Christians' by Lordship advocates seriously underestimates the impact of sin in the lives of believers. Paul's words to the Corinthians undeniably teach that 'carnal Christians' do exist (1 Cor. 2:14–3:3). It is true that he is not suggesting grades of spirituality; however, he does accuse the Corinthians of immature and fleshly behaviour (3:1–3). His point is that

<sup>80</sup> John F. Walvoord, 'The Augustinian–Dispensational Perspective', in *Five Views on Sanctification* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), p. 218.

<sup>81</sup> John F. Walvoord, *The Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1958), p. 197; Ryrie, *Balancing the Christian Life*, pp. 79, 187; Dwight Pentecost, *Pattern for Maturity* (Chicago: Moody, 1966), pp. 129–30; and Chafer, *Systematic Theology* vol. 6, pp. 254–55.

<sup>82</sup> E.g., D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), pp. 69–72; Buist M. Fanning, *Verbal Aspect in New Testament Greek* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990), pp. 359–61; Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), p. 500.

<sup>83</sup> Rather than a 'one-for-all' dedication of oneself to God, the aorist active imperative 'present' (*parastēsate*) in Rom. 6:13 is best understood as an ingressive aorist expressing a command to commence or begin presenting ourselves alive to God. Hence, Romans 6:13 could be translated, 'Do not continue yielding your members to sin ..., but start presenting yourselves to God' (see Nigel Turner, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, vol. 3 [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1963], pp. 74, 76). Its force is similar to the aorist active infinitive 'to present' (*parastēsai*) in 2 Tim. 2:15, 'Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth.' Compare this with the same form of the word (aorist active infinitive) used in Romans 12:1, 'I urge you ... to present (*parastēsai*) your bodies a living and holy sacrifice.' In each case the ingressive idea of beginning an ongoing process fits well the context (Fanning, *Verbal Aspect*, pp. 359–61).



though they had 'received ... the Spirit' (2:12) he 'could not speak to [them] as spiritual men' (3:1) because they were 'walking like mere men' (3:3). They had the Spirit but they were thinking and living like those who did not.

That their carnal condition had continued for a long while is indicated by Paul's regret that they were 'yet unable to receive' solid food (3:2) and were 'still fleshly' (3:3). How long could they stay carnal? Long enough to 'suffer loss' at the judgment seat of Christ and yet 'be saved ... as through fire' (3:15). Every believer will evidence some growth during his lifetime, yet that does not preclude the possibility that after conversion he may enter into a state of carnality that continues for an extended period, even to the end of his life. A notable example of this is Lot. In the Old Testament Lot is always portrayed as a selfish, compromising individual. Ryrie ably explains:

If we had only the Old Testament record concerning Lot we would seriously question his spiritual relation to God. But the New Testament declares that he was a righteous man in God's sight even when he was living in Sodom (2 Peter 2:7-8 where the word *righteous*, translated 'just' in v. 7, is used three times of Lot). So here is a man whose lifelong rejection of the sovereignty of God over his life did not prevent him from being righteous in God's sight.<sup>84</sup>

Therefore, it is critical for all who hold to 'Lordship salvation' to account for extended periods of disobedience in the life of the believer.

Another serious omission in Lordship theology relates to the issue of the 'sin unto death' (1 John 5:16). The Bible is clear that disobedience in the life of the Christian will not go unnoticed by God. Hebrews 12:5-11 teaches that the Lord will always discipline those who truly belong to him. Furthermore, divine discipline can ultimately result in the loss of physical life. According to 1 John 5:16, it is possible for a believer to commit a 'sin unto death' which due to God's judgment results in the loss of physical life.<sup>85</sup> In the Old Testament we have the example of the Exodus generation who rebelled at Kadesh Barnea. With the exception of Joshua and Caleb, they all died in the wilderness (Duet. 2:14) including Moses and Aaron.<sup>86</sup>

This kind of temporal judgement which ultimately leads to physical death is also mentioned several times by the apostle Paul. He speaks of delivering certain ones within the church over to Satan 'for the destruction of [their] flesh' in order that their 'spirit may be saved' (1 Cor. 5:5; cf. 1 Tim. 1:20). Also due to their disregard for the Lord's table, we are told that in the Corinthian church 'a number sleep' (1 Cor. 11:30). Indeed, God may judge a sinning

<sup>85</sup> W. Robert Cook, *The Theology of John* (Chicago: Moody, 1979), pp. 138-39.

<sup>86</sup> Regarding the redeemed status of the Exodus generation (Exod. 4:31; 12:27, 50; 14:30-31; cf. Heb. 11:29) and the relationship between their sin/judgment and Moses and Aaron's offence (Num. 20:12) see my article, 'The Old Testament Background of Rest in Hebrews 3:7-4:11,' *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 157 (July-Sept 2000), pp. 288-94.

<sup>84</sup> Ryrie, *Balancing the Christian Life* (Chicago: Moody, 1969), p. 173.

Christian with physical death as a result of falling into a state of disobedience. This condition is so contrary to the believer's status as a 'new creature' that the Lord removes such a one from the earth in order to prevent the continuation of such a state.

The severe warnings against Christians living in disobedience indicate that it is indeed possible for a believer to be in this condition. However, MacArthur ignores all these facts with his insistence that the mark of a true disciple is 'that when he does sin he *inevitably returns* to the Lord to receive forgiveness and cleansing'.<sup>87</sup> If such was truly the case, the Lord would never have made provision for 'the sin unto death'.

Lordship advocates are correct to be concerned about the serious problem of false profession within the church today. However, their solution to this problem is flawed by overstatements and an inadequate account of sin in the life of the believer. Repentance, discipleship, and a willingness to obey are each a vital part of the gospel presentation. However, none require an exhaustive understanding of all that the Lord demands in order to be genuine. Furthermore, no matter how clearly the gospel is presented, false profession can never be totally avoided, for 'Even Jesus had a Judas.'<sup>88</sup>

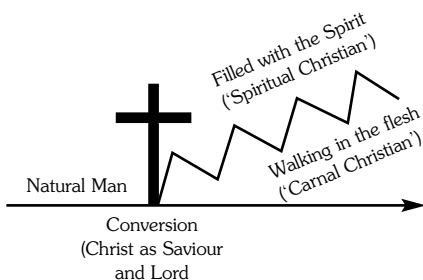
### *An Alternative to the Lordship Controversy*

In his booklet entitled *Have you made the wonderful discovery of the Spirit-filled life?* Dr Bright offers a needed alternative between the two-stage spirituality of the non-Lordship model and the denial of Christian carnality by Lordship theology. Dr Bright's concept of the carnal Christian fits well Paul's teaching in 1 Cor. 3:1-3. Never does he state that carnality is a stage that many will pass through before achieving spiritual victory. His distinction between Christians refers to two different spiritual conditions, not sequential categories or stages. His explanation of how to be filled with the Spirit contains no reference to a once-for-all act of dedication that initiates the believer into the category of 'spiritual man.' His description of 'spiritual breathing' clearly indicates he is speaking of a life-long spiritual discipline not a once-for-all crisis experience. He calls believers not to 'breathe' just once but rather to daily practise personal confession and Spirit-filling. Furthermore, he acknowledges the danger of false profession when he warns, 'The individual who professes to be a Christian but who continues to practice sin, should realize that he may not be a Christian at all, according to 1 John 2:3; 3:6-9; Ephesians 5:5.' When Lordship proponents object to the Holy Spirit booklet they are primarily rejecting the Chaferian view of the 'carnal Christian' and not an accurate understanding of Dr Bright's teaching on the Spirit-filled

<sup>87</sup> MacArthur, *Gospel According to Jesus*, p. 104. (my emphasis)

<sup>88</sup> Bock, 'Review,' p. 38.

life.<sup>89</sup>



In *The Four Spiritual Laws* booklet Bill Bright clearly makes Lordship a part of coming to Christ. He explains that 'it is not enough just to know [the first] three laws' (i.e., the facts of the Gospel). Law four declares, 'We must individually receive Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord ... as an act of the will.' In this booklet he presents only two of the three circles: the natural man with Christ outside and self on the throne and the spiritual man with Christ on the throne. Thus the invitation to sinners is clearly to become the spiritual man with Christ on the throne directing all the interests of one's life. This is repeated in the prayer of invitation, 'I ... receive You as my Saviour and Lord. ... Take control of the throne of my life. Make me the kind of person You want me to be.' Bright considers the request to 'take control' and 'make me the kind of person You want me to be' a necessary part of the prayer of faith. Here Bright expresses agreement with

Lordship proponents that insist a 'willingness' to obey and submit to Christ must be part of the initial act of saving faith. Nowhere in the booklet does he either blur the distinction between faith and obedience or suggest that a commitment to Christ's saving work apart for a willingness to obey is sufficient.

Regarding the genuineness of my decision to accept Christ at the age five, I have come to realize that child-like faith is truly all that God requires of us to be born again. As I look back at those earlier years there were signs of spiritual life and obedience to Christ that confirm the reality of my first decision. Recently a childhood friend shared with me a forgotten memory from the distant past. He reminded me how I had led him to Christ at the age of nine. His words confirmed to me that God was indeed graciously at work long before my dramatic teenage crisis experience. Fortunately, since that time there have been many spiritual turning points that have moved me along in my pursuit of Christ. One such milestone was my decision to work with the ministry of Campus Crusade for Christ. I thank Dr Bright for his careful and balanced statement of the biblical gospel that has left an unparalleled impact on the cause of world-evangelism for a generation. May the Lord raise up more like Dr Bright who can show us what God can do with a man wholeheartedly devoted to the Lordship of Christ.

<sup>89</sup> Hoekema, *Saved by Grace*, pp. 20-23; Gerstner, 'Legalism and Antinomianism', pp. 144-45; Reisinger, *Lord and Christ*, pp. 81-84.