

with more traditional Reformed thinkers who were wrestling with the problems of interpreting and applying the Old Testament long before anyone had heard of theonomy. There is no need for ex-theonomists to forfeit their right to fight for dominion in society, since as we've seen, one can be a reconstructionist without also being a theonomist.

CONCLUSION

What have we learned in this chapter? Quite a bit, I hope. For one thing, the people called theonomists don't appear to be dangerous. Efforts to show that they are dangerous do more, I suspect, to dishonor the people raising the charges. But just because theonomists are not dangerous doesn't mean that they're not wrong—at least on some important matters.

We can thank theonomists for forcing the rest of us to face up to the question of what we're going to do with all those laws in the Old Testament. But there is one thing that we non-theonomists cannot do and that is conclude that all those laws must be applied literally to our cultural and social situations. Moreover, as we've seen, this is a conclusion that some theonomist leaders are reaching for themselves.

I suspect that large numbers of theonomists will effectively abandon some of the distinctive features that used to characterize all theonomists and that continue to be the marks of the more extreme. Given the associations the theonomist label has acquired, it would make sense for them to abandon that term as well.

Chapter Nine

THE CONTROVERSY OVER LORDSHIP SALVATION

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The debate over what has become known as "lordship salvation" involves the relationship between salvation and obedience. In 1988 the controversy was given new impetus with the appearance of the book *The Gospel According to Jesus* by John F. MacArthur, Jr.¹ MacArthur states that his reason for writing the book was concern over what he saw as evangelical teaching of a defective view of salvation. According to MacArthur, the central claim of his book "is that the gospel summons sinners to yield to Christ's authority."²

One major source of the position MacArthur was criticizing was Zane Hodges, author of *The Gospel Under Siege*.³ Soon after the appearance of MacArthur's book, Hodges published his reply in a book titled *Absolutely Free*.⁴ Not to be outdone, another opponent of "lordship salvation," Charles Ryrie, came out with his own response, *So Great Salvation*.⁵ All three books sold tens of thousands of copies, which suggests a lot of interest and possibly also a lot of confusion about the subject.

However difficult it may be to sort out the issues in this controversy, the dispute holds important implications for the church's understanding and teaching of the doctrine of salvation.

Other issues involved in this debate include the relationship between faith and works, repentance, legalism, and cheap grace. No feature of this disagreement is trivial or unimportant for Christians who wish to be informed about their faith.

WHAT IS LORDSHIP SALVATION?

Livingston Blauvelt, Jr., defines "lordship salvation" as "the view that for salvation a person must trust Jesus Christ as his Savior from sin and must also commit himself to Christ as Lord of his life, submitting to His sovereign authority."⁶ Arthur W. Pink summarized the position: "No one can receive Christ as His Savior while he rejects Him as Lord. Therefore, those who have not bowed to Christ's scepter and enthroned Him in their hearts and lives, and yet imagine that they are trusting Him as Savior, are deceived."⁷

John R. W. Stott, a widely published evangelical author and former rector of All Souls' Church in London, England, made his own commitment to lordship salvation clear when he wrote: "The astonishing idea is current in some circles today that we can enjoy the benefits of Christ's salvation without accepting the challenge of His sovereign Lordship."⁸

As proponents of lordship salvation see things, it is a serious error to separate the acts of receiving Christ as Savior and acknowledging Him as Lord. Opponents of the lordship doctrine, on the other hand, see these as distinct acts. In the second view, one first becomes a Christian via the act of receiving Christ as Savior. Then, following conversion, the Christian may or may not submit to Christ as Lord and Master.

The basic issue in the dispute is whether it is necessary to accept Christ as Lord in order to have Him as one's Savior. The question then becomes, If someone accepts Christ as Savior without also explicitly accepting Him as Lord, is such a person truly saved?

Proponents of the lordship doctrine answer this question

in the negative. Critics of the lordship teaching, on the other hand, accuse it of mixing faith with works in the act of salvation. Proponents of lordship salvation deny this claim. They reject any suggestion that their position entails salvation by works. Justification is by faith alone, they insist. MacArthur writes,

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 every one who is saved.

MacArthur continues by claiming,

Real salvation cannot and will not fail to produce works of righteousness in the life of a true believer. There are no human works in the saving act, but God's work of salvation includes a change of intent, will, desire, and attitude that inevitably produces the fruit of the Spirit. The very essence of God's saving work is the transformation of the will that results in a love for God. Salvation thus establishes the *root* that will surely produce the *fruit*.⁹

WHO ARE ITS OPPONENTS?

Assigning a label to opponents of the lordship doctrine is a difficult task. None of the names suggested by lordship proponents really fit. There is, of course, the old word *antinomian*. But critics of the lordship doctrine object to this term, which literally means "opposed to the law" (of God). Since the term has historically been applied to people who suggested that Christians

are totally free from any relationship to God's law and thus free to live any way they choose, the word does have strongly negative connotations. But I think we must give the lordship critics every benefit of the doubt and assume that they wish to avoid the antinomian heresy.

For the sake of discussion, the best labels to use are "supporters" and "proponents" to describe those who defend the lordship doctrine and "critics" and "opponents" to refer to those who do not.

Opponents like Charles Ryrie claim that evangelicals who teach lordship salvation are preachers of a different gospel. Ryrie does not mince words when he says, "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)."¹⁰ This is a serious charge.

But supporters of lordship salvation are not the least bit timid in expressing their opinions of the doctrine's opponents. When these critics, MacArthur writes, separate faith from faithfulness,¹¹ "it leaves the impression that intellectual assent is as valid as wholehearted obedience to the truth. Thus the good news of Christ has given way to the bad news of an insidious easy-believism that makes no moral demands on the lives of sinners. It is not the same message Jesus proclaimed."¹² And so we see that both sides accuse the other of preaching a different gospel, a false gospel!

Why, MacArthur asks, "should we assume that people who live in an unbroken pattern of adultery, fornication, homosexuality, deceit, and every conceivable kind of flagrant excess are truly born again?" And yet, he continues, "that is exactly the assumption Christians of this age have been taught to make. They've been told that the only criterion for salvation is knowing and believing some basic facts about Christ. They hear from the beginning that obedience is optional."¹³ MacArthur accuses his opponents of teaching justification without sanctification.

"Faith that does not result in righteous living is dead and cannot save (James 2:14-17)."¹⁴

Is the position of lordship salvation opponents really as extreme as writers like MacArthur suggest? Let's examine their views. Zane Hodges, in interpreting Jesus' encounter with the woman at the well in John 4, states, "There is no call here for surrender, submission, acknowledgement of Christ's Lordship, or anything else of this kind. A gift is being offered to one totally unworthy of God's favor. And to get it, the woman is required to make no spiritual commitment whatsoever. She is merely invited to ask."¹⁵ Hodges does appear to present salvation as a matter of intellectual assent to the claims of the gospel. But would he agree? We'll see in a moment.

The importance of the dispute should be obvious. Christians have an obligation to present Christ and the gospel in a way that is faithful to the Scriptures. If the lordship doctrine is correct, then many involved in evangelism are doing an incomplete job; they are presenting only half a message. Proponents of lordship salvation are concerned "that an improper, shallow presentation of the Gospel will drive men to a mere psychological or emotional conversion."¹⁶

As I look back over my own early ministry, I recognize how this controversy affected me, even though at the time, I had no clear idea what was occurring. During my first pastorate, in the Finger Lakes region of New York state, a visiting evangelist held services in the church. As he and I visited in various homes in the community, his approach to evangelism led us into a discussion of the issue. What I did not realize then, and in fact only comprehended after beginning work on this chapter, is that the evangelist's approach to soul-winning paralleled that of authors like Zane Hodges who reject lordship salvation. The evangelist's approach to the unconverted was to invite them to assent intellectually to certain true statements. What lordship proponents would object to was that there was no mention of repentance or commitment. Given this personal history, I must

confess that when I read Hodges or Ryrie stating that a person can “have Christ as Savior without having him as Lord,”¹⁷ my first inclination is to dismiss this view as unbiblical. But perhaps a more detailed examination of the critics’ arguments will help to put the debate in a different light.

THE MAJOR OBJECTIONS TO LORDSHIP SALVATION

In this section of the chapter, we’ll examine the major objections to the lordship doctrine found in the writings of critics. The first is the claim that *lordship salvation mixes faith and works*. If true, this would be a serious charge.

Hodges accuses MacArthur of mixing faith and works in his book *Absolutely Free*.¹⁸ Hodges’s main support for his claim is a quotation in which MacArthur states that “obedience is the inevitable manifestation of saving faith.” As Hodges reads MacArthur, this is supposed to mean that “without obedience there is no justification and no heaven.”¹⁹ Given MacArthur’s repeated assurances that he rejects any place for human works in justification, perhaps Hodges misunderstands MacArthur’s position. MacArthur does not say in his quote that obedience is the necessary condition for salvation, only that obedience is the inevitable manifestation of salvation. While the first claim would be heretical, the second is quite biblical.

The book of James teaches that faith without works is dead. If a supposedly converted sinner evidences no change following his “conversion,” then James teaches there may be some question about the genuineness of that person’s faith. So, the proponent of lordship salvation claims he is not adding anything to biblical faith or mixing faith with works. He is only stating what Scripture itself declares, namely, that every genuine conversion ought to be followed by some fruits of regeneration.

One of Hodges’s standard arguments is apparent in the

following quote: “Neither Romans 2:6 nor 2:13 even remotely imply that faith inevitably produces works.”²⁰ The proponent of lordship salvation would answer that there is a flaw in this kind of appeal: No author and no text can say everything. Different passages of Scripture emphasize different aspects of the total truth. The fact that other passages of God’s inerrant Word do seem to teach that faith inevitably produces works is enough for the lordship side.

As we’ve seen, Hodges attacks MacArthur for allegedly making human effort an essential part of salvation. But in other places, he turns his guns against MacArthur for doing precisely the opposite, that is, for making salvation entirely the work of a sovereign God.²¹

Now, it is hard for a lordship proponent to see how Hodges can have it both ways. If our salvation is entirely the work of a sovereign God, then nothing we do can help effect that salvation. The two claims do seem logically incompatible. MacArthur makes it perfectly clear that he, unlike Hodges, sides totally with the Reformed position. In MacArthur’s words, “Thus salvation cannot be defective in any dimension. As part of His saving work, God will produce repentance, faith, sanctification, yieldedness, obedience, and ultimately glorification. Since He is not dependent on human effort in producing those elements, an experience that lacks any of them cannot be the saving work of God.”²²

In a 1990 article published in the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, MacArthur locates the source of much of Hodges’ position on the relationship between faith and works in his inattention to the following distinction:²³

1. Faith is *passive* in the sense that God does everything in salvation; the sinner contributes nothing to his own salvation.
2. Faith is *inactive* in the sense that it does not necessarily result in any altered conduct or behavior.

Hodges notes that lordship thinkers like MacArthur hold to view one, so he cannot understand why they emphasize obedience. The reason is that lordship supporters reject view two, which of course also happens to be a description of Hodges' position.

Lordship thinkers claim that Hodges' position understands saving faith as nothing more than mental or intellectual assent to the truth of certain propositions, such as "Christ died for my sins." Consequently, they believe Hodges' position is incapable of doing justice to the danger that such New Testament writers as James saw in the possibility of counterfeit faith or imitation faith. As MacArthur points out,

Evidently there were some in the early Church who flirted with the notion that faith could be a static, inert, inanimate assent to facts. The book of James, probably the earliest NT epistle, confronts this error. James sounds almost as if he were writing to twentieth-century "no-lordship" advocates. He says that people can be deluded into thinking they believe when in fact they do not, and he says that the single factor that distinguishes counterfeit faith from the real thing is the righteous behavior inevitably produced in those who have authentic faith.²⁴

Hodges' view of his position says otherwise:

The one thing we cannot do, however, is to believe something we don't know about. That is why the apostle Paul declared quite plainly, "And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard?" (Romans 10:14). And he added appropriately, "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (10:17).

Does that involve the intellect? Of course! But is

it *mere* intellectual assent? Of course *not!* To describe faith that way is to demean it as a trivial, academic exercise, when in fact it is no such thing.

What faith really is, in biblical language, is receiving the testimony of God. It is the *inward conviction* that what God says to us in the gospel is true. That—and that alone—is saving faith.

MacArthur builds a strong case, however, in a later article, that James himself wrote to counter views like Hodges':

Is it enough to know and understand and assent to the facts of the gospel—even holding the "inward conviction" that these truths apply to me personally—and yet never shun sin or submit to the Lord Jesus? Is a person who holds that kind of belief guaranteed eternal life? Does such a hope constitute faith in the sense in which Scripture uses the term? James expressly teaches that it does not. Real faith, he says, will produce righteous behavior. And the true character of saving faith may be examined in light of the believer's works.²⁵

While good works play no role in any person's becoming a Christian (Romans 3:20,24; 4:5; Ephesians 2:9; Titus 3:5), the Bible makes it plain that they do function as a sign of regeneration (Ephesians 2:10, 5:9; 1 John 2:5). There is a difference in the Bible between a dead faith and a *living* faith. "Does this mean," MacArthur writes, "that all true believers are doers of the Word? Yes. Do they always put the Word in practice? No—or else a pastor's task would be relatively simple. Believers fail, sometimes miserably, as we see in Scripture. But even when they fail, true believers will not altogether cease having the disposition and motivation of one who is a doer."²⁶

The major point in James 2 is not that a person is saved by

faith plus works, but that we are saved only through a genuine or living faith as opposed to a counterfeit or dead faith. According to the argument of Hodges and other critics of lordship salvation, the doctrine in effect mixes faith and works, which is a serious misunderstanding of the lordship teaching. At this point the two sides seem at an impasse.

IS LORDSHIP DOCTRINE DETRIMENTAL TO PERSONAL HOLINESS?

Hodges' second argument states that *lordship salvation is detrimental to personal holiness*. "Instead of promoting holiness," Hodges writes, "the doctrine of lordship salvation destroys the very foundation on which true holiness must be built. By returning to the principles of the law, it has forfeited the spiritual power of grace."²⁷ The lordship proponent would counter again that the grace described in Scripture is quite different.

What Hodges is doing, of course, is accusing MacArthur of the Galatian heresy. Like the error condemned in Galatians, Hodges claims the lordship position "promotes a judgmental and pharisaical spirit within the church," by allegedly teaching that professing believers who have moral or spiritual difficulties are not good enough for heaven. "The fact that a person falls below the moral standards laid down in God's Word is always tragic and deplorable. But it is not necessarily a proof that one is also unsaved."²⁸ Of course. But because this point is so obvious, no lordship advocate disagrees.

The lordship doctrine, Hodges argues, also "exposes Christians to spiritual defeat. By stripping us of the unconditional certainty that we possess eternal life, it dangerously erodes the solid ground we need beneath our feet."²⁹ We should pause here and reflect upon Hodges' complete position. Remember that Hodges is the friend of, the advocate for, backslidden Christians. While no lordship advocate denies

that genuine Christians may backslide, Hodges defends the professing Christian who shows no fruit—or has fallen into worldliness—from any suggestion that their profession might be less than genuine. Given Hodges' argument, lordship advocates find it incredible that he accuses them of inducing "spiritual defeat." The lordship side would argue that, while Christian leaders should be careful about introducing doubt into any Christian's life, there is also a serious danger of inducing a false confidence, especially in the case of professing believers who show absolutely no signs of regeneration.

At this point the debate is again at an impasse. Hodges argues that his position does not entail "mere intellectual assent" while MacArthur and other lordship proponents defend their side against the charge that they promote either a pharisaical spirit or spiritual defeat in the sanctification of the believer.

Again, both sides are confident of their positions and both believe they are right. No unity or common ground seems possible.

Let's now turn to some key ingredients in the debate that shed further important light on each side.

SEVERAL CRUCIAL ISSUES

In an effort to move even closer to the biblical truth on this matter, let us examine two crucial issues: repentance and the meaning of the term *Lord*.

Repentance

According to Hodges, repentance is *not* a condition for salvation. In his view of things, "the call to repentance is *broader than* the call to eternal salvation. It is rather a call to *harmony* between the creature and his creator, a call to *fellowship* between sinful men and women and a forgiving God."³⁰

On the other side, lordship proponents can count on quite a few cases in which the biblical teaching about repentance is

spread among a number of passages. Different texts emphasize different points.

Hodges' view seems to turn on two critical points: (1) that there's a clear distinction between faith and repentance such that repentance cannot be made a condition for eternal life, and (2) the meaning of the Greek word *metanoeo*, the word translated "to repent" in the New Testament. Hodges writes:

It is an extremely serious matter when the biblical distinction between faith and repentance is collapsed and when repentance is thus made a condition for eternal life. For under this perception of things the New Testament doctrine of faith is radically rewritten and held hostage to the demand for repentance. No wonder one scholar in the writings of Calvin has been moved to assert:

Those who teach that repentance precedes faith, and make faith and forgiveness conditional upon repentance, fail to see that theirs is a position parallel to the Roman doctrine of penance that Calvin so strongly opposed [M. Charles Bell, *Calvin and Scottish Theology* (Edinburgh, Scotland: Handsel, 1985), page 39, n. 208].

There can be no compromise on this point if we wish to preserve and to proclaim the biblical truth of *sola fide*. To make repentance a condition for eternal salvation is nothing less than a regression toward Roman Catholic dogma.

"But," someone will say, "does not the Bible also declare God's demand for repentance?" Indeed it does, and perhaps nowhere more forcefully than in Acts 17:30 where Paul declares: "And these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands *all men everywhere to repent*" (italics added).

Can this declaration be harmonized with *sola*

fide—"faith alone"? Yes, it can, since the Bible is never internally contradictory. And the harmonization is really very easy and natural. How?

Simply put, we may say this: the call to faith represents the call to eternal salvation. The call to repentance is the call to enter into harmonious relations with God.³¹

Hodges believes that while genuine repentance *may* precede salvation, it *need not* do so. But where I find his argument lacking is in his view of the meaning of the word *repentance*. He writes:

Originally, these Greek words meant to change one's mind. But the standard Greek-English dictionary does not list any New Testament passage where the meaning "to change one's mind" actually occurs.³²

But this is not what the Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich Greek Lexicon states (BAG—the "standard" one Hodges refers to in his endnotes). The BAG entry on *metanoia* (Greek noun, "repentance") and *metanoeo* (Greek verb, "to repent") lists a number of specific entries where these words do, in the Greek New Testament, refer specifically to the act of changing one's mind. Page 513 (fourth revised and augmented edition) gives "change one's mind" as the primary meaning of the word *metanoeo*, then adds a number of additions to that meaning, but never changes the primary meaning of the word. There are also a number of entries under the noun *metanoia*, which refer to "conversion," "a turning away from dead works," "repentance that leads to God," and "turning about." All of these meanings seem to derive from the basic meaning of "a change of mind." And a whole passel of New Testament passages are cited entailing these meanings including: Hebrews 6:1, Matthew 3:8, Luke 3:8 and 15:7 (where BAG denotes the meaning as "repentance for conversion").³³

Even giving Hodges the benefit of the doubt on his view, at the very least, one can see why MacArthur, J. I. Packer, and many others would take issue with him on the meaning of repentance. On the lordship proponent's view, Hodges has misread the basic meaning of the term and placed an unnecessary limitation on the word's meanings.

Interestingly, Hodges' contention that repentance is not necessarily bound up in salvation was not shared by his mentor, Lewis Sperry Chafer, who wrote:

Too often, when it is asserted—as it is here—that repentance is not to be added to belief as a separate requirement for salvation, it is assumed that by so much the claim has been set up that repentance is *not* necessary to salvation. Therefore, it is as dogmatically stated as language can declare, that repentance is essential to salvation and that none could be saved apart from repentance, but it is included in believing and could not be separated from it.³⁴

Both sides agree that godly repentance should not be confused with emotionalism. As Kenneth Gentry explains, "The necessary element in salvatory repentance is a true recognition of one's evil state and a decided resolve to forsake sin and thrust oneself at Christ's mercy. Certainly great sorrow may be involved, but it will be sorrow because of the recognition of Christ's holiness displayed against the background of one's own sinfulness."³⁵

James Packer concurs: "The repentance that Christ requires of His people consists in a settled refusal to set any limits to the claims which He may make on their lives. . . . Where there is no clear knowledge, and hence no realistic recognition of the real claims that Christ makes, there can be no repentance, and therefore no salvation."³⁶

John MacArthur clearly aligns himself with those who

understand Scripture to teach a role for repentance in salvation. He argues that repentance "involves a recognition of one's utter sinfulness and a turning from self and sin to God (c.f. 1 Thessalonians 1:9). Far from being a human work, it is the inevitable result of *God's* work in a human heart. And it always represents the end of any human attempt to earn God's favor. It is much more than a mere change of mind—it involves a complete change of heart, attitude, interest, and direction. It is a conversion in every sense of the word."³⁷

MacArthur is surely right when he argues that "repentance is not merely being ashamed or sorry over sin, although genuine repentance always involves an element of remorse. It is a redirection of the human will, a purposeful decision to forsake all unrighteousness and pursue righteousness instead. Nor is repentance merely a human work. It is, like every element of redemption, a sovereignly bestowed gift of God. . . . Above all, repentance is *not* a pre-salvation attempt to set one's life in order. The call to repentance is not a command to make sin right *before* turning to Christ in faith. Rather it is a command to recognize one's lawlessness and hate it, to turn one's back on it and flee to Christ, embracing Him with wholehearted devotion."³⁸

The Meaning of "Lord"

Opponents of lordship salvation do not deny that Christ is Lord or that acknowledging His lordship is necessary to salvation. Romans 10:9-10 is simply too clear for any Christian to ignore. They do, however, draw a distinction between what they call the objective and subjective lordship of Jesus.

Objective lordship refers to Jesus' deity. In this sense, Jesus is already Lord. In the objective sense, the lordship of Christ cannot be denied without rejecting the essential Christian teaching that Jesus has always been God the Son.

The subjective lordship of Jesus refers to the need for people to surrender to Him as Master. Charles Ryrie utilizes the

distinction in trying to avoid the lordship doctrine by claiming that Romans 10:9-10 has nothing to do with Christ's subjective lordship. It concerns only His deity. "To believe that Jesus (the man) is Lord (God) and that He is alive (which means that He died) results in righteousness and salvation."³⁹ But when it comes to the question of Christ's subjective lordship, Ryrie retreats to tentativeness. Is Christ Lord in the sense of being God? Yes, says Ryrie. But is Christ not also to be Lord in the subjective sense? Here all Ryrie can say is, "Of course He should be, sometimes is, and sometimes is partly so."⁴⁰

While no one can be a believer without acknowledging the objective lordship of Christ (Romans 10:9-10), lordship critics like Ryrie and Hodges insist that one *can* be a believer without acknowledging Christ's lordship in the subjective sense, that is, without actually acknowledging Him to be Lord or Master.⁴¹

Kenneth Gentry's reply to this line of thinking is instructive. First, the fact that "the linguistic evidence points quite strongly to the conclusion that *kurios* [Greek, 'Lord'] emphasizes controlling authority. When used of Christ in the frequent Gospel preaching of Acts and the Epistles, it most certainly has to do with the acceptance of Jesus Christ as Lord [in Ryrie's 'subjective sense'] to be Savior." Moreover, Gentry continues, "when Christ is preached as Lord and Savior, the term Lord, or some term expressing rulership, always occurs first for emphasis. See: Luke 1:46-47; Acts 5:31; 2 Peter 1:11; 2:20; 3:18."⁴²

John 20:28 is especially relevant in this disagreement. When Thomas saw the risen Christ, he cried out, "My Lord and my God!" If one adopts the position of Ryrie and Hodges, Thomas said nothing more than "My God and my God." The lordship position makes much more sense of this verse, interpreting Thomas' famous utterance as "My Master and my God."⁴³ Gentry reasons, "When Christ is believed upon or into, it is His Person which is accepted for salvation. Thus, Christ, being the Lord comes into the heart of the believer as Lord and

Master. To omit Christ's office as Lord in the Gospel message is weak evangelistic preaching."⁴⁴ I agree.

CONCLUSION

S. Lewis Johnson, Jr., published an important article in *Christianity Today* in which he attempted to adjudicate the dispute between MacArthur and Hodges. I will not take the time to summarize all of his article. But at the end, Johnson drew seven conclusions, which we should review in detail.⁴⁵

First, "it is true that one must confess the lordship of Christ to be saved. Only a sovereign God can save sinners, and the calling on the Lord for mercy is an implicit recognition of his Lordship and of his right of control over us." On this first point, Johnson sides with the supporters of lordship salvation. The point he makes should be beyond dispute.

Second, Johnson insists that the sinner's confession of the lordship of Christ cannot be a shallow profession; it must be genuine. Once again, then, Johnson has no problem with the position of lordship salvation.

In his third point, Johnson explains that "the preeminent term by which salvation is received is *faith*, or *belief*." It is obvious that Johnson views repentance and faith as inseparable. When we understand this correctly, he continues, what we are left with "is not easy believism; in fact, such faith can only be given by God (Ephesians 2:8-9; 1 Corinthians 12:3). It was Jesus himself who said to Jairus, 'Only believe, and she shall be well' (Luke 8:50). The Gospel of John was written to induce faith, and its demand is for faith alone (John 20:30-31)."

In a letter to the editor of *Christianity Today* published two issues later, John MacArthur indicated his solid agreement with Johnson's statement of this point. Since Johnson sides with the lordship position on repentance in this same paragraph, it seems best to regard the third point as another nod in the direction of the lordship position.

Johnson's fourth point begins with an allusion to the Westminster Confession, which teaches that "the realization of Christ's Lordship in growing obedience and submission to his will is the work of sanctification, not justification. The two great teachings [of justification and sanctification] must not be confounded, or the peril of mixing things that differ threatens us." On this matter, Johnson's position accords precisely with that of the lordship salvation advocates.

Johnson's fifth point returns to the teaching of the Westminster Confession, to what it states about the relationship between sanctification and saving faith. Johnson writes, "Christians may *for a time* live in carnality, but only for a time, since divine discipline, which may become severe enough to necessitate physical death, is applied by God (1 Corinthians 5:5, 11:29-30). The term *the carnal Christian*, therefore, is not a category of a Christian acceptable to God, nor does it represent a permanent status in the Christian life." Once again, MacArthur (in his previously noted letter) expresses his total agreement with this point.

But this brings us to Johnson's sixth point where, for the first time, he appears to side with the lordship critics. In Johnson's words, "To insist on a complete submission to God's will as necessary for salvation is unsupported by not only the Gospel of John, but also the Book of Acts."

However, in his aforementioned letter, MacArthur dissociates himself from the position described in Johnson's sixth point. MacArthur concurs that a "total commitment of one's life to Christ in all of life's details is impossible." Who of us knows any Christian who has attained *total* commitment? Even though Jesus called for complete surrender, our fleshly nature always results in something far short of what God demands.

All of this brings us to Johnson's seventh and final point where, once again, he and supporters of the lordship doctrine agree. As Johnson explains, "It is sounder and simpler to keep to Paul's invitation as delivered to the Philippian jailer,

'Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved, you and your household' (Acts 16:31, NASB). If we keep in mind that the Lord Jesus is he who has offered himself as a propitiatory substitutionary sacrifice for sinners, and if we remember that saving faith comprehends knowledge, assent, and trust, and if we see that the new life and standing given in justification must issue in a new submission to God's will, then we shall have our gospel thinking in order."

Johnson's recognition that regeneration must of necessity manifest itself in "submission to God's will" is the very point to which supporters of lordship salvation have wanted to draw attention.

To close this chapter on a note of unity, even Charles Ryrie once affirmed the very same point when he asked,

Can a non-working, dead, spurious faith save a person? James is not saying that we are saved by works, but that a faith that does not produce good works is a dead faith. . . . Unproductive faith cannot save, because it is not genuine faith. Faith and works are like a two-coupon ticket to heaven. The coupon of works is not good for passage, and the coupon of faith is not valid if detached from works.⁴⁶

If both sides of our dispute would affirm what Ryrie states in the previous paragraph, the controversy would be laid to rest. I am confident that MacArthur, Packer, Stott, and others on the lordship side agree. Unless Ryrie has changed his mind, he agrees. I hope Zane Hodges will agree as well.