

Christian Discipleship

THE LORDSHIP SALVATION DEBATE

I've included four articles on Lordship Salvation to establish the debate.

Click on each underlined link to go directly to that article in this document.

- (1) The first, [Lordship Salvation for Dummies](#), is by Bob Wilkin of the Grace Evangelical Society. He advocates “free grace” and opposes Lordship Salvation.
- (2) Second is a [Rebuttal](#) to the Wilkin article. It’s written by John Hendryx from www.monergism.com who was responding to a query about the article by a visitor to John’s website.
- (3) Third is a study of the biblical foundations of [Lordship Salvation](#). It’s written by William Webster of Grace Bible Church. It affirms the believer’s need to evidence a changed life. It’s akin to A.W. Pink’s work titled [The Great Change](#) which likewise emphasizes our responsibility to cooperate in our sanctification.
- (4) I’ve added an [Epilogue](#) with a caution concerning Lordship Salvation. I’ve seen some abuses and presumptions concerning Lordship Salvation that I believe ought to be considered. How should we treat others who may not evidence the godliness that we might insist on for ourselves? Paul wrote, “[Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand.](#)” (Rom 14:4 ^{NKJ}) How then do grace and discipline work together for the common good? The answer isn’t as simple as we may like.

William H. Gross www.onthewing.org January 2013

Lordship Salvation for Dummies

by Bob Wilkin

There are lots of books *for Dummies* today. I've chosen to call this article *Lordship Salvation for Dummies* not because I question your intelligence, but because I want to lighten up the discussion of what could otherwise become a very heavy subject. While Lordship Salvation is complicated, its basic tenets are quite simple. Often when I speak on this I give loads of quotes from Lordship authors to show I'm not making this stuff up. In this article I don't do that because I can't keep it simple if I give you 20 or 30 quotes. However, there are plenty of quotes on our website backing up what I write here.

The Basic Definition: COP

There are three key words that define Lordship Salvation. They are captured in the word **COP**.

1. C = Commitment

All who believe in Lordship Salvation agree that mere belief of certain facts or propositions about Jesus is not enough to save anyone. Lordship Salvation says that one must not only believe in Jesus as the Savior, but one must yield one's life to Him as Lord of your life. According to Lordship Salvation, a person can believe in Jesus for everlasting life and not be saved because that faith must be joined by a commitment to serve Him one's entire life. *The first word to remember is commitment.*

2. O = Obedience

Lordship Salvation is not only concerned with a person's commitment to Christ at the start of the Christian life. Initial commitment to Christ must be followed by ongoing obedience. According to Lordship Salvation, one's initial commitment to serve Christ must be followed by a life of obedience. There is no salvation apart from obedience according to Lordship Salvation, because obedience proves that one is truly saved. Often it is said this way, "We are saved by faith alone, but the faith that saves is never alone." Commitment is always wedded to obedience. *The second word to remember is obedience.*

3. P = Perseverance

Lordship Salvation believes that commitment must result in obedience that in turn perseveres to the end of life. A person who commits (C) his life to Christ, and obeys (O) Him for decades, yet who stops serving and obeying Him at the end of life and who dies as an immoral person or an alcoholic or a drug addict or any other type of sinner will not make it into the kingdom. According to Lordship Salvation, no matter how long you have been committed to and have obeyed Christ, you can never assume you are secure, for that is when you are most likely to let down your guard, fall away, and end up in hell. *The third word to remember is perseverance.* So, putting it all together, you can remember the three key elements of Lordship Salvation with the word COP: Commitment + Obedience + Perseverance = Everlasting Life.

Two Types of Lordship Salvation: RA

You can remember the two types with the letters RA, which stands for the element Radium, or for the disease many have, Rheumatoid Arthritis. But in this case it stands for Reformed and Arminian. The type of Lordship Salvation most people are most familiar with is found in the writings of men like John MacArthur, John Piper, and R. C. Sproul. I call this *Reformed* Lordship Salvation. It is *Reformed* because these men believe the five points of Calvinism which grew out of the Reformation. COP for the Reformed person means this: No one is absolutely sure that he has been chosen by God or that Christ died for him. The only way to be sure you are born again is to persevere until death. Therefore, according to Reformed Lordship Salvation, if at the moment of death you are not persevering, you haven't *lost* everlasting life, for that is impossible. Rather, you have simply *proved* what you thought was the new birth was actually a Satanic deception.

The second type of Lordship Salvation is *Arminian*. Arminius was a follower of Calvin who thought the system needed to be modified to include free will. So for him, if a person failed to persevere in faith and good works, then he would *lose* eternal life. Since it was a choice of the free will to receive eternal life from God, it could also be a choice of the free will (through rebellion or sin) to give it back. COP for the Arminian Lordship Salvation person says that if at the moment of death you are not persevering in faith and good works, then you will go to hell because you lost everlasting life at some point along the way. While that may sound like a big difference from Reformed Lordship Salvation, it really isn't. Whether you *lose* everlasting life or *prove* you never had it by failing to persevere, you end up in the lake of fire. The end result of both forms is the same. Commitment, obedience, and perseverance (COP) are required in both systems for a person to ultimately receive everlasting life.

“Assurance” According to Lordship Salvation

According to Lordship Salvation “assurance” is a degree of confidence that I am likely to persevere. For both Reformed and Arminian brands of Lordship Salvation, perseverance is the key. Thus the question is, how confident am I that I will hang in there? And since nobody can know for sure what will happen to them in the future, assurance of salvation is never certainty. Several years ago, I had a conversation in Miami with a Reformed Lordship Salvation pastor and seminary professor who admitted he wasn't sure if he would persevere and that therefore he wasn't sure he was born again or that he would escape hell. He said, “I might fail to persevere, and if so, I'd end up in hell.”

For one believing in Lordship Salvation “assurance” may fluctuate from 1% to 99%, but it can only be 100% after you have died. Surely when Lordship Salvation people have arguments with their spouse, when they lose their temper, when they find themselves gossiping, or when they find themselves doing something else they shouldn't do, their assurance goes way down, maybe to 10% or less. For a person who is obsessive-compulsive and perfectionistic, you'd never have over 50% confidence. You'd be mired in despair over the hopelessness of your situation. If anyone reading this holds to Lordship Salvation, I do not wish to offend you. However, I liken this view of assurance, common to both Reformed and Arminian Lordship Salvation, as leading

to this type of evangelism: “I don’t know where I’m going when I die and if you have ten minutes I can help you not know where you are going when you die.” My heart breaks for people caught in this sort of thinking.

Does Lordship Salvation Proclaim the True Gospel?

I’ve had conversations and debates with many Lordship Salvation people. In all of these we agree on one thing: One of us is proclaiming the true gospel and the other is not. Therefore, Lordship Salvation people will admit that if the Free Grace view of the gospel is correct, then they are not proclaiming the true gospel. Similarly, if the Lordship gospel is correct, then Free Grace theology is not. According to Galatians 1:6-9, we must be very careful to believe and proclaim the correct gospel, for those who do not are under a curse. This is why gospel-related issues are the most important doctrinal issues in the church today. Every Christian, every pastor, every church must make sure that the gospel they proclaim is the biblical gospel.

As we have seen, both brands of Lordship Salvation teach that works are necessary for a person to escape hell and enter into eternity with God. This is the false gospel that Paul condemns in Galatians. Therefore, the Lordship Salvation gospel is not the true gospel because it doesn’t teach that all who simply believe in Jesus have everlasting life that can never be lost. Their gospel is at odds with the message Jesus proclaimed. No person who holds to Lordship Salvation can say that John 3:16, 5:24, or 6:47 contains enough information for a person to be saved, because these verses do not mention commitment, obedience, or perseverance. The insistence on commitment, obedience, and perseverance as conditions for kingdom entrance makes the Lordship Salvation gospel a works salvation gospel.

Let me clarify by making it clear what I’m not saying. First, I am not saying that Lordship Salvation people are necessarily unsaved. What I’m saying is that they don’t believe the gospel now. If in the past they believed in Jesus Christ alone for everlasting life, apart from works of any kind, they are born again but confused. For example, by his own testimony, leading Lordship Salvation theologian and preacher, Dr. J. I. Packer said in a *Table Talk* article that he once believed the gospel that Zane Hodges preaches, but he doesn’t anymore. Thus he is born again, although he indicates that he no longer believes the Free Grace gospel. Many in Lordship Salvation, however, have never believed that simply by faith in Jesus they themselves are eternally secure. Second, I’m not saying that someone cannot be saved by hearing a Lordship Salvation gospel. What I am saying is that if a person is saved under Lordship Salvation teaching, it is because they reject most of what the Lordship Salvation person told them. Lordship Salvation garbles the gospel and the more it is garbled, the less likely it is that a person can grasp and believe the true gospel.

Lordship Salvation Is Popular But Wrong

Lordship Salvation is very popular today. I would estimate that 95% of all churches, denominations, seminary and Bible college professors believe in either Reformed or Arminian

Lordship Salvation. But popularity must not be confused with correctness. The Lord Himself made it clear that the way is narrow that leads to life. While many assume He was speaking of non-Christian religions, there is no reason to conclude that. Careful examination shows that most “Christians” do not believe that the one who simply believes in Jesus has irrevocable everlasting life. The next time you see a law enforcement officer, think COP: Commitment, Obedience, Perseverance. That is what Lordship Salvation is all about. Lordship Salvation is about eternal salvation by law keeping. When you hear a leading Reformed theologian speak of our “Arminian brethren,” don’t be surprised. Arminians and Calvinists are united in their belief in COP. Only committed and obedient believers who persevere to the end will make it into the kingdom. But that message is not good news. Here’s good news: “He who believes in Me has everlasting life” (John 6:47).

Source: <http://www.faithalone.org/magazine/y2006/06so1.html>

[RETURN to the top](#)

Rebuttal

by John Hendryx

John,

Please read the article entitled [Putting the Gospel Debate in Sharper Focus](#) by Bob Wilkin and comment. In which camp do you fall?

Dear _____

Thanks you for your question on Free Grace vs. Lordship Salvation ... I want to first point out that the short essay on this topic (that you sent) was written by Executive Director of the Grace Evangelical Society. I do not know if you are familiar with this group but it prides itself on believing in what they call *free grace* while openly charging their doctrinal opponents of adding something to the requirements of salvation over and above the simple requirement to believe. I mention this simply so you know that the essay is biased on the side of the so-called free grace position. It shines a negative light on the “Lordship” position but I would argue that just about anyone from the Lordship camp would probably deny the position as he has stated it. The first rule of debate, as far as I am concerned, is that *if you can not represent another man’s views in a way that he would agree with, then you have no right to disagree with him.*

Having said this I will come clean by telling you that I am firmly in the Lordship camp. I have thought about this for a very long time. In fact this was one of the first major debates I participated in when first becoming a Christian when at the University of Colorado about 20 years ago.

While the no-Lordship position, which is often called “easy-believism”, appears outwardly to promote a kind of “grace alone” position, the facts are actually stacked against it. Upon closer scrutiny we find the group seems to freely exchange the words “grace” and “faith” as if they were speaking of exactly the same thing. Let me explain. While the “no-Lordship” position appears to admirably attempt to protect the doctrine of “faith alone”, but in the process it casts aside the biblical doctrine of “grace alone”. Those who hold to the free grace or no-lordship position, which include scholars like Zane Hodges, Charles Ryrie as well as other famous dispensationalists at Dallas Seminary, are also firmly against the concept of [monergistic regeneration](#). And this is intimately related to the topic at hand as you will see. They reject all biblical evidence which suggests that *regeneration precedes faith*. Instead, they view faith as something they must contribute to the price of their salvation. So while they may appear to be promoting a ‘free grace’ position, the fact is that they do not believe that faith arises as a gift of God. If that is the case, then salvation is not **by grace alone through faith** alone, but by grace **plus** faith. So in the end, their theology is self-defeating. C.H. Spurgeon once said:

“Remember this; or you may fall into error by fixing your minds so much upon the faith which is the channel of salvation as to forget the grace which is the fountain and source even of faith itself. Faith is the work of God’s grace in us. “No man comes to Me,” says Jesus, “except the Father who sent Me draws him”... Grace is the first and last moving cause of salvation; and faith, essential as it is, is only an important part of the machinery which grace employs. We are saved “through faith,” but salvation is ‘by grace.’”

Believe it or not, it is the Lordship position which actually embraces a full-orbed free grace ... This is because God initiates and gives us new life SO THAT WE MIGHT believe. AND that same new disposition brings us to repentance. Repentance is necessary for our salvation ... The gospel itself clearly and unambiguously says so ... This is no gospel addition... But again, it certainly does not come from our own natural intrinsic ability. God's grace is what enables us to do so. If we look at 2Tim 2:25 it speaks of how believers are to respond to persons who oppose the gospel and what God may do for them. It says, "Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will **GRANT THEM REPENTANCE** leading them to a knowledge of the truth."

In other words, repentance is something that is granted by God – a result of God opening our eyes and showing us our need of Christ in light of God's holiness, beauty, and excellence. An unregenerate man cannot apprehend such spiritual truths (1Cor 2:14). When the text says that God's action of grace leads them to "a knowledge of the truth" it is clearly referring to salvation. It is not something we come up with ourselves in our unregenerate natures. And what does repentance consist of? First, it is a **repentance of all trust in our own ability to save ourselves** – repentance from trusting in our own good works. A full humble recognition from the Holy Spirit that we are spiritually impotent. Next, because regeneration illumines our spiritual understanding, circumcises our heart, unplugs our deaf ears, opens our spiritual eyes, and implants new affections, we therefore now love God more than we love sin, for the first time. God works repentance in us as the object of our affections has been changed. No one says Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit. So this means that we no longer **want** to live a lifestyle of unbroken sin. Sin's power has been broken. Those who do continue in a lifestyle of sin can really have no assurance of their salvation.

The Grace Evangelical Society, as the article demonstrates, are dangerously promoting an antinomian-like theology which seems to uphold a kind of "once saved always saved" position – not a biblical doctrine. Why not? Because it means that most easy-believism groups embrace the concept that anyone who has EVER made a profession of faith is saved; and if they later fall away and become a Buddhist or an atheist, it does not matter – they're in. As long as I made some profession or prayed the prayer ten or twenty years ago, then I am a Christian in that scheme. It seems that Charles Stanley and others teachers like him have embraced this kind of theology. In fact, in a sermon earlier this month (8-5-04) he insisted that conviction of *sin* is not a necessary part of conversion (conviction of a *felt need* is).

In my view, and I would argue that it is the view of most Christians through church history, the holy Scriptures never speak this way. There are clear warnings about those who make (false) professions and yet live in unbroken sin. 1John 2:19 teaches that those who leave the faith were never a part of it to begin with. And Jesus likewise says,

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'" (Matthew 7:21-23)

Notice that the text says that he **never knew them**. It does not say to these false professors that He once knew them and then ceased knowing them at a later time. No, it says “**I never knew you**”. That means that there are actually persons out there who have spuriously believed in Christ. This should be sobering; but if we take hold of God’s promises, then we derive great comfort because our regeneration changes the disposition of our hearts from hostility to affection, for Christ and implants in us a principle of perseverance. The Christian, while he may commit grievous sin, cannot live in it. Rather, faith is ongoing, as is our desire to obey. God both encourages and disciplines those he loves so they will continue in their faith. In 1Cor 11:31-32 Paul says, “If we judged ourselves rightly, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord **so that we will not be condemned along with the world.**” A person who refuses to repent of sin as a professed Christian, may eventually have to be excommunicated with the hope that they will be reconciled/restored into fellowship through repentance. We cannot tell someone who lives in sin that they can have assurance. To do so, does such a person no good. It is positively harmful.

The essay you linked to in your email characterized the Lordship people as believing that one **must be willing to turn from sins or commit one’s life to Christ to be saved**. In criticizing this, then, the ‘free grace’ people view these things as extra and unnecessary for salvation. In other words we may cling to sins and not have any desire to commit our lives to Christ, just so long as we made some kind of a profession of faith. As far as I am concerned, such a belief is horrific, antithetical to everything the Bible teaches and needs to be censored. Repentance is never seen as optional. Obeying Christ’s commands is likewise never seen as optional. A truly regenerate person will desire to believe and obey. We will often miserably fail but the Spirit which dwells in us presses us on to sanctification. A lifestyle of sin with no desire to obey Christ is a sign of being unregenerate and plainly in great danger. But whatever our conscience accuses us of, we can turn in faith to Christ, and He will forgive us.

The essay you sent also charges the Lordship people as believing that “the promises of God’s Word, while necessary for assurance, are not sufficient. One must also look to his works. No believer can have 100% assurance of salvation merely by looking to the promises in God’s Word to the believer.” Really? On the contrary, the Reformed position is the **only position** that trusts in the promises of God as sufficient. Those who make such charges forget that sanctification is also a promise of God to the believer. Look in John 15:16 “You did not choose Me but I chose you, and **appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain**, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you.”

Christ earlier warns us against not abiding in the vine and says those who do not will be burned. But then here in verse 16, he makes a promise that He chose us and appointed us to bear fruit ... so the truly regenerate will not fall into the camp of those who fall away. Christ guarantees it. Christ cannot lose a believer. He intercedes for us (Romans 8:34) so we will not fail. Can Christ’s prayer for His elect fail? Hebrews likewise says of Christ’s prayer for us: “Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost [*that is, completely*] those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.” This is God’s word. And so when we note that our works give evidence of true belief, the glory goes to God alone because He **ordained** that we would bear fruit. The Apostle Paul said, “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, **which God prepared beforehand**, that we should walk

in them.” The Text continually presents this message: That we are required to persevere AND that God grants us the ability to do so. Those who do not persevere, cannot live in assurance.

So instead of “once saved, always saved” we believe that Christ will never lose a Christian, he will enable us to persevere, and he will save us to the uttermost. “He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.” (Phil 1:6) God grants the desire to press on to the end, always remembering that we are sinners and can trust in Christ alone for everything we have. Our desire for faith, repentance, and obedience is a gift of God’s sheer grace, not something we must come up with in our flesh. The *easy-believism / antinomian position* somehow thinks that when repentance is demanded by the “Lordship” camp, then we are calling for trust in works. Sorry, but a true faith produces works because regeneration and sanctification are a work of God in us to begin with. It is those who trust in their own ability to have faith that are ultimately trusting in themselves, since such a faith is produced apart from God’s regenerative work. Again, to the easy-believism camp, faith is a product of their unregenerated human nature – so in the end, which theology leads us to trust in free grace?

Grace and peace,
John

Further Reading on this Topic

[Regeneration: The New Birth, Changed Lives, and Sin In the Church](#) by Stephen Fernandez
[More Essays on the Lordship of Christ](#) at www.monergism.com

[RETURN to the top](#)

LORDSHIP SALVATION

Biblical or Heretical?

By William Webster

The past 20 years has seen an ongoing debate within the evangelical community on the issue of lordship salvation. There have been a number of works published addressing the subject but there is still much confusion within the evangelical Church concerning this issue.

There is much contradictory opinion as to what is necessary for an individual to come into the experience of salvation. On the one hand there are those who believe that lordship is absolutely essential while others deem such teaching a works salvation. No one involved in the controversy denies the essential truth of the deity of Christ, that he is Lord and God. In this sense it is impossible to ‘make Christ Lord’ since he *is* Lord. The controversy is not over the essential nature of Christ, but whether submission to him, as Lord of one’s life, is a necessary aspect of saving faith. There are those who claim that lordship is a betrayal of the Reformation in that it undermines the vital reformation principle of ‘faith alone’. And there are those who state that rather than a betrayal, the teaching of lordship is, in fact, an affirmation of both the biblical gospel and the historic Protestant faith. There is even confusion among those who consider themselves ‘reformed’ in theology. While we all agree that justification is by faith alone, we do not all agree on the meaning of saving faith. How do we resolve these differences?

I believe the answer is found in clarifying the discipleship teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ. The teaching of Jesus is particularly germane to this whole controversy and is ultimately the definitive answer to the question of lordship. If he taught it, that settles it. The controversy over lordship is not an academic issue. It hits right at the heart of the gospel and the meaning of true salvation. Nothing less than the eternal destiny of men and women is at stake. When teaching on salvation Jesus has a great deal to say about hell, the kingdom of God, his atonement, union with himself, conversion, faith, repentance, sanctification and discipleship. Surprisingly, he has little to say about justification. In the context of Protestant–Roman Catholic ecumenism, Harold O.J. Brown recently made an interesting observation about the teaching of Christ. Referring to liberal Protestants and Catholics he states:

It is true that they have reduced the old hostility between the confessions, but unfortunately, in order to hold them, as both of these groups...do, one has to ignore some of the most explicit teachings of Jesus Himself (Harold O.J. Brown, *Unhelpful Antagonism and Unhealthy Courtesy*. Found in *Roman Catholicism: Evangelical Protestants Analyze What Divides and What Unites Us* (Chicago: Moody, 1994), John Armstrong, Ed., p. 169).

These comments apply to our present study. In order to hold our personal or denominational views on salvation, do we ignore or reinterpret some of the teachings of Jesus?

In any study of Jesus’ teaching on salvation what is striking is his constant focus upon himself as the source of salvation. ‘Come to me, follow me, believe in me, drink of me’ (Mt. 11:28–30; Mk. 8:34–38; Jn. 6:35; Jn. 7:38) are his constant cries. He says, ‘I am the way the truth and the life;

no one comes to the Father, but through Me' (Jn. 14:6). According to Jesus, it is through a personal relationship with him that one comes into the experience of salvation.

He preaches the absolute necessity for the new birth (Jn. 3:3–6), for conversion (Mt. 18:3) and for sanctification (Mt. 7:21–24). He tells men that it is only those who do the will of God who will enter the kingdom of heaven, that those who truly belong to him will manifest the reality of that relationship by bearing the fruit of obedience in their lives (Jn. 15:1–8; 8:31).

He says that none can come to him except the Father first draw them (Jn. 6:44) and yet he calls men to repentance and faith (Mk. 1:15; Jn. 3:16; Lk. 13:3; Jn. 4:15–18).

He teaches that justification is not by works but based solely on the mercy of God (Lk. 18:9–14). He emphasizes faith in himself and his atoning work as the sole basis for salvation and complete deliverance from judgment and condemnation (Jn. 3:14–16; 6:35, 47–58, 5:24, 10:27–29), but he also equally emphasizes his authority as Lord, as clearly seen in his call to discipleship. His teaching on discipleship is his definitive teaching on the kingdom of God and what it means to enter into a relationship with himself. There is perhaps no greater confusion within evangelicalism in our day, however, than that which relates to this subject. For this reason we need to look at it in some detail.

Christ's Call to Discipleship

In Luke 14, Jesus gives the following conditions of discipleship:

If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple (Lk. 14:26).

Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple (Lk. 14:27).

So therefore, no one of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions (Lk. 14:33).

It is clear that Jesus is not talking here about a *process* of discipleship, but a *commitment* of discipleship. While a biblical commitment to Christ results in a process of growth, in this particular passage Christ is talking about an initial commitment to himself. Jesus has enunciated unalterable and absolute requirements which he says must be met or one cannot become his disciple. Let us examine his words to see what exactly the Lord means by his teaching.

1.) Luke 14:26: 'If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple.'

To properly interpret the meaning of the Lord's words, especially his use of the word hate, we need to refer to Matthew 10:37: 'He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.'

What Jesus is dealing with here is love and devotion. Jesus demands first place in the heart of an individual. He must be preeminent in the life. All other relationships are to take a secondary place in relationship to himself. William Hendriksen makes the following comments on this verse:

He tells the people that devotion to Himself must be so wholehearted that even attachment to parents and to other members of one's family must not be allowed to stand in the way. Clearly the meaning of the word hate in the Lucan passage is to love less. In all things Christ must always have the preeminence (Col 1:18). That the word hate in Luke 14:26 cannot have the meaning which we generally attach to it is clear also from the fact that Jesus tells us to love even our enemies (Matt 5:44). What the Savior demands in Luke 14:26 and other passages is complete devotion, the type of loyalty that is so true and unswerving that every other attachment, even to one's own life must be subjected to it. If a person is unwilling to tender that unconditional devotion, then says Jesus, 'he cannot be My disciple' (William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary, The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), pp. 734-735).

2.) Luke 14:27: 'Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.'

The issue in this verse is that of self denial. We will be looking at this concept in more detail but these words by G. Campbell Morgan adequately sum up what the Lord Jesus means:

What is self denial? ...To deny self is to say no to every wish that comes out of the personal life. To deny self is radical. It goes down to the roots of things. A man may practice self denial all his life and never deny himself. A man may practice self denial in this and that respect, and all the while his self-centeredness is strengthened. Jesus did not say exercise self denial in externalities. He said deny self, have done with choosing, wishing, planning, arranging for self. Choose no more, will no more, except to will that God shall will...I deny self when I hand over the keys of the citadel to the king and say, Enter and reign in every chamber of the being, in all possibilities of the soul (G. Campbell Morgan, *The Westminster Pulpit*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1954) Volume I, pp. 43-44).

So, Jesus must not only be first in one's affections, but his will must come first in one's life. An individual's will must be submitted to the will of Jesus Christ.

3.) Luke 14:33: 'So therefore, no one of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions.'

William Hendriksen explains the meaning of this verse in these words, 'Wholehearted devotion, all-out loyalty, complete self denial, so that one places himself, his time, his earthly possessions, his talents etc., at the disposal of Christ, is what Jesus asks' (William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary, The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), p. 737).

As a matter of summation, then, what Jesus is calling for in these verses is a forsaking of everything and the unconditional surrender of self to him as Lord if we are to become his

disciple. These are the conditions he clearly sets forth for entering into a relationship with himself. It is a commitment that is necessary for entering the kingdom of God. Apart from this commitment to become his disciple we cannot be saved.

In order to show this is an accurate interpretation of Jesus' teaching in Luke 14 it is essential that we look carefully at a number of additional passages that deal with Jesus' teaching on discipleship. These are Mark 8:34-37, John 12:24-26, Matthew 11:28-30 and Mark 10:17-22. These passages reveal three general word pictures used by Jesus which are descriptive of his teaching on salvation and discipleship: the cross, the yoke and the grain of wheat. They each illustrate the attitude towards self we must adopt if we are to be rightly related to him. They teach us that a Christian is one who has died to his life, in this world, and given himself wholly to Christ, to love him supremely and serve him exclusively. We cannot follow Christ and possess eternal life unless these word pictures are descriptive of our lives.

Mark 8:34-37: The Cross

If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's shall save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul? For what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? (Mk. 8:34–37. Cf. Lk. 9:23–27).

This is another foundational passage related to discipleship. In fact, Mark 8:34 is in principle the same verse as Luke 14:27. But in Mark 8 Jesus amplifies the verse, so we will understand exactly what he means. Whatever it means in Mark 8:34 is what it means in Luke 14:27.

These words of Jesus to his disciples and the multitudes follow the incident of Peter's attempt to dissuade the Lord from the path of the cross. Peter appeals to him to spare himself. Peter's admonition springs from loving concern, but it is met with a stern, severe rebuke from Jesus. His reply to Peter is both revealing and instructive for it reveals to us the master principle that governed the life of Christ. And it is this initial response to Peter which forms the backdrop to his additional comments to all the disciples and the multitudes. Jesus utterly rejects Peter's suggestion, actually ascribing it to Satan, and then says to Peter: 'You are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's (Mk. 8:33).' Here Jesus sets forth a contrast between two life principles: God's interests and man's interests. And he reveals that the two are in conflict with one another. But he leaves us in no doubt as to which principle dominated his life. Jesus was controlled by one master passion: To know and do the will of God no matter what the cost to himself. Jesus' life was not governed by his own interests, but those of his Father's. As he himself stated over and over again: 'For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me' (Jn. 6:38). Self interest is the very antithesis of the life of Christ. His one holy passion was the will of God, for the glory of God, even if it meant persecution, suffering and death on a cross!

There is the stark contrast here between man's interests and God's interests. It forms the context in which Jesus teaches about the cross and what it means to follow him. Being his follower means adopting the same attitude towards my life that he had towards his. After calling the

multitudes and the disciples to himself Jesus says that if any man would come after him he must do three things: deny himself, take up his cross, and follow him. What does this mean?

Deny self: This means a turning from self-will, renouncing living for self. John Stott says: ‘Self denied...is not to deny things to myself, but to deny myself to myself. It is to say no to self and yes to Christ; to repudiate self and acknowledge Christ’ (John Stott, *Basic Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), p. 111).

Take up the cross: A cross is an instrument of death and is used in a metaphorical sense by Jesus. When the term is used in conjunction with the phrase ‘deny self’, it carries the idea of dying to my right to myself and of living to promote my own interests. John Stott comments: ‘To take up a cross is to put oneself into the position of a condemned man on his way to execution. In other words, the attitude to self is that of crucifixion. Every day the Christian is to die. Every day he renounces the sovereignty to his own will. Every day he renews his unconditional surrender to Jesus Christ.’ (John Stott, *Basic Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), pp. 111-112).

Follow me: The tense of this verb indicates that it means to continually follow. Thayer’s Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament states that the Greek word follow means ‘to join one as a disciple, to become or be his disciple.’ To follow Jesus therefore means a death to self to become his disciple. I cease to live for my sake in order that I might live for his sake.

Why the imperative call to deny self, take up a cross and follow Jesus? ‘For’, he says, ‘whosoever will save his life shall lose it, but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel’s the same shall save it’ (Mk. 8:35). The key to understanding the meaning of this verse is the word lose. The Greek ‘lose’ is precisely the same Greek word that is translated perish in other parts of the New Testament. It means to die eternally:

The Lord is not...wishing for any to perish, but for all to come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9).

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life (Jn. 3:16).

To insure that we fully understand the issues involved Christ further explains and emphasizes his point in verses 36-37:

For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul? For what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?

Jesus is saying that if a man does not deny self, take up a cross and commit to be his follower or disciple then that man will *perish*—he will forfeit his soul. Jesus makes this same point in John 10:27-28 where he once again uses the word ‘follow’ as a characteristic of his sheep:

My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they shall never perish; and no one shall snatch them out of My hand.

Who are the true sheep of the Lord Jesus? Who are the ones who hear his voice, to whom he gives eternal life and who will therefore never perish? It is those who follow him; those who commit themselves to him to become his disciples. The issue is one of eternity and salvation. Both William Hendriksen and R.C.H. Lenski make this point in their comments on Mark 8:34:

This is not self denial in the current sense of the word but true conversion, the very first essential of the Christian life (R.C.H. Lenski, *Interpretation of St. Mark's Gospel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1961), p. 348).

Together the three (deny self, take up a cross, and follow me) indicate true conversion followed by a life-long sanctification (William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary, The Gospel of Mark* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1975), p. 330).

Based upon the meaning and contextual interpretation of the words Jesus used one can only conclude that Mark 8:34 is stating a requirement for salvation. This scripture clearly says that one cannot become a Christian without a commitment to Christ as a disciple. In Luke 14:27, the parallel passage to Mark 8:34, Jesus also relates discipleship to salvation. In Mark 8 Jesus says one must become his disciple or he will perish. In Luke 14 he amplifies for us the conditions which must be fulfilled if one would become his disciple. It is obvious from our study of the above passage that when Jesus uses the term 'disciple', he uses it as a synonym for the term Christian. To become a disciple, therefore, is to become a Christian. To become a Christian is to become a disciple. Thus, the whole passage in Luke 14 is the setting forth of his conditions for entering the kingdom of God. William Hendriksen's comments on the importance of obeying Christ's demands in Mark 8:34 and Luke 9:23 to deny self and take up a cross are worth noting:

In the next three verses...the obligation to be converted, etc., and the reward that results are brought into sharp contrast with the loss experienced by those who refuse to deny themselves, to take up their cross, and to follow Jesus...Accordingly, with an implied 'Let him not refuse,' there follows...For whoever would save his life shall lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake, he shall save it. Meaning: the individual who would—or 'should wish to'—save his life shall lose it. Exactly what is it that he wishes to save? Answer: his life, that is, himself...This man clings to that sinful life of his, holding on to it tenaciously...On the other hand, whoever loses his life 'for my sake,' he shall save it. One loses his life in the present sense by devoting oneself completely to Christ, to the service of those in need, to the gospel (Cf. Mark 8:35). Note that Christ lays claim to absolute devotion. This proves that he regards himself as Lord of all, and that the evangelist was fully aware of this! The person who offers this devotion saves his life, that is, his soul, or as we can also say, himself...It is only by losing oneself—looking away from self in order to serve the Master and his 'little ones' (Cf. Matt. 25:40)—that one can ever be saved...For the sinner salvation is impossible apart from obedience to this rule (William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary, The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), pp. 498-500).

In light of these passages it is clear that Jesus never taught that an individual could become a Christian and then at a later time make a secondary wholehearted commitment to him as a disciple. Jesus does not separate being a Christian from being a disciple. They are interchangeable terms. According to Jesus, if one is not a disciple he is not a Christian. When he

calls men to himself to be saved he calls them to a discipleship commitment—to the taking up of a cross to crucify self to become a follower. And scripture teaches that all who truly belong to Christ have done that: ‘Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires’ (Gal. 5:24). There are a number of other examples which amplify and highlight this emphasis in the teaching and evangelism of Jesus.

Matthew 11:28-30: The Yoke

Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and you shall find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My load is light.

In Mark 8 and Luke 14 Jesus uses the image of the cross to communicate the conditions of discipleship. Here he refers to a yoke. What does Jesus mean by his yoke? In Jewish culture the yoke was used to harness animals, to control them and bring them into submission to one’s will, so that they could be used in labor. In this passage (Mt. 11), Jesus issues an invitation to men to come to him to find rest for their souls. He sets forth an invitation, a condition and a promise. The invitation is ‘come to me’. The promise is rest and the condition is ‘take my yoke upon you.’ Man is restless and burdened. Why? Because he is ruled by self and not by God. What Jesus is saying is that he can give us rest but it requires a certain kind of commitment. We must bend our necks under his yoke and come into submission to his authority and teaching. We must be willing to adopt the same heart towards self that Jesus himself has. He tells us in this passage that he is meek and humble in heart. His whole life is dominated and governed by God and his will and interests. If we would come to him and find rest we must repudiate self and selfish interests and submit ourselves to Jesus as Lord—to yield to his yoke, his authority and control. James Montgomery Boice makes these observations on the meaning of Christ’s yoke:

In one of Jesus’ most important sayings about discipleship...the Lord pictures discipleship as putting on a yoke. This suggests a number of things, but chiefly it suggests submission to Christ for His assigned work. It is the picture of an animal yoked to others as well as to a plow.

A yoke is also the connection between submission and subjection. ‘Submit’ comes from the two Latin words sub (meaning ‘under’) and mitto, mittere (meaning ‘to put’ or ‘place’). So submission means putting oneself under the authority of another. ‘Subject’ also comes from two Latin words, in this case sub (meaning ‘under’) and iacto, iactare (meaning ‘cast’ or ‘throw’). It means being put under the authority of another. In other words, although the first word has an active sense (I put myself under another’s authority) and the second word has a passive sense (I am placed under that authority), the idea is nevertheless essentially the same. Moreover, it is connected with ‘yoke’ in this way. In ancient times it was customary for a ruler, when he had conquered a new people or territory, to place a staff across two upright poles, perhaps four feet off the ground, and require the captured people to pass under it. By this act they passed under his yoke or submitted to his authority. When Jesus used this image He was saying that to follow Him was to submit to Him. It was to receive Him as Lord of one’s life (James Montgomery Boice, *Christ’s Call to Discipleship* (Chicago: Moody, 1986), p. 19).

John 12:24-26: The Grain of Wheat

Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains by itself alone; but if it dies it bears much fruit. He who loves his life loses it; and he who hates his life in this world shall keep it to life eternal. If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there shall My servant also be; if anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him.

Jesus gives us yet another word picture here which is descriptive of both his own life and that of the Christian. Again he is illustrating what it means to come into a saving relationship with himself. First of all, he depicts himself as a grain of wheat in describing his death on the cross. He is using a principle drawn from the physical world to teach a spiritual truth. What is that truth? Fruitfulness and life is born out of death. It is only as the grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies that it produces fruit. Just so, unless the Son of Man goes to the cross there will be no fruit, but if he dies there will be much spiritual fruit for the kingdom of God.

Through this word picture Jesus tells us the attitude he has towards his own life. His life is not lived unto himself but totally for the sake of others—first and foremost for his Father and then for people. He constantly gives of himself even to the point of death.

Jesus then applies this principle to all who would be his followers. He says there are two fundamental attitudes that we can adopt towards our life in this world: that of love and that of hatred. Jesus says that if we love our life we will lose it, but if we hate it we will keep it to life eternal. We must understand the word hate here in the same way that Jesus used it in Luke 14. He means that nothing is to take priority over himself and the kingdom of God in our hearts. Everything else is to be loved less. Our lives are not to be our highest priority. We are not here to live for ourselves but for our Lord. We are not to literally hate ourselves but our love for God and his kingdom must take absolute priority over our lives. If we love our life more than Christ we will lose it. This word lose is the same word Jesus uses in Mark 8 which means to perish. He is speaking here about eternal death and eternal life.

He then states that to be his servant we must follow him. If we would gain eternal life and truly know Christ there must be a death to self. I must become, in a figurative sense, a grain of wheat which falls into the ground and dies. I must come to an end of living for myself and this world. I commit myself unreservedly to Christ to be his follower—to love him supremely and to serve him exclusively. If I do not do this Jesus says I will perish. He says the same thing in Mark 8. We die to ourselves that we might live for God and his will and the result is fruit. The apostle Paul writes of this in Romans 12:1 where he exhorts believers to continually offer themselves to God as a living sacrifice: ‘I urge you therefore brethren by the mercies of God to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.’ F.F. Bruce makes these comments on the meaning of Jesus’ teaching about the grain of wheat in John 12:24:

The principle stated in verse 24 is of wide application; in particular, if it is true of Jesus, it must be true of his followers. They too must be prepared to renounce present interests for the sake of a future inheritance. This is a Johannine counterpart to the Synoptic saying about the disciple’s obligation to take up his cross and follow his Master (cf. Mark 8:34-38). To love

one's life here means to give it priority over the interests of God's kingdom; similarly to hate one's life is to give priority over it to the interests of God's kingdom (F.F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), p. 265).

The New Testament scholar, D.A. Carson, gives these insightful and sobering observations in explaining the essence of Jesus' teaching:

But if the principle modelled by the seed—that death is the necessary condition for the generation of life—is peculiarly applicable to Jesus, in a slightly different way it is properly applied to all of Jesus' followers...The movement of thought in this passage runs from Jesus' uniquely fruitful death (the death of one seed producing many living seeds) to the mandated death of Jesus' followers as the necessary condition of their own life. The person who loves his own life will lose it: it could not be otherwise, for to love one's life is a fundamental denial of God's sovereignty, of God's rights, and a brazen elevation of self to the apogee of one's perception, and therefore an idolatrous focus on self, which is the heart of all sin. Such a person loses his life, i.e. causes his own perdition. By contrast, the one who hates his life (the love/hate contrast reflects a semitic idiom that articulates fundamental preference, not hatred on some absolute scale...) will keep it for eternal life (cf. Mk. 8:35 par...). This person denies himself, or, to use another of Jesus' metaphors, takes up his cross daily (Mk. 8:34 par.), i.e. he chooses not to pander to self-interest but at the deepest level of his being declines to make himself the focus of his interest and perception, thereby dying.

A second contrast emerges in v. 25. The man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life...These choices cannot be acts of mere self-abnegation. Self must be displaced by another; the endless, shameless focus on self must be displaced by focus on Jesus Christ, who is the supreme revelation of God (D.A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), pp. 438-439).

The theme of Jesus' teaching in John 12 is that of fruit. This is an important theme throughout the New Testament:

- Romans 7:4 states that a believer is united to Christ with the ultimate purpose of bearing fruit unto God.
- In John 12 Jesus defines what conditions are necessary for union with Christ to take place that fruit might be produced: a death to self with a corresponding commitment to Christ to be his follower or disciple.
- John 15:8 says that we are to bear much fruit and so prove to be Christ's disciple. Only a disciple can bear fruit. And a true disciple is one who has met the conditions set forth by Jesus in Luke 14, Mark 8, Matthew 11 and John 12.
- Romans 6:22 states that fruit can only come from a heart and life that is wholly consecrated to God.

Discipleship is the essence of true Christianity. All who would come into the kingdom of God must submit their lives to Christ as his disciple to be his follower. This is evident in the commission that Christ gives to his disciples in Matthew 28:19-20 in the preaching of the gospel:

All authority in heaven and earth has been given to Me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you, And lo I am with you always even to the end of the age.

This passage of scripture is known as the Great Commission. It is the Savior's commission to his followers to go into all the world and 'make disciples.'

The Lord himself has already defined the word disciple in Luke 14. Therefore the word is going to retain the same meaning in Matthew 28. He is commissioning his followers to carry on the same ministry he has been engaged in—that of bringing men and women to himself through the preaching of the gospel. To 'make disciples' is to bring men and women to the kind of commitment that is defined by Jesus in Luke 14. Such people then become disciples or true converts. Then we are told to baptize them and teach them. Who does the word them refer to? Clearly to those who have been 'made disciples'. We are to baptize and then teach those who have become disciples. This passage is not dealing only with a process of growth in discipleship, but with that point of commitment where an individual becomes a true follower of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord is commissioning his disciples to carry on the same kind of evangelism he has been involved in throughout his ministry. One clear example of this is seen in the incident of the rich young ruler.

The Rich Young Ruler

And as He was setting out on a journey, a man ran up to Him and knelt before Him and began asking Him, 'Good teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?' And Jesus said to him, 'Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone. You know the commandments, Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother.' And he said to him, 'Teacher I have kept all these things from my youth up.'

And looking at him, Jesus felt a love for him, and said to him, 'One thing you lack: go and sell all you possess and give to the poor and you shall have treasure in heaven, and come follow Me.' But at these words his face fell and he went away grieved, for he was one who owned much property (Mk. 10:17-22).

This passage of Scripture is very important as it relates to our present study. This man comes to Jesus earnestly seeking the way of eternal life. He specifically asks the Lord what he must do to be saved. And Jesus tells him that he lacks one thing. He must sell all he possesses, give the proceeds to the poor, and follow him. Again we are confronted with this key word—follow. This is the same condition Jesus lays before the multitudes in Luke 14: 'Whoever does not take up his cross and follow Me cannot be My disciple...No one of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions' (Lk. 14:27,33). The Lord places this condition before the young ruler as a condition for salvation. If he would enter the kingdom of God and inherit eternal life he must forsake all and follow Christ. As we have already seen the word 'follow' means to become a disciple. He can gain eternal life if he is willing to become a disciple. This means unreserved surrender to Christ as Lord. Walter Chantry makes the following comments:

Often Christ turned crowds away by insisting that ‘whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be My disciple’ (Lk. 14:33). He was not speaking of abundant life nor of ‘victorious’ giants of the faith...He demanded this turning from everything to himself as a condition of discipleship for everyone. The young ruler would turn from earthly riches to heavenly or he would cling to earthly riches and perish...The sinner must know that Jesus will not be a Savior to any man who refuses to bow to him as Lord...Christ knew nothing of the man-made twentieth-century suggestion that taking Jesus as Lord is optional. For him it was no second step which is essential for great blessings but unnecessary for entering God’s kingdom. The altered message of today has deceived men and women by convincing them that Jesus will gladly be a Savior even to those who refuse to follow him as Lord. It simply is not the truth! Jesus’ invitation to salvation is, ‘Come, follow me’...Practical acknowledgment of Jesus’ Lordship, yielding to his rule by following is the very fibre of saving faith...Believing is obeying. Without obedience, you shall not see life! Unless you bow to Christ’s scepter you will not receive the benefits of Christ’s sacrifice. That is just what Jesus said to the ruler (Walter Chantry, *Today’s Gospel - Synthetic or Authentic?* (Edinburgh: Banner, 1970), pp. 55, 59-60).

Christ preached the law to the rich young ruler to bring him under conviction and to repentance. He put his finger on the young man’s idol and demanded a forsaking of that idol if he would inherit eternal life. Jesus did not tell the rich young ruler simply to ‘believe’ in him. He commanded him to become a disciple. This is Jesus’ message in evangelism, a call to discipleship. Thus, in Matthew 28:18–20 he is commissioning his disciples to follow his example.

It is clear from these passages that Christ taught that salvation requires a commitment to him as Lord. To understand why this is true we need to understand how Jesus’ teaching relates to the gospel message itself.

Matthew 7:13-24: Beware of False Prophets

[Enter the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction and many are those who enter by it. For the gate is small, and the way is narrow that leads to life, and few are those who find it. Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves \(Mt. 7:13–15\).](#)

Christ warns that the gate is strait and the way is narrow that leads to life. It is narrow because Christ is the only way and because the conditions required for those who would enter are difficult. We do well to heed Jesus’ words of warning in Matthew 7: ‘Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves’ (Mt. 7:15). False prophets proclaim a false message resulting in false assurance. They dilute the demands of the gospel by making the gate wide and the way broad. Such teachers and preachers may acknowledge Christ as Lord, by affirming his deity, but deny that a commitment to him as Lord is necessary for salvation. But acknowledging the title or position of Jesus theologically and submitting to him as Lord are very different. Jesus tells us that those who profess his deity without a corresponding submission of life will not enter heaven. Only those who do the will of God will enter heaven:

Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophecy in your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.'

The people Jesus mentions are sincere and orthodox in their view of Christ but they are lost. Jesus says the reason is that they practice lawlessness. 1 John 3:4 says, 'Sin is lawlessness.' Lawlessness is a heart of rebellion against God. A heart of self-will and self-rule. These people profess Christ as Lord but they do not submit to him as Lord to do his will. In preaching the gospel we must call men to Christ, but in doing so, we must impress upon them what that will mean. If we minimize Christ's demands for repentance and faith we will in effect be wolves in sheep's clothing—false prophets declaring to men a wide gate and a broad way of salvation. Martyn Lloyd-Jones gives this warning about the false prophets of Matthew 7:

We are told at the very outset of this way of life, before we start on it that if we would walk along it there are certain things which must be left outside, behind us. There is no room for them because we have to start by passing through a strait and narrow gate...The first thing we leave behind us is what is called worldliness. We leave behind the crowd and the way of the world...Our Lord is warning us against the danger of an easy salvation, against the tendency to say—Just come to Christ as you are and all is going to be well. No, the gospel tells us at the outset that it is going to be difficult. It means a radical break with the world...Yes, but still narrower and still straiter, if we really want to come into this way of life, we have to leave our 'self' outside. And it is there of course that we come to the greatest stumbling-block of all. It is one thing to leave the world, and the way of the world, but the most important thing in a sense is to leave our self outside. Have no illusion about this...for he who would enter by this gate must say goodbye to self. It is a life of self-abasement, self humiliation. 'If any man will come after Me'—what happens? Let him deny himself (the first thing always), and take up his cross and follow Me. But self denial, denial of self, does not mean refraining from various pleasures and things that we may like. It means to deny our very right to ourself. We leave our self outside and go through the gate saying, 'Yet not I but Christ liveth in Me.'

In the same way it (the false prophet's teaching) does not emphasize repentance in any real sense. It has a very wide gate leading to salvation and a very broad way leading to heaven. You need not feel much of your own sinfulness; you need not be aware of the blackness of your own heart. You just decide for Christ and rush in with the crowd and your name is put down and is one of the large number of decisions reported by the press.

Repentance means that you realize that you are a guilty vile sinner in the presence of God; that you deserve the wrath and punishment of God, that you are hell-bound. It means that you begin to realize that this thing called sin is in you; that you long to get rid of it, and that you turn your back on it in every shape and form. You renounce the world whatever the cost, the world in its mind and outlook as well as its practice, and you deny yourself, and take up the cross and go after Christ. Your nearest and dearest and the whole world may call you a fool, or say you have religious mania. You may have to suffer financially, but it makes no

difference. That is repentance. The false prophet does not put it like that. He heals ‘the hurt of the daughter of My people slightly, simply saying that it is all right and that you have but to come to Christ, ‘follow Christ,’ or ‘become a Christian’ (D. M. Lloyd-Jones, *Sermon on the Mount* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), Vol. 2, pp. 221, 224-225, 248-249).

Jesus’ Definition of the Word Disciple

The yoke, the cross, the grain of wheat, a follower, a servant —these are all terms used by Jesus to describe his radical teaching on what it means to truly know him. But much of his teaching is misinterpreted, misunderstood and misapplied. Many evangelical teachers today view discipleship as a process of sanctification or as a second, deeper commitment, not having anything to do with the conditions for entering the kingdom of God.

The word disciple is the Greek word *mathetes*, which means a learner. However, this definition is inadequate when used in relationship with Jesus Christ for he amplifies the term far beyond its basic Greek meaning. Just as the word for love, as normally used in Greek culture, was expanded and redefined by the writers of the New Testament, so the term disciple is given a whole new depth of meaning by Jesus. The normative meaning of the term in the Jewish and Greek cultures of Jesus’ day was that of one who committed himself to a teacher to become a learner. But when scripture uses the term in relation to Jesus Christ it gives an expanded meaning to the term for the obvious reason that we are not merely dealing with a human teacher in Jesus, but with the incarnate God! Our concept of discipleship must be according to Jesus’ definition and his words must be the standard by which we define the term. It is true that a disciple of Jesus will be a learner. But a disciple of Jesus is more than a learner, he is a follower who has denied self, taken up a cross and forsaken all to live for Christ and his kingdom. And according to Jesus, only a disciple is a true Christian.

The Demands of Discipleship and the Gospel

How does the discipleship teaching of Jesus fit into the overall scheme of the gospel of grace and salvation? To properly interpret this, we must understand the purpose of creation. We were not only created by God, but created to fulfil a specific purpose. Colossians 1:16 says that all things have been created ‘by Him and for Him.’ We have been created for God. He, himself, is to be the supreme purpose for our existence and the object of our love: ‘I am the Lord your God...you shall have no other gods before Me’ (Ex. 20:2-3).

This is reiterated by the Lord Jesus when he says that the first and greatest of all the commandments is: ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind’ (Mt. 22:37). God himself is to be the center of our lives. He is to have first place in our affections, the preeminent place in our hearts. No other person or thing must be allowed to displace him from his rightful place in our hearts. And no other purpose should be more important than knowing and doing the will of God. My own personal will, ambitions or interests, or those of another should never to take precedence over the will of God.

Man was created to be under God's authority, to love him supremely, and to live in obedience to his will. Man's fundamental problem, however, is that he does not live this way. He has rebelled against his Creator and does not live to fulfil God's will but his own. The Bible calls this sin. God no longer holds his rightful place in the heart of man. The pursuit of personal happiness and self rule dominates the life rather than God. Men do not live under God's rule but have become authorities unto themselves, living independently of him. Man is alienated and separated from God and is not rightly related to him as a person. Man exists in a state of sin and produces specific acts of sin.

The Gospel and Salvation

The gospel is a message of reconciliation. It tells us that the just demands of God's law, to which all men are accountable, have been fulfilled through the life and death of Christ. But salvation means much more than a declaration of forgiveness, acceptance with God and the assurance that one has been delivered from hell. It means cleansing from guilt and defilement. But it also means restoration to a relationship with God. An individual repents of sin and rebellion, and God takes his rightful place in the life. That person now begins to fulfil the purpose for which he was created. He now no longer lives for himself but for Jesus Christ. In other words, salvation is deliverance from sin—its guilt and its dominion and power. Repentance is a turning from sin and selfishness with wholehearted commitment to God. This is conversion.

Scripture clearly teaches that repentance is a necessary condition for salvation along with faith. The Bible presents repentance as a separate and distinct concept from faith. They are two completely different Greek words, and they mean entirely different things, though in the experience of salvation or conversion, they are indivisible. J.I. Packer writes, 'The gospel is a summons to faith and repentance. All who hear the gospel are summoned by God to repent and believe' (Acts 17:30, John 6:29). Faith and repentance are both acts, and acts of the whole man.'⁸ John Calvin makes the following comment: 'The sum of the gospel is held to consist in repentance and forgiveness of sins (Luke 24:47, Acts 5:31). Any discussion of faith, therefore, that omitted these two topics would be barren and mutilated and well nigh useless.'⁹ That repentance is necessary for salvation but is used as a separate concept from faith is seen in the following verses:

Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer, and rise again from the dead the third day; and that repentance for forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem (Luke 24:46-47).

Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent and believe in the gospel' (Mark 1: 14, 15).

Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish (Luke 13:3).

Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all everywhere should repent (Acts 17:30).

I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house, solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 20:20,21).

The Lord is not...wishing for any to perish, but for all to come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9).

The word of God clearly states that repentance and faith are both necessary for salvation. Delete either one and you do not have biblical salvation or a biblical gospel. Faith without repentance cannot save because the Lord Jesus clearly says, 'Except ye repent ye will all likewise perish' (Luke 13:3). And repentance without faith cannot save because it is faith that justifies. Therefore we must conclude that salvation is the result of repentant faith. Both must be present.

It is also important to note that this call to repentance is not to be understood as something which applies only to the Jews in a different dispensation. The Lord Jesus commanded that it be preached as a part of the great commission to the whole world (Luke 24:44) and Paul in summing up the gospel that he preached to both Gentiles and Jews (Acts 20:19-20) said it consisted of repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Since repentance is necessary for salvation, what precisely is biblical repentance? In other words, if an individual is going to repent, what is that going to mean? How is this truth to be applied? The Bible answers this in the teaching of Jesus. In the passages we have looked at Jesus is defining and applying the truth of repentance. He tells us what it means in practical terms. The specific things which Jesus mentions in Luke 14—other relationships, one's own life, possessions—are the very things which can displace God from his rightful place of preeminence in the heart. These are idols and Jesus says they must be torn down and cast away. Jonathan Edwards underscores this truth in these words:

The apostasy of man summarily consists in departing from the true God, to idols; forsaking his Creator and setting up other things in his room...The gods which a natural man worships, instead of the God that made him, are himself and the world...They are not willing to accept Christ; for in doing so, they must of necessity part with all their sins; they must sell the world, and part with their own righteousness...He is a Savior appointed of God; he anointed him, and sent him into the world. And in performing the work of redemption, he wrought the works of God; always did those things that pleased him; and all that he does as a Savior, is to his glory. And one great thing he aimed at in redemption, was to deliver them from their idols, and bring them to God (*The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Volume 2, Discourse: Men Naturally are God's Enemies, pp. 132, 138-139).

Finally Jesus gives the warning in Luke 14:28–32 to count the cost of becoming his disciple. Why? Because he is in this world to build and to battle. He is here to further his kingdom. Any man who comes to him must forsake all (Lk. 14:33), submit his life to Jesus Christ as Lord and follow him to live for his kingdom. This is the nature of repentance. J.I. Packer makes this point in the following comments:

Repentance is more than just sorrow for the past; repentance is a change of mind and heart, a new life of denying self and serving the Savior as King in self's place...More than once

Christ deliberately called attention to the radical break with the past that repentance involves. Luke 9:23,24—'If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me, whosoever will lose his life for My sake the same (but only he) will save it'. Luke 14:26,33—'If any man come to Me and hate not his father and mother and wife and children and brethren and sisters yea and his own life also (i.e., put them all decisively second in his esteem) he cannot be my disciple. . .whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be My disciple.' The repentance that Christ requires of His people consists in a settled refusal to set any limit to the claims which He may make on their lives (J.I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1961), p. 72).

Christ's call to discipleship is in principle the same call of God given to lost men and women during the Old Testament days of Ezekiel. It is a call to repentance—a turning from and forsaking of idolatry and sin:

Then some of the elders of Israel came to me and sat down before me. And the word of the Lord came to me saying, 'Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their hearts, and have put right before their faces the stumbling block of their iniquity. Should I be consulted by them at all? Therefore speak to them and tell them, Thus says the Lord God, Any man of the house of Israel who sets up his idols in his heart, puts right before his face the stumbling block of his iniquity, and then comes to the prophet, I the Lord will be brought to give him an answer in the matter in view of the multitude of his idols, in order to lay hold of the hearts of the house of Israel who are estranged from Me through all their idols.

Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord God, Repent and turn away from your idols, and turn your faces away from all your abominations.'

Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, each according to his conduct declares the Lord God. Repent and turn away from all your transgressions, so that iniquity may not become a stumbling block to you. Cast away from you all your transgressions which you have committed, and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! For why will you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies, declares the Lord God. Therefore, repent and live (Ez. 14:1-6, 18:30-32).

This word of the prophet is echoed in the New Testament by Jesus when he says, 'Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish' (Lk. 13:3). Jesus is saying is that to become a Christian, one must become a disciple. The two are synonymous terms. The Bible knows of no such concept as that taught so widely today that a person can be a Christian and yet not be a disciple. The Lord Jesus forever nullifies such a concept by his teaching. If a man does not become a disciple by denying self and enthroning Jesus as Lord, he will perish. Acts 11:26 tells us that 'the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.' Before they ever received the name Christian they were called disciples.

The essence of sin is self-will and self-rule. In other words living for self. Sin is defined in 1 John 3:4 where we are told 'sin is lawlessness.' Vines Expository Dictionary says that lawlessness is 'the displacement of the will of God with the will of self.' Therefore sin in its

essence is self-will. Or as John Stott puts it, 'sin is self.' Repentance means turning from sin. Dr. Thiessen says:

In conversion, faith is the turning of the soul to God, as repentance is the turning of the soul from sin (Henry Thiessen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), pg. 271).

Therefore since the essence of sin is self-will, repentance is turning from self-will or self-rule and submitting the life to Jesus as Lord, thereby becoming his disciple. If a man has not dethroned self and enthroned Jesus as Lord, he is still living in self-will and self-rule and has therefore not truly repented. He will perish. Repentance is towards God. It is a change of mind toward God as the rightful ruler and authority in one's life. The Scriptures emphasize salvation as a total concept. Justification is but one aspect of salvation. Salvation is in Jesus Christ. **He** is the Savior. **He** has done the work. It is by his merits and his alone that any individual is forgiven and accepted by God. His righteousness is imputed to the believer. But salvation becomes the personal possession of an individual only when Christ becomes the personal possession of the individual and he is in turn possessed by Christ. Salvation is applied to an individual through union with Christ when an individual receives Christ as prophet, priest and king through repentance and faith. I trust him as Savior and commit myself to him as Lord. The Westminster Confession says:

The principal acts of saving faith are, accepting, receiving, and resting upon Christ alone for justification, sanctification, and eternal life, by virtue of the covenant of grace (XIV.2) (Found in *The Confession of Faith* by A.A. Hodge (Edinburgh: Banner, 1958), p. 204).

The Confession states that saving faith involves receiving Christ for justification and also for sanctification. What it means to receive Christ for sanctification is described by the Puritan theologian John Owen in these words:

Obedience unto Christ does not consist merely in doing the things which He requireth... All obedience unto Christ proceeds from an express subjection of our souls and consciences unto Him (*The Works of John Owen* (Edinburgh: Banner, 1965), Volume I, pp. 134, 136).

What Owen is saying is that the process of sanctification will begin when there is first a **commitment** characterized by submission to Christ. The process flows out of the commitment. John Murray points out that the term sanctification in Scripture has two meanings: an initial commitment and consecration of the life to Christ from the world and sin, which he calls 'definitive sanctification', and the process of growth in the Christian life. He describes it in these terms:

When we speak of sanctification we generally think of it as a process by which the believer is gradually transformed in heart, mind, will, and conduct, and conformed more and more to the will of God and to the image of Christ, until at death the disembodied spirit is made perfect in holiness, and at the resurrection his body likewise will be conformed to the likeness of the body of Christ's glory. It is biblical to apply the term 'sanctification' to this process of transformation and conformation. But it is a fact too frequently overlooked that in the New

Testament the most characteristic terms that refer to sanctification are used, not of a process, but of a once-for-all definitive act. We properly think of calling, regeneration, justification, and adoption as acts of God effected once for all, and not requiring or admitting of repetition. It is of their nature to be definitive. But a considerable part of the New Testament teaching places sanctification in this category. We are... compelled to take account of the fact that the language of sanctification is used with reference to some decisive action that occurs at the inception of the Christian life, and one that characterizes the people of God in their identity as called effectually by God's grace. It would be, therefore, a deflection from biblical patterns of language and conception to think of sanctification exclusively in terms of a progressive work...

What is this sanctification? ...The person who lives in sin, or to sin, lives and acts in the realm of sin—it is the sphere of his life and activity. And the person who died to sin no longer lives in that sphere. His tie with it has been broken, and he has been translated into another realm...This is the decisive cleavage that the apostle has in view; it is the foundation upon which rests his whole conception of a believer's life, and it is a cleavage, a breach, a translation as really and decisively true in the sphere of moral and religious relationship as in ordinary experience of death. There is a once-for-all definitive and irreversible breach with the realm in which sin reigns in and unto death...This means that there is a decisive and definitive breach with the power and service of sin in the case of every one who has come under the control of the provisions of grace (emphasis mine) (*Collected Writings of John Murray* (Edinburgh: Banner, 1977), Volume 2, pp. 278-280).

A saved man is a man who has received Christ as Savior and Lord. He is both justified and sanctified. He is regenerated and converted. Because of union with Christ and a new nature, he lives a life in conformity to Jesus Christ in the power of his resurrection by the enabling of the indwelling Spirit. Where there is no submission to Christ as Lord there simply is no true Christianity. James Montgomery Boice offers this sober warning regarding the salvation teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ:

There is a fatal defect in the life of Christ's church in the twentieth century: a lack of true discipleship. Discipleship means forsaking everything to follow Christ. But for many of today's supposed Christians—perhaps the majority—it is the case that while there is much talk about Christ and even much furious activity, there is actually very little following of Christ Himself. And that means in some circles there is very little genuine Christianity. Many who fervently call Him 'Lord, Lord' are not Christians (Matthew 7:21)... There are several reasons that the situation I have described is common in today's church. The first is a defective theology that has crept over us like a deadening fog. This theology separates faith from discipleship and grace from obedience. It teaches that Jesus can be received as one's Savior without being received as one's Lord... Discipleship is not a supposed second step in Christianity, as if one first became a believer in Jesus and then, if he chooses, a disciple. From the beginning, discipleship is involved in what it means to be a Christian....Is 'faith' minus commitment a true biblical faith? ...If faith without works is dead—how much truer is it that faith without commitment is dead... True faith involves these elements: knowledge... heart response... and commitment, without which 'faith' is no different from the assent of the

demons who 'believe... and shudder' (James 2:19) (James Montgomery Boice, *Christ's Call to Discipleship* (Chicago: Moody, 1986), pp. 13, 14, 16, 21).

A.W. Tozer makes these comments:

The sinner is actually a rebel against properly constituted authority. That is what makes sin—sin. We are rebels. We are sons of disobedience. Sin is the breaking of the law and we are in rebellion and we are fugitives from the just laws of God while we are sinners. The root of sin is rebellion against law, rebellion against God. Does not the sinner say, I belong to myself. I owe allegiance to no one unless I choose to give it. That is the essence of sin. Thus in repentance, we reverse that relationship and we fully submit to the Word of God and the will of God as obedient children. We have no basis to believe that we can come casually and sprightly to the Lord Jesus and say, I have come for some help, Lord Jesus. I understand that you are the Savior so I am going to believe and be saved and then I am going to turn away and think about the other matters of lordship and allegiance and obedience at some other time in the future.

I warn you, you will not get help from Him in that way for the Lord will not save those whom He cannot command. He will not divide His offices. You cannot believe on a half Christ. We take Him for what He is, the anointed Savior and Lord who is King of Kings and Lord of Lords (A. W. Tozer, *I Call It Heresy* (Camp Hill: Christian Publications, 1974), pp. 9, 14-16. 18-20).

The Bible makes it very clear that submission to the Lordship of Christ is a necessary condition for salvation. This is seen not only in Mark 8:34-37 but also is clearly stated or implied in the following verses:

For to this end Christ died and lived again, that He might be Lord both of the dead and of the living (Rom. 14:9).

That if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and shalt believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved (Rom. 10:9).

But now having been freed from sin and enslaved to God you derive your benefit, resulting in sanctification, and the outcome, eternal life (Rom. 6:22).

He died for all, that they who live should no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf (2 Cor. 5:15).

For they themselves report about us what kind of reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God (1Thes. 1:9)

The Issue of Works

The Bible clearly teaches that salvation is a gift of God and not of works lest any man should boast (Ephesians 2:8, 9). Conservative evangelicals emphasize and rightly so, that no man can

work his way to heaven. They preach consistently and forcefully against good works as a basis for salvation. They preach the need of turning by faith to Christ alone as the Savior, resting in his finished work and in the merits of his shed blood and righteousness. We commonly hear, ‘Baptism will not save you, church membership will not save you, tithing, witnessing, your moral life, your good deeds, your fastings, your prayers, indulgences, etc. None of these things can give you a standing before God.’

There must indeed be a turning from all self-righteousness if one is to come to know Jesus Christ as Savior. However, many of the same evangelicals who preach the need to turn from self-righteousness in order to be saved will not preach repentance from self-will and self-rule. Why? Many wrongly believe that demanding men to turn from self-will adds works to the gospel of grace. The question is this: What is the difference between turning from self-righteousness to Jesus as Savior and self-will to Jesus as Lord? If the one is a form of works then so is the other.

The fact is, neither of them is works. Repentant, saving faith is a gift from God. Faith is a gift from God (Eph 2:8) as is repentance (Acts 11: 18): ‘[When they heard these things, they held their peace and glorified God saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.](#)’

Jesus Christ is both Savior and Lord. He cannot be divided. If a man comes to Jesus he comes to him as he is, as both Lord and Savior. There must be a turning from self-righteousness for Jesus to be Savior and there must be a turning from self-will or self-rule for Jesus to be Lord. This is not a form of works but true biblical repentance which is a gift from God. True repentance is turning from self, while faith is turning to Christ. The result is conversion. As A.W. Pink says:

Repentance is the negative side of conversion. Conversion is a whole hearted turning unto God, but there cannot be a turning unto without a turning from. Sin must be forsaken ere one can draw nigh unto the Holy One. As it is written, “Ye turned to God from idols to serve (live for) the living and true God” (1Thessalonians 1:9) (A.W. Pink, *The Doctrine of Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), p. 60).

We need to distinguish between discipleship as an initial commitment and discipleship as a process, for it is both. Much of the confusion about commitment to Christ as Lord as ‘works salvation’ comes from a failure to distinguish between the two. When Christ calls men to himself he calls them to a commitment of discipleship, as we have seen. From that commitment issues a life of good works in discipleship or sanctification. But unless this initial commitment is made there will be no new life of holiness because there is no union with Christ. The Holy Spirit does not indwell the heart. The individual is not converted. Many do not make the biblical distinction between an initial lordship or discipleship commitment and the process of sanctification. If we understand the distinction between the commitment of discipleship and the process of discipleship which is growth in sanctification, the confusion can be avoided.

The Results of Repentant Faith

What will be the result in the life of a person who truly repents and believes? The result will be a totally changed life. The overall bent or direction of the life, from the heart attitudes and motivations to the outward behavior, completely changes. Where the life used to be centered around self and the pursuit of selfish interests, it is now centered around Christ and His interests.

No Christian will live a perfect life, but the desire of the heart—the practice or habit of the new creature in Christ—is to know and do the will of God. The issue is not perfection, but a changed life. If a person's life has not been fundamentally changed from one of self centeredness to one of living for the will of God, then that person has never come to know Jesus Christ. The evidence of true conversion is a changed life.

This is clearly taught in the Bible. Matthew 7:21 and 1John 2:17 emphatically state that the only people who will enter the kingdom of heaven, possess eternal life and abide forever are those who do the will of God.

Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven (Mt. 7:21).

Do not love the world, nor the things in the world. If any one loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him...And the world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God abides for ever (I Jn. 2:15,17).

In 1John 2:1 we read, 'My little children, I am writing these things to you that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.'

1John 1:9 it says, 'If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.'

The apostle John readily admits in these verses that the possibility of sin is very real. He does not teach perfection but in the book of 1 John he teaches that if a person's life is not characterized by change, that person has never come to know Jesus Christ. In other words he has never truly repented and believed.

He says in 1John 5:13 that he has written what he has written in order that men might know if they really possess eternal life. He says if a person has really believed in the Son he has life: 'He who has the Son has life' (1John 5:12). But how does one know whether or not he has the Son and therefore has life? The answer to that question is clear. If the life passes the tests he has written about in all that precedes chapter five, the person can know he has eternal life. If the things he writes about are not evidenced in the life, then that person does not have the Son and therefore he does not have life. He has not believed savingly. He has what James calls 'dead faith' because he has no works or changed life.

John is not teaching perfection. Again, the issue is not perfection; the issue is a changed life. The following are some of the tests he gives:

And by this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. The one who says, 'I have come to know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him (1John 2:3, 4).

Do not love the world, nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. And the world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God abides for ever (1John 2:15–17).

No one who is born of God practices sin; because His seed abides in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother (1John 3:9, 10).

We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren (1 Jn. 3:14).

J.C. Ryle states:

To be 'born of God' is to be the subject of an inward change of heart, so complete, that it is like passing into a new existence. It is the introduction into the human soul of a seed from heaven, a new principle, a Divine nature, a new will. Certainly it is no outward bodily alteration; but it is no less certain that it is an entire alteration of the inward man. It adds no new faculties to our minds; but it gives an entirely new bent and bias to our old ones. The tastes and opinions of one 'born again,' his views of sin, of the world, of the Bible, of God, and of Christ, are so thoroughly new, that he is to all intents and purposes what St. Paul calls a new creature. In fact, as the Church Catechism truly says, it is 'a death unto sin and a new birth unto righteousness (J.C. Ryle, *The Upper Room* (Edinburgh: Banner, 1977), p. 137).

John MacArthur makes the following comments about the necessity for a changed life:

The church again is facing an age-old problem—the invasion of it by what has become known as 'easy-believism' or 'cheap grace'... People are told just to 'believe in Jesus' and everything will be settled forever... Our Lord recognized the potential problem of an easy-believism, as indicated in John 8:30,31, 'As He spoke these things, many came to believe in Him. Jesus therefore was saying to those Jews who had believed in Him, "If you abide in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine".' Jesus affirms that an easy-believism is inadequate.

The concept of easy-believism is contrary also to the message of the New Testament epistles regarding salvation and assurance. The life of a true believer is never portrayed as a soft, do-as-you-please existence. The believer is called to a life of obedience, in which faith is verified by conduct. A life of obedience should flow from a Christian's basic relationship to Christ. The Beatitudes call for a full self-examination. Such an approach Paul calls for in 2 Corinthians 13:5, 'Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith.' Prove it, he's saying. If it

were easy to point to an experience in the past to prove your salvation, why would Paul ask you to examine yourself? There must be something else here.

You might be saying, ‘Well, I’m a Christian. I believe. I made a decision for Christ.’ A lot of people point to the past to verify their salvation, but did you know that the Bible never does that? It never points to the past. It always bases proof of real salvation on your life now. Examine (test in NASB) is a present tense continuous action, ‘Be constantly examining yourselves’ ...Righteousness is the issue. Righteousness sets us apart as converted. Righteousness simply means living right, living under God’s standards, by His definition—If we do not live this way, the genuineness of our salvation is open to suspicion—to others and to ourselves (usually in the form of insecurity). Hebrews 12:14 haunts me when I meet people who claim to be Christians but whose lives do not agree: ‘Sanctification without which no one will see the Lord.’ Second Timothy 2:19 says that the Lord knows them that are His. And who are they? Those that name the name of Christ and depart from iniquity. Titus 1: 16 says, ‘They profess to know God, but by their deeds they deny Him, being detestable and disobedient, and worthless for any good deeds.’ Profession means nothing without obedience, without righteousness, without holiness, without departing from iniquity. Once, I actually heard a pastor preach, ‘Isn’t it wonderful that you can come to Jesus Christ and you don’t have to change anything on the inside or the outside?’ Can that be true? Of course not. There had better be transformation. Of course we can come to Jesus just as we are, but if we come away from conversion just as we were, how can we call it conversion? Second Corinthians 5:17 sums it up well: ‘Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.’

Being righteous does not mean that we never sin. First John 1:9 says Christians are constantly confessing their sin. That certainly indicates that we do sin. But it is sin that we deal with sooner or later. We confess it, we turn from it, we repent of it, we despise it. We do not love it. ‘If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him’ (1John 2:15) ...You cannot prove that you are a Christian by waltzing down the same old path. Having made a decision, having walked an aisle, having gone into an inquiry room, or having read through a little book was never the biblical criterion for salvation. The biblical criterion for salvation is what Your life is like right now... In Matthew 5:13 Christ calls us the salt of the earth and in verse 14, the light of the world. If you are really a Christian, your testimony will be clearly, decisively distinguishable from the rest of the world.

Don’t claim to be a Christian because five years ago you walked an aisle. Don’t claim to be a Christian because you once signed a card. Don’t try to tell God you’re a Christian because you went into a prayer room and talked to a counselor. And don’t even tell yourself you’re a Christian because some counselor told you that you were, because, at that moment, he didn’t know positively, either.

Assurance is the Holy Spirit’s work. He grants it by the inward testimony (Romans 8) and by the outer exhibit of works. Faith without works is dead, James says. Jesus puts it this way in John 8:31, ‘If you abide in My word, then You are truly disciples of Mine.’ He is saying you will be characterized by right thinking, obedience, right talking and right doing... Don’t lull yourself to sleep. Beloved, examine yourselves whether you are in the faith. Prove

yourselves...If you have not committed your life to Christ and come into the kingdom on His terms, you had better do it while you can (John MacArthur, Kingdom Living Here and Now (Chicago: Moody, 1980), pp. 5-22).

When did your life change? When did you turn from living for yourself and surrender yourself unreservedly to Jesus as Lord to become his disciple? When did you come to him on his terms as he has defined it in Mark 8, John 12, Luke 14 and Matthew 11? Who do you live for, yourself or Jesus Christ? Who rules your life? What do you live for? This world and the fulfillment of your own interests, plans and ambitions or the kingdom of God?

When did you deny self and take up a cross and die to yourself that you might follow Jesus Christ to be what He wants you to be, to go where He would have you go, to do what He would have you do?

When did you forsake all to follow him? In other words, when did you repent? [‘Unless you repent, you will ... perish’ \(Lk. 13:3\).](#)

Source: <http://www.christiantruth.com/articles/lordshipsalvation.html>

[RETURN to the top](#)

Epilogue

By William Gross

www.onthewing.org

John Hendryx and William Webster have made a clear case for Lordship Salvation. But as I see it, the dispute isn't so much about whether Scripture requires the Lordship of Christ, as it is about judging the salvation of another believer – of establishing a *benchmark* rather than a *hallmark* of salvation. It's as if we're asking, "What must I *do* to be saved?" (Acts 16.30) instead of asking "What must I *believe* to be saved?" (Acts 16.31) Some of us want a definitive standard by which to sinfully judge who is and is not saved. The only benchmark of salvation is *faith in Christ*; and the only cause of salvation is the *grace of God*. We should never stand in God's place and claim that we're able to judge another sinner's salvation. Rather, we proclaim the Gospel to call sinners to repentance. We believe their credible profession of faith in Christ. And we encourage such *believers* to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord (2Pet 3.18).

That is, we cannot *repent* other sinners by force, nor by heaping condemnation and shame on them, nor by establishing performance standards for them. Repentance comes from the heart, not from the law – it comes from an inner conviction of the Holy Spirit, not from outward obedience. We are no longer under the law, under its curse, under its demands, or under its yoke. We are not to abuse our freedom (Gal 5.13) Yet we are not to abuse God's grace either. We uphold the law (Rom 3.31), but we are to live free. "It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery." (Gal 5:1 NAS)

How then do works and church discipline operate in the tension between liberty and law? Are we not to hold one another accountable? Yes, of course we are. But the abuses we sometimes see with Lordship Salvation don't concern restorative discipline within the church. They concern a sinful desire to define who is and is not saved – who *is* or *is not* within the church. If they are not of us, these sinners are no longer our concern. If they were never part of us, we may drive them out. However, in 1John 2.18-19, antichrists were not *driven* from the church; they *left*. "If they had been of us, they would have remained with us." These antichrists judged themselves.

In 1Cor 5:12 we read, "For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within *the church*?" (NAS) But notice the verse preceding: "But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler-- not even to eat with such a one." (1Co 5:11 NAU) Is Paul saying that such persons are judged "not saved", or only that such persons are to be treated "as if" not saved? If such persons are to be judged "not saved", why did Paul expend such effort to get the church at Corinth to correct this sexually aberrant brother, restore him, and accept him, lest he be overwhelmed? (2Cor 2.7) If his *behavior* was not the standard of his *salvation*, of belonging to the church, then what was? Jesus says, with regard to church discipline, "And if he refuses to hear them, tell *it* to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, *let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector*." (Mat 18:17 NKJ)

I would submit that neither Paul nor our Lord instructs us by these admonitions to *judge* others unsaved, but to *treat* them as unsaved, as ignorant of the truth, ignorant of grace, ignorant of what it means to die to self, and what it means to take up our cross daily. *What do we do about ignorance in the church?* We instruct. We exemplify. We exhort. We urge one another on to love and good deeds (2Tim 4.2; Heb 10.24). We remind one another that our sinful behavior brings

God's name into condemnation among the outsiders (Rom 2.24). We self-identify as a follower of Christ by professing faith in him as our Lord and Savior; and we self-identify as his enemy by rejecting Christ as our Lord and Savior. If someone claims to believe in Christ, we take them at their word. And then we instruct them in the ways of Christ, so that they may *walk* in them. We don't abandon them. We assume that this is the desire of their heart. We don't call them liars and cast them into the darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. *That's not our business.* We don't separate the wheat from the tares, or the goats from the sheep; Christ will do that at the Judgment (Mat 13.29; 25.32). We invite believers into the church, and we treat them as believers, until they *confess* otherwise. The Gospel invitation is ever open and never closed.

Was **Abraham** outside the covenant by his disobedience and half-truths after he was called? Was **Moses** outside the covenant by murdering the Egyptian and burying him in the sand? Was **David** outside the covenant by his adultery and murder, or by his disobedience in taking a census that cost 70,000 of his countrymen their lives? Nathan's reply to David's confession is God's reply to every believer concerning their sins, "Then David said to Nathan, 'I have sinned against the LORD.' And Nathan said to David, 'The LORD also has taken away your sin; you shall not die.'" (2Sa 12:13 NAU) *How much sin, what kinds of sins, are sufficient to establish a reprobate life and a false profession of faith Christ? Can anyone say? Let them tell you of their unbelief; don't tell them of it. How did Peter respond to Simon the magician? Did he dismiss him as unsaved – as *unelect* – and thus unredeemable? Or did he call Simon to repentance?*

²⁰ But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money!" ²¹ "You have no part or portion in this matter, for your heart is not right before God." ²² "Therefore *repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray the Lord* that if possible, the intention of your heart may be forgiven you." ²³ "For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bondage of iniquity." ²⁴ But Simon answered and said, "Pray to the Lord for me yourselves, so that nothing of what you have said may come upon me." (Act 8:20-24 NAS)

Simon refused to "pray the Lord" himself. He asked Peter to pray for him instead. History records that Simon Magus never did repent, and his sinful ways became notorious. The sin of *simony*, or paying for position and influence in the church, is named for Simon. The practice of asking for the intercession of the saints, widespread in the Roman Catholic Church to this day, marks an unrepentant heart that will not flee to Christ, but seeks another means of forgiveness. In all this, Simon self-identified as an enemy of Christ. Peter never assumed that Simon was beyond redemption. He treated Simon as a non-believer in need of Christ, and called him to *repentance* and *belief*. He didn't try to coerce acceptable behavior from him while ignoring Simon's underlying disease of unbelief. This is the error we so often make in today's reformed churches. We tend to exercise *discipline* without first ascertaining *conversion*. It leads only to legalism.

That's what Bob Wilkin objects to in using obedience as a proof of salvation. We must rely on the person's profession of faith alone, but encourage obedience as the appropriate *expression of* that faith. Where that expression is absent, or manufactured (insincere), then we must react as Peter did, and call such a sinner to repentance and to belief in Christ. We must charge him to flee to Christ for refuge from the wrath to come, as Peter did with Simon. We must not judge anyone as *unelect*, but only as a sinner in need of Christ. *It is impossible to distinguish between a believer who sins, and a non-believer who sins, except by a profession of faith in Christ. It is impossible to distinguish between a new believer who has no evidences of a life in Christ, and a non-believer who has never known Christ, except by the new believer's love for Christ.* And so,

having called sinners to repentance and belief, we let them self-identify either as belonging to Christ, or as his enemy. We don't make that call ourselves. We *cannot* make that call ourselves. We are not privy to the will of God (Joh 1.13), nor the content of their heart (Act 15.8). So when a brother sins, professing Christ as his Lord, we must forgive him again and again (Mt 18.21-22).

In his famous work, *Mortification of Sin*, John Owen never addressed anyone but the sinner. He never intimated that anyone else was involved in mortification other than the sinner himself. And Owen demanded that we understand the need for grace to precede any attempt at mortification of sin. When we demand that someone's performance is the standard of their *salvation*, rather than the goal of their *sanctification*, we pervert the gospel. We swap sanctification for justification. Justification is *by faith alone* (Rom 3.28). Owen writes (modernized),

In fact, there are several nasty evils which accompany efforts by non-believers to mortify sin:

[1] His mind is consumed by something that is *not* the man's proper business, and so he is diverted from something that *is* his business. By his Word and his judgments, God has laid hold of a sin in him. He chafes the man's conscience, troubles his heart, and deprives him of his rest, so that other diversions will not serve his needs. The man is supposed to apply himself to the work in front of him. And that work is to awaken and consider his condition apart from God, his need to be brought home to God. Instead, he sets out to mortify the sin that chafes him. This attempt to be freed from his trouble is a pure case of self-love. This is not the work he is called to at all. And so he is distracted from his true work...

What do men do, what are they often *directed* to do, when their consciences are chafed by sin and uneasiness because the Lord has taken hold of them? Are they not told to give up the sin they are troubled by? And after making some headway against it, do they not devote themselves all the more to it? But in the end, these convictions have cost them the aim of the gospel. This is how men remain in their sin and rot.

[2] This duty of mortification is a good thing in its proper place. It is a duty that evidences sincerity, and brings peace to the conscience. A man might conclude he is in good shape if he is committed to this duty. His mind and heart are set against a particular sin, and he is resolved to have no more to do with it. But he deludes himself because,

1. When a man's conscience is sickened with sin, and he can find no rest, he should go to the great Physician of souls to be healed in his blood. But the man who merely wants to pacify his conscience by ending a sin, sits down without going to Christ at all.

2. By doing this, men convince themselves that they are all right. After all, it is a good work, and they are not doing it to be seen. They are sincere. But all this does is harden them in a kind of self-righteousness.

[3.] When a man has pursued this course for awhile, and deceived himself by it, he finds over the *course* of his life that indeed his sin has *not been mortified*. It has simply taken a new form. He begins to think that he is wasting his time. He will never be able to prevail. He is only building a dam against constantly rising waters. That is when he *gives up*, despairing of any success. He yields himself to the power of sin and the formality of fighting it.

This is the usual result for people who attempt to mortify sin without first obtaining an interest in Christ. It *deludes* them, *hardens* them, and *destroys* them. The most loathsome and

desperate sinners in the world are those who pursued this course out of conviction, found it fruitless, and then deserted it without discovering Christ... I repeat, mortification is for believers and believers only. Killing sin is the work of living men. When men are *dead*, as unbelievers are dead, sin is *alive*, and it continues to live.

So when we declare that someone is *not saved* because we see unmortified sin, or a dearth of godly works, and we separate them from our fellowship without attempting to bring them to a saving faith in the work of Jesus Christ – when we ignore their plea that they *want* to be saved – we have failed them, and we have failed our Lord. When Peter denied Christ, he didn't *act* like a believer; it didn't prove that he was *not* a believer. If these sinners are indeed unsaved, and yet we demand sanctification in order to prove their salvation, without first demanding faith in Christ, we likewise do them and our Lord a disservice. We ask the impossible of them.

Sanctification is not the mark of salvation. *Faith* is the mark of salvation. When faith is declared – when someone asserts their belief and trust in the atoning work of Christ alone – then and only then may we expect sanctification to flow from such faith. And faith comes by grace (Eph 2.8-9). None of this should be denied by reformed theologians.

The aberration arises when we believe someone is not saved because there is no changed life, and we then demand the change, we then require their sanctification, without first establishing their conversion. It's as if we're saying that the only evidence of salvation is the fruit of good works – works which can be imitated (Mat 7.23). ***THIS is what the free grace critics are getting at.*** We reformed theologians rightly assert that sanctification is the *product* and *evidence* of justification, and not the *cause* of justification, and yet we demand that every sinner *among us* – within the church – prove his justification by *works* instead of by *faith*. We seldom question what this sinner *actually* believes, before we demand to see the fruit of what he *ought* to believe.

Justification and sanctification are irretrievably linked, but the order is never to be confused, nor is sanctification ever to be the evidence of justification unless justification is *first* established by *faith* – by believing a series of propositional truths that establish a clear understanding of the gospel. If this professed believer cannot articulate the gospel in his own words, how can he possibly walk in the gospel truth which he claims to believe? Are works an evidence of saving faith? Yes, of course they are. James makes it clear that faith without works is dead (Jas 2.20). And yet the solution when godliness is absent is not to demand *godliness*, but first and foremost to demand *faith* – to establish this sinner's understanding of the gospel truth. Godliness only follows where understanding lights the path. Owen writes in *Mortification* (modernized),

The seventh chapter of Romans contains the description of a regenerate man, a believer. If you need evidence of being a believer, it must come from the things that constitute a believer. Someone who evidences these things in himself, and yet is plagued by sin, may safely conclude that, "If I am a believer, I am a most miserable one."¹

There are two *judgments* that a man may make about himself. The first is about his *person*, and the second, about his *ways*. It is the judgment of his ways, not his person, that I am speaking about. He should get the best evidence about his person that he can. But it is his duty to judge whether an evil way will end in destruction; not to do that is atheism. I am not saying that when a man is so dominated [by sin], he ought to throw away the evidence he has

¹ Chap 9, end

of his personal interest in Christ. But I am saying that he cannot simply store it away in an attic as a thing of the past.²

I'll close with this quote from Joseph Alleine, Puritan author of "Alarm to the Unconverted." He doesn't call the church to judge and convict sinners among us, but their own *conscience*.

And now, *Conscience*, perform your office: speak out, and drive it home to the one who hears or reads these lines. If you find any of these marks on him, you must pronounce him utterly unclean.^{Lev. 13.44} Don't lie: don't speak peace to anyone to whom God speaks no peace. Don't let lust bribe you, or self-love; don't let carnal prejudice blind you. I *subpoena* you from the court of heaven, to come and give evidence: I require you, in the name of God, to go with me to search the suspected house. Because you will answer at your peril, give a true report of the state and condition of the one who reads this book.

Conscience, will you utterly hold your peace at such a time as this? I adjure you by the living God, tell us the *truth*.^{Matt. 26.63} **Is the man converted, or is he not?** Does he allow himself to continue in any way of sin, or does he not? Does he truly love, please, prize, and delight in God above all other things, or not? Come, put it to the test. How long will this soul live in uncertainty?

O Conscience, bring in your verdict. **Is this man a new man, or is he not?** How do you find it? Has a thorough and mighty change transpired in him, or not? When was the time? Where was the place? Or by what means was this thorough change of the new birth worked in his soul? *Speak*, conscience! Or if you cannot tell the time and place, can you show scripture evidence that the work is done? *Has the man ever been removed from his false foundation, from the false hopes and false peace in which once he trusted? Has he been deeply convicted of sin, of his lost and undone condition, and has he been brought out of himself, and away from his sins, to surrender himself entirely to Jesus Christ?* Or do you find him to this day under the power of ignorance, or in the mire of profaneness? Have you found on him the gains of unrighteousness? Do you find him a stranger to prayer; does he neglect the word; is he a lover of this present world? Do you often catch him in a lie? Do you find his heart fermented with malice, or burning with lust, or pursuing his covetousness? Speak plainly to all the mentioned particulars: can you acquit this man, this woman, from being any of the twenty-two sorts described here? If he is found in any of them, then set him aside; his portion is not with the saints. **He must be converted and made a new creature, or else he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.** (pp. 112-114)

So then, the great question of Lordship Salvation when it comes to sanctification is not, "Is this man finally saved?" but "Has this man ever been converted?" The demand, therefore, is not that he display his *godliness*, but that he understandingly profess his *faith*. Only then may we expect to see the Lordship of Christ over his life, and the progressive sanctification of his soul – "being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete *it* until the day of Jesus Christ;" (Phi 1:6 NKJ).

[RETURN to the top](#)

² Chap 10, towards the end

