

The Lordship of Jesus Christ and the Gospel

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God the Father has decreed that every man will bow his knee to Jesus Christ and confess that He is Lord. He has further decreed that this will bring him glory. We read in Philippians 2:7-11

⁷ . . . but [Christ] made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men.

⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.

⁹ Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name,

¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth,

¹¹ and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (NKJ)

So, every person who has ever lived, is living, or ever will live, will eventually bow at the name of Jesus Christ and will confess that He is Lord. When we look through the book of Acts, we find that the lordship of Jesus was continually presented as a component of the Gospel message. Later in this analysis we will look at twelve different occasions from Acts where this is the case—essentially each time the Gospel was preached. Although each unsaved person will confess Christ as Lord at the Great White Throne Judgment, our desire is that any given person might willingly confess Him as Lord during this lifetime and not need to face the Great White Throne Judgment.

God uses the creation to personally show each man His holiness and lordship

The lordship of the Creator is implicitly taught by the creation. The same thing applies to His holiness. This is indirectly taught in Romans 1:18-25,

¹⁸ For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,

¹⁹ because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them.

²⁰ For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse,

²¹ because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

²² Professing to be wise, they became fools,

²³ and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.

²⁴ Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves,
²⁵ who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. (NKJ)

The word “godhead” in these verses is ambiguous, not being explicitly defined. It is sometimes translated as “divine nature.” However, the context reveals some things that must be included within its meaning. This is because the passage teaches that men suppress the truth about God on account of the conflict between their sin and the things God reveals to them personally through the creation. From the flow of thought in the passage, it must be God’s *divine nature* or *Godhead* that causes the suppression. There are two attributes of God that men in general find offensive: First, His Lordship, which is God’s desire to be the Lord or Master of our lives. Second, His holiness also appears to be implicitly revealed. Men are quite willing to believe in a god who is not truly holy. The pagan gods of many religions attest to this. The true offense comes with a God who is absolute in His holiness, as the God of Creation is. The natural man does not want to know an omnipotent, eternal, holy God who is offended by sin and judges that which is morally inferior to His nature.

Because of God’s personal testimony to each person, every man in every society is already guilty before Him. No matter where or when a person lives or what the prevailing religious attitudes of his culture might be, God shows him His eternal power, His lordship, and His holiness through the creation. Apart from those who have come to know Christ as Savior, every man deliberately suppresses this knowledge and exchanges it for some form of error, because the weight of this knowledge is too heavy for him to endure.

Recognition of this condition is the starting point in every person’s relationship with God.

Enemies of God

The hostility between a natural man (i.e., one who is unsaved) and God is so intense that he counts God as his enemy and vice-versa, as discussed in the following representative verses:

1. Philippians 3:18-20

¹⁸ For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ:

¹⁹ whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame—who set their mind on earthly things.

²⁰ For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.... (NKJ)

So, there are those who are enemies of the cross of Christ. Who are these enemies? They include everyone who has heard about the cross but does not submit to the Gospel! There can be varying degrees of rejection. Some people may dedicate their lives to blaspheming the Gospel. Others will pretend to love it and pay lip service to it, yet, in their hearts they reject it and refuse to submit to it as they hang on to their sin. Both are enemies of the cross and the message about

it. There are all shades of gray between these two positions. All are equally guilty of hating God's demand for obedience and holiness in their lives.

2. Colossians 1:21-23

²¹ And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled.

²² in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight--

²³ if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister. (NKJ)

In each man's natural state, he is alienated from God and the two are enemies with each other. Wicked works are the heart of the issue. Man loves his sin, is a willing slave to it, and does not want to forsake it. God counts this as an offense. After addressing this issue, the passage then presents man's only hope, reconciliation.

The purpose of a Gospel presentation is to deal with this situation. These are the questions facing man at the point of salvation: Is he looking at Christ to cleanse him of his sins in order to reconcile him with a holy God? Or does he count pleasing his flesh more important than pleasing God and therefore still desires to hold on to his sins, using the cross merely as an escape from judgment? This is the issue of repentance. Who does he want to rule his life? Sin? or God? A man cannot serve two masters (Matthew 6:24). Reconciliation cannot take place between a holy God who hates sin and a man who despises God's holiness, has no desire for it and takes offense in it, and who in truth only wants an escape from God's judgment while he continues in his sin.

Notice the expectation of continuance in the faith mentioned in verse 23. It is true that a person who has been born again cannot be unborn. But, a false professor of faith in Christ, as represented by the second seed landing on the rocky soil, will eventually reveal his true character—unsaved (Matthew 13:20,21). A true believer will persist in his faith and continue in it to the end. If a person departs from the faith, many passages of Scripture indicate that both the person himself as well as others who observe him should count him as unsaved.

3. Romans 8:6-8

⁶ For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.

⁷ Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.

⁸ So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God. (NKJ)

Man's natural, fleshly mind is focused on the things of the flesh, not the things of God. It does not subject itself to God's will or standards. It is an enemy of God and does not please God nor even want to please Him. Such a man does not want reconciliation. He does not want God to transform him to His standards; he wants God to allow his continued rebellion while he only makes a lip service claim to belief. He is not interested in anything that requires true repentance.

4. James 4:4

“Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.”

The attractions of the world seem so important and so satisfying that they squeeze out the things of God. Yet, when a person does this, God says that it results in God counting him as an enemy. It should be terrifying for a person to have the Creator of the universe view him as His enemy! The implications of this are so horrible that they cannot be comprehended by the human mind. A person should jump at the chance to make peace with the Creator as he hears the Gospel. Yet, in only a very few cases does this happen.

5. Romans 5:8-10

⁸ But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

⁹ Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him.

¹⁰ For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.

This verse reveals something totally unexpected, totally foreign to what man would naturally expect. Despite God’s offense to sin, He still loves us. This applies to all of us, even while we are still sinners. God demonstrated this love by sending Christ to die for our sins.

However, there is something extremely important here. The purpose of Christ dying for us was for our justification. That means being declared “just” or “righteous” in God’s eyes, not by our own works but by the righteousness of Christ applied to individuals who take Him to be their Savior. The consequence of this is that we are saved from wrath (that is, the Lake of Fire) and reconciled to God through His Son.

The false Gospel of *experiencing* the abundant life

Any Gospel presentation which does not present Christ’s death as occurring for the sake of reconciling us to a holy God, of saving us from eternal wrath in the Lake of Fire, and giving us eternal life through the resurrected life of Christ, cheapens the Gospel. It can cheapen it so much that it loses its power to save. A Gospel presentation which deliberately avoids dealing with these issues is not a true Gospel presentation.

This issue is extremely relevant to contemporary Christendom. There is a false gospel that is being preached today by many who claim to be Christians. The issue concerns what is properly presented as the primary accomplishment of Christ in His death and resurrection. The controversy concerns the interpretation of this passage:

John 10:10-11

¹⁰ “ I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. ¹¹ ‘I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.’” (NIV)

The issue concerns the meaning of having life “to the full.” The typical claim is that this full, abundant life which God gives us is something to be experienced. Exactly what is to be experienced varies. The “health and wealth” camp claim this is a primary verse that teaches us that God wants us to be healthy and wealthy in order to experience life “to the full.” More conservative variations present the verse as meaning that God wants us to experience a life full of purpose, meaning, love, joy, peace, and so on. Both groups emphasize that the benefits of Christ dying for our sins are to be experienced in this lifetime. Likewise, the penalty for not experiencing these benefits is presented as various kinds and intensities of frustration experienced during this lifetime.

Is this an accurate interpretation and application of the passage? The answer to this hinges on the meaning of the word “life” as it is used in the passage. Actually, there are three different words which are commonly translated as “life” in the Greek language of the original manuscripts of the Bible. It is impossible to understand what this verse means without first understanding the definitions and distinctions of these words and then determining which of them is used in the passage.

1. *Bios*. This word refers primarily to physical life and the manner in which it is experienced. If the Greek text were to use this word, it would give a basis for the *health and wealth* message of some churches and evangelists.

2. *Psuches*. This word refers to the *soul* or *the breath of life*. The soul is an immaterial part of man with perpetual existence. It is the true seat of a person’s will and emotions. Physical death comes when the soul is separated from the body. If the Greek text were to use this word, then it would give a basis for the “*life with purpose and meaning*” message of some churches and evangelists.

3. *Zoe*. This word is used to describe the life God possesses. It is an innate quality of His existence. He possesses it eternally because He is eternal. By contrast, man is born spiritually dead (Ephesians 2:1). However, when a man receives a new birth in Christ, he is made alive. God gives him *zoe*. This is **not** something experienced; it is something possessed. This distinction is critically important. This is the word used for eternal life in John 3:16 as well as many other passages. A saved man has this new *zoe* life without limit. He possesses it perpetually, beginning with the point in time he was created in Christ (Ephesians 2:10), continuing throughout his lifetime here on earth, and then continuing for eternity. It is frequently prefixed with the word *eternal* and called *eternal life*. Other times, the word *eternal* is not used with it. In this case *eternal* is simply understood as inherent in the meaning of the word itself.

So, the question becomes, which of the three words does the Greek text of the New Testament use in the passage? It uses *zoe*. The life that Jesus promised us in this passage is “life without measure” (an alternative translation of “life to the full”), i.e. *eternal life*. Again, it starts at the point of salvation, continues throughout this lifetime, and then continues into eternity. It has no limit or measure. So, the passage in John 10:10 has nothing to do with what we experience here on earth. It has everything to do with the eternal life possessed by one who has been born again.

The next verse, verse 11, drives this point home. In it Jesus says that He is the good shepherd and the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. This was a prophetic statement about when Jesus would eventually offer Himself as a sacrifice for our sins on the cross. There is something critically important in verse 11, though, which does not show up in the English language. The Greek word used for *life* in this verse is NOT *zoe*, but *psuche*. Scripturally, death takes place when the *psuche* is separated from the body. So, when Jesus died on the cross at Calvary, His *psuche* was separated from His body and His body died, even as spoken about in verse 11 above. By contrast *zoe* is eternal and cannot die.

So, this passage teaches that Jesus would someday die for us and that this death would be the basis for Him to give us eternal life. Do you notice something? The two verses quoted above, when combined together, actually teach the same basic message as John 3:16. It may be viewed as the same message as John 3:16, except with a slightly different wording and emphasis.

Most people readily understand that John 3:16 is talking about eternal issues and has nothing to do with experiencing an abundant life here on earth at the present time. John 10:10-11 merely restates the same teaching a few chapters later.

There is another important observation which adds weight to this understanding. The apostle John used the word *zoe* in over thirty verses in his Gospel. Two of these verses refer to God's life. Every one of the others, including John 10:10 as well as John 3:16, refers to the eternal life God gives to His child. There is no legitimate basis to give John 10:10 any other meaning.

Likewise, the epistle of 1 John has ten verses in it which use the word *zoe*. The first two of these refer to God's innate life. The remaining eight are all about the eternal life possessed by a believer. John never uses *zoe* with any other meaning.

The heart of the problem

There is an even bigger, second issue which is actually the heart of the problem. The above false interpretation of the passage leads to a false gospel. It is a gospel which allows one to talk about and pay lip service to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, one which allows a degree of faith in claiming Christ's work for our benefit, but without requiring the person to deal with the repentance required by God for salvation. The purpose of Christ's death is shifted from me being reconciled to a holy Lord to me having a fuller experience of life on this earth. Basically, as a hyperbolic statement the gospel message based on the false interpretation of John 10:10b becomes, "Jesus died to make me happy. I can now experience the fullness that this world offers me better through Christ than I can without Him." This is nothing more than a twisted, counterfeit gospel, one which can appear authentic if one does not look at it carefully.

We should never forget that the problems of this life stem from the curses God spoke in Genesis 3 because of all of the sin and disobedience described in the chapter. The eternal Son of God did not lay aside the outward expression of His deity, take on the form of a man, suffer all of the tests and temptations of this lifetime, and then go through the shame and agony of bearing

the sins of all men on the cross, just to make us happy in this lifetime. In fact, throughout the New Testament we are told to expect persecution and suffering as a direct result of standing for Christ. If Jesus merely wanted to make us happy now, He could have accomplished this by simply letting up on the impact of the curses without going to the cross. However, this would not have provided reconciliation, which is a more important task.

We need to remember that each man already knows of God holiness and lordship and that he rejects them in order to live a self-focused life, one in which gratifying his lusts means everything to him. The false gospel has enough truth in it that it can appear to represent God's promise. However, it also has enough error to pronounce someone "saved" even before has dealt with and resolved the issues of personal sin and Christ's lordship and holiness in his life. He has not been faced and required to deal with the natural enmity between him and God. He is unwilling to acknowledge that God rightfully views his sins as serious enough to require eternity confined within the Lake of Fire, unless He repents while here. He still hates God's lordship and holiness and righteousness. He just wants a free escape ticket from Hell while he continues to be his own lord of his own life.

The typical message of those preaching the false message of experiencing the "abundant life here and now" completely avoids warning about the coming penalty of spending an eternity in the Lake of Fire. This is too offensive to all but those select few who are under true conviction of the Holy Spirit. Instead, the penalty is limited to an unfulfilled life right now. This may not at first appear to be such a big issue, but it is.

The problem with the false approach is that it still leaves a person in control of his life. God's **commands** end up having no teeth; they are merely suggestions. There is no hint of serious, **eternal** consequences happening to a person who ignores the warning—the worse that happens is some kind of frustration in this lifetime. This is appealing to a sinner wanting to soothe his conscience while he still maintains control of his life. I.e., I can serve God when I choose to and He will bless my life here on earth in response to when I do. However, if a particular sin or opportunity to sin is appealingly enough, I can still indulge myself without any significant penalty. I can still be in control of how much control I turn over to God at any time. Many who have already professed to receive the false gospel of the abundant life will still take an immediate offense to a message which includes a warning about an eternity in Hell as a reasonable penalty for an unrepentant sinner. Yet, a person who is still taking offense to this message is not saved.

Serving God in Old Testament Times

At first appearance, serving God under the Law before Christ came was simple. Obey the commands and if you stumbled, you offer a sacrifice. However, in time some people began to look at the sacrifices as payments they made in order to allow them to sin. The problem in this case was one of their hearts. They were not truly trying to get right with God; they only wanted a way to get God off their backs while they continued to live as their own lords. The following two representative passages speak for themselves:

Isaiah 1:11-20

¹¹ "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to Me?" says the LORD. "I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed cattle. I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs or goats.

¹² "When you come to appear before Me, who has required this from your hand, to trample My courts?

¹³ Bring no more futile sacrifices; incense is an abomination to Me. The New Moons, the Sabbaths, and the calling of assemblies—I cannot endure iniquity and the sacred meeting.

¹⁴ Your New Moons and your appointed feasts my soul hates; they are a trouble to Me, I am weary of bearing them.

¹⁵ When you spread out your hands, I will hide My eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood.

¹⁶ "Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil,

¹⁷ Learn to do good; seek justice, rebuke the oppressor; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow.

¹⁸ "Come now, and let us reason together," says the LORD, "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool.

¹⁹ If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land;

²⁰ But if you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured by the sword"; for the mouth of the LORD has spoken. (NKJ)

God was not interested in the sacrifices of a person whose heart was far from Him.

Jeremiah 7:22-26

²² "For I did not speak to your fathers, or command them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices.

²³ "But this is what I commanded them, saying, 'Obey My voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be My people. And walk in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well with you.'

²⁴ "Yet they did not obey or incline their ear, but followed the counsels and the dictates of their evil hearts, and went backward and not forward.

²⁵ "Since the day that your fathers came out of the land of Egypt until this day, I have even sent to you all My servants the prophets, daily rising up early and sending them.

²⁶ "Yet they did not obey Me or incline their ear, but stiffened their neck. They did worse than their fathers. (NKJ)

Again, God was not interested in the sacrifices of a person whose heart was far from Him. Likewise, Jesus made the following comment about the Pharisees,

Matt 15:7-9

⁷ "Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying:

⁸ 'These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me.

⁹ And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.'" (NKJ)

So, God is not interested in lip service from one whose heart is not right. He wants a person truly to seek Him. When a person comes to Christ so that he can experience life to the full, but does not want to face his pending damnation by a Holy God, when he does not want to deal with the issues that he is already suppressing, when he is not interested in true reconciliation, he is still unsaved. Throughout Scripture we see discussions of those who made outward professions of serving God, whose hearts were not right, and remained unsaved. Cain, Balaam, King Saul, Judas, Simon the magician, certain elders of Ephesus, those Jude describe as creeping in unnoticed—all of them had some degree of knowledge of the truth, made outward statements of believing it, and yet were still unsaved.

The Lordship of Christ

As Jesus Christ was preparing to leave the earth and go to heaven until He returns, His final message to His disciples was the Great Commission. This was introduced by the words, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations...teaching them to observe all things I have commanded you...." (Matthew 28:18-19) Christ's supreme authority is the foundation for Gospel preaching. It gives us the authority to preach the Gospel anywhere at any time to any person. The purpose of the message is to make disciples, who are taught to observe everything Jesus has commanded.

Even as we discussed in the opening comment of this article, ultimately every tongue is going to confess Jesus as Lord to the glory of the Father. This should be the underlying motivation which drives us to witness. May the person we are witnessing to acknowledge Christ as Lord now, willingly from the heart!!! Otherwise, he will be forced to at the Great White Throne Judgment! This is the burden and goal of true Gospel preaching.

Throughout the book of Acts, God is presented as the Lord. He is not like a car wash that a person drives through to get the dirt off of his car and then continues happily down the road, owing no allegiance to the car wash. The cleansing is how one comes to find Him as Lord. Keep this in mind as the following passages are read. In it there are summaries of twelve Gospel presentations. These comprise ALL of the Gospel presentations in Acts—every Gospel message in Acts presents Christ as Lord to some degree or other. The consistency over so many passages is significant, particularly when one considers how sketchy and brief some of the summaries are.

1. When the Apostle Paul was making his first missionary trip through Greece, he came to the city of Athens. He was given an opportunity to make a formal presentation at Mars Hill of his beliefs to the philosophers of the city. These men were pagan worshippers of false deities. They were ignorant of the God of the Bible (except as revealed to all men by natural revelation through the creation, in accordance with Psalm 19:1 and Romans 1:18-20.) Paul introduced his message to them with the following statement:

Acts 17:24-27

²⁴ "God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands.

²⁵ "Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things.

²⁶ "And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings,

²⁷ "so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us;
(NKJ)

There are two significant issues concerning the content of this passage:

First, there is a God who created the world and everything in it. This God is Lord of heaven and earth. He is to be worshipped.

Second, it is His will that men should seek Him as the Lord, in hopes that they might find Him.

The priority Paul gives to the Lordship of Christ is consistent with the opening Scripture of this analysis, Phillipans 2:11, ". . . every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." Notice: the tone of this message is totally foreign to the modern contemporary gospel which says that "grace is a free gift available to anyone who claims it, no repentance required, no requirement to face the eternal guilt already earned by already committed sins, no need to recognize that the source of the gift is an all-powerful, eternal God who is holy, who has all authority in Heaven and on Earth, and expects those coming to Him to desire to please Him.

These two declarations establish the framework for the Gospel that follows. Men have the responsibility to seek this One who is innately the Lord. The Gospel which we preach provides the means for a sin laden man to be reconciled to a Creator God who is innately the Lord. Notice, it is not that they necessarily take Christ to be the Lord as a specific act, which some theologians have equated with works salvation. It is rather that they understand that they are coming to a holy God in order to be reconciled to Him and that **by nature He is Lord**. There is no reconciliation without a person understanding who God is and what He expects.

It is not that a person comes to God promising never to sin. That would be a future works kind of salvation. Furthermore, no man can live up to God's holiness until He sees Christ face to face and is transformed to be like Him after his service on earth is over (1 John 3:2). Rather, it is recognizing that he is guilty before a holy God who is innately Lord and that he looks at Jesus Christ as the means of this reconciliation. There needs to be a desire to please this Lord. There needs to be the desire that God will give him the power to do good works. The moment of salvation is when a person believes on (relies on) the cross as the means of becoming reconciled with a Holy Lord who desires him to do good works.

2. Peter's message on the day of Pentecost in Acts chapter 2 was the first time the Gospel was publically preached after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Throughout the message, Peter refers to the holiness and lordship of Christ. As the end of the message approaches, Peter concludes

Acts 2:34-38

³⁴ "For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he says himself: 'The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand,

³⁵ Till I make Your enemies Your footstool.'"

³⁶ Therefore let all the house of Israel **know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.**

³⁷ Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?"

³⁸ **Then Peter said to them, 'Repent,** and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins" (NKJ)

So, those hearing the message needed to know that God made Jesus to be Lord and Christ (King). They needed to repent as a means to receive remissions of sins. In their society it was understood that Lord's and Kings expected loyal obedience.

3. Acts 3 gives an account of a certain event in which a man lame from his mother's womb is healed at the gate of the Temple in Jerusalem. A crowd collected in response to the excitement this caused and Peter used this as an opportunity to preach the Gospel to the crowd. In the message at verse 14, Jesus is called the *holy One*. In verse 15 He is called the "Prince of life." In verse 19, those in the audience are called on to "Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out." In verse 26, the invitation concludes with the statement, "To you first, God, having raised up His Servant Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from your iniquities." The invitation concluded with a statement that those hearing the message are to turn away from their iniquities. So, a component of true repentance, of repentance which leads to salvation, is submitting to God's expectation that those hearing the message are to turn from their sin to a life pleasing a holy God. The responsibility to do this flows from the Lordship of God. It is lordship in action.

4. Acts chapter 7 talks about the martyrdom of Stephen. Stephen had an opportunity to witness to the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem. He gave a rather long message in which he painstakingly established over a long period of Jewish history how God was constantly striving for the people of Israel to serve Him from an obedient heart. He sent them prophets to teach them what He wanted. Their response was to kill the prophets. Stephen then got very direct with those in the audience. He was confronting them with their sin. At the end of the message, the following took place:

Acts 7:51-59

⁵¹ "[Stephen speaking] You stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you.

⁵² "Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers,

⁵³ "who have received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept it."

⁵⁴ When they heard these things they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed at him with their teeth.

...
59 And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on God and saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."

Stephen was trying to bring these leaders to see the seriousness of their condition before God so that they might repent. He was extremely direct in confronting them with their sin and declaring the necessity for them to turn from it. Unfortunately, in their hardness of heart they chose to kill him rather than to repent. He was not allowed to complete his message, but in his final comment as he dies, he calls on the Lord Jesus. He addresses Jesus as Lord! Compare Stephen's message with the contemporary one of "Jesus died so that you can experience life to the full!" The contrast in subject matter between truly Biblical preaching of the Gospel and the modern false imitation is dramatic.

5. In Acts chapter 8, Simon the Magician outwardly makes a profession of believing Christ. However, he has not truly repented, but is still focused on himself. He was not wanting to be a servant of the Lord, but wanted to increase his power so that anyone he laid his hands on would receive the Holy Spirit. However, God determines who comes to him, not man. In effect, Simon wanted to be lord over God instead of vice-versa.

Acts 8:13, 18-23

13 Then Simon himself also believed; and when he was baptized he continued with Philip, and was amazed, seeing the miracles and signs which were done.

...
18 And when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money,

19 saying, "Give me this power also, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit."

20 But Peter said to him, "Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money!

21 "You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God.

22 "Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you.

23 "For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity."

Perhaps it is worth noting that in the occult arts, a spell is understood as the means to control the forces and spirits of nature. Simon may have made a superficial belief in Christ, but was still rejecting all notion of submitting himself to God's authority. He still wanted to be his own god—i.e. he wanted to have control over who would receive the Holy Spirit.

Peter understood the significance of Simon's request and Peter's response was immediate and forceful. Simon was still perishing! He had neither part nor portion in the things of God! His heart was not right in the sight of God! He needed to repent of his wickedness! He needed to pray that perhaps his heart attitude might be forgiven him!

Church history records that eventually Simon became one of the church's most belligerent opponents of the Gospel. He was willing to make an outward profession of belief. He was willing to claim the benefits of grace for himself. But, he rejected the lordship of Christ, actually wanting to make God subject to him. As an understatement, God was not impressed with his profession. By all indications Simon is in Hades right now, waiting until the time comes for him to confess that Christ truly is Lord to the glory of the Father. This will happen when he bows the knee before Christ at the Great White Throne Judgment and his works are judged to determine the full extent of his punishment.

6. In Acts chapter 8, the evangelist Phillip hears a certain man, an Ethiopian eunuch, reading from Isaiah 53 a passage about the Servant of God (i.e., Christ) who makes Himself an offering for sin. He invites Phillip to explain the meaning of the passage. We read,

Acts 8:35-38

³⁵ Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him.

³⁶ Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, "See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?"

³⁷ Then Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And he answered and said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."

³⁸ So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him.

Phillip explained the deity of Jesus, the Kingship of Jesus, and the importance of obeying Him. It is refreshing to read of his testimony. He without hesitation confesses that Jesus Christ [the King] is the Son of God. In that society, being King and Son of God indicates one who is to be ruler and obeyed. He had no problem with this and immediately wanted to be baptized as an expression of the belief from his heart. He was saved by his faith and immediately wanted to obey.

7. In Acts 9, the Apostle Paul gets converted.

Acts 9:3-6

³ And as he [Paul] journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven.

⁴ Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?"

⁵ And he said, "Who are You, **Lord**?" And **the Lord** said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads."

⁶ So he, trembling and astonished, said, "**Lord, what do You want me to do?**" And the Lord said to him, "Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

This passage has always intrigued me. Paul hears a strange voice calling out his name and he recognizes immediately that God is speaking to him. He does not yet understand who is talking, but immediately submits to Him as Lord and addresses Him as such. This is the proper response to God. It is also the proper response to the Gospel As mentioned earlier in our discussion of Romans 1:18-25, every person already has God's lordship impressed upon his

heart. The issue is how he responds to this: submission or suppression. Jesus announced that it was He, Jesus, the One that Paul had been persecuting, that was speaking to Him. He then said it was hard for Paul to kick against the goads. In other words, the Holy Spirit had been convicting Paul about the truth of the Gospel. He would certainly have heard this message over and over as he arrested all of the Christians he was able to round up. He was beginning to understand the truth of the message, but was fighting against it. Apparently, as Jesus spoke these words, Paul quit kicking against the goads, he quit resisting the Holy Spirit. He already knew the Gospel and in his heart he turned to Christ to save Him. He was saved in that instant. Now, with a true servant's heart, he asks Christ what Christ wants him to do, again addressing Him as Lord.

So for Paul, getting saved was the process by which Christ became the Lord of his life.

Notice how foreign the content of this passage is to that of those who cheapen the Gospel, claiming that Jesus died and rose again merely so that we can experience this life to the full! Actually, in Paul's case coming to Christ was to result in tremendous suffering. (Acts 9:16).

8. In Acts 10, the Peter preaches the Gospel to Cornelius, a Gentile and a Roman army officer.

Acts 10:34-36, 42-43

³⁴ Then Peter opened his mouth and said: "In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality.

³⁵ "But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him.

³⁶ "The word which God sent to the children of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ-- He is Lord of all--

⁴² "And He commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that it is He who was ordained by God to be Judge of the living and the dead.

⁴³ "To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins."

So, Peter starts his Gospel presentation with a declaration that Jesus Christ is Lord of all men, regardless of their nationality. He concludes with a statement of how each person is ultimately going to be judged by Jesus Christ for his sins, but that whoever believes in Him can have his sins remitted.

Christ's lordship and his role of being the Judge at The Great White Throne Judgment are presented in this message.

9. In Acts 16 we read of the salvation of the Philippian jailer's salvation:

Acts 16:30-33

³⁰ And he [the jailer] brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

³¹ So they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household."

³² Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house.

³³ And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized. (NKJ)

Notice how the Gospel message is presented as placing faith in the One who is Lord. Salvation is presented as reconciliation to One who claims the right to rule over a person. Christ's lordship is then expanded on in the message. Ultimately the jailer and his family responded in faith and obedience and were baptized that night.

10. In Acts 18, Paul has left Athens and the Mars Hill philosophers and moved on to Corinth. His message is very briefly summarized as follows:

Acts 18:5

"When Silas and Timothy had come from Macedonia, Paul was compelled by the Spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus is the Christ."

At the end of this section we will analyze how the title "the Christ" refers to Jesus' Kingship, which is a position of rule or lordship. A King expects true allegiance and submission to His authority. Moreover, Christ's rule goes beyond that of ordinary kings; He also understands the intent of a person's thoughts—there is no "faking it" with Him. Obviously, this statement opens up all kinds of potential topics worthy of discussion. But, the one subject most naturally flowing from the statement is that Jesus is the "King" is a person's innate responsibility to submit to His Kingly authority.

11. In Acts 26 Paul makes his defense before King Agrippa. This was technically merely a show time; it had already been decreed that Paul was going to make his case before the emperor and this occasion had no bearing on anything, one way or the other. So, for Paul this was an excellent opportunity to give a forceful, no-holds-barred presentation of the Gospel. Perhaps God might use this experience as a "dress rehearsal" for the time when Paul actually stood before Nero, the Emperor.

Acts 26:19-20

¹⁹ "Therefore, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision,

²⁰ "but declared first to those in Damascus and in Jerusalem, and throughout all the region of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance. (NKJ)

This is another intriguing passage. The Gospel is not presented as a mere fire escape from Hell. Rather, it is intended that when a person repents, that this will result in his doing works appropriate to repentance. Notice, the sinner is not promising to do good works. That would be a form of works salvation. The issue is one of attitude. The sinner recognizes God expects good works as a result of salvation and it is his desire to give God these works. The issue is attitude. The true Gospel message is presented in a way to produce this attitude.

12. In Acts 28 Paul has finally reached Rome as a prisoner. He is waiting for his trial before Nero, the Emperor. He is given the freedom to stay in his own rented house and people can visit him freely. His message is only briefly alluded to. However, in these few words, it is

mentioned twice that he preached about the kingdom of God. Hence, the only subject specifically mentioned was focused on the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ (the King of the kingdom).

Acts 28:23-24, 30-31

²³ So when they had appointed him a day, many came to him at his lodging, to whom he explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets, from morning till evening.

²⁴ And some were persuaded by the things which were spoken, and some disbelieved.

...

³⁰ Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him,

³¹ preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him. (NKJ)

We have now surveyed 12 incidents from the book of Acts which describe the preaching of the Gospel by various messengers in the early church, beginning with Paul's message to the philosophers at Mars Hill and then following that with 11 other passages. There are only 12 incidents recorded in Acts and every single one of them speaks to some degree of the lordship of Christ in its presentation of the Gospel. This should provide a strong testimony to us of its importance. So, whether Peter, or Phillip, or Paul was preaching the Gospel, the message talked about the lordship of the King (Christ) as a fundamental element.

I have heard some people reject any relationship between the lordship of Jesus Christ and the Gospel. They typically claim that lordship is an issue to be dealt with later, after a person is saved. Their argument is at least in part based on 1 Corinthians 15:2-5. This passage defines the Gospel, which is the unique message with the power to save (Romans 1:16). It appears not to mention anything about lordship. It reads as follows:

1 Corinthians 15:2-5

² ... by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you— unless you believed in vain.

³ For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,

⁴ and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures,

⁵ and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve.

This passage states that it merely summarizes doctrines taught in other passages of Scripture; it does not stand alone. It should be viewed as a simple summary or outline of a true Gospel presentation, but one which needs to be embellished and expanded according to the understanding and knowledge of the audience and as presented in other Scriptures.

Superficially, it might appear that this passage does not mention lordship as a component of the Gospel. However, notice who died for our sins. The passage does not state "Jesus died for our sins..." This would have emphasized Jesus' humanity. Rather, it reads that *Christ* died for our sins. So, let's expand this based on who *the Christ* is.

Christ is a title, not actually a name as the English translation implies. It is the Greek word for “the anointed One.” This anointed One is the promised King of the Old Testament. Kings by right expect loyal obedience by any who claim their allegiance to him. Those within his domain of authority who do not recognize his authority are counted his enemies. Since Christ is the Creator, all men are inherently subject to Him. However, He is not just any King, but He is the Lord of Lords and Kings of Kings (Revelation 19: 6 says of Him, “And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.”)

Who is the One who died for me and you and everyone in the world? It is the KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS that I come to for salvation!!!

For a person to think that he can come to a person of this rank and dignity with a false heart, not actually willing to acknowledge This One’s innate right to rule over him, is foolish. They are as foolish as the Old Testament sinners who acknowledged God with their lips but whose heart was far from Him. They also need to remember that this God is the one who searches all hearts and understands all the intent of the thoughts. We read:

1 Chronicles 28:9

"As for you, my son Solomon, know the God of your father, and serve Him with a loyal heart and with a willing mind; for the LORD searches all hearts and understands all the intent of the thoughts. If you seek Him, He will be found by you; but if you forsake Him, He will cast you off forever. (NKJ)

It is foolish for a person to pretend to receive Him as Savior while rebelling against His innate authority in his heart. This is not truly seeking Him. It only adds to his guilt because he has been confronted with the reality of a Creator God Savior, but rejects the message. He is not saved. Because his heart is not right, Christ casts him off forever! Remember Simon the Magician.

All judgment has been given to the Son (John 5:22-29). It is Jesus Christ Himself who will be offended and in anger tell the person to depart from Him and that He never knew him as He orders him cast into the Lake of Fire. We need to remember Jesus’ words in the Sermon on the Mount:

Matt 7:21-23

²¹ "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.

²² "Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?'

²³ "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'

Sadly, there will be many people who thought they were saved who, nonetheless, find themselves being cast into the Lake of Fire at the Great White Throne Judgment. There can be many reasons for a false profession. Even calling Jesus “Lord, Lord,” but not from a true heart is

inadequate, for God judges the heart. Cain provides a clear example of this, as also does Balaam, King Saul, etc.

A person is still unsaved who is still offended when he hears a message which focuses on God's true holiness and Christ's desire to be the Lord of his life. This is particularly the case if he is still offended when he is warned about pending judgment, eternally tormented in a Lake of Fire. He is unsaved until and unless he truly repents.

According to John 16:7-11, the things that the Holy Spirit uses to convince a person of the truth of the Gospel are the same things that we have been talking about here: the seriousness of man's sin in God's eyes, the absolute righteousness of God, and the judgment that is waiting for the unconverted sinner. Any profession of faith which is not the result of the convicting work of the Holy Spirit is a profession done in the flesh. Such a person is not saved. A true Gospel message MUST be focused on sin, righteousness, and judgment AS GOD DEFINES THEM—not merely twisting in order to remove as much offense as possible.

Woe to a preacher who delivers a false message to an unsaved person in order to make him think he has been saved, when actually the person has never been confronted with the nature of his true condition before God and is still continuing in his resistance to Him.

This is why Paul presented to the pagan philosophers on Mars Hill that they have the responsibility to seek the Lord in an effort to find Him. The Gospel is God's only provision for reconciliation to the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. It is never presented in the New Testament as a free pass for a person to continue in his sins.

In conclusion, as we preach the Gospel we should always keep in mind the original passage we looked at in the beginning of this analysis:

Phillipians 2:9-11

⁹ Therefore God also has highly exalted Him [Jesus] and given Him the name which is above every name,

¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth,

¹¹ and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Whether a person is saved or unsaved, this is what it is all about. Some will confess Him as Lord willingly, from the heart and be blessed by Him. Others will confess Him as Lord under compulsion as He casts them into the Lake of Fire. May God grant us the wisdom and the courage and the open door to fulfill in our lives the request by Paul and his associates as follows:

Colossians 4:3-4

³ . . . praying at the same time for us as well, that God may open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ, for which I have also been imprisoned;

⁴ in order that I may make it clear in the way I ought to speak. (NAS)