

Lord and Saviour

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"My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord"
—Isaiah 55:8

Most solemnly do these words make manifest the terrible havoc which sin has wrought in fallen mankind. They are out of touch with their Maker; nay more, they are "alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart" (Eph 4:18). In consequence of this the soul has lost its anchorage, everything has been thrown out of gear, and human depravity has turned all things upside down. Instead of subordinating the concerns of this life to the interests of the life to come, man devotes himself principally to the present, and gives little or no thought unto the eternal hereafter. Instead of putting the good of his soul before the needs of the body, man is chiefly occupied about food and raiment. Instead of man's great aim being to please God, ministering to self has become his prime business.

Man's thoughts ought to be governed by God's Word, and his ways regulated by God's revealed will. But the converse is the case. Hence it is that the things which are of great price in the sight of God (1 Peter 3:4) are despised by the fallen creature, and hence it is that "that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God" (Luke 16:15). Man has turned things topsy-turvy. This is sadly evidenced when he attempts to handle Divine things: the perversity which sin has caused appears in our reversing God's order. Holy Scripture speaks of man's "spirit and soul and body" (1 Thess 5:23), but when the world makes reference thereto, it says "body, soul, and spirit"-- witness the motto of the YMCA. Scripture declares that Christians are "strangers and pilgrims" in this scene, but nine times out of ten, even good men talk and write of "pilgrims and strangers."

This tendency to reverse God's order of things is part and parcel of fallen man's nature, and unless the Holy Spirit interposes by working in us a miracle of grace, its effects are fatal to the soul. Nowhere do we have a more fearful and tragic example of this than in the evangelistic message which is now being given out, though scarcely any wrong with the world is widely recognized. That Christendom too is in a sad state many are painfully conscious: that error abounds on every side, that practical godliness is at a low ebb, that worldliness has devitalized most of the churches, is apparent to an increasing number of earnest souls. But there are few indeed whose eyes are open to see how bad things are, few indeed perceive that things are rotten at the very foundation. Yet such is the case.

God's way of salvation is almost entirely unknown today. The "Gospel" which is being preached, even in "orthodox" circles, where it is supposed that the faith once delivered to the saints is still being earnestly contended for, is an erroneous gospel. Even there man has reversed God's order. With very rare exceptions it is being taught (and has been for upwards of thirty years) that nothing more is required in order for a sinner's salvation than that he "accept Christ as his personal Saviour." Later, he ought to bow to Him as Lord, consecrate his life to Him, and serve Him fully and gladly. But though he fails to do so, nevertheless Heaven is sure unto him. He will lack peace and joy now, and probably miss some of the millennial "crown," but having received Christ "as his personal Saviour," he has been delivered from the wrath to come. Such is a reversing of God's order. It is the Devil's lie, and only the Day to come will show how many have been fatally deceived by it.

We are well aware that the above is strong language, and likely to come as a shock unto many of our readers, but we beg them to test it by what now follows. In every passage of the New Testament where these two titles occur together it is "Lord and Saviour," and never "Saviour and Lord." The mother of Jesus proclaimed, "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour" (Luke 1:46-47). Unless Jehovah had first become her "Lord," most

certainly He would not have been her "Saviour." No spiritual mind that seriously ponders the matter can have any difficulty in perceiving this. How should the thrice holy God save one who scorned His authority, despised His honour, and flouted His revealed will. It is indeed infinite grace that God is ready to be reconciled to us when we throw down the weapons of our rebellion against Him, but it would be an act of unrighteousness, a putting a premium upon lawlessness, were he to pardon any sinner before he was first reconciled to His offended Maker.

In 2 Peter 1:10 the saints of God are bidden to make their "calling and election sure" (and this, by adding to their faith the other graces enumerated in vv. 5-7), and are assured that if they do so they shall never fall, for so an entrance shall be ministered unto them abundantly "into the everlasting kingdom of our (1) Lord and (2) Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 1:11): that is, an abundant entrance should be given them now into His kingdom of grace, and hereafter into His kingdom of glory. But what we would particularly note is the order in which Christ's titles are here mentioned: it is not "our Saviour and Lord" as the corrupt preaching and teaching of this degenerate day presents it; but instead, "Lord and Saviour," for He becomes the Saviour of none until the heart and will unreservedly receive Him as LORD.

"For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning" (2 Peter 2:20). Here the apostle refers to those who had a head-knowledge of the Truth, and then apostatized. There had been a reformation in their outward lives, but no regeneration of the heart. For a while they were delivered from the pollutions of the world, but no super-natural work of grace having been wrought in their souls, the lust of the flesh proved too strong, and they were again overcome; returning to their former manner of life like the dog to its vomit and the sow to its wallowing in the mire. The apostasy is described as "to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them," which has a reference to the terms of discipleship made known in the Gospel. But what we are particularly concerned with is the Spirit's order: these apostates had been favoured with the "knowledge of (1) the Lord and (2) Saviour Jesus Christ."

In 2 Peter 3:18 God's people are exhorted to "grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." Here again God's order is the very opposite of man's. Nor is this merely a technical detail, concerning which a mistake is of little moment. No, the subject of which we are now treating is basic, vital, fundamental, and error at this point is fatal. Those who have not submitted unto Christ as LORD, but are trusting in Him as "Saviour" are deceived, and unless God graciously dis-illusions them, will go down to the everlasting burnings with a lie in their right hand (Isa 44:20).

The same principle is clearly illustrated in passages where other titles of Christ occur. Take the opening verse of the New Testament, where He is presented as "Jesus Christ (1) the son of David, (2) the son of Abraham." Let us view these titles from the doctrinal and practical viewpoint, which should ever be our first consideration. "Son of David" brings in the throne; it emphasizes His authority; it demands allegiance to His sceptre. And "son of David" comes before "son of Abraham"! Again, in Acts 5:31 we are told, that God had exalted Jesus to His own right hand "to be (1) a Prince and (2) a Saviour." The concept embodied in the title "Prince" is that of supreme dominion and authority, as Revelation 1:5 clearly shows: "The Prince of the kings of the earth."

If we turn to the book of Acts and read it attentively, we shall quickly discover that the message of the apostles was altogether different--not only in emphasis, but in substance--from the preaching of our times. On the day of Pentecost Peter declared, "Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (2:21), and reminded his hearers that God had made Jesus (or manifested Him to be) "both Lord and Christ" (2:36), not Christ and Lord! To Cornelius and his household Peter presented Christ as "Lord of all" (10:36). When Barnabas came to Antioch, he "exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord" (11:23). There

also Paul and Barnabas "commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed" (14:23). At the great synod in Jerusalem, Peter reminded his fellows that the Gentiles would "seek after [not only a "Saviour," but] the Lord" (15:17). To the Philippian jailor and his household Paul and Silas preached "the Word of the Lord" (16:32).

What we specially desire the reader to see is not only that the apostles emphasized the Lordship of Christ, but that they made surrender thereto essential unto salvation. This is clear from many other passages. For example, we read "And believers were the more added to [not "Christ," but] the Lord" (Acts 5:14). "And all that dwelt at Lydda and Saron saw him, and turned to the Lord" (9:35). "And many believed in the Lord" (9:42). "And much people was added unto the Lord" (11:24). "Then the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord" (13:12). "And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house" (18:8).

The fact is that very, very few today have any right conception of what a scriptural and saving conversion consists of. The call to it is set forth in Isaiah 55:7, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return [having in Adam departed] unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him." The character of it is described in 1 Thessalonians 1:9, "Ye turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God." Conversion, then, is a turning from sin unto holiness, from self unto God, from Satan unto Christ. It is the voluntary surrendering of ourselves to the Lord Jesus, not only by a consent of dependence upon His merits, but also by a willing readiness to obey Him, giving up the keys of our hearts and laying them at His feet. It is the soul declaring, "O Lord our God, lords beside Thee have had dominion over us [namely, the world, the flesh, and the Devil]; but by Thee only will we make mention of Thy name" (Isa 26:13).

"Conversion consists in our being recovered from our present sinfulness to the moral image of God, or, which is the same thing, to a real conformity to the moral law. But a conformity to the moral law consists in a disposition to love God supremely, live to Him ultimately, and delight in Him superlatively, and to love our neighbor as ourselves; and a practice agreeing thereto. And therefore conversion consists in our being recovered from what we are by nature to such a disposition and practice" (James Bellamy, 1770). Searching indeed are those words in Acts 3:26, "Unto you first God having raised up His Son Jesus, sent Him to bless you in turning away every one of you from his iniquities." This is Christ's mode of blessing men: converting them. However the Gospel may instruct and enlighten men, so long as they remain the slaves of sin, it has conferred upon them no eternal advantage: "Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves, servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?" (Rom 6:16).

Let us point out here that there is a very real difference between believing in the Deity of Christ and surrendering to His Lordship. There are many who are firmly persuaded that Jesus is the Son of God. They have not a doubt that He is the Maker of heaven and earth. But that is no proof of conversion. The demons owned Him as the "Son of God" (Matt 8:29). What we are pressing in this article is not the mind's assent to the Godhood of Christ, but the will's yielding to His authority, so that the life is regulated by His commandments. While there must be a believing in Him, there must also be a subjecting of ourselves to Him: the one being useless without the other. As Hebrews 5:9 so plainly tells us, "He became the Author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him."

Yet in the very face of the sunlight-clear teaching of Holy Writ, intimated above, when unsaved people are concerned about (we will not say their dreadful state, but) their future destiny, and inquire, "What must we do to be saved?" the only answer they are now given is, "Accept Christ as your personal Saviour," no effort being made to press upon them (as Paul did upon the Philippian jailor) the Lordship of Christ. John 1:12 is the verse which many a blind leader of the blind glibly quotes: "But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of

God." Perhaps the reader objects, "But nothing is there said about receiving Christ as Lord." Directly, no; nor is anything there said about receiving Christ "as a personal Saviour"! It is a whole Christ which must be received, or none at all. Why seek to halve Him?

But if the objector will carefully ponder the context of John 1:12 he will, unless blinded by prejudice, quickly discover that it is as LORD, Christ is there presented, and as such must be "received" by us. In the previous verse we are told, "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not." Why, clearly, as the Owner and Master of Israel; and it was as such they "received Him not." Consider too what He does for those who do receive Him: "to them gave He power [the right or prerogative] to become the sons of God." Who but the Lord of lords is vested with authority to give unto others the title to be sons of God!

In his unregenerate state, no sinner is subject to Christ as Lord, though he may be fully convinced of and freely acknowledge His Deity, and employ the words "Lord Jesus" when referring to Him. When we say that no unregenerate person "is subject unto Christ as Lord," we mean that His will is not the rule of life; to please, obey, honour and glorify Christ, is not the dominant aim, disposition, and striving of the heart. No, so far from this being the case, his real sentiment is "Who is the Lord that I should obey His voice?" (Exo 5:2). The whole trend of his life in a saying is: "I will not have this Man to reign over me" (Luke 19:14). Despite all their religious pretensions, the actual attitude of the unregenerate unto God is, "Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of Thy ways: what is the Almighty, that we should serve [be in subjection to] Him?" (Job 21:14-15). Their conduct intimates "our lips are our own, who is Lord over us!" (Psalm 12:4). Instead of surrendering to God in Christ, every sinner "turns unto his own way" (Isa 53:6), living only to please self.

When the Holy Spirit convicts one of sin, He causes that person to see what SIN really is. He makes the convicted one to understand and feel that sin is rebellion against God, that it is a refusal to submit to the LORD. The Spirit causes him to recognize and realize that he has been an insurrectionist against Him who is exalted above all. He is now convicted not only of this or that sin, this or that "idol," but is brought to realize that his whole life has been a fight against God; that he has knowingly, willfully, and constantly ignored and defied Him, deliberately preferring and choosing to go his own way. The work of the Spirit in God's elect is now so much to show and convince each of them that they are "lost sinners" (the conscience of the natural man knows that, without any supernatural operation of the Spirit!), as it is to reveal the exceeding "sinfulness of sin" (Rom 7:13); and that, by making us to see and feel the fact that all sin is a species of spiritual anarchy, a defiance of the "Lordship" of God.

Hence it is that when a man has really and truly been "convicted" by the supernatural operations of the Holy Spirit, the first effect is complete and abject despair in the heart. It now appears to that one that his case is utterly hopeless. He now perceives he has sinned so grievously that it appears impossible for a righteous God to do anything but damn him for all eternity. He now sees what a fool he has been in thus heeding the voice of temptation, fighting against the Most High, and in losing his own soul. He now recalls how often God has spoken to him in the past--as a child, as a youth, as an adult, upon a bed of sickness, in the death of a loved one, in adversities-- and how he refused to hearken, deliberately turning a deaf ear, and defiantly going on his own way. He now feels that he has in truth sinned away his day of grace.

Ah, my reader, the ground must be ploughed and harrowed before it is made receptive to the seed. So the heart must be prepared by these harrowing experiences, the stubborn will broken, before it is ready for the balm of the Gospel. But O how very few ever are savingly "convicted" by the Spirit! As the Spirit continues His work in the soul, ploughing still deeper, revealing the hideousness and heinousness of SIN, producing a horror of and hatred for it; he next begets the beginning of hope, which issues in an earnest and diligent seeking and inquiry, "What must I do to be saved?" Then it is that He who has come to earth to glorify Christ, presses upon that awakened soul the claims of His Lordship--set forth in such passages as Luke 14:26-33--and

gives us to realize that Christ demands our hearts, lives, and all. Then it is He grants grace unto the quickened soul to renounce all other "lords," to turn away from all "idols" and to receive Christ as Prophet, Priest and King.

And nothing but the sovereign and supernatural work of God the Spirit can bring this to pass. Surely this is self-evident. A preacher may induce a man to believe what Scripture says about his lost and undone condition, persuade him to "bow to" the Divine verdict, and then "accept Christ as his personal Saviour." No man wants to go to hell, and if he be intellectually assured that Christ stands ready as a fire-escape, on the sole condition that he jumps into His arms ("rest on His finished work"), thousands will do so. But a hundred preachers are unable to make an unregenerate person realize the unspeakably dreadful nature of SIN, make him feel that he has been a lifelong rebel against God, so change his heart that he now hates himself, and longs to please God and serve Christ. Only God the Spirit can bring any man to the place where he is willing to forsake every idol, cut off an hindering right hand or pluck out an offending right eye, if so be that Christ will "receive" him! Ah, a miracle of grace has been wrought when we give up ourselves to the Lord (2 Cor 8:5) to be ruled by Him.

Ere closing, let us anticipate and remove an objection. Probably some are disposed to say in reply to what has been written above, "But the exhortations addressed to the saints in the New Testament epistles show that it is Christians, and not the unsaved, who are required to surrender to God and yield to Christ's Lordship"--Romans 12:1, etc. Such a mistake, now alas so commonly made, only serves to demonstrate the gross spiritual darkness which has enveloped even "orthodox" Christendom. The exhortations of the Epistles simply signify that Christians are to continue AS they began: "As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord so walk ye in Him" (Col 2:6). All the exhortations of the New Testament may be summed up in but a few words: "Come to Christ," "Abide in Him," and what is "abiding" but coming to Christ constantly--1 Peter 2:4! The saints who were exhorted as per Romans 12:1 had already been bidden to "yield" themselves "unto God" (6:13)! While we are left on earth we shall ever need such admonitions. Proof of what we have said is found in Revelation 2: the backslidden church at Ephesus was told to "Repent and do the first works" (v. 5)!

And now dear reader, a pointed question: IS CHRIST YOUR LORD? Does He indeed and in truth occupy the throne of your heart? Does He actually rule your life? If not, then most certainly He is NOT your "Saviour." Unless your heart has been renewed, unless grace has changed you from a lawless rebel into a loving and loyal subject, then you are yet in your sins, on the broad road that leadeth to destruction. May it please God in His sovereign grace, to speak loudly to some precious souls through this article.