

Christ is Lord: What Does it Mean?

We enter the domain of God's reign when we enthrone Christ as Lord of our life. This seems simple enough. But actually, I think there's a lot of misunderstanding of what this means.

The Bible says that if we "declare with our mouth 'Jesus is Lord,' we "will be saved" (Rom.10:9). To the thinking of many consumeristic-minded people today, this is simply a cheap deal that is too good to pass up.

What does it mean to confess that "Jesus is Lord"? According to West's Dictionary, a "lord" is one who "has power and authority over others." I don't think the Greek concept of "lord" (*kurios*) as applied to Jesus Christ is very far from this.

So, when a person confesses that "Jesus is Lord," they are confessing that Jesus "has power and authority" over them. And for a person to confess that someone "has power and authority" over them means they submit to them. What else could it possibly mean for someone to have "power and authority" over another?

If someone confesses "Jesus is Lord" but doesn't actually submit to his "power and authority," they are *contradicting themselves*. Their confession is meaningless. It's like confessing "milk flats tire poke" or "round square" or "nikbo jip slupe" – or (better), just remaining silent.

No wonder Jesus asked, "Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not the things that I say?" He's pointing out that people who do this are simply saying "nikbo jip slupe."

The simple truth is that when Paul tells us that if we confess "Jesus is Lord" we will be saved, he's not giving us a magical salvation verbal formula. Rather, he's stipulating what *kind of relationship* we need to have with Jesus to be "saved." This relationship, by definition, must be one of submission. We are saved when we authentically surrender our life over to Christ. This not only changes our eternal destiny, but it begins to bring wholeness into our life, as the Jewish concept of salvation (*shalom, soteria*) implies.

This leads to a rather sobering conclusion. Folks who confess "Jesus is Lord" as a magical formula to invoke a supposed legal transaction in heaven without actually submitting their lives to Christ are kidding themselves. I know that may sound harsh. But I don't see any way of avoiding this conclusion.

Now, I can immediately hear someone wondering, “Well, how submitted to I have to be to be saved?” When I first became a Christian, I belonged to a church that basically said *any* and *every* sin *un*-saves you. You’re only as saved as your last sinless moment. So, they would say only 100% submission saves you.

I didn’t last long in that church.

But the funny thing was, the people of this congregation seemed to me to be serious sinners. They didn’t smoke or drink or go to movies or dance or a million other things. But they were packed full of religious self-righteousness, gossiped like it was nobody’s business, and didn’t share much of what they had with the poor (though most seemed pretty well off).

Now, this meant to be a slam on my first church, because the truth is that all churches are packed full of sinners – because we’re in them. So if 100% submission is required, then we’re all lost.

So then, what percentage “gets us in”?

May I suggest that this is the *exact wrong question to be asking?* It’s still operating with a legal-transaction mentality, treating God like a cosmic attorney who relates to us in a court of law rather than a cosmic lover who simply wants our hearts so he can dance with us throughout eternity.

It’d be a pretty sick marriage if one spouse were to ask the other spouse, “What’s the minimal level I can be committed to my marriage vows without you divorcing me?” Well, this is basically what we’re doing when we ask, “How submitted do I have to be to the Lord to be saved?”

To confess Christ as Lord isn’t a pledge that one will at all times be perfectly submitted to Christ. But it is a pledge of commitment that one will seek to cultivate a life of submission to Christ. And if this pledge isn’t present, the confession is devoid of meaning.

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