

What: Article for February
For: The Free Grace Alliance
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LORDSHIP SANCTIFICATION

Have you ever noticed how busy everyone is with getting words just right? It turns out to be more than political correctness, it is really an issue of communication. You may not have thought about it this way, but language is actually the most 'democratic' thing on the planet. The use of words actually determines their meanings; and, of course, the use of words in a particular context determines THAT meaning. If I tell you I love my wife, my dog, and my Kindle, then surely you can make out the different nuances.

More to our common faith, it has become a recent trend to refer to oneself as a “Christ-Follower” rather than a Christian. The reason for this shift is that the word 'Christian' has fallen on hard time and doesn't communicate the right meaning internationally or practically. 'Fundamentalist' (in the faith) has fallen under the same spell of disrepute because it has been associated with certain militaristic 'Christian' sub-strata, as well as 'Islamic Fundamentalism'. So do we change words or keep working on the proper use of the terms? Democrats and Republicans have been two groups whose names have fallen on hard times in the back-and-forth nature of popularity. They just keep working at redefining their name.

The Context

I'll leave it to you to solve such matters. My concern here is with the Gospel of Grace. The debate between Lordship Salvation and Free Grace has been muddling along for the better part of 100 years in noticeable ways. Here's an example that predates John MacArthur's entrance into the foray with *The Gospel According to Jesus* in 1986. A.W. Tozer in *The Root of the Righteous* (Wingspread Publishers, © 1955, 1986), says

There can be no spiritual regeneration till there has been moral reformation. That this statement requires defense only proves how far from the truth we have strayed. In our current popular theology pardon depends on faith alone.

Unfortunately, Tozer is saying exactly what he sounds like he's saying. For Tozer, salvation is conditioned on a commitment to reform and not faith alone. All of this is tied up in confusing the relationship between faith and works (see [Back to Faith](#) by Fred R. Lybrand for a thorough discussion of this matter), so Tozer can also, at times, affirm the doctrine of 'faith alone' as well. Kevin Butcher pointed out the real issue back in 1989 when he asserted that the Lordship Salvation side doesn't

represent the Free Grace side's view of the gospel accurately. He said,

MacArthur's first error involves a problem of perception—he doesn't clearly understand the other view. He does well when he states his own position, describing "Lordship Salvation" as a gospel that requires a faith that commits all (cf. pp. 169ff), a repentance that gives up sin (cf. pp. 159ff) and a submission to the "mastership of Christ" (cf. pp. 203ff) before eternal life is apprehended. The Lordship gospel, according to MacArthur, speaks of a "salvation that is a gift, yet costs everything" (cf. p. 140). But the "other" view which might be referred to as the "Free Grace" Gospel is misrepresented on several counts. (Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society, Spring 1989 —Volume 2:1)

The issue is rather simple:

The Lordship Salvation View: One (or many) things are required of the one desiring eternal salvation. These things largely have to do with a commitment on the part of the seeker to pursue life-change through an abandonment of all desires, possessions, lifestyle, and choice to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

The Free Grace Salvation View: There are no requirements for the one desiring eternal salvation. The 'requirement' is that which attends the acceptance of any gift; a willingness to accept it. In the Free Grace View this willingness to accept is found in the phrase 'faith alone in Christ alone'. While the content of what is to be believed is occasionally debated, the essential idea is that one is saved eternally by believing in Christ's promise of eternal life for those who believe in Him. I understand this 'believe in Him' have to do with the basics of His person and work, especially his dying and being raised again on our behalf.

What is missed in the debate is that Lordship Salvation proponents affirm they believe in 'faith alone in Christ alone' and Free Grace proponents affirm they believe in the Lordship of Christ. I sit in the curious spot of honestly believing that the Lordship Salvation proponents really do believe in 'faith alone in Christ alone', and often share the message properly. Of course, I also believe they often muddle their communication and make the gospel sound as though much more is required than faith in Christ. I have concluded that their 'muddling' of the issue comes from a fundamental incongruence in their theology and thinking. While affirming a distinction between justification (being eternally saved) and sanctification (growing spiritually to match the image and character of Christ), they also deny the distinction by affirming that believer = disciple [see [Back to Faith](#), Xulon Press, 2009].

The topic especially becomes an issue when it gets down to sharing the gospel. The Lordship Salvation proponents accuse the Free Grace proponents of not emphasizing the 'lordship' of Christ in our presentation, hence misleading people from what God requires for their eternal destiny. The Free Grace proponents accuse the Lordship Salvation proponents of 'adding' to faith in such a way that the individual is not trusting in Christ, but rather in oneself (or other things) for his eternal destiny.

The Appeal

I really want to appeal to those on the Lordship Salvation side to clarify the issue we Free Grace advocates wrestle with concerning presenting a gospel with various conditions attached to faith alone in Christ alone. However, for our part, I want to propose a fresh way to explain our view. It uses words to force a re-thinking of what Free Grace advocates are saying. Here's the term,

LORDSHIP SANCTIFICATION

I believe in Lordship Sanctification, and in my 24 years of ministry I have advocated individuals abandoning themselves to the Lord. I have begged believers to completely bring their will, desires, and possessions under Jesus Christ, the Son of God, as the Lord of their lives. I personally and deeply believe Lordship is crucial for the one who has faith in Christ. In no sense would I ever be against Christ as Lord. However, I do believe that this call is directed at those who have believed (see Romans 12:1-2) already.

If this understanding of Christ's Lordship makes sense for our growth in the Lord, then the term Lordship Sanctification turns out to be a very clarifying phrase. I believe in acknowledging Christ's Lordship as a necessary part of the sanctification process. I believe that in order to continue growing in the Lord, one must, in the course of time, yield utterly to the divine oversight of Jesus Christ regarding his life and conformity to the Image of Christ (see Romans 8:28-29).

There is also one great advantage in the debate over the gospel with the use of the term Lordship Sanctification; Free Grace proponents can never again be accused by the Lordship Salvation proponents of not preaching the gospel. Frankly, if you preach Lordship as an important aspect of ones spiritual growth in Christ, then you can only be accused of being 'slow', never of being wrong! They at least must admit that 'finally' we get around to sharing a saving message (in their estimation).

I believe in Free Grace Salvation and Lordship Sanctification. My appeal to everyone who acknowledges himself as promoters of grace--- please begin to refer to *Lordship Sanctification* often in your preaching, teaching, and mentoring. If we could infuse this term into the discussion, I am confident that a new age of conversation and clarification can arise. I believe in Lordship Sanctification as I hope you do as well, and I always get around to explaining it. However, with one seeking forgiveness, hope, and eternity--- I always begin with the good news that Christ died for you and if you will believe in Him you'll have everlasting life, just as He promised. In the gospel, the word is FAITH. In spiritual growth, the word is LORDSHIP. Let's grow united in our clarity and in our communication. Eternal salvation is by faith alone in Christ alone, while progress in sanctification inevitably leads to abandoning oneself to the Lord of Glory.

Grace and peace,

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