

Common Questions about Lordship, Part 2

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

Code: QA061

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QUESTION: Why do you use language like "forsake everything," "death to self," and "unconditional surrender"? The absoluteness of those demands is intimidating. Aren't you afraid you'll turn people away from Christ?

Actually, it was Jesus himself who said, "Whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:33 KJV). And he said, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me" (Luke 9:23).

Jesus also preached, "If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off ... and if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off ... and if your eye causes you to stumble, cast it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes, to be cast into hell" (Mark 9:43-47). And, "I came to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.... He who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me" (Matt. 10:35, 38). And, "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" (Luke 14:26).

It was Jesus, after all, who first stated, "No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:62).

We could go on and on quoting from Jesus' hard sayings, which he often preached to unbelieving multitudes but never offset with any qualification. Clearly he was insisting on wholehearted commitment. He did not soften his demands with words that would accommodate the halfhearted.

Our Lord was certainly not fearful that people would be turned away by such hard demands. He said, "All that the Father gives Me shall come to Me" (John 6:37). Likewise, I am confident that those being drawn by the Father and convicted by the Holy Spirit will not be turned away by the straightforward truth of his Word.

QUESTION: What about those who come to Christ after hearing a no-lordship message? Do you regard their salvation as questionable?

The implanted Word of God is able to save our souls, often even when the message accompanying it is flawed or confused. Jesus said, "All that the Father gives Me shall come to Me" (John 6:37). The glorious truth of God's sovereign election guarantees that those he has chosen will respond to his

Word with true faith and repentance. So we can be assured that God can work in the hearts of those we love in response to our prayers, even if the gospel they hear from some Christians is not complete.

But that great truth does not mean that the kind of gospel we preach is of no consequence. The problem with easy-believism is not that it will keep God's elect from getting saved, but that it allows people who are not genuine Christians to live comfortably with a false assurance--which leads to the tragedy described in Matthew 7:21-23.

QUESTION: Can a person be saved who does not consciously count the cost of following Christ at the time of conversion?

A person might be truly born again without explicitly considering the cost of following Christ, but no one can be saved who counts the cost and is unwilling to pay it. Again, I am certain that no one understands the full implications of Christ's lordship at the moment of conversion; in fact, none of us ever reaches full knowledge of such spiritual realities in this life. But the work of the Holy Spirit in the heart of a true believer prompts some degree of surrender to Christ's authority even at the inception of the new birth.

QUESTION: Can a true Christian "backslide"?

Certainly true Christians can "backslide," if by that you mean they can regress into a period of spiritual dullness or disobedience. Those who do incur God's discipline (Heb. 12:6-11). Those who are not disciplined are not true sons (vv. 8-9).

But if you are thinking of backsliding as a perpetual state of willful rebellion or ungodly indifference on the part of one who professes faith in Christ but does not love him, that is a sign of false profession (Matt. 7:21-23; 1 John 3:4-10). Sometimes the term backslider is used to describe one who has forsaken Christ and abandoned the faith. In that case it describes a person who was never truly saved (John 8:31; 1 Tim. 2:12; 1 John 2:19). The word backsliding is used two ways in Scripture. It is found only in Old Testament references to the nation of Israel (Jer. 3:22; 31:22; 49:4; Hos. 4:16; 11:7; 14:4 KJV). Sometimes it speaks of backsliding as the action of unregenerate people who turn stubbornly away from God (cf. Jer. 8:5). In that sense the Word cannot be used to describe true Christians.

Other times true believers are said to backslide (Jer. 14:7). All believers go through times when they do not grow or are set back in their growth by sin--they seem to be sliding backwards like a calf on a muddy slope (cf. Hos. 4:16 KJV). In that sense the word could apply to true believers. But it cannot be used to support the notion that true Christians might abandon the faith completely.

QUESTION: How should we act toward those who profess to be Christians but seem indifferent to spiritual things?

This is a common question posed by those who realize how truly narrow the way is (Matt. 7:13-14). It can be frightening to think that many people in the church (including many whom we love) may not be true Christians. I often wonder if those who espouse easy-believism have simply adapted their theology in order to try to get a sinning loved one into the kingdom.

There are two extremes to be avoided in assessing the spiritual status of others. On the one hand, we must realize that we are not ultimately the judge of anyone's salvation, because we cannot see anyone's heart. Only God can do that (1 Sam. 16:7). And people express their love for God and faith in Christ in different ways.

But on the other hand, we must hold firmly to the truth of God's Word concerning salvation and not offer false assurance to people who may not be truly saved.

If you have a friend or loved one whose lifestyle seriously discredits his or her profession of faith, I suggest you speak frankly to that person about your concerns. Certainly we have the Lord's own warrant for that in Matthew 18:15-20. If you carefully and lovingly follow the steps Jesus outlined in that passage you will soon know whether to treat the person as a brother or sister in Christ, or as "a Gentile and a tax-gatherer" (v. 17). Either way, your attitude toward the person is not to be judgmental, but loving and compassionate.

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