

4. One Lord

The confession of Jesus as Lord is seen in the New Testament as one of the most significant and important marks of a true believer and disciple of Jesus. This confession is of such importance in the process of salvation that Paul could write, “if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved” (Rom. 10:9). Paul also sees the confession as a sure sign of the work of the Holy Spirit, writing that, “no one can say Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit” (1Cor. 12:3). Paul did not mean that the mere speaking of the phrase “Jesus is Lord” would be effective to the saving of a soul; what is in view, is that the confession of Jesus as Lord springs from the ministry of the Holy Spirit in a repentant and believing heart, along with an understanding of the implications of the title Lord as applied to Jesus. Such implications are two-fold: doctrinally in understanding that Jesus is the divine Son of God; and practically in submission of life to His Lordship. The apostle Thomas gives us a good example, his eventual understanding of the true character of Jesus expressed clearly when he called Jesus, “My Lord and My God” (Jn. 20:28). Thomas’s statement came from the heart of a man deeply convicted of the truth about Jesus, his response illustrates that deep conviction which is required for genuine conversion. Paul gives further explanation of Romans 10:9 by adding that, “with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation” (Rom. 10:10), Paul showing that true salvation is first wrought in the heart, the words of the mouth being the outward expression of the conviction of the heart, which also reminds of Jesus’ saying that, “out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks” (Mt. 12:23; Lk. 6:45). For there to be genuine conversion and salvation, there must be, to be true to the Bible, a deep Holy Spirit given conviction that Jesus is truly God, and that He is therefore the Lord, and that because He is such, one should surrender to His Lordship, and declare it to others. True believers will be united in this understanding of the Lordship of Jesus.

Doctrinal Aspects of the Title Lord As Applied to Jesus

It is perhaps no wonder that the Christian belief in the divine nature of Jesus has been attacked from the early days of the church. For it is beyond normal human powers of comprehension to believe that God would send his Son to live as a man, and that He sent Him in order that He would die on the cross to pay the price for our sins. These things can only be spiritually discerned (1Cor. 2:14), the natural man will therefore seek to argue against them, and provide his own reasons as to why such a thing cannot be true. This difficulty for the human mind in accepting the teaching that Jesus is God, and that with the birth of Jesus, God became man, has over the years led to many heresies and the founding of cults. For while some may accept that a man called Jesus lived on the earth, and did good things, even that He died to save sinners, and that by merit of good works he became God and Saviour, the leap into believing that God became man proves a step too far, and the truth is rejected. In rejecting the Biblical testimony to the deity of Jesus, other explanations must be invented, but every attempt to make Jesus less than God is sure to end in opposition to Scripture and must therefore lead to heresy. The true church, its members

having been granted spiritual understanding by the Holy Spirit, has throughout its history, boldly proclaimed its belief that Jesus is truly God.

The New Testament Declares the Deity of Jesus

It is not the intention here to give a full doctrinal teaching on the deity of Jesus (many books have been written on the subject). As an introduction to the subject we will highlight some of the important scriptural proofs which clearly declare the deity of Jesus, and present these for your further study:

i) Old Testament Messianic prophecies require the Messiah to be both man and God: Messianic prophecies picture the Messiah as both man and God, this caused quite some difficulty for the Jewish rabbis, but for Christians the difficulties are easily resolved by accepting that Jesus met all the requirements.

See: 1Chron. 17:11-14; Ps. 2:7-9; Ps. 110:1; Prov. 30:4; Isa. 7:14; Isa. 9:6,7; Jer. 23:5,6; Dan. 7:13,14; Mic. 5:2.

ii) Angels declared the deity of Jesus: Stating Jesus' conception by the Holy Spirit, which Matthew shows as fulfilment of the Immanuel prophecy (Mt. 1:20-23; Immanuel being translated as "God with us"); Mary was told that she would give birth to the "Son of the Highest," the "Holy One" who would be called the "Son of God" (Lk. 1:31-35); and at His birth angels proclaimed Him, "a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord (Lk. 2:11).

iii) Jesus declared Himself to be God: If Jesus is not God, then we must conclude that He lied, lying is sin, and therefore if Jesus lied He would not have been raised from the dead, and could not be our Saviour. Denial of the deity of Jesus is therefore completely against Scripture and should be viewed as a blasphemous character assassination of Jesus. In two particular areas Jesus spoke clearly of His deity: i) in His unique relationship with His Father; and ii), in His understanding that He had been sent from heaven by His Father, thereby declaring His pre-existence in glory before He came to earth.

See: Lk. 2:49; Jn. 3:17; 34; Jn. 5:17-23; Jn. 8:56-58; Jn. 10:30; Jn. 17:5; Jn. 20:28.

iv) The Titles of Jesus: Jesus is given many titles in the Bible, of interest for us here are those which apply deity to Him. We have seen above how the title of Messiah carries implications of both humanity and deity. Other titles used in the New Testament carry the same implications:

Son of Man: Jesus often used this title when speaking of Himself (more than 80 times in the Gospels), it comes from Daniel 7:13, and speaks of a heavenly and divine figure who comes to earth with the clouds of heaven to reign over an eternal kingdom - which has obvious reference to the return of Jesus with great power and glory (Mk. 13:26). In making use of this title, Jesus is saying He is this heavenly being (see for example: Mt. 9:6; 12:40; 16:27; 25:31; 24:30; 26:24). As

well as divine implications, the title alludes also to the humanity of Jesus, and was often used by Jesus when speaking of His sufferings (Mk. 8:31; Jn. 12:23; 13:31); there is a reminder that God became man in order to identify with mankind, and so to redeem us from our sins.

Son of God: Throughout the gospels Jesus is presented as the Son of God, Peter recognised Him as such (Mt. 16:16), and the voice from heaven declared him such (Mt. 3:17). The Jews who heard Jesus speak clearly understood the implications of His claim to be the Father's Son, and accused Him of blasphemy because of it (Jn. 10:33; 36). New Testament scriptures clearly proclaim Jesus as the Son of God, who has a unique relationship with the Father, and that He came from heaven to do His Father's will on the earth. We cannot deny this essential Biblical truth without doing grave injustice to the character of Jesus, and the testimony of the Holy Bible.

Lord: The title Lord applied to Jesus carries tremendous implications and significance, and perhaps more than any other reveals how the first believers considered Jesus to be God. The Greek word *kyrios* was used in the Septuagint to translate the Old Testament covenant name of God (Yahweh), and in being applied to Jesus in the early preaching and writings of the church it clearly identified Jesus as God. We see this very clearly in Acts with such declarations as:

Therefore let the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus whom you crucified both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36).

The word which God sent to the children of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ - He is Lord of all - (Acts 10:36).

Jesus is God

When we come to Paul's writings we find a strengthened and more developed theology of the lordship of Jesus, and very close identification of Jesus with God. Paul often used compound titles such as "Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 1:3), and he so closely linked Jesus and the Father that divine functions could be associated with either or both, for example, "Grace and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 1:7). This close association of divine functions with both Father and Son draws the conclusion that both are equally God, as can be seen in the following examples:

- The gospel of God (Rom. 1:1), is also the gospel of Christ (Rom. 1:16).
- The day of the Lord (Zeph. 1:7; Rom. 2:16), becomes the day of our Lord Jesus Christ (1Cor. 1:8).
- The kingdom of God (Rom. 14:17), is also the kingdom of the Son (Col. 1:13).
- The church of God (Gal. 1:13), is also the church of Christ (Acts 20:28; Col. 1:24).
- Forgiveness comes from God (Col. 2:13), it also comes from Christ (Col. 3:13).
- Judgment is attributed to Christ and to God (Rom. 14:10-12; Jn. 5:22-30).

- Prayers are addressed to both the Lord Jesus Christ and our God and Father (1Thess. 3:11; 2Thess. 2:16).

From all that is written above, I trust it will be clear that in the believers' confession that "Jesus is Lord" there is an implicit understanding of the theological significance of those words. It is not a statement of simple respect for someone worthy of honour, but it is declaration of belief that Jesus is God, and that God became man, and lived on this earth in order to be the Saviour of mankind. Anything less is denial of the word of God. We have also noted that besides the doctrinal aspects of the declaration, there is also a practical side, because if Jesus is Lord, then there must also be submission to His Lordship.

Practical Aspects of the Title Lord As Applied to Jesus

Why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do the things I say? (Lk. 6:46)

With these words, the Lord Jesus brings home to us the practical and personal application of belief in Him as Lord. No man can demand absolute obedience from other human beings, those who have sought to do so become evil tyrants and dictators. Only God, can make such a demand and insist on it, not because He is a tyrant, but because He is our Creator, and because of His great love for us. Obedience to the Lord is an act of love on our part in recognition of His right to be Lord, in thankfulness for His grace and mercy toward us, and in recognition that He knows what is best for us. The relationship between God and His people has always been based on love, the exhortation to Israel was,

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one, and you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall diligently teach them to your children and you shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down and when you rise up. (Deut. 6:4-7)

You shall diligently keep the commandments of the LORD your God ... and you shall do what is right and good in the sight of the LORD, that it may be well with you, and that you may go in and possess the good land of which the LORD swore to your fathers. (Deut. 6:17,18)

We see that loving obedience brought blessing, and the fulfilment of God's promises to His people. It is the same with Jesus, but now we have a far greater testimony of His love toward us, for He came and laid down His life on our behalf, and we ought to love Him in return because of it (Jn. 15:13; 1Jn. 4:9,10). No tyrant ever gave his life on behalf of others, God did, that we might be set free from the condemnation of sin, and enter the fullness and joy of eternal life, and receive His blessings forevermore. Jesus, because He is God, because He came from heaven to earth, because

He lived as a man, because He paid the price for our sins, because He rose from the dead, because of God's love for us, is rightfully our Lord, and can ask that we do all He commands. The question we really ought to ask, is not why should we obey Him, but rather, why would we not obey Him who loves us so much?

Doctrinally, to deny the Lordship and associated deity of Jesus is blasphemy, it is grievous to God, because it is at essence a denial and rejection of His loving act in sending His Son to be our Saviour. Practically, refusal to submit to the Lordship of Jesus and allow Him to have the rule of our lives is foolishness, likened to building a house on the sand (Lk. 6:46-49).

There is one Lord: Those who acknowledge this truth, will resist any compromise of the teaching that Jesus is God, they will submit fully to the Lordship of Jesus in every area of life. Together they will witness and give testimony to the truth about Jesus, all the time longing for and looking forward to the day when, "every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:11).