

“WHAT DOES IT MEAN WHEN WE SAY ‘JESUS IS LORD OF ALL OF LIFE’?”

“But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope you have. But do this with gentleness and respect...” (I Peter 3:15-16)

The Christian Faith is at one time uncompromisingly moral (*“be ye perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect, said Jesus”*) (Matthew 5:48) and unapologetically intellectual¹ (*“...always be prepared to answer anyone who asks you the reason for the hope you have...”*) (I Peter 3:15). As Augustine wrote, *“No one believes anything unless one first thought it believable...Everything that is believed is believed after being preceded by thought...Not everyone who thinks believes since many think in order not to believe; but everyone who believes thinks, thinks in believing and believes in thinking.”*²

Sometimes I fear that when it comes to having a thoughtful faith, that Christians have parked their brains in neutral with the motor running and that they are about to run out of gas! Then there are other times when I think that we have forgotten that while the Christian faith is indeed a thoughtful one, we have failed to realize that Christianity is more about relationships than about being right or even having all of the answers. When I ask myself, “How can this be?” I realize how easy it is to be schizophrenic³ when it comes to living the Christian life. Part of this is because we allow life to be divided into two categories: the sacred and the secular. Yet another part of this is because no one has ever explained to us what “*Jesus as Lord*” really means. How appropriate then, that session VII of “*Developing a Christian Mind*” is entitled, “**What Does It Mean When We Say ‘Jesus is Lord of All of Life’?**”

Together we will discover what it means to put Jesus first or at the center of our lives: Why would anyone want to do that? What difference would it make any way? Can we be a Christian without Jesus being Lord of our lives? What does it mean to “*Love God with all of our hearts, our minds, our souls, and our strength?*” How does that fit with Peter’s statement: “*But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope you have. But do this with gentleness and respect...*” (I Peter 3:15-16). Where in the Bible do we see examples of those who did this? And what can I learn from them?

What Can Be Said of YAHWEH Can Be Said of Christ

In Isaiah’s vision of God’s sovereignty, he tells us, “*Behold, the LORD God comes with might, and his arm rules for him...*” (Isaiah 40:10) ...for He is the “*everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not grow faint or weary*” and his understanding is “*unsearchable*” (Isaiah 40:28). David Wells makes this insightful comment,

¹ Robert J. Wilken, *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003) xiii-xiv.

² Augustine, *Predestination of the Saints* 5 (PL 44:962-63).

*“This sovereignty, then, is expressed over the nature which Yahweh has brought forth and sustains (Isaiah 49:11) and over people (Isaiah 43:6). And Isaiah warns people of the futility of contesting the God will of God. How ridiculous is the person who **“who strives with his Maker, an earthen vessel with the potter! Does the clay say to him who fashioned it, ‘What are you making?’**” (Isaiah 45:9; Romans 9:21-24). This vision of the greatness of God in his power and his rule is summed up in the lofty declaration God makes to Isaiah that **“I am the Alpha and the Omega , says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come.”**” (Revelation 1:8). This language of Alpha and Omega and first and last are merisms which express the two ends of a comparison with the intention of including everything in between (cf. Rev. 21:6; 22:13). This statement then, expresses that the God who transcends time, ‘guides the entire course of human history because he stands as sovereign over its beginning and its end.’”⁴*

*“When the New Testament comes to speak of Christ, it speaks of him...in ways that exactly replicate what had been said of Yahweh. If Yahweh made the world and everything in it, so too, did Christ. There is but one God, Paul says, from whom are all things, and one Christ **“through who are all things and through whom we exist”** (I Corinthians 8:6; Col. 1:16; Hebrews 1:3).⁵*

*“The biblical confession of sovereignty is already being realized in the life of the Church. Christ, who is at the center of creation, and who subdues **“all things”** is also at the center of the Church in whom this triumphant reign is already being savingly realized. The preexistent Christ in whom **“all things were created”** (Colossians 1:16), and in whom **“all things hold together”** (Col. 1:17), is the very same Christ who is **“the head of the body, the Church”** (Col. 1:18). The conclusion then is that **“in everything he might be preeminent”** (Col. 1:18). He is the Church’s center, life, its focus, its glory, and its hope.”⁶*

As we sing in Samuel J. Stone’s hymn:

The Church’s one foundation
Is Jesus Christ her Lord;
She is his new creation
By water and the Word.
From heav’n he came and sought her
To be his holy bride;
With his own blood he bought her,
And for her life he died.

⁴ David F. Wells, *Above All Earthly Powers: Christ in a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2005) 253-254. Wells quotes G.K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1999) 199.

⁵ Wells, 254.

⁶ Wells, 259.

Mid toil and tribulation,
And tumult of her war,
She waits the consummation
Of peace for evermore;
Till with vision glorious,
Her longing eyes are blest,
And the great Church victorious
Shall be the Church at rest.

Jesus, Lord of Life and Death

In the words of Robert Lewis Wilken: "*The Resurrection of Jesus is the central fact of Christian devotion and the ground of all Christian thinking.*"⁷ In his final resurrection appearance to the disciples, Jesus said: "**All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.**" (Matthew 28:19-20)

When Jesus said that he had received "**all authority in heaven and on earth**" it is clear that it was none other than God the Father who had conferred unique and far reaching power upon him. As Lord of the resurrection, Jesus was "Lord of all of life." That means that he is the Lord of all creation, Lord of universe, Lord of human history, Lord of the Church, and Lord of my life and yours. Jesus speaks without equivocation, without exception. The fact of his Lordship is beyond question and without dispute. We need look to no other for he is indeed "**the Alpha and the Omega. I am the Living One. I was dead, and behold I am alive forever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.**" (Revelation 1: 17-18). His statement here, as he begins to speak the words of the Revelation to John, are a direct parallel to Revelation 1:8 where God speaks and says of himself, "**I am the Alpha and the Omega, says the Lord God, who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.**"

The alpha and omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. The Lord God is the beginning and the end. In other words, God the Father is the eternal Lord and Ruler of the past, the present, and the future. Without him, nothing is eternal. He is the beginning of all existence, wisdom, and power, the Lord of time and human history, and through the resurrection of his Son, he has acknowledged him as the Lord of all of life... "**All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me...**" (Matthew 28:18).

No wonder then that the Apostle John fell at his feet when he saw Jesus, the Lord and Ruler of all that is. There is no place in all the universe where his power does not reach and his sovereignty does not command. Everything and everyone belongs to him...

⁷ Robert Louis Wilkin, xv.

“Who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, in heaven and on earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of the Father.” (Philippians 2:6-11)

The Lordship and supremacy of Jesus are so important to the Apostle Paul who first met him on the Damascus road and spent years in prayerful meditation on the significance of his Lordship that he explains to the Colossian Church:

“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the ⁸firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.” (Colossians 1:15-20)

Now we understand that Jesus is Lord not only of the physical world through his resurrection, but that all of creation (ourselves included) was created by and under his authority. But Paul goes further still by saying that all rulers, powers, thrones, and authorities of both the physical and the spiritual world are under the authority of Christ himself. Then still further, we are told that a part of his Lordship is that he is Sustainer of all creation and that in him everything holds together and because of him, it does not disintegrate into chaos. Now we come to see and understand that because he is the Sustainer of all of life, that none of us are independent from him. We are his servants and must daily trust him for protecting us, caring for us, and sustaining us.

Trusting Jesus as Lord of Life in Matters Great and Small

In *The Divine Conspiracy*, Dallas Willard answers the question, “What did Jesus Know?” or ‘How smart was/is Jesus?’ when he writes:

“Our commitment to Jesus can stand on no other foundation than the recognition that he is the one who knows the truth about our lives and our universe. It is not possible to trust Jesus, or anyone else, in matters where we do not believe him to be competent. We cannot pray for his help and rely on his collaboration in dealing with real life matters we suspect might defeat his knowledge or abilities.”

⁸ See note on Colossians 1:17 in *The Application Study Bible*

“And could we seriously imagine that Jesus could be Lord if he were not smart? If he were divine, would he be dumb? Or uninformed? Once you stop to think about it, how could he be what we take him to be in all other respects and not be the best-informed and most intelligent person of all, the smartest person who ever lived?”

“The biblical and continuing vision of Jesus was of the one who made all of the created reality and kept it working, literally ‘holding it all together’ (Col. 1:17). And today we think people are smart who make light bulbs and computer chips and rockets out of ‘stuff’ already provided! He made the ‘stuff’!

*“Small wonder then, that the first Christians thought that he held within himself **“all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge”** (Colossians 2:3). This confidence in his intellectual greatness is the basis of the radicalism of Christ-following in relation to human order. It sees Jesus now living beyond death as **“the faithful witness, the first born of the dead, the ruler of the kings of the earth...the first and the last, the living One,”** the one who can say **“I was dead and behold, I am alive forever more, the master of death and the world of the dead”** (Rev. 1:5, 18).”⁹*

Jesus Our Lord

*“The first certainty for the first Christians was that Jesus was both their Lord and Savior and Lord of all.”¹⁰ Can anyone think of a book of the New Testament that does not testify to this conviction one way or another? If we were to pick one text that demonstrates this emphatically, it would be ‘Simon Peter’s answer to Jesus’ question, **“Who do you say that I am?”** (Matthew 16:13-19; Mark 8:27-30; Luke 9:18-20). It happened like this:*

“When Jesus came to Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, ‘Who do people say Son of Man is?’ They replied, ‘Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.’ ‘But what about you?’ he asked, ‘Who do you say that I am?’ Simon Peter answered, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’” (Matthew 16:13-16).

Is it significant that this conversation happens against the backdrop of three pagan temples? Andrew Purvis and Charles Partee answer,

“The question of Jesus as Lord is always a question that is discussed in the context of other claims to divinity. The affirmation of the Lordship of Jesus excludes other claims. The issue is who really is Lord? Is Jesus Christ Lord or the gods of nature, of Greece, or of Rome, or today of America, of power, of money, or our own ideological devising? Who do people say the Son of Man is?”¹¹

⁹Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1997) 94.

¹⁰ Andrew Purvis and Charles Partee, *Encountering God: Christian Faith in Turbulent Times* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2000) 35.

¹¹ Purvis and Partee, 36.

That was Jesus question to his disciples of two thousand years ago and it has been his question to every generation of disciples through the generations. *“Our Lord puts this same question to us today, with many religions, many spiritualities, and many philosophies all claiming authority as the backdrop.”*¹²

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It should not surprise us that the affirmation *“Jesus Christ is Lord”* (Philippians 2:11) is the great affirmation of the New Testament. After all, the Lordship of Christ is proclaimed in the Gospels over a hundred times. *“If you confess with your lip that Jesus is (Kyrios) and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”* (Romans 10:9)

While many of us are saying, well, that settles it for me, there has been an ongoing controversy over whether or not ‘the Lordship of Christ’ is essential for salvation. In other words can a person accept Jesus as Savior without acknowledging him as Lord of their lives? To do so, one must understand ‘faith’ in exclusively intellectual terms in such a way that it becomes merely ‘mental assent.’ Those who follow this line of thinking, strongly feel that adding the concept of ‘Lordship’ adds meritorious work(s) to faith so that one ends up with ‘a works righteousness.’¹³

But for those of us who follow the teaching of the Reformation, we see ‘faith’ within the greater work of the Holy Spirit in justification, regeneration, sanctification, and eternal life.¹⁴ As the Apostle Paul wrote: *“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation, the old is gone and the new is come!”* (II Corinthians 5:18) and *“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”* (Galatians 2:20) Only then are we able to *“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.”* ...much less to *“Love your neighbor as yourself.”* (Matthew 22:37-39).

¹² Purvis and Paretee, 36.

¹³ Many of the Dispensationalists such as Zane Hodges, the Scofield Bible, Lewis Sperry Chaefer, Charles Ryrie, and John MacArthur hold this view along with the Roman Catholic conception of faith as believing what the church teaches. Even Karl Barth for whom faith is simply believing that because of Christ’s death and resurrection one is already justified and an heir of eternal life fits here.

¹⁴ See *The Westminster Confession* xiv 2)