

On Lordship Salvation

What MacArthur is stating is that we have a defective gospel. To think that we can receive salvation only accepting Jesus as a Savior but not "Lord" is incomplete in the prerequisite of salvation. One must accept Jesus not only as a Savior, but Lord as well (strongest biblical support is Rom 10:9).

He continues and says that discipleship is certainly required to receive salvation. He is somewhat disturbed by people who create a dichotomy between living a Christian life and being a genuine disciple of Christ. In his opinion we need to be a disciple of Christ.

Several angles must be explored in revealing what seems to be a great challenge for all Christians to raise their standards in Christian living. I do wish his theology was sound, because I believe we need to take Jesus more seriously (fear Him more in our lives).

However, couple of points can be noted to derail MacArthur's theology. First, in answering the Romans 10:9 passage. It is noted that commentaries agree on the context of this passage. Addressing the Jews and Gentiles, Paul emphatically writes that we must confess with our mouth that Jesus is Lord. This problem still lingers today for all or most Jews. They do not believe that Jesus is Lord, in other words, Jesus is God. In trying to help his readers understand the identity of Christ, Paul draws a complete picture of who Jesus is. If this exegesis is incorrect—"Lord" emphasizing the deity of Christ, would MacArthur's interpretation really work? Think about it. We only have to confess with our mouth that Jesus is our Lord/master whom we must obey completely and believe in our hearts that God raised him from the dead in order for us to receive salvation? What about the fact that he is our Savior? The context allows us to understand that Paul is addressing the Romans who needed a solid confession of faith that would allow them to receive salvation (Expositor's commentary: "Paul's statement in vv. 9, 10 is misunderstood when it is made to support the claim that one cannot be saved unless he makes Jesus the Lord of his life by a personal commitment. Such a commitment is most important; however, in this passage, Paul is speaking of the objective lordship of Christ [deity of Christ], which is the very cornerstone for faith, something without which no one could be saved.").

What MacArthur claims is illogical based on analogy of what true faith is. Paul says that we are justified by faith, and it seems that James is contradicting that statement. In James, he writes that faith without deeds cannot save. So, it seems as though James is saying that Paul is wrong, we are not justified by faith only, but deeds as well. So, Roman Catholicism banks on James. However, we as Protestants know that what James and Paul are saying does not contradict. Simply, what James is saying is that we need true faith to be justified. And in true faith, actions are surely to follow.

We can make this analogy in MacArthur's theology. MacArthur is like James. If we want to be justified, actually glorified we need Jesus as Savior and Lord. But what he is essentially saying is that we need a true Savior. Our faith in accepting Jesus as our Savior must be true and genuine. If we have accepted the true Savior, he should become our Lord somewhere along the journey of one's Christian life through the grace of God working through our process of sanctification. I say this part about the sanctification because it's an important point I need to make. Many Christians don't have a problem in understanding that Justification is by grace and glorification is by grace as well, but when it comes to sanctification, we think, "Well, that's up to us," as if to say that making Jesus our Lord and living a sanctified life is under our control. We have to understand that sanctification too is the work of God (2 Thessalonians 5:23). Just because we have not succeeded or are unaware of the fact that Jesus is Lord does not disqualify us from salvation. In fact, I'll go as far as to say that even if we are aware and choose to live a life not surrendered to Jesus does not disqualify us from salvation. The reason is because we just don't know. We don't know who will be saved and not be saved. That's not for us to judge. So, going back to what MacArthur is essentially saying is that we need to accept the true Savior. Therefore, essentially MacArthur and the opposing view are in agreement.

But, I'm not writing this essay to be a peacemaker. When push comes to shove, I must say that MacArthur's view is incorrect. If he said that accepting Jesus as the true savior (who is Lord) is required for salvation, I would not have a problem with that statement. However, we all know that that's not all he's saying. He is saying that unless we accept Jesus as Savior AND Lord, we will not be saved. Where this fails ultimately is on the grounds of systematic theology. What MacArthur is saying when he commits to his claim is that sanctification is really up to us. We must will to surrender and accept Jesus as Lord and live a life of a disciple. Unless we do that, we will not be saved, because we don't want to water down the Gospel. Gospel is not that easy, we should give it a higher standard. The list goes on.... I wish I could say that too (because I believe people are not serious enough about their faith). But when we do that, we are making the sanctification based on our effort and our decision. So, it fails at this level of theology. Furthermore, it fails on another level. We are not justified by works. We are justified by faith. As soon as we take the word "Lord" in the context of MacArthur's argument, we are adding to the Gospel. The reason is because the word "Lord" in the context of MacArthur's argument includes the connotation of works/deeds. Lastly, we are justified on the grounds of God accepting the payment of Christ on our behalf (for our sins). Now, when we are in Christ (because we have accepted him as our Savior), God sees us sinless on the grounds of Christ covering our sins. Theologically speaking, that is what is needed for justification. In the progress of redemption, justification is inaugurated glorification. We are justified by faith in Christ as our Savior who is Lord, and although we might not have accepted Jesus as Lord justification is not impaired. Therefore, whether we accept Jesus as Lord (context of MacArthur's claim) and live a life consistent with that commitment, salvation has no bearing on that human decision, because after all, even the faith of receiving Christ as Savior is a gift of God.