

God Has a Right on Our Lives - Lordship

By Eli Gautreaux

In Chi Alpha, we speak often of fundamentals. We believe a Christian's outward life is a direct result of the way he or she thinks. The main issues center around the internal parts of our lives, and the external is always a result of the internal. Therefore, we are very concerned with ideas we embrace as Christians. The following talk will deal with a very fundamental principal of Christianity – selflessness. This is probably the primary characteristic of those of whom we say, “He really gets it.” There are many who come through Chi Alpha, even through leadership, who are good, moral people, but we can easily say they never “got it”. Understanding this concept is absolutely necessary to living the true Christian life. It is the difference between being in Christendom (as the religion man has created based on his own ideas), and being “in Christ” (or the true faith that is revealed by God.)

Most of Christendom is a religion of selfishness, which is absolutely opposed to the teachings of scripture. The true Christian is a man or woman who is dead to self and alive to Christ. “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” Galatians 2:20 (NIV)

We will try to pursue this idea of being dead to self and alive to Christ by looking at the concept of lordship.

Lordship

Humanism is a philosophy that puts its ultimate faith in mankind - saying that man is his own master, the determiner of his own destiny - to the exclusion of God. This is a very man-centered philosophy. We as Christians would reject this idea, at least on paper. However, if we take a close look at our own lives and the church, we will see how often we embrace humanism in practice. The church has been so influenced by the man-centered (or self-centered) thinking of the world that we have imported this mindset into our theology. Winkie Pratney has called the man centeredness of the church an Evangelical Humanism, or a Christian Humanism. He speaks of a church that is man-centered in motive, manner, and message.

As we study this idea, we need to be brutally honest with ourselves about our own theology. The fundamental questions we need to ask ourselves are “Why do you do the things you do? and Who do you do them for?” God is a God of motive. He is concerned not with outward appearances, but the reality of who we are on the inside. The answer to this question will reveal to us what Francis Shaeffer called our true integration point. There is a great difference in participating in “Christian” activities out of a true love for God and our neighbor versus out of a selfish desire to advance our own person. We will discuss this in further detail later.

G.K. Chesterton, in his book *Orthodoxy*, has a chapter titled “The Maniac.” In it, he opens with a conversation he had with his publisher while walking down the street. The publisher, noticing an acquaintance from the business world passing on the street, has just said, “That man will get on in life (succeed), simply because he really believes in himself.” Chesterton, with his usual sense of sarcasm, replies:

“Shall I tell you where the men are who believe most in themselves? For I can tell you. I know of men who believe in themselves more colossally than Napoleon or Caesar. I know where flames the fixed star of certainty and

success. I can guide you to the thrones of the Super-men. The men who really believe in themselves are all in lunatic asylums."

He goes on to explain the mental position of the man we say is a paranoid schizophrenic. He sees a person on the park bench sitting and reading a newspaper, apparently unconcerned about those who are passing by. But our friend knows this person is not really reading the newspaper, it is only a disguise. This person is really watching our friend. He also sees the woman on the cell phone, but he knows she is not really having a leisurely conversation. She is speaking to someone about our friend! In fact, everyone our friend passes on the street is involved in this plot to capture him.

Chesterton again says:

"Are there no other stories in the world except yours; and are all men busy with your business? Suppose we grant the details; perhaps when the man in the street did not seem to see you it was only his cunning; perhaps when the policeman asked you your name it was only because he knew it already. But how much happier you would be if you only knew that these people cared nothing about you! How much larger your life would be if your self could become smaller in it."

We call this person a maniac, simply because it is lunacy to think that the whole world revolves around you!

In the light of this principal, I would like to introduce to you what I would call Christian maniacs – Christians who really do believe everything revolves, or at least should revolve, around them. We see this self-centeredness in everything – in motive, manner and message. Our theology reflects it. We read the bible with this in mind; that every promise, whether Old or New Testament, was meant for me personally. We never give consideration to a corporate interpretation, only that this is meant for me and me alone. Our motives reveal it; so often I only obey God so I will be blessed by God. We choose our church body on the basis of "What's in it for me?" If I like the preacher, I'll come back. If the worship suits my style, I'll come back. I'll keep coming as long as I am being fed.

Our messages from the pulpit verify our self-centered religion. Preachers say over and over again things like, "God is here to meet your needs this morning." We hear sermon titles such as: "How to unlock YOUR potential" , "How to unleash YOUR heavenly blessing" , or "How to enlarge YOUR territory." Just this past week I heard an extremely popular preacher give a message entitled "Thanksgiving, the key to YOUR victory." This coordinated with the Thanksgiving holiday, so it seemingly had relevance to the audience. But it is easy to see the point of selfishness we have come to when we can take the one day that, more than any other, should be God-centered, and make even Thanksgiving about us.

The point is that man is still the center of the church. I am still the center of my life. I keep me as the integration point. Everything is filtered through how it affects me. I am still looking out for number one. This is what I call the Christian maniac, and what Pratney calls Evangelical Humanism. Where is the practice of the Lordship of Christ?

Where Is The Lordship Of Christ?

Romans 10:9 "... if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."

A simple word study on the word Lord shows that salvation is more than a confession of the mouth. From Strongs' Greek Dictionary, we learn that this word kurios (koo'-ree-os) has the literal meaning of a supreme in authority, or a controller. This is translated in the Bible as God, Lord, or even master. The idea of having another as the supreme in authority, or a master and controller of our lives, is repulsive to the natural man. But as we will see, Jesus demands to be Lord and Savior, not just Savior.

An easy definition of this concept of Lordship is to have God as the integration point of our lives. When we speak of integration point, we mean the thing that everything in our lives revolves around. We mean also, the thing by which all other things are filtered. Our integration point is the ultimate meaning in our lives, the thing that holds everything else together. Humanism has taught us to place man as the integration point. Our sinful nature, which is essentially selfishness, has taught us specifically to place our own individual person as our integration point.

People once thought that the earth was the center of our solar system – that everything revolved around us. We have since learned that we actually revolve around the sun! We must see that we as finite creatures cannot sustain our world. Simply put, we are not big enough, strong enough or wise enough. Only the infinite God is capable of being the true integration point. This is where we run into trouble. We try to be the integration point – we try to be God. Then, because we are incapable, the whole thing collapses. The greatest thing we can know as a Christian (and when I say know – I mean know not only on paper, but in practice) is that God is God, and I am not. This means, practically speaking, that everything revolves around Him. Everything in our lives is centered on and filtered through how it affects Him and His kingdom. We have died to self! I no longer live, but Christ lives in me!

I said before that Jesus demands Lordship. If you will, remember the story from the Bible of the Rich Young Ruler (Matthew 19 / Luke 18). This young man, who had mostly everything this world has to offer (power, youth, wealth, etc...), came to Jesus with a question. He asked, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" After a brief conversation concerning the commandments, in which the man asserts his attempts at religion, Jesus tells him he lacks one very essential thing. Jesus commands him to go and sell all that he has, give the money to the poor, and come follow Him. The Bible tells us at this, the man went away sad, for he had great wealth.

The point of this story, as it relates to our discussion of Lordship, is that this young man wanted salvation without lordship – but Jesus wouldn't lower His standards. He came looking for a savior, but he already had his lord. And if the truth is told, his lord wasn't money, it was himself. He wouldn't let go of his selfishness, and trust the lordship of his life to Jesus Christ. Jesus did him a favor by calling him to the highest standard, that of absolute surrender to Himself. Too many preachers do people a disservice today by lowering the standards and offering a "fire insurance" form of Christianity, that says you can make Jesus your Savior while holding on to the Lordship of your life. Jesus will have none of it. He will be Lord or he will be Judge.

You will remember also from Mark 8:34-36, Jesus is speaking with not only His disciples, but other followers as well, within the context of His coming death. "Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?" (NIV)

The Denying of Self spoken of here is not an occasional “not getting what one wants”. Jesus is speaking of taking up a cross. The cross meant only one thing then, and only one thing now – death! He speaks here also of losing one’s life. This is no isolated theme in Jesus’ teaching. He continually speaks of dying to self, crucifying self, burying self, etc... The man who tries to hold on to his life will forfeit it in the end.

God has a Fundamental Right on our Lives!

We will try to deal now with a little of the “Why” behind this demand of God to be the center. Is it just vanity on His part, or are there legitimate reasons why He makes this demand? There are numerous reasons that come to mind immediately. We will discuss a few of these, which will by no means be exhaustive, but which nevertheless will help us to see things in a better perspective.

The first and most obvious reason that God has a fundamental right to rule our lives is that He is our creator. I will not try to prove this to the unbeliever, but state it as a given for those of us who call ourselves Christian. As the creator, God has a right to the ownership of His creatures. "The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; for he founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters." Psalm 24:1-2 (NIV)

Even more central to our discussion here though is the fact that as Redeemer, He owns us! 1 Corinthians 7:23 says, “You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men.” In Romans 14:8, Paul says, “If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.” Again, in speaking of the return of Jesus, Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:23 that He is coming back for those “...who belong to Him.” Peter testifies to the same principal. In 1 Peter 1:18-19, he reminds believers that they were redeemed with the “precious blood of Christ.” The Bible is clear. If you are a Christian, you are not your own, you have been bought at a price, and you belong to Him!

Finally, we have already mentioned our own inadequacies compared to God’s adequacy. Simply put, he has a right to rule because He is most qualified. In any situation, logic would lead us to choose the one most qualified to lead. Surely when we consider God’s omnipotence, omniscience, and the host of other characteristics of the infinite God, we will gladly choose Him as Lord and master of our lives.

As we move on, you might be thinking that releasing lordship of your life to another is a scary thing. This is true for most people at first. But as we will see soon, it is only scary to the degree that you do not know Him. As your understanding of who God is increases, your fear of relinquishing lordship of your life to Him will decrease dramatically. The more you understand who he is, the more you will trust Him.

Now, there are two types of people that embrace this idea of Lordship. First are those who fearfully or reluctantly submit. These we will only mention in passing, but they are always characterized by legalism and never joy. Secondly, there are those who joyfully submit control of their lives to God. This is the principal of selflessness at work. These are those who are dead to self and alive to Christ on the inside. These are the ones who understand this next very important principal.

God's Right on Our Lives is Founded Upon His Value/Worth

"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.

"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it. Matthew 13:44-46 (NIV)

I began with this scripture, now I would like to come back to it. There is much to be gained from a careful study of this parable, with many details that we will not consider. However, the main point Jesus was trying to communicate with this story, and the one of the great pearl immediately following, is that of the overwhelming value of the treasure. This man seems to have almost stumbled on to the treasure in the field, while the merchant had been searching all his life for the pearl. Both men, however, immediately recognize the great value of their "find." Notice that the man who found the treasure did not reluctantly sell everything he owned. He sold everything with joy! The point is that the treasure is so obviously more valuable that it is easy to lose all his other possessions. So he sells everything with joy and seemingly without a second thought.

Is this your story? The treasure, ultimately, is the presence of God in your life. His kingdom means He is Lord, and you are in your rightful place as the creature. However, as the creature, if you have been redeemed, your rightful place is with Him! Have you found His presence and Lordship in your life to be the most valuable thing in the world? Have you seen His beauty and fallen in love with Him – for who He is rather than for what He can do for you?

Let's look at some other Biblical and historical characters and what they had to say about this subject. Remember that what we are considering is the releasing of the rule of our lives to God as the rightful Lord, based on His overwhelming value.

The Apostle Paul

In talking about all of his worldly and even religious pursuits, those things that were important to him before he became a Christian, Paul speaks these words in the book of Philippians chapter 3. "But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ... Philippians 3:7-8 (NIV)

He is saying that what was once so valuable to him, valuable enough to be the pursuit of his life, is a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus his Lord. In fact, he considers them rubbish compared to Jesus. The word rubbish literally means trash. In the King James Version of the Bible, it is translated not loss but dung – or manure! Paul experienced the beauty and magnificence of Christ. When he compared it to his life before, he called it rubbish.

C.S. Lewis

Lewis speaks of this in his essay "The Weight of Glory." He talks of an ignorant boy who has fun playing in the mud, making mud pies. It is fun, but when he experiences a vacation at the ocean with sand castles, he does not want to go back to mud pies!

The Angels of God

Look at the picture of worship at the throne of God in the book of Revelation. Why do the angels of God - thousands upon thousands of them - continually freak out, year after year and time after time, at the mere sight of God? We would think that after thousands of years of acquaintance with the Creator, they would become accustomed to the sight. But rather than growing complacent, they continually fall on their faces in worship.

Maybe they're just of an "excitable nature." Or possibly, they're simple-minded creatures and unaware of the "wonders of this world," such as material things or passions of the flesh. Possibly they would change their minds if they ever drove a new Lexus or saw the Sports Illustrated swimsuit edition. Of course, these are ludicrous ideas. The angels have seen all that this world has to offer, but their eyes have also seen what theologians refer to as the "summum bonum," the final picture of beauty and worth. They know God to be the highest good. None other is worthy of their lives or attention.

King David

"Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere." Psalms 84:10 (NIV)

David would rather have been in the presence of God than anywhere else. He understood this idea of God's awesome value.

Charles Finney

In writing of his experience of being filled with the Holy Spirit, Finney said: "No words can express the wonderful love that was shed abroad in my heart. I wept aloud with joy and love; and I do not know but I should say, I literally bellowed out the un-utter-able gushings of my heart. These waves came over me, and over me, and over me, one after the other, until I recollect I cried out, "I shall die if these waves continue to pass over me." I said, "Lord, I cannot bear any more..."

Winkie Pratney

In his book The Nature and Character of God, Pratney talks about our individual assessments of value. We all have things we look for when determining whether something is valuable, or worth the cost. What is valuable to you? Why do you seek after the things that you seek? What makes something "worthwhile," or worth the cost, or worth the effort to obtain it? He lists some universal characteristics of value or worth, including beauty, permanence, uniqueness, rarity and power.

We would generally esteem anything that contained any one of these elements, not to mention multiple ones. This is why we so highly value diamonds; they exhibit many of these qualities at the same time. It is a thing of beauty because of its luminosity. It is also a thing of permanence, known to be one of strongest formations we know. So in one item, we have the combination of two normally mutually exclusive characteristics. Usually if we have a thing of beauty, say a flower for instance, it is short-lived. Or, if we have a thing of permanence, say a stone, it is not beautiful at all. So when we see these characteristics together, we attach a greater relative worth to the object.

We do not have the time to give the details, but we as Christians have found God to be everything we have ever dreamed of as valuable. He is more beautiful than anything we can point to in His creation. He is the essence of permanence - the "same yesterday, today and forever." His uniqueness is affirmed throughout scripture; there is none like him. His rarity is seen in that there is no other god beside Him. And finally, He is called the all-powerful One! Pratney goes on with this profound thought:

"Try to imagine the impossible: think of all the lovely things you have ever seen, all the most wonderful times and places and people you have ever

known; - - - Imagine you could contain all of that beauty and loveliness, concentrate and distill all those experiences of awe and wonder and happiness in your life into one moment. - - - It would be so painfully lovely, so breathtakingly beautiful that you could not bear for it to go on any more or you would die, nor could you bear having it cease for the same reason. - - - What would you give to be part, even for a moment, of something so utterly wonderful as that, so intensely joyful?"

What would you give? I think we could all say we would certainly give everything, with great joy! We could go on and on with this thought, but the point is that it is not a frightening thing to give your life into the hands of One so awesome and worthy. Our fear of God's lordship of our lives can only be attributed to our lack of understanding of who He is. The more you know Him, the more you will love and trust Him with everything.

To summarize:

- To try to be the lord of your own life is humanistic and self-centered, not Christian, and basically lunacy.
- We are told to die to self. Jesus commands us to take up our cross in order to follow Him.
- God is the rightful owner of everything, especially those He has purchased with the blood of Christ.
- His right is ultimately founded upon His infinite value and worth.
- Only those who do not really know Him will want to maintain control of their own lives.

Questions for Discussion:

1. Is God the integration point of your life? What areas of your life do you find it most tempting to make something other than God your integration point?
2. What keeps you from submitting to the lordship of Jesus?
3. Why do you do the things you do and who do you do them for?
4. Who or what defines your identity? Who or what should define your identity?
5. How do we change? How can we help people hunger for this? What does this look like?
6. What are you lacking understanding of who he is?

Prayer Points:

1. Who's the center of your life: you or Jesus? Why do you do the things you do? and Who do you do them for? You may choose to be the integration point of your world, but what a small, pathetic little world you will have. You may be ready to surrender Lordship of your life to the only One who is worthy. If so, you'll never regret it. He will take you and use you, based on His great love. Unselfishly, He will always choose what's best for Himself, His Kingdom, and ultimately, for you.

2. These things begin on the inside. Pray and ask Him to be Lord of your life. Ask Him to root out your self-centered nature and ideas. Ask Him to give you a revelation of His ultimate beauty and worth. "I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better." Ephesians 1:17 (NIV)