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SO MANY LORDS

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*So God created mankind in
his own image, in the image of
God he created them; male and
female he created them.*

—Gen. 1:27

The twenty-first century is now well underway, and Christians are everywhere. They have spread throughout the world and are found on every continent, speaking nearly every language known to humanity. Two thousand or so years have passed since Jesus walked along the shores of Galilee, and during that time his message has taken root in countless hearts. Starting with eleven disciples—twelve minus the one who betrayed him—Jesus grew his church to where it is today. He filled his disciples and those who followed after them with the Holy Spirit. Empowered by that Spirit, ordinary Christians—like you and me—down through the centuries have reached others with the good news about Jesus. Ours is an incredible heritage!

Perhaps the most common phrase that has united all of us everywhere and in every time is “Jesus is Lord.” That phrase appears in more languages and more countries than any other. From large sanctuaries filled with suburban believers to thatched-roof churches packed with rural worshippers, the message remains the same around the world: Jesus is Lord!

Lost in Translation

But now that we’ve moved into the twenty-first century, something has changed. It’s been a quiet and a subtle change. But the change has been no less dramatic. Our contemporary culture has somehow lost its capacity to adequately interpret the word “lord” for us. We just don’t know what it really means anymore. Something has been lost in translation. No word in our modern languages carries all of the rich meaning of the words found in biblical language. So we need to take a new look and explore the concept and its meaning for us today.

It’s easy to conform to our Christian heritage and say, “Jesus is Lord.” It’s not as easy, however, to put those words into daily action. What do we mean when we say that Jesus is Lord of everything in our world? And how do we make him Lord of our daily words and deeds? That’s what we’re going to explore in the pages ahead. We need to

understand today, just as much as Jesus' first disciples did, what it means to apply this confession of faith to our everyday lives.

Timeless

Some things in contemporary culture change, but other things don't. Human nature, for instance, remains timelessly the same. People next door act about the way people did in Abraham's day—four thousand years ago. Relationships are another thing that doesn't change. Human beings get together to talk, laugh, cry, and just be in one another's presence. We like to play together, shop together, and eat together. And when we can't be with one another, we send greeting cards, presents, and letters. We also send emails, make phone calls, or use video calling. But best of all, when we can't be together in person, we like to connect through Facebook. Millions of us from around the world use Facebook to keep up with one another, renew old acquaintances, and make new friends.

All of us have quiet and reflective moments from time to time. Maybe the death of a loved one causes us to stop and reflect on life. Or maybe something good happens that causes us to stop and count our blessings. Whatever the occasion may be, we usually realize that the most important realities in our lives are the relationships we have with the people we know and love. These relationships soar in value far above any job titles, awards, possessions, or educational degrees. Why? Because God made us as relational beings. He made us in his image, as Gen. 1:27 tells us. Father, Son, and Spirit relate to one another in an intimate way. We, too, are hardwired for relationships with one another. That being said, we experience an eerie feeling that something is not right with life when human relationships are missing from our lives.

A certain insurance actuary, for example, sits in his office cubical all day and crunches numbers to predict the probable life expectancies of others. Although this man has everything in life that money can buy, he's not happy. His life is missing relationships. "Without

relationships,” he says, “I have nothing.” Even though people may urge him to go out and enjoy spending his big paycheck, he knows better. Life’s true meaning is not found in money or the things it can purchase; we find life’s meaning through relationships.

University students going on mission trips to underdeveloped countries often gain a new perspective about the importance of relationships.¹ They go to build churches and schools and do compassionate ministries. They work manually alongside the local people, interacting with them and playing and worshipping together. Students often wonder, at the start of such trips, how the people they are going to work with can be so happy with so few material possessions, but by the end of the trip the students usually realize that the people are very rich relationally: (1) they have a relationship with Jesus as Lord of their lives, (2) they have relationships with their family members, and (3) they have relationships with one another in the community of faith. As far as the people are concerned, they have everything they need. Why would they need material possessions to be happy? What do material possessions have to do with happiness, anyway?

As Christians we know the importance of relationships, both with our family members and with members of our community of faith. Our most important relationship, however, is with Jesus Christ. We must start with him.

Jesus First

Jesus makes possible a relationship with our heavenly Father. Once we have firmly established that relationship, we can sort out the broken pieces in our own hearts and heads so that we can become whole persons inwardly. Then we can relate properly to ourselves. Once we are on the road to wholeness within ourselves, we move outwardly to our family members and start to build strong relationships with them. From family members, we move on to friends and acquaintances in the world to build strong relationships with them. Never forget that

all of those relationships flow, like spokes from a wheel, from our primary relationship with Jesus Christ. We must nurture our relationship with him first. Only then are we healthy enough to build relationships with others.

If Jesus serves as our primary relationship, then he must be Lord over all of our lives. He must be the lens through which we view all of life. He must be the One to whom we offer our primary and complete commitment. We say that in theory as we talk together in our small-group meetings. It's harder to put in daily practice. Why? Because we have to make so many quick choices each day—and we find so many lords competing for our allegiance.

So Many Lords

Life in contemporary culture keeps us preoccupied with so many daily activities. We have so many options, so many authorities, so many truths, and so many lords. We must keep our bearings as we negotiate the ever-shifting seas of our information and communication explosion. We have so much coming at us so quickly each day.

This issue of lordship is not just a matter affecting the culture of the United States and Canada, Western Europe, and other developed nations. It affects our entire world. More than ever before in human history, the nations and cultures of the world have become interdependent on one another. At one time, individual families lived much to themselves and supplied most of their own needs. They lived and died as self-contained family units. Their reliance on other people and outside resources was limited.²

That's seldom true anywhere in the world today. Watch the morning news. Global stock markets impact one another every hour of the business day. The daily price of crude oil makes the news on every television station in the world. Ecology issues, like climate change and resource management, affect nearly every culture of the world. Satellite television, cell phone technology, Internet connectivity, and economical air travel unite all the peoples of the earth in amazing ways.³

Perhaps that's part of the reason for the global shift that is shrinking our world. Maybe it's because of worldwide, seamless communication through the Internet and cell phones. Perhaps it's because of the dramatic increase in jet travel that takes us to faraway places in a few short hours. Perhaps it's because of great migrations of people around the world. No doubt, there are many factors, but what is clear is that we are the most connected people in human history. Our world is shrinking at lightning speed!

Added to this new reality is the increased attention and visibility the religions of the world are receiving. Once considered as belonging to somewhere faraway, in distant lands, now the religions of the world are as near as our neighborhood grocery stores. Their places of worship are in our cities, towns, and rural areas, and their worshippers can be found reading their sacred books and saying their prayers in almost any airport. In all of this religious diversity, who is Lord?

The Big Blue Globe

Think for a minute about this big, blue globe we call planet earth. Who is Lord of it? Who oversees its daily preservation? Do you think of that often? And who oversees the nations of the world? Are they left to manage the best way they can? Who is Lord over the global issues that most worry our scientists? Who is Lord over things that can so easily get out of hand, like technology or pandemic diseases? These and dozens of other big-picture questions remind us that we need a Lord big enough to care for these matters that are bigger than any and all of us.

We also live in an environment of competing value systems and worldviews. The business world has its lords. The television industry has its lords. The movie industry has its lords. So do the worlds of sports, advertising, and finance. The same is true for the worlds of education, music, and politics. The list is endless! Will we Christians pay our respect and give our time and money to these lords or will

we save our allegiance for Another? That's a question that demands an answer.

From time to time scientists on television or in the newspaper predict the end of life on earth as we know it. Some speak of using up all of the energy stored in the earth. Others speak of running out of clean air to breathe or clean water to drink. Some say a giant meteor will smash into the earth. Others say the sun may burn out. Some say crazy people with the keys to atomic bombs will blow us all to kingdom come.

Whether or not any of these self-proclaimed authorities have their facts straight is uncertain. But what is certain is that each of us is going to come to the end of this life someday. And the evidence seems to indicate that life as we know it on this earth right now also has a termination day. What then? Who is Lord of the future? Furthermore, who is Lord of the next life?

Finding Answers

You're not going to get answers to any of these questions from the contemporary culture. It doesn't know. It asks many questions and questions many theories but offers few answers. It seems to be uncertain about pretty much everything. Those of us who call ourselves Christian need to think about our responses to these questions from a Christian perspective and offer biblical responses. We can know some things for sure when it comes to this matter of lordship.

In the pages ahead, we'll explore these and other topics. First, we'll turn our attention to examples of Christians declaring "Jesus is Lord" in their confessions, creeds, and statements of faith. Then we'll turn to the Bible for insights into the concept of lordship from both the Old and New Testaments. Next, we will explore the many domains over which Jesus exercises lordship. Finally, we will devote the rest of the book to a personal application of these thoughts to our lives and examine practical ways to make Jesus Lord over every aspect of daily living.

THINK ABOUT THIS

1. What qualities, desires, and interests about people do not change with time?
2. Why are relationships so important to human beings?
3. Why do people in developed nations often think material possessions are required for happiness in life?
4. How do you manage big-picture questions such as, Who is Lord of the daily preservation of planet earth?
5. Why does contemporary culture ask many questions but offer few answers?

PRACTICE THIS

1. For one entire day keep a log of how many choices you make. Write down the times of day, the options, and the selections you made. At the end of the day, total the number of choices you made that day. You will be amazed at the sheer number. Look over the list. Analyze it. How many were really important? How many involved much thought? How many brought stress? How many were of eternal value? How many had moral implications? How many had spiritual implications? More specifically, how many affected your commitment to making Jesus Lord of your life?
2. For one entire day keep a log of how many truth claims come your way. Remember the sources, such as news reports, advertisements, the Internet, Facebook, blogs, phone calls, and books. Examples of truth claims might include, "This car is safer," "This drink tastes better," and "This dress is cheaper." Write down the source and one word that will jog your memory for each truth claim. At the end of the day, total the number of truth claims you received that day. How many truth claims did you hear? How many did you really believe? How many were important to you? How many had moral implications?

How many had spiritual implications? How many affected your commitment to make Jesus Lord of your life?