



JESUS IS LORD

**“Every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”
Philippians 2:11**

The Importance of the Baptist Commitment to the Lordship of Christ

Why have Baptists held so strongly to the exclusive lordship of Christ? We have taken our stand on several basic convictions, including the following:

- (1) The Bible teaches the lordship of Christ, and Baptists look to the Bible as their sole written authority for faith and practice.
- (2) The biblical teaching about soul competency demands that each individual Christian bow to no ultimate authority other than God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
- (3) The biblical emphasis on soul competency flows from the lordship of Christ.
- (4) The New Testament model for a church is founded upon the lordship of Christ; he alone is the head of the church.

The word “lord” has a variety of meanings and a number of definitions. However, as Christians, we confess that Jesus Christ is Lord because we owe him our total allegiance, loving service and faithful obedience because of who he is and what he has done.

All Christian groups hold to the truth that Jesus is Lord, but Baptists have a special emphasis that they give to this truth.

Baptists believe that Jesus is the exclusive Lord of life. They accept no person or institution as lord of individual Christians or of churches.

For this belief, Baptists, like the early Christians, have suffered persecution by both government and religious authorities.

The Bible Teaches the Lordship of Christ

The Bible gives a number of reasons why Jesus is Lord of all. He is divine, one of the three persons of the Trinity. Jesus declared, “I and my Father are one” (John 10:30). Concerning Jesus, the Bible states that in him “all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form” (Colossians 2:9 NIV).

Jesus died on the cross for the sins of the world and as such is worthy of all praise and honor as Lord: “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing” (Revelation 5:12).

Jesus rose from the dead, indicating his power over death itself. When we meet the resurrected Christ, we exclaim as did the

disciple Thomas, “My Lord and my God!” (John 20:28).

Jesus ascended into heaven, sits at the right hand of the Father making intercession for us, and is coming again to bring a new heaven and a new earth. Before such a One we stand in awe declaring, “Come, Lord Jesus” (Revelation 22:20).

The Extent of the Lordship of Christ

The Bible sets forth the extent of Christ’s lordship in several ways. The Bible states that Jesus is the **Lord of all creation**: “That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:10-11).

The Bible teaches that Jesus is **Lord of every person**. Many deny or fail to recognize that lordship, but for Christians, the lordship of Christ is central. In fact, the Christian life begins with the acknowledgment that Jesus is Lord: “That 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” (Romans 10:9 NIV).

The Bible emphasizes that Jesus is **Lord of churches**. Jesus declared, “I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18). And Paul wrote concerning Jesus, “And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body” (Ephesians 1:22-23 NIV).

The Lordship of Christ and Soul Competency

The Bible teaches that Christ’s lordship is direct. No person or institution is to attempt to usurp the authority of Jesus over a Christian. Of course, persons can gain insight and understanding from others, but only Jesus has ultimate authority over a Christian.

The call to be a disciple of Jesus assumes the ability to know and follow the will of Jesus Christ as Lord. The Bible’s teaching on soul competency indicates that persons have the God-given ability to know and to do God’s will. Persons are not puppets. Their Creator has given them freedom and responsibility of choice.

Baptists have resisted efforts by individuals, government officials and religious

“Christ only is the king, and lawgiver of the church and conscience.”

John Smyth (b.1570? - d.1612) An Englishman, he was the founding pastor of the first English Baptist church in Amsterdam in 1609. The quote is from a confessional statement that he played a major role in drafting.

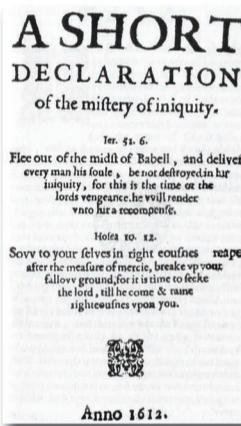
organizations to dictate what the will of Jesus is for his followers. Baptists insist that each person has the competence and the responsibility to find and follow the will of Jesus as Lord. As the early disciples declared, “We must obey God rather than men!” (Acts 5:29).

The Lordship of Christ Mandates Religious Freedom

The lordship of Christ means that persons and churches ought to be free from coercion by government or religious organizations in spiritual and religious matters. Baptists have always denounced such coercive efforts, declaring that only Jesus is Lord. For this resistance Baptists have often paid a high price.

For example, in the early 1600s King James I of England claimed to be the head of the Church of England as well as of the government of England. He

demanded that all churches conform to his will. Thomas Helwys, a Baptist pastor, wrote a book titled *A Short Declaration of the Mystery of Iniquity* in which he insisted that the king had no right to dic-



tate to persons and churches what to believe.

Helwys sent a copy of the book to King James with a personal inscription in which he declared, **“The king is a mortal man and not God and therefore has no power over the immortal souls of his subjects, to make laws and ordinances for them and to set spiritual lords over them.”** For his statement of this Bible truth, the king imprisoned the pastor, and he died in prison, refusing to recognize anyone other than Jesus as Lord of the churches.

The Lordship of Christ and a New Testament Church Are Inseparable

What does it mean for individual Christians and for the churches of which they are a part to be under the lordship

of Christ? For one thing, it means that they should acknowledge Christ as Lord. The church belongs to Christ, not to them. He is the head of the church; they are not. They are not to rule the church; Christ is.

Furthermore, **each** member of the church should recognize that he or she has opportunity and responsibility to make decisions regarding the church under the lordship of Christ. This is the New Testament model of a church. Persons make decisions about the church of which they are part, such as who the deacons and pastor will be, how the tithes and offerings will be spent, and what sort of building they will occupy. Yet each of these decisions should be made in light of the fact that Jesus is Lord of the church.

Also, **all** of the members of the body of Christ are responsible for the decisions of the church. There is no hierarchy in a New Testament church. No pastor, deacon body, or any other individual or group is to lord it over the church (1 Peter 5:3). **Only Jesus is Lord, of each person and of the church as a whole.** Through prayer and respectful discussion as part of a loving fellowship, the members of the church are to seek to know the mind of Christ.

In Summary

The lordship of Christ is a basic Christian doctrine. For Baptists, it has special meaning and is related to other key Baptist beliefs, such as those about the authority of the Bible, soul competency, religious freedom and the nature of what a church modeled after the New Testament churches is to be.

It is a King, and therefore God's commands come before his. The King is a mortal man, not God, therefore hath no power over the immortal souls of his subjects, to make laws & ordinances for them, and to set spiritual lords over them. The King has authority to make men, but not to make immortal souls. Men may be seduced by deceivers to fight against God, whom they ought to obey, nor against the laws of God, which they ought to obey, nor to set up their own wills and ends, or to take their lives in their hands, or to take the lives of others.
God Save the King
Tho. Helwys



KING JAMES I

For further information on Baptists and the lordship of Jesus Christ, see www.baptistdistinctives.org.

