

SALVATION
BELONGS TO
THE LORD





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THE LORD

*An Introduction to
Systematic Theology*

JOHN M. FRAME



P U B L I S H I N G
P.O. BOX 817 • PHILLIPSBURG • NEW JERSEY 08865-0817

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Italics within Scripture quotations indicate emphasis added.

Printed in the United States of America

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Frame, John M., 1939–

Salvation belongs to the Lord : an introduction to systematic theology /
John M. Frame.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and indexes.

ISBN-10: 1-59638-018-7

ISBN-13: 978-1-59638-018-9

1. Reformed Church—Doctrines. 2. Theology, Doctrinal. 3. Jesus Christ—
Lordship. I. Title.

BX9422.3.F73 2006

230'.42—dc22

2006041565

To Debbie, Doreen, and Skip



CONTENTS

Preface ix

Part One

1. God, the Lord 3
2. Who God Is and What He Does 15
3. God, Three in One 30
4. The Word of God 42
5. The Authority of the Bible 58
6. What Is Theology? 72
7. Man, the Image of God 85
8. Sin and Evil 100
9. God's Covenants 115
10. Who Is Jesus Christ? 129
11. What Did Jesus Do? 146
12. The Holy Spirit 159

Part Two

13. Election, Calling, and Regeneration 175
14. Faith and Repentance 188
15. Justification and Adoption 200

16. Sanctification and Assurance	211
17. Perseverance and Glorification	222
18. The Nature of the Church	233
19. The Task of the Church	247
20. The Means of Grace	260
21. The Sacraments	274
22. Heaven and Hell	287
23. The Events of the Last Days	300
24. How Then Shall We Live?	314
25. Summary and Conclusion	328
Notes	343
Further Readings	349
Index of Scripture	355
Index of Subjects and Names	372

PREFACE

A number of years ago I began writing a multivolume series of theological studies that examine major biblical topics from the perspective of the lordship of God. Known as the Theology of Lordship, the series comprises two volumes thus far, and two more volumes are either in progress or planned.

People have sometimes asked me if I intended to make the Theology of Lordship series into a complete systematic theology. I have always answered no. My purpose in that series is not to cover all the topics of systematics but to discuss a few of them in depth. Furthermore, although I have taught the doctrines of Scripture, God, and ethics for thirty-five years, I have never taught some of the other loci of systematics at the seminary level, such as the atonement, the *ordo salutis*, and eschatology. So, I thought I probably was not equipped to write a comprehensive systematic theology.

But in the summer of 2003 Mark Sigmon of the Institute for Theological Studies in Grand Rapids, Michigan, asked if I would tape lectures for a “survey course” in systematics. I have always admired the work of ITS, particularly its ministry to developing churches. Honored to be asked, I delivered those lectures as the institute’s course “Foundations of Systematic Theology” in 2004. As a bit of icing on the cake, ITS gave me the right to use that material in any printed form I desired, and P&R Publishing Company quickly expressed interest. Most of the chapters in *Salvation Belongs to the Lord* are enhanced versions of those taped lectures. I’ve added notes and several additional topics, such as chapter 24 on ethics (“How Then Shall We Live?”).

This book will not be part of the Theology of Lordship series, but readers of those books will find here the same approach: exeget-

ical, Reformed, and focused on the lordship of God and of Jesus Christ. As in the Lordship books, threefold distinctions abound here, some that you won't find elsewhere.

Parts of this introduction to systematic theology summarize the Lordship books. Chapters 1–3 and 10 and a few portions of other chapters summarize sections of *Doctrine of God*. Chapters 4–5 anticipate the teaching of my forthcoming *Doctrine of the Word of God*. Chapter 6 recalls elements of *Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*. Chapter 24 summarizes *Doctrine of the Christian Life*, which I'm currently writing. And chapter 25 lists a catalog of lordship triads from all the loci in the manner of the Lordship volumes.

Nevertheless, *Salvation Belongs to the Lord* is not directed primarily to readers of the Lordship series but to beginners in theology, people who are seeking a basic introduction. For them I have tried to adopt a more conversational tone (at times, indeed, it may sound just like a voice on a tape!). I have also tried especially hard to explain my technical terms. I do hope that this approach will give such readers the basic lay of the land in the theology of the Bible, and I pray that it will leave them eager for more.

If you are new to reading theology, let me address you now. Survey courses and books have the reputation of being easy and/or superficial, but I consider this work to be college or seminary level in difficulty. I intend to challenge you to think hard about these matters and to learn some technical terms, to ask some tough questions, and to dig deeply into the Word of God. Since *Salvation Belongs to the Lord* is a survey, we will be focusing on the big picture rather than the details. But understanding the big picture takes some intellectual and spiritual discipline—at least as much as it takes to understand the details.

By focusing on the big picture you can sometimes learn important things that you might pass over in a more detailed study. Here I intend to emphasize the general shape of the biblical teaching and to give you some basic categories, some hooks on which you can hang the various things you learn. One of these hooks is a system of threes, the aforementioned lordship triads, which runs through the whole book. This system is mainly a pedagogical device, but I hope it will show you some important ways in which everything in the Bible is

PREFACE

xi

tied together. As you will see, the Bible is not a miscellaneous collection of ideas but a coherent, consistent system of truth in which the major doctrines depend on one another.

I wish to thank Mark Sigmon and the ITS Board for giving me the opportunity to work on this important project. Thanks also to Darrell Yoder and other members of the wonderful ITS staff who assisted me in so many ways. I am grateful again, as so many times before, to P&R Publishing for understanding and appreciating my work. Thanks especially to Ted Ojarovsky for editing this volume.





PART ONE





❁ Chapter 1

GOD, THE LORD

Who is God? The Bible most often describes him as Lord. *Lord* is the name of a profoundly *holy person* in covenant *relationship* with us. This chapter will explore the meaning of God's lordship in terms of his control, authority, and presence, as well as the related concepts of transcendence and immanence.

In this book I will introduce you to the discipline of systematic theology. I'll discuss the nature of systematic theology itself in chapter 6. But I think we need to *do* some systematic theology together before we try to define it. Just for now, however, let me say that theology is the human attempt to apply the Bible to people's questions and, indeed, to all human needs.

Systematic theology is *topical* theology. It studies the Bible not by going from Genesis to Revelation but by exploring topics treated in various parts of Scripture, like the topics of God, man, revelation, Christ, the last days. Theologians have sometimes called these topics *loci*, the Latin plural of *locus* ("place"). So, systematic theology asks "whole Bible" questions: What does the whole Bible teach about God? About sin? About justification by faith? These are some of the topics we'll be looking at.

This book is an introductory survey of systematic theology, and therefore it will not cover each topic in great detail. Many theologians give book-length treatment to, say, God and man, or the person and

work of Christ, or the events of the last days.¹ In this book, however, we will be covering briefly, in twenty-five chapters, the whole content of systematic theology. I'll try to give you the main gist of each doctrinal area, so that you will have a good foundation. I hope it will motivate some of you to study some specific areas more intensively.

This first chapter, not surprisingly, is about God. In fact, we'll spend three chapters on the doctrine of God, what some theologians call *theology proper*, because even in a survey this is the foundation for everything else.² How important it is to know God! Jesus prayed to his Father, "This is eternal life, that they may know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent" (John 17:3).

Who is God, anyway? The Westminster Shorter Catechism in one of its most famous definitions says, "God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth" (SC 4). That's an excellent statement. I think that everything in that statement is biblical. But it's interesting to note that the Bible doesn't contain this kind of definition of God.

How, then, does the Bible introduce us to God? It begins with an *act* of God: "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1:1). I believe Moses wrote the book of Genesis, and he wrote it for the benefit of the people of Israel, whom God had delivered miraculously from slavery in Egypt. These people didn't need a definition of God. They already knew who God was. He was the one who led them out of Egypt. So, the book of Genesis does not include a definition. It begins by telling the people that the God they know already, the God who led them out of Egypt, is also the one who created the heavens and the earth.

How did the Israelites of Moses' generation come to know God? First through the stories of their forefathers. When God spoke to Moses, he identified himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But to the Israelites these three patriarchs were ancient history. God had helped them centuries earlier. When Moses was born, Israel had been in Egypt for four hundred years. Originally the Egyptians had been friendly to them, but later pharaohs arose who hated them and subjected them to slavery. Israel cried out to God for help, but for those four hundred years God was silent. Many Israelites must

have wondered why God did not answer their cries for help. Perhaps some of them even doubted whether the old stories were true.

However, God did answer their prayers. He began by appearing to Moses. We learn about this meeting between Moses and God in Exodus 3, and I think that passage is the real beginning of the biblical doctrine of God. We read about God in Genesis, but the author of Genesis met God in Exodus 3.

In this passage Moses sees a bush that burns but doesn't burn up. The flames do not consume it. It turns out that the burning bush is a place where God is, a place where God wants to talk with Moses. God is everywhere, of course, but sometimes he makes his presence known in a very intense way. So, God calls Moses and tells him to remove his shoes, for the area of the bush is holy ground. God identifies himself as the God of Moses' father and of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He says that he has seen the affliction of Israel and has heard their cry. He now intends to bring them out of Egypt to the land of Canaan, which he promised to their forefathers. Moses is to be his prophet, his spokesman.

Understandably, Moses is overwhelmed by this responsibility. God assures him that he will be successful. God will deliver Israel, and they will worship God on this very mountain, the mountain of the burning bush. But Moses has another question: "If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" (Ex. 3:13).

It seems like an odd question to us. *What is God's name?* Why would Moses ask something like that? Today, we give our kids names like Billy or Susie without much thought of the meaning of those names. You might call your daughter Elizabeth because you think the name sounds good or because it was your grandmother's name. But in the ancient Near East, names had meaning. Abram meant "high father," and Abram's new name, Abraham, given him by God, meant "father of a multitude." Usually, when a father gave a name to his son, he chose a name that didn't just sound good but conveyed something of his hopes for the child, or his feelings about the child, or the circumstances of the child's

birth. So, to ask about God's name is to seek information about him. To seek God's name is to ask what kind of God he is.

We should be interested in God's answer to Moses' question. How does God identify himself? How does God say who he is to the author of the first books of the Bible? We wait with bated breath, on the edge of our seats, to hear God's name.

God's name is, at first, rather bewildering. "God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM.' And he said, 'Say this to the people of Israel, "I AM has sent me to you" ' " (Ex. 3:14). God here gives his name in a long form, "I AM WHO I AM," and in a short form, simply "I AM." The long form is difficult Hebrew. It can be translated in present or future tenses, and the relative pronoun translated "who" in the English Standard Version of the Bible (ESV hereafter) can be translated in a variety of other ways as well. I can't explore all these translations here, but the main point is that God's answer to Moses is mysterious, to say the least. Even the short form of the name, "I AM," is difficult. It is a familiar phrase, as when one says "I am John" or "I am a teacher." But what can be meant by "I AM" just by itself?

It will help us, however, to go on to verse 15: "God also said to Moses, 'Say this to the people of Israel, "The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you. This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations." ' " Here we see the mysterious name in still a third form. We've seen it in a long form, a short form, and now a very short form, a one-word form translated "LORD." The word *LORD* in the ESV represents the word *Yahweh* in Hebrew. *Yahweh* is derived, evidently, from a form of the verb "to be," so it is connected with the repeated "I AM" in verse 14. Some older English Bibles render this word as "Jehovah," but most of them now follow the example of the King James Version and translate it "LORD."

Verse 15 says that this is the way God wants to be known, the name by which he is to be remembered for all generations. So, the English word "Lord"—representing the Hebrew *Yahweh*, another Hebrew word, *adon*, and the Greek *kyrios*—occurs over seven thousand times in our Bibles, mostly referring to God the Father or, and this is important, to Jesus Christ.

Our Jewish friends today often use Deuteronomy 6:4–5 as a kind of confession of faith: “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.” This is a confession of lordship. There is only one God, and he is Yahweh, the Lord. The Christians of the New Testament also confessed lordship: Jesus is Lord (Rom. 10:9–10; 1 Cor. 12:3; Phil. 2:11). We should notice, too, that over and over again in Scripture, God says he is going to do this or that so that people “shall know that I am the LORD” (as Ex. 6:7; 7:5, 17; 8:22; 14:4; 29:46; Isa. 45:6; 49:23, 26; Jer. 16:21; 24:7; etc.). So we may say that “God is Lord” is the fundamental confession of the people of God in the Old Testament. The fundamental confession of the New Testament people of God is “Jesus is Lord.” That is a way of summarizing the main content of the Bible: “God is Lord” is the message of the Old Testament; “Jesus is Lord” is the message of the New Testament.

So, if we want to know the God of Scripture, we must come to know his lordship. There are, of course, many other concepts that are helpful in understanding God, such as the “infinite, eternal, unchangeable” of the Westminster Shorter Catechism, and we shall look at some of those. But we need to start somewhere, and it would be hard to find any starting point more appropriate than that of lordship. So we ask, what does it mean for God to be Lord?

To begin with, I should emphasize that Lord is a personal name. So, our God is a *person*. That is a tremendously important fact. We know that in our world there are personal beings, like Joey, Cindy, Yo-Yo Ma, Sammy Sosa, George Bush, and so on. The world also contains impersonal beings, like rocks, trees, the law of gravity, tornadoes, brussels sprouts, matter, motion, space, time, and chance. Secularists usually try to argue that the personal reduces to the impersonal: in the end, Joey, Cindy, and Yo-Yo Ma are ultimately just matter, motion, space, time, and chance. But the Bible teaches the opposite: the impersonal reduces to the personal. Matter, motion, space, time, and chance are, ultimately, tools used by one great Person to organize and run the universe he has made.

Another point that we can get from Exodus 3 is that the Lord is a supremely *holy* person. That is, he is separate from us and transcendent over us. We may not approach him without supreme respect. Holiness also means that God is supremely righteous and

good, and that he must cross a great barrier to have any fellowship with sinners like you and me. But more of that later.

The main meaning of the name Lord is that he is the head of a *covenant*. In a covenant, God takes a people to be his. The heart of it, often recorded in Scripture, is his saying, “I will be their God, and they shall be my people” (Heb. 8:10; cf. Ex. 6:7; Lev. 26:12; Jer. 7:23; 11:4; 2 Cor. 6:16; Rev. 21:3). He rules them by his law (in a written document, as we shall see), and he delivers them from destruction and death. So, the covenant includes both law and grace. We’ll think some more about covenants in chapter 9.

The name Lord also tells us about his *nature*, what kind of God he is. Scripture typically associates three ideas with the idea of lordship, to which I’ve given the names *control*, *authority*, and *presence*. I warned you that this book would include a lot of threefold distinctions. This is the first of them, and there will be a lot of others that coordinate with these. I will call these the *lordship attributes*. Let’s look at them in turn.

Control

When God comes to Moses and identifies himself as Lord, he comes in *power*. He heard the cry of the Israelites, and he comes to deliver them from the oppression of the Egyptians, with a mighty hand and a strong arm. Pharaoh is the most powerful totalitarian ruler of his day, and the might of Egypt is thought to be invulnerable. But God works powerful miracles and gains a decisive victory over Egypt’s land, its rulers, its armies, and its gods (Ex. 12:12; 15:11; 18:11). He is gracious to whom he will be gracious, and he shows mercy to whom he will show mercy (Ex. 33:19). So, he judges Egypt but saves Israel. What he intends to do, he accomplishes. Nothing is too hard for him (Jer. 32:7; Gen. 18:14). His word is never void of power (Isa. 55:11). His prophecies always come to pass (Deut. 18:21–22).

This is what we often call the *sovereignty of God*. Everything that happens in the world comes from him. He is the one who sends rain, thunder, and lightning (Pss. 65:9–11; 135:6–7; 147:15–18). He makes things freeze, then melts the ice. The smallest details of nature are under his control: the falling of a sparrow, the number of hairs on your

head (Matt. 6:26–30; 10:29–30). And the events that we call random, that we ascribe to chance, are really God at work. Look at Proverbs 16:33: “The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD.” Just roll dice. Whether you get a six or an eight or a twelve, the number comes from God; it’s God’s decision.

God rules not only the little things but the big things, too. How could it be otherwise, since the big things are combinations of little things? He determines what nations will dwell in which territory (Acts 17:26). He decides what king is to rule, when, and where (Isa. 44:28). He decides whether the purpose of a nation will stand or fall (Ps. 33:10–11). And he decided, once, that wicked people would take the life of his own dear Son, so that we, we sinners, might live (Acts 2:23–24).

God rules not only the important events of human history but also the lives of individual people like you and me. He knits us together in our mothers’ wombs (Ps. 139:13–16). He decides whether we will travel or stay home (James 4:13–17).

Does this mean that God controls even our free decisions? Certainly he does. Joseph’s brothers sold him into slavery in order to harm him. That was their free decision, and they are responsible for it. But, ultimately, it was God who used their evil deed to accomplish his good purpose (Gen. 45:5–8). Indeed, Scripture often ascribes to God even the sinful behavior of human beings. He made Israel’s enemies to hate her (Ps. 105:24–25). He hardened Pharaoh’s heart against his people (Ex. 4:21; Rom. 9:18). He moved Judas, Herod, and Pontius Pilate to bring about the death of Jesus (Acts 2:23; 4:28).

But God also works wondrously to bring good! God’s power, God’s control, also brings about our faith and repentance, so that we can have eternal life in Christ. Paul says, “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:8–10). Faith is not something we work up in ourselves. God gives it to us as his gift. He *opens* our heart to believe (Acts 16:14–15). We believe because he *appoints* us to eternal life (Acts 13:48). He *draws*

us to himself (John 6:44), *gives* us faith (John 6:65; Phil. 1:29). Yes, we also choose him, but he chooses us first (Eph. 1:4; John 1:12).

God's control means that he is sovereign over everything that happens in the whole universe. Hear these passages:

Who has spoken and it came to pass,
 unless the Lord has commanded it?
 Is it not from the mouth of the Most High
 that good and bad come? (Lam. 3:37–38)

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. (Rom. 8:28)

In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will. (Eph. 1:11)

Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!
 How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!

“For who has known the mind of the Lord,
 or who has been his counselor?”
 “Or who has given a gift to him
 that he might be repaid?”

For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen. (Rom. 11:33–36)

Here, in the very first chapter of the survey, I am teaching you the doctrine of *predestination*. I know predestination is difficult. We ask, for example, if God predestines everything, what happens to human freedom? Good question. We'll deal with it in chapter 7. Another important question is, how can God bring evil things to pass if he is holy, just, and good? That's a real difficult one, and it has brought a lot of grief to some people. We'll have to look at that carefully, but we can't do it now. I hope you can wait until chapter 8 for our discussion of the problem of evil. For now, I will say only that when God brings about human sinful actions, he does it for his own

good purposes. We may not always know what those purposes are, but God assures us that they are good. And he assures us of his goodness and justice by sending his own Son to die for our sins.

Authority

The second of the three lordship attributes is his *authority*. God's authority is his *right to tell his creatures what they must do*. Control is about might; authority is about right. Control means that God makes everything happen; authority means that God has the right to be obeyed, and therefore we have the obligation to obey him.

God's authority is part of his lordship. When God meets with Moses in Exodus 3, he gives him an authoritative message—Let my people go, that they may serve me—which has authority even over Pharaoh (Ex. 4:12). When God meets with Israel at Mount Sinai, he identifies himself as Lord (Ex. 20:1–2) and then tells them to have no other gods before him (v. 3). God's lordship means that we must obey his Ten Commandments and any other commandments he chooses to give us. So, God calls us to confess his lordship and then go on to obey all his commandments (Deut. 6:4–6). Jesus, too, says over and over again, in various ways, “If you love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:21, 23; 15:10, 14; 1 John 2:3–6; 3:22, 24; 5:3; 2 John 6; Rev. 12:17; 14:12). “How,” he asks, “can you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ when you don’t do the things I say?” (Luke 6:46 paraphrased; cf. Matt. 7:21–22).

God's authority is *absolute*. That means, first, that we shouldn't doubt or question it. Paul says that Abraham “wavered not” in his belief in God's promise (Rom. 4:16–22). Abraham was certainly tempted to waver. God had promised him the land of Canaan, but although he lived there, he owned not one square inch. God had promised him a son, who would in turn have more descendants than the sand of the sea. But Abraham's wife, Sarah, was beyond the age of childbearing, and Abraham was over one hundred years old before the promise was fulfilled. Nevertheless, Abraham clung to God's authoritative word, even against the evidence of his senses. And so should we.

Second, the absoluteness of God's authority means that his lordship transcends all our other loyalties. We are right to be loyal to our

parents, our nation, our friends; but God calls us to love him with *all* our heart, that is, without any rival. Jesus told his disciples to honor their parents (Matt. 15:3–6), but he told them to honor him even more (Matt. 10:34–38; cf. Matt. 8:19–22; 22:37; Phil. 3:7–8).

Third, to say that God’s authority is absolute means that it covers all areas of human life. Paul says that “whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31; cf. Rom. 14:23; Col. 3:17, 24; 2 Cor. 10:5). Everything we do is either to God’s glory or it is not. God has the right to order every aspect of human life.

Covenant Presence

God’s lordship means that he controls everything and speaks with absolute authority. There is also a third element to God’s lordship, and in some ways this is the deepest and most precious. That element is his commitment to us and, therefore, his presence with us.

As noted earlier, the essence of the covenant is God’s word, “I will be your God, and you will be my people.” God said that to Israel under Moses (Ex. 6:7) and to the New Testament people of God (2 Cor. 6:16). He declared this promise many times throughout Scripture (Gen. 17:7; Ex. 6:7; 29:45; Lev. 26:12; Jer. 7:23; 11:4; 24:7; 30:22; Ezek. 11:20; 14:11; 36:28; 37:27; Heb. 11:16; Rev. 21:3). This means that the covenant Lord is one who takes people to be his own.

When God takes us to be his people, he fights our battles, blesses us, loves us, and sometimes gives us special judgments because of our sins (as Amos 3:2). Most importantly, he is *with* us. He places his name upon us (Num. 6:27), so that he dwells with us and we with him. In the Old Testament, God literally dwelled with Israel, as he placed his theophany, his visible presence, in the tabernacle and then in the temple. In the New Testament, Jesus is Immanuel, “God with us” (Isa. 7:14; Matt. 1:23; cf. Gen. 21:22; 26:28; 28:15; 39:3–4). He is God “tabernacling” among us (John 1:14). And after his resurrection, he sends the Spirit to dwell in us, as in a temple (1 Cor. 3:16).

Control, authority, presence. Those are the main biblical concepts that explain the meaning of God’s lordship.

Transcendence and Immanence

These lordship attributes, as I call them, will help us to get a clear idea of the concepts of *transcendence* and *immanence* that theologians often use to describe the biblical God. These are not biblical terms, but the Bible does speak of God's being "on high" (Ps. 113:5, cf. 123:1; Isa. 5:16) as well as "with us." He is both "up there" and "down here." He is exalted, and he is near. When Scripture uses the "up there" language, theologians call it transcendence. When Scripture speaks of God "down here" with us, the theologians speak of immanence.

There are dangers, however, in the concepts of transcendence and immanence. I think, for example, that some theologians have misunderstood God's transcendence. They think it means that God is so far away from us that we cannot really know him, so far that human language can't describe him accurately, so far that to us he's just a great heavenly blur without any definite characteristics. This concept of transcendence is unbiblical. If God is transcendent in *that* way, how can he also be near to us? Furthermore, according to the Bible we *can* know definite things about God. Despite the limitations of human language, God is able to use human language to tell us clearly and accurately who he is and what he has done.

So, I urge you to reject that theological concept of transcendence. If you are going to use that word at all, use it to describe God's enthronement. When Scripture speaks of God as "high," "exalted," "lifted up," it is not saying that he lives far away from us so that we can't know him. Rather, it's saying that God is King, that he is Lord. In other words, biblical transcendence is God's lordship attributes of control and authority.

Similarly, you should use the word *immanence*, if you use it at all, to describe God's covenant presence. Some theologians speak as though when God becomes immanent he becomes immersed in the world, hidden in the world, so that he cannot be distinguished from creaturely reality. But that is not biblical. God is always distinct from the world, for he is the Creator and we are the creature. Yet, he is clearly revealed in the world (Ps. 19:1; Rom. 1:18–21). God does come to be with creatures, and that's something wonderful and precious.

Objections to Lordship as a Central Focus

There are, of course, a lot of perspectives by which to look at Scripture, and I think that lordship is an especially valuable one, simply because it is so central to the Bible itself. But some theologians have preferred other approaches. Some, for example, prefer to focus on God's love and mercy. I agree that these are important, but I think their importance is most obvious from a lordship perspective. God's love and mercy are aspects of his covenant presence with his people. Furthermore, God's sovereignty magnifies his love and mercy, displaying their power, assuring us that his love always accomplishes his purpose.

To some, of course, the very emphasis on divine sovereignty is to be avoided. They want to leave more room for human free will (see chap. 7). But divine sovereignty, with the doctrine of predestination, is an important part of the Bible.

Others may object that the idea of lordship suggests medieval feudalism. It is important that we understand lordship first in biblical terms, not in terms of human cultures. The biblical view of God's lordship is very different from feudalism, though there are some things in common. The main difference is God's absolute control and authority, coupled with his presence with his people.

Another objection is that to focus on lordship obscures other biblical emphases. Certainly, any model emphasizes some biblical truth somewhat at the expense of other truth. The reason is that theology is not the Bible. Theology restates the truths of the Bible, so inevitably its emphasis will differ from Scripture itself. The only way to remedy that problem is to restrict theology so that it does nothing but read the Bible from Genesis to Revelation.

Certainly, lordship may profitably be balanced with other models, such as God as Father, Husband, and Redeemer. Of all these, I believe that lordship is most comprehensive, both in its pervasiveness throughout Scripture and in its ability to include and explain other models.

The first thing to remember about God is that he is Lord, Yahweh, the I AM. As the Lord, he is the personal, holy, head of the covenant. He is in full control of the world he has made, speaks to us with absolute authority, and commits himself to us as Immanuel, God with us.