

# Our Utilitarian Approach to God

“... And the Lord God prepared a plant and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be shade for his head to deliver him from his misery. So Jonah was very grateful for the plant” (Jonah 4:5,6). Although we understand the scriptures to teach that we are God’s vessels, we sometimes look upon Him as a vessel for our own use. We tend to take a utilitarian approach to God, as if He were an instrument that exists to accomplish our purposes, rather than vice versa. The degree to which we delight in God is too often determined by how “useful” He is to us. In our own minds, we have a concept of how we would like our lives to be, and to the extent that God helps us move toward having this sort of life, we are delighted with Him. We look for the “practical” benefits of the spiritual life, and if these are not found, then we tend to become angry with God. Perhaps we reject Him altogether. We might not say it in so many words, but we have little use for a God who doesn’t come through for us in the clutch. In the heat of the blazing Assyrian sun, Jonah was pleased when God prepared a plant that would provide welcome shade and “deliver him from his misery.” He was not so pleased the next day when the plant was destroyed and he

By Gary Henry

had no choice but to sit in the sun again. “It is better,” he said, “for me to die than to live” (Jonah 4:8). Just so, our estimate of how well God is doing often depends on how satisfactorily He is providing what we desire. Yet if our relationship with God is based upon love, we can ill afford to let self-centered (though we would simply call them “practical”) motives enter in. Our enjoyment of God cannot depend on whether some desired payoff is being received from Him. Love does not calculate or bargain for personal benefit; it gives out of the sheer joy of giving to one who is beloved. “The only reward love seeks is someone to love” (Bernard of Clairvaux). And if there is any question of benefit, we exist for His benefit: our glory is to accomplish His purposes and to show forth His goodness. “That which cannot be explained or made useful tends to be rejected as contrary to our purpose. Under those circumstances, we lose the ability to remain instruments of God’s will. We would rather inform God of our needs in the hope that he will comply with our conceptions of what life ought to be” (Paul Ciholas).



# The Auburn Beacon



Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:16)

## Turning the Grace of God into a Carnal Weapon

By Larry Rouse



### Thoughts to Ponder

But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. (James 3:14-15)

All who know the Lord understand the power of His grace! Those who have seen the blackness of their own sin and were then melted by the message of how God gave His Son for them, can attest to the life-changing power of the gospel. We do not deserve salvation. We cannot earn salvation. In our sin we were once active enemies of God. Still, God, by His grace, gave us the greatest gift that has ever been given (Rom 5:6-8)!

Those who have been changed by this grace, find their hearts and their lives defined by it. Paul plainly proclaimed “By the grace of God I am what I am” (1 Cor 15:10). When Paul converted some Jews and proselytes to God he urged them to continue “in the grace of God” (Acts 13:43). Our true spiritual growth is measured by our increase in “the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18).

“I much prefer to deal with people who will meet you in the open before witnesses to air honest disagreements than those who isolate and insulate themselves in ivory towers where they look down with contempt on the fray below them.”

Others found under this banner of “grace” that in their hearts they could hate their brethren and exalt themselves over these “inferiors” in their pride (1 John 3:14-15). Jude proclaimed that these men had in fact turned “the grace of our God into lewdness” (Jude 4).

### The perversion of God’s Grace

Satan hates the grace of God, for by it men are rescued from his clutches. Being the cunning adversary that he is, Satan has encouraged many to serve him under the banner of the grace of God! There were those who preached a doctrine of “grace” that left men’s hearts untouched by the teaching of the Spirit of God. Men were told that they could “continue in sin that grace may abound” (Romans 6:1).

### Modern Day Examples

Years ago I read an article by Connie Adams that I never forgot. He received some advice concerning men who claim to define their lives by the “grace” of God and how they actually act under pressure.

“Years ago, an older preacher told me of a warning he had received years be-

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### Classes This Week

<b>Sunday 5:15 PM</b> Kid’s Class in Auditorium	<b>Tuesday 8:00 PM</b> Truth Seekers in room 2326 of the student center	<b>Tuesday 7:00 PM</b> ladies’ class at Abbie Harrison’s house on “Seasoning your Words”
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Lisa Carter (Luke’s mother)	Jesse Godwin (Troy’s father and Mac’s grandfather)	Nell Holcomb (Ben’s grandmother, Joannetta’s aunt)	Louise Pack (Anna and Christopher’s grandmother)
Gloria Detmer and Carol Dickerson (Toni Herd’s Sisters)	Don Lanier (Father of Greg Lanier)	David Hartsell (Holly and Brad’s Father)	Jamin Hymel (Chad’s son)
Madeline Morton (Greg Lanier’s g’dughter)	Alexander Locke (Jeremiah’s cousin’s son)	Betty Bradford	Hazel Gilliland and Sherry Carroll (Toni’s relatives)
Ricky Tucker (Tyler’s cousin)	Ermogene Laxson (Sara Lail’s grandmother)	Danny Weldon (Rusty Weldon’s brother)	William Smith (Ken Sullivan’s brother)
Gerald White (Christopher, Anna and Wesley’s Father)	Arabelle Rich (Joannetta’s aunt)	Sasha Rozier (Makenzie Reynolds’ cousin)	Eva Jean Cavender (Matt’s grandmother)
Bonnie Rhodes Kirkley (Toni Herd’s family)	Howard Vaughan (Mary Ann’s Granddad)	Aubrey Meeks (Toni Herd’s Nephew)	James Palmer (Rachel Hobbard’s grandfather)

### November Birthdays

- 1-Paulina Zacarius
- 2-Debbi Coleman
- 6-Troy Godwin
- 6-Bridgette Borden
- 7-Amy Godwin
- 8-Ashley Miller
- 9-Darla Hahn
- 11-Andrew Hahn
- 12-Randal Porterfield
- 13-Toni Herd
- 13-Emerson Daniels
- 13-Dylan Bartlett
- 13-Ronaldo Henriquez
- 16-Nicole Pender
- 16-Alexander Dunaway
- 18-Alaina Bagents
- 23-Mary Ann Roberts
- 25-Olyvia Winslett
- 25-Silas Weldon
- 27-Scott Fowler
- 28-Will Harris
- 30-David Simpson

### News and Notes

- ☒ - Group meetings will be tonight!
- ☒ - Hector & Cristin’s beautiful baby girl Kiara arrived Thur. night!
- ☒ - Please pray for our expectant mothers: Amanda Stephens and Jenna Vaughn.
- ☒ - Jenna Vaughn has been confined to bed rest during her pregnancy.
- ☒ - Those interested in signing up to teach or assist teachers next year in the 1-yr-old through 5th grade classes please see Jared Johnson.
- ☒ - Please keep those in your prayers who are in the adoption process: Kevin and Jessica Anderson.
- ☒ - Please pray for the Moreno’s in the visa process...
- ☒ - The Lagrange church will have a weekend meeting Nov. 4-6 with Lance Blackburn.
- ☒ - Tonight’s lesson will be a question night. Please give all questions to brother Rouse: larryrouse@aubeacon.com

**Elders**  
Walker Davis (334) 703-0050  
Larry Rouse (334) 734-2133

**SCHEDULE OF SERVICES**  
**Sunday**  
Bible Class .....9:30 AM  
Worship .....10:20 AM  
Evening Worship ..... 6:00 PM  
**Wednesday**  
Bible Classes.....7:00 PM  
**E-Mail:**  
larryrouse@aubeacon.com

Larry Rouse  
Evangelist and Editor

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fore from Cled Wallace. He said, "Watch out for the real sweet men. They will rip you to pieces when they get a chance." I have received more unkind and unjust treatment over the years from those who had the most to say about love, kindness, gentleness and such nobler qualities, but who could not tolerate any criticism about what they were teaching."

"I much prefer to deal with people who will meet you in the open before witnesses to air honest disagreements than those who isolate and insult themselves in ivory towers where they look down with contempt on the fray below them."

I, too, have experienced the wrath of these men who talk about grace, love and peace. Often these men are seeking to form a party, split a church or work to destroy the reputation of another Christian they view as a competitor in any way they can.

### Tests for the True Grace of God

Peter wanted Christians to clearly identify and stand in the "true grace of God" rather than some self-serving philosophy (1 Peter 5:12). Consider these questions and test your own heart.

#### 1. How do I view those who disagree with me?

Those who are motivated by God's grace and love are forbearing and willing to listen to others that have a difference with them. God's grace will always lead to an open Bible and an open heart to search out "the word of His grace" (Acts 20:32).

When Satan's "grace" is involved, there will be quick judgments about others. Many are quickly labeled as unworthy of study, particularly if they have displayed a strong faith and knowledge of God's word. However, those who are struggling and separated from other Christians are often approached in private about these new views (Peter 2:1).

**2. Am I being honest with others about what I really believe?** The grace of God will be open and honest about anything God has revealed. There is no need to plot, plan or scheme concerning how to teach others. "Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we do not lose heart. But we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God" (2 Cor 4:1-2).

Those who are motivated by Satan's wisdom have learned to lie. They have as their goal to bring as many into their party as possible and in any way they can. If a false impression about their own beliefs would keep a knowledgeable Christian from questioning them and thus give them more time to work behind the scenes, then they will do that very thing. If they can misrepresent what another Christian believes so they can pull another Christian into their group, then they will do that too (Gal 4:17).

**3. What is the focus of my own heart and those that associate with me?** Our tongues will ultimately reveal our hearts. "A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things" (Matthew 12:35). Those motivated by the grace of God will be looking to serve others, to speak well of others and to see the best in others.

A sure sign of Satan's wisdom is seen when men's concept of "grace" leads them to quickly label others as "traditionalist," "legalist" and with many other terms (James 3:16). These men are constantly looking at men, whether it is to condemn and attack their "opponents" or to flatter one another over their spirituality. "For we dare not class ourselves or compare ourselves with those who commend themselves. But they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise" (2 Cor 10:12).

### One Final Test

We must know the difference between these philosophies. From my personal experience, I have found most that have used God's grace as a weapon to have hearts that are filled with anger and bitterness. Sadly, if given time, they will fill their disciples with this same spirit. Keep your eyes open and see if it is God or Satan that is behind these teachings.

"Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace" (James 3:13-18).



# Doctrine and Teaching

By Doy Moyer

Pigeonholing is the process of compartmentalizing. By labeling a particular item a certain way, we can categorize it with other items labeled the same, and thus deal with it from a priority base of which items we think are most important. We all try to logically pigeonhole matters by priority. Sometimes, though, that process can become fairly arbitrary, and I believe the phrase "doctrinal issues" tends to fall into this category.

We often look at various questions in terms of being "doctrinal issues" or non-doctrinal issues (and no, I'm not going to "make a list" here). What is usually meant by this is that some matters are significant, if not vital, points of teaching, while others aren't so much. This concept of "doctrinal" fits more along the lines of dogma (a set of doctrines authoritatively affirmed). If the issues do not carry the significance, in our judgment, then we deem them non-doctrinal, and "it is ok to disagree on those issues." But what exactly is a "doctrinal issue"?

While the Bible uses the term "doctrine" (e.g., 1 Tim. 4:16), the word "doctrine" has come to have a life of its own. "Doctrine" is often used to refer more to a set of particular dogmas or tenets affirmed by certain groups. While doctrine and teaching mean the same thing in Scripture, a modern definition would include, "something taught as the principles or creed of a religion ... tenets." In other words, doctrine (as used today) is not just teaching; it is teaching that embodies a set of beliefs peculiar to a particular religious body, the violation of which brings about some kind of negative consequence. The problem is that this is not how we find the term used in Scripture.

Here's a challenge. Show just one passage where the word "doctrine" means anything other than "teaching." Think about it. Do we give the impression that some matters of "teaching" are "doctrine," while some other matters of "teaching" are "non-doctrinal" (i.e., not a part of "our" core tenets)? Here's the point: anything

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that is taught is doctrine, including our applications. Teaching – right or wrong, important or not, sound or unsound, in application or not, is doctrine by definition. Vital or not, if it is taught, it is a doctrine.

Here's where it gets more difficult. Some doctrines do not carry the same weight as others (cf. Matt. 23:23-24). I teach that a congregation may have a building in which to meet; that is a doctrine I accept. But whether a group owns a building or not is ultimately not eternally important; it won't condemn or

save anyone. This is not on par with a doctrine for which its violation would cause eternal destruction (2 Pet. 2:1; 3:16-17). Whether a person eats meats or not is ultimately not going to condemn or save. It is not a doctrine that would lead to condemnation (unless a brother was divisive about it, which seems to be a major point of Romans 14). On the other hand, Jesus said, "unless you believe that I am He, you will die in your sins" (John 8:24). What we believe and teach about Jesus does have eternal consequence.

The distinctions that need to be made are over the significance of the doctrine itself, not over whether a teaching is actually "doctrinal." If it is taught in any way, then it is doctrine. How significant will that doctrine be? This is why we need to be diligent and careful students.

Let's be careful not to misuse terms. It's too easy to espouse a pet phrase (even if the Bible does not use it like we do), then use it as a measuring stick for everyone else's soundness. If we are concerned about using Bible terms in Bible ways, then we need to think about how we sometimes use the word "doctrine." Most importantly, let's make sure that our doctrine is sound and that our application is proper (two sides of the same coin). Scripture needs to be taught and applied correctly.

