

My Journey to Grace
by Drew Arliskas

I became a Christian late in high school. I had not been raised going to church, but my parents had become Christians when I was in junior high. My salvation is obviously a longer story, but when I heard of God's grace and his desire to forgive me through Christ I responded. I understood that there was nothing I could do to put myself in a right relationship with God. I understood that Jesus had done everything and all I needed to do was believe.

I entered Bible College immediately following high school. My plans originally were to follow my parents in their business, but I hungered first to study the Bible. I knew that having not been exposed to God's Word up until that time there was much for me to learn in order to honor God as a businessman. This all took place in the 80's. John MacArthur Jr. and his books were very popular.

By the time I exited Bible College I was firmly rooted in Lordship salvation. My heart was moved from a desire to go into business to a desire to serve God in ministry. After ordination I found myself, with my family, living on Okinawa, Japan in a ministry of evangelism and discipleship among the military.

I preached and taught what I learned so well. I shared the good news of the free gift of salvation and the need to persevere faithfully as a disciple. I took my understanding of what a disciple was from MacArthur. I swallowed the pill that claimed that Matthew 10 was the definitive statement of discipleship and that saving faith produced obedient disciples. There was a cost to discipleship and any who wished to follow Christ must consider that cost.

As time went on, however, I began to question my theology. This came mainly as a result of my own personal study of the Bible. I had read Ryrie's response to MacArthur's *The Gospel According to Jesus* in my first year out of college, but I dismissed it quickly. With no mentors and living on a small, Japanese island I had to work hard to prepare myself to teach and disciple. I was teaching three Bible studies a week and always had a number of men I was working with. I found myself having to do summersaults in order to explain the two truths of free salvation and that those who are saved will be obedient disciples. I soon began to doubt what I believed. How could something free demand my obedience in order to know I had it? How was that free.

When I was studying Matthew 16 I came upon a verse that rocked my theological world. "For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and will then repay every man according to his deeds, (vs. 27 NASB). This statement made by Jesus comes after his invitation to his disciples to deny themselves, take up their own crosses, and follow him. Jesus had just told them that he was headed for Jerusalem where he would be killed. Then he asked them to follow him at a great cost to themselves. The fact that there was a promise of a reward for how the disciples did

this amazed me. Was the reward salvation? It could not be! I could not perform the right mental gymnastics to mingle Matthew 16:27 with the free salvation described in Ephesians 2:8-9. This was something entirely different than salvation.

As I looked at the context of this passage in Matthew as well as some other passages I began to notice how Jesus spoke differently to people depending on who they were. Yes, Matthew 10 is a key chapter on what it means to faithfully follow Jesus. The conversation recorded in Matthew 10, though, is between Jesus and his twelve disciples (Matt. 10:1; 11:1). In Matthew 16:21-27 Jesus is again speaking only to his twelve disciples. It is in Matthew 11 that Jesus is teaching and preaching in the cities. "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For "My yoke is easy and My burden is light," (Matt. 11:28-30). It became clear to me that Jesus was talking about two entirely different things. One was salvation. That burden is easy and light. The other is a life of following him.

It is a hard thing to dismiss as untrue what one has held as gospel truth. The only way I could hold to my previous beliefs was to ignore the Word of God. My theology changed. My ministry propelled. Free grace was really free! The call to deny myself and follow Jesus was also real and came with promises of reward and warnings of loss of reward. My motivation for obedience was no longer the fear of not being saved. I could truly rest in the saving grace of Jesus. I am even more motivated today to follow.

I am committed to the gospel of free grace. Most Christians today fail to fully understand how free their salvation is or they do understand but have no motivation toward godly living today. My purpose is to help them read their Bibles better so that they may know the perfect rest of salvation and be passionately motivated to follow Jesus.