

# GRACE GAZETTE

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*Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed.*

*Hebrews 12:12-13*

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## THE SIGN OF JONAH

*This is an evil generation: they seek a sign; and there shall no sign be given it, but the sign of Jonas the prophet.*

*Luke 11:29*

The human mind is very resourceful in finding ways to justify its own actions. We see this quite early on with both Adam and Eve. When the LORD asked Adam why he was hiding, he said, *"I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself."* (Gen 3:10) What he said was true enough, but he was actually avoiding the real answer, for which he made a classic excuse when the LORD asked *"Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat?"* (Gen 3:11)

The clear and plain answer would have been "yes", but he determined to find an excuse for his action by placing the blame upon the woman. *"And the man said, The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat."* (Gen 3:12) The implication is "It's her fault and not mine". Of course, Eve was not to be outdone nor to readily admit her own fault, either, as the LORD inquired of her, *"What is this that thou hast done?"* Her reply was in reality a mirror image of Adam's; *"And the woman said, The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat."* (Gen 3:13)

Her own nature was revealed, just as Adam's was, as she sought to mitigate her own guilt and set forth some justification for her action. Both of them spoke that which is true, yet both of them failed to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Such is the nature which abides in the flesh of man. Man, by nature, is at the same time both a deceiver and deceived. The writer of Proverbs, tells us *"There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death."* (Prov 14:12) We can convince ourselves of just about anything, especially when we have a desire to do something which we know is not proper or in keeping with the LORD's word.

Paul speaks of this mind when he says, *"For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I."* (Rom 7:15) Now, he is speaking of it from the perspective of a man who is awakened to understand both the holiness of the law and his own depravity. Not all men have this gift, yet all men without exception will, according to their nature, convince themselves of their right to do as they please and when confronted with their error will seek to justify their actions, in their own mind if not outwardly. This is especially evident in the penchant of men (and women) to excuse actions in themselves which they would condemn in others. Paul comments on this mind by saying, *"Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another,"* (Rom 2:15)

The man who can justify his own actions in taking something that he does not own, will become angry if someone should take something that belongs to him. Every thief who sits in jail, convicted of his crime, yet excusing his actions in his own mind, will react with vengeance if his cellmate should take something of his. This indicates very plainly the *"work of the law written in the heart."* Yet the work of the law cannot and does not serve to change the heart of men, only to reveal the depravity which is found there. All are without excuse before this law, yet by nature every man will seek to justify himself by the law of his mind.

A *"certain lawyer"* inquired of the LORD, what he might do to inherit eternal life. (see Luke 10:25) The LORD replied by asking him what the law said. He then answered by correctly summarizing

the law in its two tables. The LORD then plainly told him, *“Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live.”* (Luke 10:28) When confronted with his own obvious failing to keep that law he then reverted to the common default of the natural man, *“But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour?”* (Luke 10:29) The LORD then set forth the parable of the Good Samaritan. Men will either deny the veracity of the law or when that fails will seek to excuse themselves by claiming that they do not understand it. In all cases they will seek to convince themselves and all who will listen, that they have a good reason for disregarding the precepts of the law.

Some even imagine that they do keep it and wonder why they could possibly be considered as failing to abide by its precepts. This mind is illustrated by those in Matthew 7:22 who brought up their supposed “good works” as grounds for their acceptance with the LORD. Little did they comprehend their true need as they desired to “justify themselves” by their own actions. All of these excuses (in one way or another) illustrate the corrupt nature of man, left to his own thoughts.

It is impossible for a man to comprehend the separation that exists between himself and a HOLY GOD, apart from the grace of GOD to strip him of his “excuses” and to confess his inability to approach unto GOD and his devilish rebellion against HIS precepts. This “great grace” is illustrated for us as the LORD humbled Job before him, causing him to put his hand over his mouth saying, *“I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.”* (Job 42:5-6) Job was, then, a man without any excuse.

We see the same scenario on the Damascus road, as he who breathed out threatenings and slaughters against the people of GOD was now brought down upon his face to confess the LORDSHIP of CHRIST JESUS. He had excused himself of wrong as he held the coats of those that stoned Steven and convinced himself that he was doing good by obtaining letters against the disciples of CHRIST. Yet he was stripped of all of that justification in his own mind when the LORD convinced him of the truth which, heretofore, he had kicked against and defended himself. All such pretense was now purged from his mind and he had no excuse.

This is the essence of repentance. True repentance does not exist where men seek to make excuses for their actions or justify themselves in their own eyes. True repentance is a perfect work which is the product of the HOLY GHOST convincing men of sin (their own), righteousness (the only perfect righteousness, which is found in CHRIST, alone) and judgment (that which causes them to tremble, and yet own that the judgment of GOD is right and good).

The LORD sent Jonah to Nineveh to preach unto them the necessity of repentance. *“Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.”* (Jonah 3:4) On that journey the LORD saw fit to bring Jonah to repentance in a very unconventional but effective manner, as HE prepared a fish for Jonah’s passage there, even though Jonah had bought a ticket going the other way. In the belly of that fish, HE caused Jonah to come face to face with his own limitations and complete inability to deliver himself from what he supposed would be his tomb. In the midst of that darkness the LORD convinced him of sin, righteousness, and judgment and he cried out, *“But I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay that that I have vowed. Salvation is of the LORD.”* (Jon 2:9)

Though the LORD spared Nineveh, according to HIS mercy, it was unto Jonah that the LORD revealed HIS sovereign will. We see the natural depravity of Jonah, as he (though an object of the LORD’s mercy) did begrudge that same mercy shown to those he despised. Yet it seems that the LORD did all of this to soften the heart of Jonah even though such is not spelled out in the book. Why else would he have written this account but to show the LORD’s mercy in retrospect?

Yet the underlying reason for this account was not the sparing of Nineveh or even the softening of Jonah’s rebellious heart, but rather to illustrate the resurrection of the Only Begotten SON of GOD, as HE triumphed over death and hell. *“For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale’s belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here.”* (Mat 12:40-41) The resurrection of CHRIST is at the very center of the preaching of the Gospel. There can be no gospel preaching where the resurrection of CHRIST is not unequivocally declared. For if HE did not rise from the dead, then HIS death on Calvary’s cross, while noble, could have procured redemption for none. Now is CHRIST risen from the dead and become the FIRSTFRUITS of them that slept. mam