

Born to Win

A Doctrine of Grace

by Ronald L. Dart

For David and his men it had been a hard, *hard* three days. They had had to take off without any preparation; they left in a hurry. They had taken no food. He was fleeing from King Saul. When they came to a place called Nob, by the time they got there they were in a bad way. They needed food, and there was only one place that David knew of where they might get something to eat. (The story is in First Samuel 21.)

And David came to Nob, to Ahimelech who was the priest at that time. And Ahimelech was frightened at David showing up there by himself. It was *very* unusual for David, as one of the king's top men, who was always accompanied by a retinue of people. He had some fighters that traveled with him, usually, who were men who were the type that wore their clothes out from the inside. They were tough men. David was alone. But David said to Ahimelech the priest (who really was concerned and wanted to know why he was alone); he said:

1 Samuel 21

AKJV

² And David said to Ahimelech the priest, The king has commanded me a business, and has said to me, Let no man know any thing of the business about which I send you, and what I have commanded you: and I have appointed my servants to such and such a place.

Now, David *lied* to the priest. Should he have done that? Well, in fact he goes on now to *compound* his law-breaking.

1 Samuel 21

AKJV

³ Now therefore what is under your hand? give me five loaves of bread in my hand, or what there is present [*whatever it is that you've got*].

⁴ And the priest answered David, and said, [*I'm sorry.*] There is no common bread under my hand, but there is hallowed bread; if the young men have kept themselves at least from women.

⁵ And David answered the priest, and said to him, Of a truth women have been kept from us about these three days, since I came out, and the vessels of the young men are holy [*So we're safe in that regard.*], and the bread is in a manner common, yes, though it were sanctified this day in the vessel.

⁶ So the priest gave him hallowed bread: for there was no bread there but the show bread, that was taken from before the LORD, to put hot bread in the day when it was taken away.

Now, this is a real classic of rationalization—of reasoning your way around the law. Right? The law says *no one* but the priests can eat holy bread. “Well, we’ve got a problem. And maybe if the young men haven’t been close to women for three days. And maybe, maybe this is all right.” And David said, “Well yeah, in a manner of speaking it’s common.” And they managed to work their way around it, and he

gave him the show bread to eat. If you were the judge, and this infraction were brought before you... Because it is an infraction of the law. Make no mistake about that. Only the priests could eat holy bread. If you were called upon to judge it, what would you say? And how do you think *God* would judge this infraction of the law?

Well, fortunately we have a clue. Jesus himself evaluated this instance. And the passage in which he evaluates it is found in the 12th chapter of Matthew. You might wish to turn there because it's of particular interest. Matthew 12, verse 1:

Matthew 12

AKJV

¹ At that time Jesus went on the sabbath day through the grain field; and his disciples were hungry, and began to pluck the ears of grain, and to eat.

² But when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto him, Behold, your disciples do that which is not lawful to do upon the sabbath day.

Now, there is a very interesting question that comes up at this point: Was it or was it not? Surely, by their interpretation it was wrong for them to be plucking those ears of corn and to be eating them on the Sabbath day. You're supposed to get your food ready on Friday so you don't have to do that kind of thing. Jesus replied:

Matthew 12

KJ2000

³ [...] Have you not read what David did, when he was hungry, and they that were with him;

⁴ How he entered into the house of God, and did eat the showbread, which was not lawful for him to eat, neither for them who were with him, but only for the priests?

Now, you think about that for a moment. Jesus was plainly ready to let David off. Not only that, he did not even argue with the Pharisees the question of whether it was right or wrong for his disciples to pluck ears of corn on the Sabbath day. In fact, he turns to David's situation and he just says, "Look what David did. He did what it is not lawful to do."

Well, on what basis did Jesus let them off? On what basis was he prepared to justify David? Well, if you look at this situation, you have the crowd that says, "Well, if you give them an inch, they'll take a mile." And their idea is you don't give that inch in the first place, and then nobody takes the mile. Everything is kept nice and neat and everything is quite in order. This school of thought is exemplified by the Pharisees. They say to themselves, "Look, we've got to *spell these things out*. We've got to build a fence around the law so that people will not *accidentally* step over the line and break Gods law, thereby be defiled, or incur Gods displeasure."

Now, there is a strange fear (and, I don't know, some of you may actually feel a little bit of it right now) that if we begin to let the barriers down that people will take liberties, and they will abuse the law, and everything will get completely out of control. Well, I can tell you one thing: Jesus and the Pharisees were on *completely opposite* sides of the fence on this issue. On that there can't be much dispute.

Now, somebody might have walked up to Jesus right after he said this and quoted him this scripture. (You don't need to turn to it; it's a short one.) Exodus 29:32:

Exodus 29

AKJV

³² And Aaron and his sons shall eat the flesh of the ram, and the bread that is in the basket by the door of the tabernacle of the congregation.

³³ And they shall eat those things with which the atonement was made, to consecrate and to sanctify them: but a stranger shall not eat thereof, because they are holy.

And that's not the only scripture he could have quoted to Jesus; because very plainly, if you go back to the law, the law does not make any room for exceptions on the show bread. It's for the priests, the priests, and the priests. No one else. Someone could have come to Jesus after he had said that and presented him with this. And the person would want to know, "Jesus, how can you justify what David did in the light of these passages of scripture?"

How do you suppose Jesus would have answered him? Well, I am going to try and answer that question for you today. I'm going to try to answer the question in some detail. And in the process, I'm going to explain to you one of the most important things you will ever learn about God and his law. In fact, if you can grasp what I am going to explain today, it may revolutionize the way you read the Bible, the way you relate to God, and the way you relate to one another. Now, if that sounds a little presumptuous to you...well, we'll let you listen and you can judge when I have finished. But first I want to make three things clear.

One: The law of the show bread was not superseded or set aside by any of the actions of David. David did not have that kind of authority. The law of the show bread was *not* unimportant. It was as important as any other law of God. It was the law of God then. It was the law when David did it. It was the law when Christ talked about it. It was the law after that. And it will be the law again when there once again is a tabernacle or a temple and show bread placed before God.

Number two: I am a *radical believer* in the law of God. I take Jesus at his word when he says [**Matthew 5:18**], "Not one jot, not one tittle, shall pass from the law till *everything* has come to pass. As long as heaven and earth lasts, not one dotting of the 'I', not one crossing of the 'T' shall pass from the law." That's what I believe.

Number three: All rationalizations considered, *David did break the law*. Jesus said he ate the bread which it was "not lawful" for him to eat.

All right. Why, then, does Jesus use this example in reply to the accusation that his disciples were breaking the Sabbath day? How is it possible for him to justify David? And how can he justify David when there is not a *hint* in the biblical account of any remorse on David's part, of any repentance on David's part, nor anything being done by David to make up for his error? Nothing; he just did it and he went away. How could he do that?

The answer comes in one word. It's a familiar word. In fact, the word is *too* familiar. It's been used and used and used and used, and I think it's gotten to the place to where nobody really has much of a clue what Jesus means when he uses the word (or when anyone else does for that matter). The word is *grace*. A one-syllable, short little word: grace. And here is a sentence (It's so important you may want to write it down, because I don't want you to forget it.): Grace is an Old Testament doctrine. Grace is an *Old* Testament doctrine. David, an *Old* Testament character was justified, not because what he did was right, but because *God is gracious*. Isn't that simple?

Now, I know you know that. I know you know God is gracious. I know you've heard that phrase, "God is gracious." It may be a part of "God is merciful, gracious, slow to anger"...you know, all these lines of words and descriptions of what God is like. *God is gracious*. I wonder though, sometimes, what we think that means? What does it mean to say that God is gracious? Well, one of the things I want to try to do today is to see if I can explain to you, clearly, what that means.

There's a beautiful example of the graciousness of God right in the very beginning of your Bible. God came to the end of all of his creation and finally, on the sixth day, he created Man. He created Man in his own image; and we're told that he created Man, male and female [**Genesis 1:27**]. And he took the man

and the woman that he had created—both of them perfect, physical specimens; beautiful creatures, well-formed in every direction; fully-mature, beautiful, gorgeous people. And they were, in God’s wisdom, completely naked. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply.”

Now, there are two kinds of people listening to me today. There are the people who believe that God is all-seeing, he knows everything that is happening, and that nothing in the world is hidden from him. Then there are the people who believe that the Book of Genesis is telling the truth. And the Book of Genesis presents a different picture for us. For Genesis gives us the picture that God created this beautiful woman and this handsome man; and put them in this lovely garden on a warm summer day, totally naked; and then he left them *completely alone*.

You know, what is interesting to me is...I personally am charmed by the Genesis account. I just read it and I’m filled to overflowing with the realization of who I’m looking at here. Who is this person? For what he has now done is what a *gracious* man would do. He did not create them beautiful, naked; and tell them to reproduce; and then go hide in the bushes and watch. He granted them complete privacy—which has an interesting consequence: It means that God doesn’t know everything or see everything that ever happens. Not that he couldn’t. It is that he chooses not to. Why does he choose not to? Because God is gracious. Gracious, you know, is a character trait that responds to awkward situations with grace.

There are those who believe that God is more like a computer than he is like a man: If you press the delete button, things disappear. It’s the way God is. If you press the right button, things go away. You press this button, things appear. It’s all automatic. They picture a God who is remorseless—that whatever the program says has to happen, has to happen. And if anything happens contrary to that, it’s because the program was written wrong or was written differently than what we thought it was. God is like a computer: Whatever happens...you do wrong, you suffer. You do right, things work for you. It’s *all automatic*. That’s what some people believe about God. They would never *in a million years* admit that; but emotionally, in their heart, in the way they think about God, pray to him, and react to him, they think he is more like a computer than he is like a man: You break the law, the law breaks you. (I wonder if you’ve ever heard that expression in a sermon? Any of you here ever hear that in a sermon, just out of curiosity? “You break the law, the law breaks you.”)

David broke the law, and the law didn’t break him. What went wrong with our computer program? *Something* did. God is not a computer. God is a person. And the thing that began to dawn on me in the first few chapters of Genesis is not only...stay with me on this...is that not only is God a person, but that God is *personable*—that he has characteristics and traits of a *person*; and that when you are with him he is gracious, he is kind, he is generous, he is open. One of the things that terrifies us about God is that he is also *just*, and *believes* in justice, and *insists* on justice. But you know, mercy rejoices against justice [**James 2:13**]; and that it is the justice of God and of his world that he himself decides *not* to carry out that constitutes grace, graciousness, and mercy. God is a *kind* person, he is *gentle*, he is *compassionate*, he is *forgiving*. He is gracious.

Now, it is true that God can be very strict at times; but that strictness grows out of his sense of justice. And when you don’t have any justice...well, what you would have if you had a God who had no sense of justice is you would have capriciousness. And there is a *world of difference*, there is a great gulf, between *graciousness* and *capriciousness*. Because graciousness can exist right along side of justice. The two of them go hand in hand. Because there *was* justice, Adam and Eve were eventually shut out of the Garden of Eden. They were denied access to the Tree of Life because there was justice. But in fact, it was a choice they made. They could have had either tree. They chose the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

Time passed. Two sons are born. One of them is named Cain, the other one is named Abel. You know the story [**Genesis 4**]. They made their offerings to God. God accepted Abel’s offering, but he didn’t accept Cain’s offering. And Cain was angry. And apparently he called his brother out into the field; and while they were out there and they argued, he killed him. And God came looking for Abel and he said to

Cain, “Where is your brother?” And Cain lied. He lied. He said, “I don’t know, am I my brother’s keeper?” And God said, “Your brother’s blood cries to me from the ground. I know what’s happened.”

Now, justice would have called for the death of Cain. Right?

Genesis 9

AKJV

⁶ Whoever sheds man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed:[...]

For his own reasons (and God doesn’t even explain what his reasons are) and without even that much of any kind of remorse on Cain’s part, God *graciously* did not kill him. It was purely a matter of grace that he was allowed to live. And more than that, he sent him into exile, but he put a mark on Cain. The mark that was put upon Cain, however, was not a punishment. The mark that was put upon Cain was to preserve his life and to warn other men that they must not touch Cain. Why did he do that? He did that because God is gracious.

More time passes, and things really deteriorate on the earth. The earth is filled with violence. Things got so *bad* that God finally decided he was sorry he ever started the project. Yeah, he said, “I’m sorry I ever put man on the earth.” Now, I realize this runs counter to the idea that God knows everything in advance. What can I tell you? God comes on the scene and he says, “I’m sorry I ever started this mess!” He really was. You know, it seems better to me that—if I want to know God and I really want to know what he’s like—I had better take him *as he is*, not *as I want him to be*. God was sorry, and wished he hadn’t done it. Remember, God is not a computer. This is not a program that was written long ago that we’re running out, and all we are is a bunch of little electrical currents running around through wires and running across switches in a computer that are either on or off. That is not what’s happening here. In Genesis 6, and verse 5:

Genesis 6

AKJV

⁵ And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

⁶ And it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart.

I mean, how would you say it if you don’t want to say, “I wish I hadn’t done it”?

Genesis 6

KJ2000

⁷ And the LORD said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for I am sorry that I have made them.

You know, it really is foolish to go around apologizing for God. But that’s what a lot of us try to do when we try to find explanations of this passage of Scripture—that somehow we’ll reconcile what we *think* we know about God with what he’s actually doing in here. Far smarter, folks, to just take what he’s doing in here as fact. And I’m sorry if it’s upsetting to some people to learn that God does not control everything. By his own choice, *God does not control everything*. That’s why you get into the trouble you get into.

So, God decided to end the whole Earth project—just wipe it out, start all over again maybe someplace else. And, except for one thing, he would have. That one thing is found in verse 8, in this little verse:

⁸ But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD.

Now mind you, Noah was a good man. Noah was a good man, and he was righteous in all of his generations. But if you think that that is the reason why Noah and his family survived the flood, you have it *all wrong*. That's not what the Bible says. Noah found *grace* in the eyes of the Lord. He was a good man, but he was not *that* good.

More time passes, and God strikes up a friendship with a man named Abraham. And this is really fascinating, because this friendship is *remarkably* personal. Now, I say it is "remarkably" personal...it's remarkable to you and I because we don't think of God normally in the terms in which this passage of Scripture and the events that I'm about to talk about are written. We really don't think that way. We think of God, we know God's a person, and we visualize him on a throne somewhere. But we *still* have a hard time thinking of him as a person who is personable, with whom we can relate. We try. We want to. But we think of him as remote, distant, far off, high and lifted up, and untouchable, unapproachable, and all those adjectives that I might put on him. You might tell me, "No, I don't believe that." But I'm talking about not what you *say* you believe; I'm talking about the way you *feel* about God. The way you *respond* to God, the way you *react* to the Scriptures, the way you react to life in general, tells me that most of us really don't think of God in these terms.

God, remember, is not a computer; he's a person. So, he comes to see Abraham one day. This occasion we're not really told exactly in what *form* he came, only that he and Abraham are talking back and forth. And God wants Abraham to have a son, and he wants him to have it by Sarah. Now, this is an interesting thing; because this is obviously a person, this God, who has preferences. Because Abraham's *got* a son, by his wife's handmaid, named Ishmael. And as far as any particular requirement of God's original promises, all this stuff could go straight forward with Ishmael and all would be well. Right? There's no real problem here. But that's not *what he wanted*.

Why did God do it this way? He did it this way because he *wanted* it this way. And for God that's enough. (You know, if you're God you can have what you want.) *He* wanted Abraham to have a son by Sarah. And you know, when you know someone, and you're a friend with someone, you're also a friend with his wife (and vice versa). Right? And we really *care* about one another. We care about one another as couples, too. And the love that we oftentimes develop for our friends—where we see each other and we squeal with delight, and we run and hug one another back and forth...when you're dealing with couples, the love for a couple is a combined thing. And one of the terrible things that happens with divorce is this rupture of a couple that so many of us have learned to love *as a couple*. And now we've got to learn to relate to them separately. Well, God knew Abraham and Sarah. And he *liked* them.

Now, I choose the term "he liked them" because we think of God... "Well, God loves all men." And we speak that as a platitude. We need to understand: He *liked* these people, cared about them. So he wanted them to have a son by Sarah. So God said, "Abraham, I'm going to see to it that Sarah has a son." Abraham then laughed. Now, he didn't just laugh; he *fell on the ground* laughing, with God there. And he is not laughing for joy. If you read the account [**Genesis 17**] very carefully, you will see this is true. He is laughing because the idea of he and Sarah having a baby is ridiculous. It's laughable. It's funny. And he doesn't really believe it. He hasn't got his mind around it. He can't quite deal with it. Fell on the ground.

Now, think about this for a moment: God is present. They're talking. God says, "You and Sarah are going to have a son." And he starts laughing—falls on the ground laughing in front of God. Do you think God would be offended? Well, it's fascinating, most of you people here would not be able to laugh in the presence of God no matter what he said. You just couldn't do it. All your strings would be *so tight* if you were in the presence of God, God would probably look at you and say, "Son, you are not a fish; close your mouth."

Now, what is also interesting about this is that God did not smite Abraham with boils for laughing at him, did he? What *did* he do? You know, an ungracious God would have been insulted, when he made Abraham a promise, and would say, “What are you laughing at me for? I made you a promise. I’m going to give you and this woman a son. What are you laughing at? Get up!” But that would have been very ungracious, would it not? And God is not ungracious; he’s *gracious*. Abraham gets on the floor laughing, and I think God looked down at him and said, “Well, just wait. You’ll see.” I think God takes a certain amount of pleasure in doing things the hard way. And this also tells me that God has a sense of humor; for he was able to see why Abraham would laugh, and not be offended by it, because *God is gracious*.

More time passes, and God comes to call on Abraham on his way to Sodom and Gomorrah. Now, if you had been able to hide in the bushes nearby and watch this encounter, what you would have seen would have been very commonplace, indeed. You would have seen three men walking down the road. (Abraham had been sitting in the shade over here.) Three men come walking down the road in the dust. Abraham spots them, Abraham jumps up, and you would have seen Abraham make arrangements to have water brought for them to wash their feet. You would have seen them wash their feet. You would have seen Abraham lay a meal before them. You would have seen them sit down and eat. I don’t know what could have been more ordinary in that world. Everything that happens in that account, as you come onto it... There is not a *hint* of anything other than the fact: Here is Abraham. Here are three men who came to visit him about evening time.

There’s just one thing: Two of these men were angels (as we call them) and the third was God himself. Now, does it seem out of the ordinary to you that God and two angels would sit down and wash their feet? That God and two angels would sit down and *eat food* that Abraham placed before them? Do their feet get dirty? Do they get hungry? Well, when they are in the flesh (which, apparently, they can be in the flesh when they choose to do so)... I say, apparently they *do* get dirty feet and they *do* get hungry. And I also thought: You know, God created man and he created food. And he created food so it would taste good. And I can see God saying to the two angels as they were on their way to Sodom and Gomorrah, “Let’s stop off and see Abraham. I’ve got something I want to tell him, and you can always get a good feed at Abraham’s place.”

I read the account not long ago when I was preparing for a radio broadcast [*What Is God Doing? #12*], and I felt I could come to no other conclusion: the fact that God, who created man and created food and created all things good in their time, is *quite capable* of appearing in the flesh and enjoying the things that he made possible. And like he said, “I know we can get a good feed at Abraham’s house.” And God, I suspect, enjoyed good food. Strange, isn’t it? But as he left Abraham to go on to Sodom, God paused. (The account is in Genesis 18, and I’m beginning reading in verse 20.)

Genesis 18

AKJV

²⁰ And the LORD said, Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous;

²¹ I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come to me; and if not, I will know.

My question is: How come he didn’t already know, if he is a computer that has sensors all around the world? How come he didn’t know?

All right, think about this for a moment: God knows everything; that’s our assumption. God is on his throne (wherever his throne is) and he is sitting up there, and in front of him across the room there is this *huge bank* of videos, and he’s got a clicker in his hand. Now, I want you to tell me: Can you visualize God sitting on his throne, clicking across the television sets up there, and finally seeing one and having it focus in close on what was going on in the back rooms of Sodom at any time? God is not a voyeur. He doesn’t peek into *your* bedroom. He doesn’t want to know what you do in secret or in private. He did

not want to watch what was going on in Sodom because, folks, *God is gracious*. And he just doesn't want to look at that kind of thing, or face that kind of thing. But he did receive the reports. And because he was a God of justice, it was not enough for him to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah on hearsay. He said, "I am going to go down and I am going to *see for myself*." Not only that, but God decided to go down and see for himself *in the flesh*. He was not going to stand off in the spirit and observe this. He was going to *smell* it, and *taste* it, and *experience* it—to hear it with human ears, so that his judgment would be right. Because he's just, but he is also gracious. And a great leader will always face up to his problems and the things he has to deal with and will deal with them personally. He will not deal with them from a distance. What a leader he is.

It's beyond my capacity to describe or imagine. But more and more I keep getting these little hints in the Bible to realize what a tremendous person this is—a real person, who is willing to come down and get his feet dirty on the earth and have to wash them to get them clean; who will enjoy a good meal; who will stand and talk with Abraham about what he's about to do and share this thought with him; and who is not willing to judge from afar off on hearsay of what somebody else told him, but was going to force himself to go down and confront Sodom and Gomorrah in the flesh.

Genesis 18

KJ2000

²² And the men turned their faces from there, and went toward Sodom: but Abraham stood yet before the LORD.

²³ And Abraham drew near, and said, will you also destroy the righteous with the wicked?

²⁴ Suppose there be fifty righteous within the city: will you also destroy and not spare the place for the fifty righteous that are there?

²⁵ That be far from you to do after this manner [...]

Now, isn't that interesting? Abraham *knew* God. God was his friend and he was God's friend. And he was able to say to God, "That's not like you." *Why* wasn't it like God? *Because God is gracious*. He's not the kind of person to do that. Abraham says, "I can't believe that you would do that."

Genesis 18

KJ2000

²⁶ And the LORD said, If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes.
[...]

³² And he said, Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak yet but this once: Suppose ten shall be found there. [...]

You know how he did. He worked his way all the way down, one step at a time—a little bargaining, giving and taking, going on here. And God finally said:

Genesis 18

KJ2000

³² [...] I will not destroy it for ten's sake.

Why would God let Abraham talk him down like this? Why didn't he just shut him up the first time out of his mouth? "Look Abraham, don't even worry about it. I'll do what's right. You go mind your own business, and I'll take care of mine." Why didn't God do that? Because God is...gracious. And gracious people don't do that. They listen, they hear you out, they want to know how you feel about it, they want to respond. And God wanted to do, as much as he could, what Abraham was asking. And there is another thing about God that I think that you should know: God does not *like* the idea of executing

judgement. He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked [Ezekiel 18:23, Ezekiel 33:11]. It is not something that he wants to do. He doesn't like killing people—even when they have it coming, even when they richly deserve it. Even when they ought to be dead and they ought to die in a horrible way, *God does not like that*. He doesn't want to do it. And he will take whatever reason comes to hand that he can use to be gracious, and to grant grace to someone who does not deserve it. There are so many examples of this in the Old Testament we could be here all day reviewing them. But let me give you the definitive example of what it is I'm driving at.

Still more time passes, and God finds himself a prophet. The man's name is Jonah. And he says to Jonah, "I want you to go to that great city Nineveh; and I want you to walk into that city, start walking in and proclaiming in the day you hit the boundary, 'Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown!'" And Jonah was not having any of it. You all know about Jonah fleeing from the Lord. He got on the boat, went away, thrown overboard, swallowed by the whale, spit up on the shore, and finally he comes to Nineveh and does what he's supposed to do. Now, all the rest of that stuff is a lot of fun for the kids; but I'm talking to adults right now, and there's something in this story that I really want you to get, and it's not the whale. He goes into this city and starts preaching:

Jonah 3

AKJV

⁴ [...] Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.

He doesn't even tell them why. And I kind of think, judging by the response in Nineveh, *he didn't even have to*.

Jonah 3

⁵ So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them.

⁶ For word came to the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and he laid his robe from him, and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes.

⁷ And he caused it to be proclaimed and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste any thing: let them not feed, nor drink water:

⁸ But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily to God: [...]

And listen to what he says:

Jonah 3

AKJV

⁸ [...] yes, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands.

I don't know if you remember it or not, but the primary reason God said he was going down towards Sodom and Gomorrah was because of the *violence* that it was filled with. The reason that he destroyed the earth in the time of Noah was because of the *violence* it was filled with [Genesis 6:11,13]. And here he is in Nineveh, and Ninevites *knew* that they needed to repent of their evil doings; and *specifically* mentions the *violence* that is in their hands. And he said this:

Jonah 3

AKJV

⁹ Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?

¹⁰ And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do to them; and he did it not.

Well, how could he do that? I mean, he had made a *flat out prophecy*. We have a *promise* of God. There is absolutely nothing equivocal about it. If you ever wanted to know where God said something he was going to do, you have it *right there*. And he didn't do it. He felt sorry for those people, because they repented. They at least acted like they were sorry, showed signs of sorrow. And who knows whether it would last two days or five days or a week, but God said, "That's enough." And he didn't do it.

Jonah 4

AKJV

¹ But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry.

That's what I want you to get; because I sometimes feel, folks, that we are just a whole lot closer to Jonah in our attitude than we are to God. Because Jonah was *not* gracious about this at all. It displeased him.

Jonah 4

AKJV

² And he prayed to the LORD, and said, I pray you, O LORD, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? [*Didn't I say this? Before I ever left?*] Therefore I fled before to Tarshish: for I knew that you are a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repent you of the evil. [*That you won't even carry out what you say you will do.*]

That's what he said. He was furious. He was upset with God because God wouldn't do what he said he would do.

Jonah 4

AKJV

³ Therefore now, O LORD, take, I beseech you, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live.

Jehovah was not the kind of God that Jonah wanted him to be. Simple as that. Jonah is the archetype of the man who wants his religion by the numbers. He didn't want Nineveh to fall on the 39th day, and he didn't want Nineveh to fall on the 41st day; he wanted Nineveh to fall on the 40th day. And he wanted blood in the streets. That's what he wanted. Why he wanted it? Well, they probably deserved it. And for men like Jonah, exceptions to the rules *drive them crazy*. And in fact, Jonah *is* a little bit crazy here. A man to be angry with God? I don't think that's a sound mind. There's a real irony in it, though. If God had been the kind of God that Jonah *said* he wanted, he would have taken a giant fly-swatter and turned Jonah into so much roadkill. If that was the kind of God that Jonah really wanted.

Jonah 4

AKJV

⁴ Then said the LORD, Do you well to be angry? [*Should you really be this hot under the collar?*]

⁵ So Jonah went out of the city, and sat on the east side of the city, and there made him a booth, and sat under it in the shadow, till he might see what would become of the city.

⁶ And the LORD God prepared a gourd [*a plant to grow up that had big, broad leaves*], and made it to come up over Jonah, that it might be a shadow over his head, to deliver him from his grief. [...]

Now mind you, as I said earlier, that God has a sense of humor. There are a lot of ways to teach men things. God chose *this*.

Jonah 4

AKJV

⁶ [...] that it might be a shadow over his head, to deliver him from his grief. So Jonah was exceeding glad of the gourd.

⁷ But God prepared a worm when the morning rose the next day, and it smote the gourd that it withered.

⁸ And it came to pass, when the sun did arise, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat on the head of Jonah, that he fainted, [...]

He passed out. And when he came to, he...

Jonah 4

AKJV

⁸ [...] wished in himself to die, and said, It is better for me to die than to live.

⁹ And God said to Jonah, Do you well to be angry for the gourd? [*Are you doing the right thing, here?*] And he said, I do well to be angry, even to death.

¹⁰ Then said the LORD, You have had pity on the gourd, for the which you have not labored, neither made it grow [*You didn't even plant the thing.*]; which came up in a night, and perished in a night:

¹¹ And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more then six score thousand [*that's 120,000*] persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle [*sheep and goats and cows and so forth that I kind of feel sorry for, too*]?

“You can feel sorry about the gourd and you don’t think I have the right to feel sorry for a bunch of people in a town that don’t even know what’s going on around them?” Why did God do that? Because he’s gracious.

Now are you beginning to see what I mean when I say that grace is an Old Testament doctrine? It is written *throughout* the Old Testament. You encounter grace *again and again and again*. And I don’t understand why, as we read the Old Testament, we focus in on all the things that *Jonah* wants, and clean over forget all the things that *God* wants. Sure God is strict. Sure God is stern. Sure he’s a God of justice. Sure sometimes he comes down...sure he incinerated Sodom and Gomorrah. But you know something? Lot and his family *got out* of Sodom and Gomorrah. Do you know why? It was not because they were righteous. It was not because they were obedient. It was because God is gracious. Because in the end, Lot was standing there fooling around and the angel had to take him and his wife and his daughters by the hand and lead them out of the city to get them out of there. Lot was saved because God is gracious. And, in a way, he was saved because he was Abraham’s nephew. And God really cared about Abraham, and he really liked Abraham and his family, and didn’t want Abraham to feel bad because of the death of Lot.

Does it strike you as odd at all that I talk about grace as a “doctrine”? Does it strike you as odd that we have a lot to say about doctrine. I mean, we’ve got doctrinal lists that we make up. And we argue doctrine, and discuss doctrine, and go on and on about doctrine. And we divide churches over doctrine. And we won’t speak to friends over doctrine. We have doctrine coming out of our ears. Why don’t we talk about grace!? If grace is a doctrine of God, *why* does it not play a *huge* role in the whole panoply of doctrine that we have out here? (But of course, it is kind of hard to divide over grace.)

There’s a funny thing about grace in the New Testament. In *all four gospels*—the complete accounts of all of Jesus’ life, ministry, and works—there is not a single instance in all the gospels where Jesus ever

used the word “grace”. Strange, isn’t it? One might have thought, especially if grace were a doctrine, that somewhere along the line Jesus would expound the doctrine of grace. Grace was *not* a doctrine that Jesus preached. Then what role did grace play in his ministry? Was it there? Well a couple of quick scriptures. Luke 2, verse 40. It says (talking about Jesus as a child):

Luke 2

AKJV

⁴⁰ And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was on him.

Do you know what that means? That means the *graciousness* that you see *all the way through* the Old Testament, and *all these examples* of God who could have killed somebody and didn’t—of God who healed people, forgave people, let people off the hook again and again—that graciousness of the Old Testament God was *upon* Jesus. In John 1, verse 14:

John 1

AKJV

¹⁴ And the Word was made flesh, and dwelled among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.

Now, we all know Jesus was full of truth, don’t we? We’re *all* interested in the truth. We want to know, “How long ago did you come into the truth?” And we used to publish a magazine called *The Plain Truth*. We talk about “truth this” and “truth that” and “truth everything”. Where’s grace? Jesus was full first of grace, and then of truth. Where did the grace come from? It came from his Father. He came by it honestly.

John 1

AKJV

¹⁵ John bore witness of him, and cried, saying, This was he of whom I spoke, He that comes after me is preferred before me: for he was before me.

¹⁶ And of his fullness have all we received, and grace for grace.

¹⁷ For the law was given by Moses [*And it’s a wonderful law.*], but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.

The law? It’s a wonderful thing. But if you’re looking for a computer, or something to compare to a computer, the law might compare. But the law is not God. God is gracious. God is not like a computer. God is personal and kind and merciful and forgiving.

You know, if you really wanted to know what is wrong with the Church of God right now, the answer is simple enough: Great grace was upon Jesus Christ. Great grace is not upon us. When we condemn people because they celebrate the birth of Jesus on the wrong day, this is *not grace*. When we condemn people because they keep the Sabbath on the wrong day, this is *not grace*. When we are unforgiving of one another, this is *not grace*. When we take offense easily, when we make a brother “an offender for a word”—because he hasn’t got the words right, hasn’t got the formulas right, hasn’t got all these little technicalities right... when we make a brother an offender for that, this is *not grace*. When we make ourselves, our organization, our church, *better* than others. That’s not grace. When we envy others; when we are suspicious, negative, looking for flaws, looking for failure, looking for weakness... Sorry. This is not grace. And if, as you listen to me cite this *ungracious* list, you are thinking of all the people you know who are like this list, this isn’t grace either. For I’m not talking to them; I’m basically talking to you. The truth is, we have not received in ourselves enough of God’s grace to be able to share it with others. If we had received it, we would be more gracious. Right? In order for us to be gracious with others, we have got to *receive* grace in ourselves.

The truth is...well, you remember the woman who came in to Jesus one day when he was reclining at food? And she walked up behind him and she was weeping, and she bent down and she was weeping so copiously she was able to wash his feet with the tears [Luke 7]. And she then took her long hair and wiped his feet with that hair. Don't you realize that this woman who was there, who had been forgiven much, really and truly loved much?

You know, Jesus, we are told in the Bible, was full of God's grace. Where? When? How? Well, when Jesus fed the five thousand, what character trait led him to do that? Well it was grace. Can you say "grace"? Go ahead, say "grace". It was grace.

Now, when John tried to get Jesus to stop a man who was successfully casting out demons in Jesus' name [Mark 9, Luke 9]...He's going around saying, "In the name of Jesus Christ, come out of him!", and the demon left. And John came to Jesus and said, "Let's stop that man; he is not following after us!" What character trait led Jesus to tell John to let that man alone? It was...? Grace.

When his disciples wanted to call down fire on a village in Samaria because they refused to receive Jesus on his way to Jerusalem [Luke 9], they said, "Let's call down fire from heaven. Let's wipe them out!" And Jesus said, "You don't know what spirit you are of." What character trait led Jesus to refuse that option and to correct the attitude of his disciples? It was...?

When he healed the Syro-Phoenician woman's daughter, do you remember? He was up in Tyre, and she came to him crying that he would heal her daughter. And he said, "I'm sorry"...

Matthew 15

KJ2000

²⁶ [...] It is not right to take the children's bread, and cast it to dogs.

²⁷ And she said, True, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table.

What character trait led him to then say, "Boy. Woman, I have not found so much faith in all of Israel, your daughter will be healed"

When he refused to condemn this woman who washed his feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair, and the Pharisees said, "It's the town naughty lady; he ought to know better than that." And he told the woman her sins were forgiven her. What character trait made it possible for Jesus to do that? It was...grace.

When he refused to condemn the woman who was taken in adultery. They brought her in there; they said, "She was taken in the very act of adultery", and he said:

John 8

AKJV

⁷ [...] He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her.

They all left them alone. And he said to the woman:

John 8

AKJV

¹⁰ [...] Woman, where are those your accusers? has no man condemned you?

¹¹ She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said to her, Neither do I condemn you: go, and sin no more.

What character trait enabled him to do that? It was grace.

You know, after Pentecost the disciples of Jesus were *very* different men. You ever notice that? There is something important that happened to them, and it's something that seems to me that we very rarely take notice of. It's Acts 4 (you needn't turn there), verse 33:

Acts 4

AKJV

³³ And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was on them all.

And as I said, if there's one thing that's wrong with us today, it is that great grace is not with us.

You know, when I look at these things and I think of what *ought* to be; when I think of what we *could* have done; and what we *have* done; and how much difficulty we are having in working together, I...I wonder about this example of the woman who washed Jesus' feet. And in the parable that he gave to this Pharisee on that day, he gave him two men. He said one man came in, and he had this huge debt, and the master forgave him and wrote it off. Then a man came in with a small debt, and the master wrote that off. And he said:

Luke 7

AKJV

⁴² [...] Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most?

⁴³ Simon answered and said, I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most. And he said to him, You have rightly judged.

And Jesus said, "He who has been forgiven much, loves much." It's another way of saying: He who has received much grace has much grace to give.

A short scripture, Hebrews 12:28:

Hebrews 12

KJ2000

²⁸ Therefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace[...]

This is not just salt and pepper thrown in here, folks. The word has been abused and lost. When he says "let us have grace", he *means something*. He means that it should be something *in us* and something *in our lives* that enables us to "serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear".

You know, maybe in the end analysis, grace is not a doctrine after all. Because, to tell you the truth, I don't know how we could ever have an *argument* about grace. May God help us to learn to be gracious to one another.

Christian Educational Ministries

P.O. Box 560 ❖ Whitehouse, Texas 75791
Phone: 1-888-BIBLE-44 ❖ Fax: (903) 839-9311

❖ www.borntowin.net ❖

A Doctrine of Grace

ID: 97F6