

Born to Win

Extreme Grace

by: Ronald L. Dart

It had been a hard three days.

David and the handful of young men with him had left in hurry and they had taken no food. By the time they got to a place called Nob, they were in a bad way. They needed food and there was only one place David thought they might get something to eat.

So he went to the priest at the tabernacle, a man named Ahimelech

1 Samuel 21

¹ Then came David to Nob to Ahimelech the priest: and Ahimelech was afraid at the meeting of David, and said unto him, Why art thou alone, and no man with thee?

² And David said unto Ahimelech the priest, The king hath commanded me a business, and hath said unto me, Let no man know any thing of the business whereabout I send thee, and what I have commanded thee: and I have sent my servants on ahead.

- Now David lied to the priest, because Saul hadn't sent him anywhere. David was running for his life from Saul because Saul had ordered him to be killed. Should he have done that? Should he have lied to the priest?
- Well, he goes on to compound his lawbreaking.

³ Now therefore what is under thine hand? give me five loaves of bread in mine hand, or what there is present.

⁴ And the priest answered David, and said, There is no common bread under mine 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 unto 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, and the bread is in a manner common, yea, 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 showbread, 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 because the law was clear as crystal.
- If you were the judge, what would you do about this infraction? Because it was an infraction of the law—this is beyond dispute. Only the priests were allowed, by law, to eat the holy bread.

- How do you think God would judge it?
- Well, fortunately, we have a clue, because Jesus himself evaluated this instance.

Matthew 12

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

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

Well, now, wait a minute. There's nothing in the law that says they couldn't do what they were doing. But Pharisaic tradition says to pluck that grain is harvesting. So you can't do that on the Sabbath day. Not even so much as one handful on the Sabbath day.

³ But he said unto them, Have ye not read what David did, when he was an hungred, 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 which were with him, but only for the priests?

- It is plain enough as you read this that Jesus is ready to let David off for this infraction. Otherwise he wouldn't have brought it up this way. Because he's using it to justify what his disciples did.
- But how does he do that? And on what basis?

There is the "give 'em an inch and they will take a mile" school of thought on this kind of thing.

- That's the way the Pharisees were. "We have to spell these things out. We must build a fence around the law lest one of us accidentally step over the line."
- There is a strange fear that if we begin to let the barriers down, people will take liberties and abuse the law.
- Plainly, Jesus and the Pharisees were on opposite sides of this fence.

Someone might well have walked up to Jesus after this saying and quoted him this scripture:

Exodus 29

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.

Aaron and his sons; the priests.

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

- And the person would want to know how Jesus could justify the actions of David and the priests

when the law is so plain.

- How do you suppose Jesus would have answered that question?

I am going to answer that question for you today in some detail, and in the process, I am going to explain to you one of the most important things you will ever learn about God and His law.

- If you can grasp what I am going to explain, it may revolutionize the way you read the Bible, the way you relate to God, and the way you relate to one another.
- If that sounds a little presumptuous to you, well, hang on. Let's see where we can go with it from here.

First of all, I want to get a few things clear:

1. The law of the showbread was not superseded or set aside by any actions of David nor by Jesus justifying David for what he did. David did not have that kind of authority and Jesus did not take it. The law of the showbread was not unimportant. It was just as important as any other law of God. It was the law then, and it will be the law when there is a tabernacle once again.
2. I am a radical believer in the law of God. I take Jesus at his word when he says that not one jot or tittle shall pass from the law till *everything* has come to pass.
3. Now all rationalizations considered, David did break the law. Jesus said he ate the bread which it was not lawful for him to eat.

Why, then, does Jesus use this example in reply to the accusation that his disciples were breaking the Sabbath? **How is it possible for Him to justify David?** And how can He justify David when there is not a hint of repentance on David's part, not anything done to make up for his error?

- The answer comes in one word. A familiar word, one that has been used so much, that no one seems sure what it means anymore.
- The word is **Grace**.
- And here is a sentence so important you may want to write it down:
Grace is an Old Testament doctrine.

Oh sure, it's taught in the New Testament, but it's not limited to that. Grace is an Old Testament doctrine and David was justified, not because what he did was right, but because:
God is Gracious

Now we all know this, but sometimes I wonder what we think it means.

Well, what does it mean to say that God is gracious?

Let me see if I can explain:

There is a beautiful example of the graciousness of God right in the beginning of his relationship with man.

- God created man in His own image, male and female.
- And the man and the woman were naked, and were not ashamed.
- God told them to be fruitful and multiply, **and then he left them alone.**

There are two kinds of people listening to me today—Those who believe that God is all seeing, that He knows everything that is happening, that nothing is hidden from Him.

And those who believe the book of Genesis which says otherwise.

- I am totally charmed by the Genesis account, because God did what a gracious man would do. He created these two perfect physical specimens, put them in a gorgeous outdoor garden, totally naked, and then granted them total privacy.
- God did not hide in the bushes and watch.
- Why? Because he is gracious.

Graciousness is that character trait that responds to awkward situations with grace.

There are those who believe that God is like a computer.

- If you press the delete button, things disappear. Automatically. Remorselessly. “God at the console” is the model I like to call it. I remember seeing a cartoon once showing God at a big, old console and by his right hand was a big, round button with the word “Smite” on it. Now if you press that, things disappear.
- They believe that God enforces the law like a computer. You break the law, the law breaks you.
- That is not what happened to David. Why?

Because God is not a computer, He is a person!

Not only is He a person, He is a kind person, gentle, compassionate, forgiving, and above all: **Gracious.**

Now it is true that God can be very strict at times, because He is also just. Without justice, you have only caprice, and there is a great gulf between a God who is gracious, and one who is capricious.

And because there was justice, Adam and Eve were eventually shut out of the Garden and denied access to the tree of life.

But that was because of a choice they had made. They could have had either tree, but apparently not both.

Well...time passes and two sons are born, Cain and Abel.

- And in a fit of anger, Cain kills his brother. And then he lied about it.
- Justice would have called for the death of Cain as well.
- **Why did God not kill Cain?** Why did he merely exile him and even set a mark on him to protect him from somebody else killing him?
- Because God is gracious.

In the years following the time when Adam and Eve were expelled from the garden, things got really bad.

The earth was filled with violence, and things got so bad, that **God was sorry he ever started the project.**

- Now I know this runs counter to the idea that God knows everything in advance, but what can I tell you?
- It seems better to me that, if I want to know God, I had better take him as he is, not as I want Him to be or think he ought to be.
- Remember, God is not a computer. He is a personal being. And why does He not know

everything that is going to happen in the future? Because he left us free to make decisions which would affect the future. And the decisions, as I said, got so bad He just was sorry he ever started. How do I know that?

Genesis 6

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.

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 it repenteth me that I have made them.

- Now there's a God that the Green people ought to really enjoy. They have this thing about saving the planet from human beings; well God was going to do just that.
- Somehow, it seems foolish to go around apologizing for God and find explanations that sound good to the modern mind.
- I am sorry if it is upsetting to learn that God does not control everything.
- By His own choice, HE DOESN'T.

So God decided to end the whole Earth project, to just wipe it out. And except for one thing, he would have. That one thing is found in verse 8.

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

- Mind you, Noah was a good man. He was righteous in his generations. But if you think that is the reason he and his family survived the flood, you have it all wrong.
- **Noah was a good man, but he was not that good.**
- He survived because God was gracious to him. That's the scripture record.

More time passes, and God strikes up a friendship with a man named Abraham.

- This friendship is remarkably personal. But then, God is not a computer, He is a person.
- God wants Abraham to have a son by Sarah and tells Him so.
- Abraham laughs. He not only laughs, he falls on the ground laughing. And he is not laughing for joy, he is laughing because the idea of he and Sarah having a baby was funny. He was an old man. Sarah was nearly as old as he was. Everything involved with having a baby was through between them.
- Now what does that tell you about the relationship between God and Abraham?
- Most of you would not be able to laugh in the presence of God, no matter what he said.
- And God did not smite Abraham with boils for laughing at the idea as an *ungracious* God might do. He didn't punish him. He didn't chastise him. He just said, "You'll see." I think He took a certain amount of pleasure in doing all this the hard way, because He certainly could have given Abraham a son at a much younger age.
- **God also has a sense of humor.**
- It's right here on the page, Sarah laughed and God said, "What are you laughing about?" She said, "I didn't laugh." And He said, "Oh, yes you did." And so he fixed them up. They ended up

with their own child instead of someone else's child, as they got even older.

More time passes, and God comes to call on Abraham on his way to Sodom and Gomorrah.

- If you had been hiding nearby and watching this encounter, what you would have seen would have been very commonplace.
- You would have seen three men come walking down the road. You would have seen Abraham run out to them and greet them in the customary fashion. You would have seen him have water brought so the men could wash their feet. You would have seen them wash their feet. You would have seen food brought and you would have watched them eat.

All very ordinary, right? Except that two of these three men were “angels” and the third was God Himself.

- Now does it seem out of the ordinary that they washed their feet and ate a meal?
- Do Spirit beings get dirty feet? Do they get hungry?
- When they are in the flesh, apparently they do.
- On the other hand, God created food to be enjoyed, and he may simply have come by Abraham's place because he knew Abraham would serve it up well.

But as he left Abraham to go on towards Sodom, God paused.

Genesis 18

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 unto me; and if not, I will know.

What? You mean he didn't know? Well, yeah, he knew because witnesses had come to him, spirit beings, I suppose, angels had come to him and testified to him about it. But I expect He says, “I want to go down there and see what I have heard is true. And if it isn't that way, I'll know.” Why is He doing this? Well, the answer is simple. He's not going to pronounce a judgement of death and destruction on hundreds, perhaps thousands, of people *in absentia*. He's actually got to go look upon it Himself to properly judge it.

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

²³ And Abraham drew near, and said, Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked?

²⁴ Peradventure there be fifty righteous within the city: wilt thou also destroy and not spare the place for the fifty righteous that are therein?

²⁵ That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked: and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee: Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?

Good grief! This is bold; the way he comes to God on this.

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: Peradventure ten shall be found there. And he said, I will not destroy it for ten's sake.

³³ And the LORD went his way, as soon as he had left communing with Abraham: and Abraham returned unto his place.

- Why did God let Abraham talk him down like this? The answer is simple.
- **Because He is gracious.** God does not *like* the idea of executing judgement. He is merciful. He doesn't like killing people even when they have it coming *and is willing to accept almost any excuse for not doing so.* Think about that. "Just give me a reason and I won't do it."

There are so many examples of this in the Old Testament, that we could be here all day reviewing them.

But let me give you the definitive illustration of what I am driving at.

Still more time passes and a God taps a prophet named Jonah and sends him to Nineveh with a message.

Jonah didn't much want to go, so he grabbed a ship and went the opposite direction. It's a long story, everybody knows about Jonah and the whale. He comes back, marches into Nineveh and begins to tell the story, "Yet 40 days and Nineveh will be overthrown!" and then one of the strangest things that has happened in the history of the world took place.

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 unto 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 unto God: yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands.

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 unto them; and he did it not.

^{4:1} But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry.

² And he prayed unto the LORD, and said, I pray thee, O LORD, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil.

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

- Jehovah was not the kind of God Jonah wanted him to be. Jonah wanted the town wiped out. His own reputation was at stake.
- Jonah is the archetype of the man who wants his religion by the numbers. Exceptions to rules drive him nuts. Life is not worth living if sinners can get off so easily.
- But if God had been the kind of God Jonah said he wanted, he would have taken a giant fly swatter and turned Jonah into so much road kill.
- But He didn't. Why didn't He?

⁴ Then said the LORD, Doest thou well to be angry?

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, and made it to come up over Jonah, 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 upon the head of Jonah, that he fainted, and wished in himself to die, and said, It is better for me to die than to live.

⁹ And God said to Jonah, Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd? And he said, I do well to be angry, even unto death.

¹⁰ Then said the LORD, Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night:

¹¹ And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?

Perhaps by now you can see what I mean when I say that Grace is an Old Testament doctrine.

Does it strike you as odd that I talk about Grace as a “doctrine”?

Or does it strike you as odd that we have so much to say about **doctrine** and so little to say about **Grace**?

There is a funny thing about Grace in the New Testament that you should know, really.

- In all four gospels, there is not a single instance where Jesus used the word “grace.”
- Grace was not a doctrine that He preached.
- Then what role did Grace play in his ministry?

Luke 2

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

John 1

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

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

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

¹⁷ For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.

But Where? When? How?

Well, you remember the occasion when Jesus was out in the wilderness and there were about 5,000 people around him and nobody had brought any food with them? Jesus miraculously fed them all.

What character trait led him do that?

It was **grace**.

When John tried to get Jesus to stop a man who was successfully casting out demons in Jesus name, for no other reason than that the man was not in their group.

What character trait led Jesus to tell John to let the man alone?

It was **grace**.

When His disciples wanted to call down fire on a Samaritan town that refused to accept Jesus on his way to Jerusalem.

What character trait led Jesus to correct them for that spirit?

By now, you're with me, aren't you? It was **grace**.

- When he healed the Syro-Phoenician woman's daughter, first of all having said he wouldn't do it.
- When He refused to condemn the woman who washed his feet with her tears.
- When he refused to condemn the woman taken in Adultery. Why did He do all these things? It's simple. He did what He did because He was gracious.

After Pentecost, the disciples of Jesus were very different men. Something very important had happened to them, something we seem rarely to notice.

Acts 4

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

If you really want to know what is wrong with Christianity right now, the answer is simple enough:

Great Grace is NOT upon us.

- When we are unforgiving.
- When we take offense easily.
- When we make a brother an offender for a word.
- When we make ourselves, our church, better than others.

This is not grace.

- When we envy others.
- When we are suspicious, negative, looking for flaws, failures and weaknesses in other people.
- This is not grace.

And if, as you listen to me recite this ungracious list, you are thinking of all the people you know who display these characteristics.

That's not grace either.

The truth is:

We have not received in ourselves enough of God's grace that we can share it with others.

Do you remember that woman who washed Jesus feet with tears, and what Jesus said?

“He who has been forgiven much, loves much”

He who has received much grace, has much grace to give.

Until next time.

Christian Educational Ministries

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