

Discerning Truth and Error About God's Grace (Part 1)

RECOGNIZING FALSE TEACHINGS ABOUT THE GRACE OF GOD

Well, there is a lot of confusion, and it is very dangerous—spiritually dangerous, the confusion about the grace of God—a lot of distortion. So this is not an area where you think, “The grace of God, yeah, I understand.” I think it is an area that is commonly significantly misunderstood today in the Body of Christ. So I would like for you to just put an alert in your heart so you say, “OK, I need to be paying attention to this in a careful way in terms of my searching the Scripture on this great subjection.”

Roman numeral I—false teachers in the Church distort the grace of God. Paragraph A—one of the great pressures in the end times will come from false teachers who are in the Church. This was prophesied the most clearly in 2 Peter 2 and the book of Jude. Most of you know that the book of Jude is only one chapter. That's why it's just “Jude.” So the chapter of the book of Jude and 2 Peter 2 go together. They are parallel passages together. There is repetition, and they cover most of the same themes, although they expand—each one of them takes on some new insights from the other one. So you want to read them together, but those are two of the weightiest chapters in the Bible that you want to be familiar with on the subject of false teachers in the end times.

Now the false teachers were in the First Century as well, and Peter and Jude were addressing the false teachers of their day, but then warning about the false teachers at the end of the age. These are very sober passages, because these teachers will end up in eternal judgment, and that is what Jude and Peter are saying. Most of us think of false teachers as the cults—you know, the Eastern religions out there—but there are many false teachers in the Church. That does not mean they are demonic. It does not mean that they don't have some kind of understanding of Biblical truths.

Paragraph B—The most common idea of false teaching is that which perverts the Biblical understanding of the grace of God. The way that it is perverted—and it is perverted; that's the right word—is that they pervert God's grace by reducing the message of grace to receiving forgiveness without repentance, and by seeking to make people comfortable with God while they continue in their sin without repenting.

Now, actually, we have a little bit of that in our midst. Because of our emphasis on the Bridal Paradigm, which is a very important emphasis, I pick up confusion here and there in some of our ranks. The Lord will correct it, but I pick up clearly the confusion that the main thing is for people to be confident before God, almost regardless. As long as they are confident with God it is good, and that is not true. It is only good that we are confident with God if we are living right with God. If we are not living right with God, then we have no reason to be confident with God.

I have seen in our own midst how people take the teaching on the Bridal Paradigm, which is the message of Jesus as a passionate Bridegroom who loves us even in our weakness. The underlying point is that He loves us in our weakness while we are sincerely seeking to obey Him. That is a critical part of the Bridal Paradigm. So they will take this and really emphasize the need for confidence before God, because that is a vast and weighty subject, and a very important one, to be confident before God. But we do not want to be confident before God in a false way. I see that trend, strands of that, in our own midst occasionally. It is not a prominent thing, but I am zealous that it is not in our midst at all.

We want people confident before God. We want to talk about His infinite mercy, we want to talk about His kindness, His passion, and His longing for us, but we must respond to Him in wholeheartedness. Now, our wholeheartedness is flawed. It's weak. It's inconsistent. But it is still a longing to be right, it is a longing to be consistent, it's a longing to be full. So I do not know anybody's wholeheartedness that is perfect, but when we see its weakness and its failures, then we respond and reach: "Oh God, we are concerned about this. We want to be fully Yours in all the areas of life." That's the wholeheartedness that I am talking about.

I am not talking about sinless perfection. I am talking about a sincere longing and desire for every area of our life to line up with the Lord, and I do not know anybody who is doing, who is walking it out one hundred percent, but I know a lot of people who are aiming for it, who really want it to be true in their life.

It says in Jude 4, "certain men have crept in unnoticed." Now, that is the key word: "unnoticed." They are teachers in the Body of Christ, and nobody has noticed that they are off-base. It doesn't mean they crept into the meeting unnoticed, you know—they sat on the back row and nobody saw them. They are teachers in the Body of Christ. They are up front teaching, but they haven't been noted as being a false teacher. Here's what they do: "These men, they turn the grace of God into lewdness" (Jude 4, paraphrased). That is what the New King James says. The other translations say "licentiousness" or "ungodliness," meaning they preach the grace of God in a way that makes people comfortable living in sin while they are claiming grace. That's what that verse means, that they turn the grace of God into lewdness. It means the people are comfortable to live in their immorality and claim grace, and say, "Well, praise God His grace is here. Brother, that is what grace is for."

Yes, grace does cover us in great sins when we repent of those sins. The grace of God does not cover us while we live in them because we just have this positive view of God. It says, "These men actually deny the Lord Jesus Christ" (Jude 4, paraphrased). Their teaching denies what Jesus came for and what He died for. They deny the purpose of what Jesus was about at His coming.

THE GRACE OF GOD: WHAT IT IS AND WHAT IT DOES

Paragraph C—The true grace of God inspires us to deny lust. It gives us power to walk godly. Titus chapter 2: "The grace of God that brings salvation has appeared" (Titus 2:11), and here is what the grace of God does. When it is really the New Testament teaching on grace, it teaches us to deny ungodliness, and it teaches us to deny worldly lusts. And if your teaching, if your insight into grace is not teaching you to deny lusts in your heart—not just lust of sexual impurity, but pride and all kinds of lusts. Lust has many, many dimensions. If your understanding of grace is not inspiring you to deny your anger, your covetousness, your pride, your immorality of any sort—if it is not pushing you, pressuring your spirit, inspiring you to deny it, then you don't understand the teaching of grace. You've got a wrong idea of what grace is about.

Grace is not that which makes us comfortable while we are sinning. Grace is that which God gives us, that when we sin, the grace of God convinces us to repent of it, and it does give us confidence to have a new beginning right now—today, this minute—and we can be first-class citizens in His kingdom that very hour. So grace *does* give us confidence, but it is critical that it is confidence after we repent. If we have confidence *before* we repent, it is a false teaching on grace.

There is much of that going around in the Body of Christ today. Like I said, I am not overly concerned because I know our leadership team, and we are zealous that this does not take root in our midst. But every now and then, I see little signs of this, and I go, "No, no, no, let's get this thing back on the main stream of the Word of God."

Paragraph D—Much of the grace teaching in the Body of Christ today—and I say this word measuredly. I do not want to be a hotshot. I do not want to be negative in an undue way. I want to be accurate. I do not want to be negative or positive. I want to be accurate. I have thought on this word I am using much, and I believe it is true. I believe much teaching in the Church in the West today is not true grace teaching. I believe the Church in the West is, as a whole, significantly in a different pathway from the grace that compels people to live abandoned and righteous on the inside—not just righteous on external things (although that is good, too). But I am talking about longing to live out the Sermon on the Mount at the heart level.

It is distorted because it empowers people to compromise. It is a grace teaching that makes sins small, like, “Hey, who cares? Boys will be boys. That is how it is. God understands, you know? Praise God. Thank You for grace.” We just keep on in drunkenness and lewdness and immorality and all kinds of unclean speech and many, many things. We just say, “Well, hey, grace. What about the Bride of Christ?” and it is a perversion of a very holy and precious thing in God’s sight.

Now, many have grown up in their church setting in—I am talking about in our own midst here, you know, the thousand or so folks who are here in the full-time sense, whether they are Bible school students or interns. Their primary occupation right now is to do this thing called the IHOP–KC Missions Base. I think of that thousand, and many of them grew up in church settings where the grace of God was taught in a perverse way. They did not know it, and even to this day, they might not know that the grace of God was presented where Jesus was like a big Santa Claus trying to make our life happier. He was with us and saying, “Hey, things are going to get better. Hang in there.”

So even in our own midst, when I teach on grace, I find that there is a very easy, natural resistance to the truth of it because it is new. They think, “No, I’ve heard about grace.” I hear a lot of time, “Well, where is the grace in that teaching?”

I respond, “You have to have the right definition of what grace is to ask that question in a right way.”

So many who come, and even are in our midst, have come from five, ten, or fifteen years of a spiritual atmosphere where grace was really minimized. True grace was distorted, and the Sermon on the Mount type of living was not the premier thing with which the grace of God was packaged. If it is not packaged to a call to live that way, then it is not the true grace message. It really isn’t. It is something other than what the apostles were teaching, and it is very, very common in our nation today.

RECOGNIZING FALSE TEACHERS

Paragraph E—What is a false teacher? Those who do not hold to the main and plain doctrines of Scripture. That is a very simple definition. The first one is the easier one to recognize. Jude said, “They deny the Lord Jesus” (Jude 4, paraphrased). They deny Him, false teachers do, by denying the main doctrines, for instance the doctrine, the true doctrine that Jesus is the only way to salvation.

More and more teachers in the Body of Christ—and I am talking about many on TV, many big ministries are becoming really—they are uncomfortable with the narrowness of that position, and they are saying, “Well, you know, who knows? God only knows.” They begin to deny the Lord Jesus in this, but they would not imagine that, “No, no, I am preaching grace.” That is not preaching grace. That is denying the Lord Jesus Christ, is what that is. More common is the false teacher who denies Jesus by denying the plain teachings of grace, which are in relationship to holy

living as defined in the Sermon on the Mount.

I have talked to young people for years at IHOP, who say, “Radical. We want to be radical.” I like that. But we need to be radical as defined by the Sermon on the Mount, not radical as defined by just kind of radical. Well, what does radical mean? “I do not know. I am just going for God radically.” Give me a little more insight on what you are talking about, like what does radical mean? Doing strange things, doing bizarre things?

Radical must be defined by pursuing the eight Beatitudes, Matthew 5:3-12. If we are not pursuing the eight Beatitudes, it is *not* radical Christianity. It is something other than what the Bible set forth as the grace of God. So a lot of people are excited about being radical, but whether that radicalness is rooted in reality or not is not always a concern. I am concerned that our radicalness is rooted soberly in a pursuit of the lifestyle of the eight beatitudes and the Sermon on the Mount.

Jesus defined what radical and basic Christianity is, and there is no other definition that is acceptable besides the one that He gave. He would know best what it is. So there is a lot of energy in the Body of Christ about “radical” and “cutting-edge” and “out there,” but if it is not leading us to the eight Beatitudes, it is not radical Christianity. It is a distortion and a deception, even though it may have truth in it.

Paragraph F—This may be a new idea to some of you, but it is important that you get it. False teachers are not only those who are involved in false religions, but false teachers can be born-again believers and still be false teachers. A man or woman can be born again and love God in that general sense, but not uphold the true teachings of Scripture because they are deceived in their heart and they don't know it.

Some of these born-again teachers will go too far. Scripture makes it clear in half a dozen places, really clear, that they will actually lose their salvation. The ones in 2 Peter 2—that is clearly what he is talking about. In the book of Jude, they go too far and they leave the way of righteousness, and they reject the knowledge of Jesus that saved them—it says it really clearly—and they turn to darkness. 2 Peter 2—just read it throughout the whole chapter. Toward the end is where it really gets powerful—I mean, scary powerful. It is whoa, it is heavy, it's sober.

SIZE DOES NOT IMPLY GOD'S BLESSING

Other false teachers—I am talking about born-again believers, maybe mega-ministries that are growing with thousands joining—it does not matter how many people join. We are not seduced by the size of a ministry and how fast it grows. I have had people make this comment to me because IHOP has been growing a bit in the last few years: “Boy, the Lord is really blessing you. Look at how much you have grown.”

I say, “You know, I think it is the Lord's blessing, but do not look at growth and just assume it is blessing.”

There are many, many ministries that are growing, and it is not the blessing of the Lord. It is because the ministry is catering to the lust of the people and making them feel good about God in a deceptive way while they live in their unrighteousness. The Bible is clear that many ministries will explode and grow rapidly under this ear-tickling, man-pleasing spirit. It's not the blessing of God. It's actually an allowance of allowing people to live unrighteously, but feeling good about it before God. If a preacher with a big ministry can make you feel good in your conscience while you are sinning, that kind of church will grow rapidly. A lot of people want to be right with God and they want to stay in their sin.

So I tell them, “Well, I don’t think God is with us because we are growing. That is not the issue. There are other criteria. Don’t be seduced by a growing ministry.”

It says here in 1 Corinthians 3, talking about ministries, “At the judgment seat of Christ if anyone’s work (their lifestyles, choices of the ministry) is burned up at the judgment seat of Christ, that man or woman will suffer loss though they will be saved, yet as though by fire” (1 Cor. 3:13-15, paraphrased). They will keep their salvation, but all that they have worked for in their life and their ministry will be burned up—and there will be many who will stand before God with this description. They will suffer the loss of all they labored for because it was tainted with distortion, significant distortion.

The grace of God is generous if we are sincere about being wholehearted with the Lord. Again, our wholeheartedness is flawed. Our wholeheartedness is fragile. It is not that consistent, but when we find failures in our wholeheartedness and gaps in it, we return back and cry out for help and we are laboring for help. We are trying to find a way to break through, and that is within the definition of wholeheartedness. There is a sincerity in that that pleases the Lord.

There is an area that you cannot get free on in an area of your life and you are concerned with it. It is ever before you. I do not mean every minute of every day. That is not what I mean—but it is a concern, a major concern in your life. It is not a peripheral thing in your life, like, “Who cares?” It is something you think about daily, and you are trying to figure out, “I am trying to fast and pray and get free, and I break my fast, and the Bible is boring, but I am trying.”

That is all still within the vein of wholeheartedness. You are still reaching, you are trying, you are taking seriously the Beatitude, “Blessed are those who are poor in spirit and those who are mourning” (Mt. 5:3-4, paraphrased). Those are the first two Beatitudes. You are in the vein of that, and that is pleasing to the Lord.

So don’t think the Lord is only pleased when the breakthrough comes. The reaching, the contending, the wrestling, the failing and getting back up and repenting and getting back in the war, the failing again, falling down, getting up, repenting, getting back in the war—all of that is pleasing to the Lord. That is in the vein of wholeheartedness that I am talking about. I am talking about a wholeheartedness that is attainable by you and me, the wholeheartedness that is human-friendly. It is human-friendly. It can be attained by weak people like us.

AVOIDING DECEPTION

Paragraph G—Today, some large and popular ministries have false teachers, and they use Biblical language. It is really common to use a few Bible verses in the presentation, but let’s just read this here in 2 Peter, this very important passage. Verse 1, “There will be false teachers” (2 Pet. 2:1).

Now he is talking—we are in his day, in Peter’s day, but they are yet coming in the future. They will be among you. They will be in the Body of Christ. We are not just talking about the Eastern religions, the cults. They are among the Body of Christ, and here is what they will do. They will secretly or subtly introduce destructive heresies.

They do not get up and say, “Hey, I want to deceive all of you today.” It is subtle. Again, they present—it is mostly about perverting the grace of God. They teach the grace of God in a way that’s contrary to the way that Scripture teaches it, but it’s very popular. Again, it is very popular today, this approach is rampant in the Church in the West.

Verse 2 (paraphrased), “Many will follow them,” They will have mega-ministries. Multitudes will follow them. “They will follow their destructive ways” (2 Pet. 2:2, paraphrased). Their ways are pleasing to the flesh. They will be really soft on sin and really big on covetousness.

Peter goes on to emphasize that one of the main things they will do is to promise people money—that God’s reigning in Heaven to give them more money. There is truth in the fact that God blesses with money, but in our nation right now, this doctrine is so exaggerated in so many ministries. It’s just rank covetousness wrapped up deceptively in the grace of God and the power of God. It’s destructive. It is destructive to people’s faith.

Verse 3: “By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words.” They teach the Bible in a way that manipulates and deceives and exploits. It’s deceptive. They will use the verse and put spins on it and use their grand story, and everybody will buy into it.

Verse 13 (paraphrased): “They are carousing in their own deceptions, and they are feasting with you,” meaning, they go to the fellowship dinners. They are right in your midst. They are teaching in your pulpits, and they are at your fellowship dinners breaking bread with you. They are not in some far-away, distant, false religion. They are right in the middle of that thriving ministry.

Verse 14 (paraphrased): “They have a heart trained”—Peter says this over and over, actually—“their heart is trained in covetousness”. They are experts in presenting the issues of money using the Bible in a way that feeds their own covetousness and feeds the covetousness of the people listening. They are experts in it. Their hearts are trained in it.

Verse 18 (paraphrased): “They speak great swelling words, but they’re empty.” They are swelling words of how grand and great it is going to be and how awesome it is. “They are swelling words of emptiness” is what Peter says (2 Pet. 2:18, paraphrased). He says, “Don’t buy into it.”

“They allure through lust and through lewdness” (2 Pet. 2:18, paraphrased). That is their covetousness and their presentation of the grace of God that reduces the grace of God to where we do not repent. They allure. They stir up people’s lust. People like them because of their lust, not because they are anointed. They stir them up through lewdness—in other words, through presenting them with a presentation of the kingdom where lewdness, or immorality, is acceptable. They don’t exactly say it, but they just never, ever deal with the issues. People just feel so good in their midst.

“They allure the ones who have actually escaped from error” (2 Pet. 2:18, paraphrased). In other words, these people are in the Church. They have escaped from error through the knowledge of Jesus, it goes on to say. And those are the ones being allured by these false teachers on grace.

GOD’S FORGIVENESS REQUIRES REAL REPENTENCE

Again, when I think of the thousand people who are in our midst, many of them came from backgrounds where the grace of God was not taught as that which empowers righteousness and godliness at the heart level. They have an idea that it’s a blanket forgiveness for whoever asks for it, for whoever wants it. They can get forgiveness.

And as I said last week, and I’ve got it here later in the notes, that the idea—you hear it all the time—“If you want forgiveness, just ask the Lord.”

Well, the Lord will say, “No.” Millions ask the Lord for forgiveness, and the Lord’s answer is, “No, I am not going to forgive you.”

“What do You mean, ‘no’? The preacher said that if I ask, that’s all I’ve got to do.”

You have to repent and ask for forgiveness and give yourself to Jesus. The idea of, “Pray a simple prayer, and ask the prayer, and you are born again...” So much of that is just utter deception. Jesus is a King running a kingdom. We are coming under His leadership the whole of our life. We are not praying a short prayer at the end of a meeting and getting saved. So much of that is falsehood.

Because when the guy says, “Jesus, forgive me,” as they repeat the prayer, Jesus answers from Heaven, “No, I won’t forgive you. That is the answer right now. But I would like to, but I need a different response from you before I forgive you.”

Our repentance does not earn our forgiveness. You could never go before a judge when you’re guilty of crimes and tell the judge, “I am sorry,” and the judge says, “Well, in that case, you will not go to prison and get the death sentence.”

If you stand before the judge and say, “I am sorry,” that is not going to get a murderer off of death row. Our repentance in no way earns us salvation, but it is essential that we line up with the King. Again, in our broken, fractured, imperfect repentance—but we are with real energy and effort giving ourselves to walk and obey Him, although our obedience is greatly flawed. Our love is greatly flawed, but it’s real and sincere, even in its weakness.

And of course the verse—there are many verses where I can back up where Jesus would tell a person “no” if they asked for forgiveness if they don’t repent—of course, the primary one is Matthew 7:22, which I have in the notes, which is where Jesus says, “Many—M-A-N-Y—many on that day will say, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and I will say, ‘I never, ever knew you’”—which translates to, “When you prayed the sinner’s prayer, I told you ‘no’. I never knew you.” Many will claim to know the Lord because they took the word of the preacher, and the Lord will say, “I did not know you. They did not tell you My Word. They gave you a false offer.”

THE FALLING AWAY

Paragraph H—The Scripture prophesies of spiritual compromise, and there are many passages. I just put a few up there to let you see. It is a big subject. It is a big subject in the New Testament. It says in 2 Thessalonians 2:3 (paraphrased), “Let no one deceive you by any means. The day”—that means the Second Coming—“the day of the Lord will not come unless the falling away comes first and then unless the Antichrist is revealed.” The man of sin is the Antichrist.

The falling away is as big of a sign—the great falling away—as the appearing of the Antichrist. Those are the two biggest signs of the generation the Lord returns; one is the massive falling away. This is not a “trickling out.” This is a massive, wholesale falling away from the faith globally. It’s called “*the* falling away.” It is not a trend for two thousand years through Church history. It is a definitive sign that the Lord is about to return. It hasn’t happened yet. We can see the beginnings of it, but beloved, this is real, and it will come with a false teaching on grace.

It says in 1 Timothy 4, “Now the Spirit expressly says in the last times, in the latter times, some will depart from the faith” (1 Tim. 4:1, paraphrased)—not all, by any means, because the Church is going to have a great revival at the same time, but some will depart from the faith. Now, Paul said the Spirit explicitly, or expressly, says this. I wonder what that means. Paul says, “Well the Spirit said it. No, He *expressly* said it. He put exclamation points on this. There *will* be some that fall away worldwide.”

Why are they going to fall away? They are going to give heed to deceiving spirits. They are going to pay attention to lies about the Bible—and there is no subject more lied about than the subject of the grace of God. That's the subject that people are so confident that they understand, and when something does not suit them: "That is not grace." That's the wholesale answer for everything that touches and stirs up their laziness and lust. When their laziness, covetousness or lust is infringed upon, the answer is, "What about grace? Because grace would never infringe upon my lust."

Yes, it will. Grace will move in decisively and invasively to confront our lust. That is the teaching on the grace of God, but so many don't understand this. Again, the most common deception today in the Church is their confidence in understanding the grace of God as that which is not dynamically related to the pursuit of wholeheartedness.

2 Timothy 4, "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine" (4:3, paraphrased). The Church won't endure it. Sound doctrine—they will say, "I can't take it anymore." Sound, Biblical teaching—a call to wholeheartedness—will so offend them that they will just bolt. They cannot take it. It will create pressure on them, and this is bad that it creates pressure. It should create conviction and then revelation, but it creates a pressure that they cannot endure anymore, saying, "It is fanatical. It is ridiculous. This is legalism," and they all bolt.

They will, according to their own desires, find teachers who will satisfy their lustful, covetous, and lazy spiritual living. They will find doctrines and people who will make them feel good about the way they live.

It says, "They will search out teachers for themselves"—verse 4 (paraphrased)—"they will turn their ears away from truth." We are talking about believers will do this.

Roman numeral II. Now you say, "Boy, this isn't very positive." Actually it is. Actually it is. The reason it is positive is because the distorted message of grace never brings power to people's spirits. There are so many sincere believers who are not wholehearted, but they don't even know that they are not, and their spirits don't feel the presence of God. The grace of God is not operating in any kind of abundant measure on their heart. They're bored, and God is boring, and the Word is stuck, and they just don't—nothing feels right.

They need grace on their spirit, and they're not going to get it by someone telling them lies about how good they are doing. They need to war and wrestle and break through, and they can have the grace of God on their spirit, and then they feel that brightness and that spark of God in their inner man.

This is very kind, because the other approach leaves us spiritually bored and spiritually barren and with a depressed spirit. God has more for us, but it's the real grace teaching that has power on it, and I am jealous as a shepherd that people have power. I am jealous for people's greatness in God. Like I said last week, I am contending for your greatness. I want you to enter into the things of God that will make you great in His sight. You will stand before Him with boldness on the last day because of the way that you lived. Of course, our boldness is because of what He did on the cross, but I am talking about something separate from that, that when the Lord reviews our life, we have confidence that we have lived in meekness and righteousness in our days on the Earth.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN GRACE AND MERCY

Paragraph A—The difference between grace and mercy. Mercy extends forgiveness. Grace imparts power. Grace is about power. Mercy is about forgiveness. The teaching of grace isn't mostly about forgiveness. In the most general sense, you could fit everything under grace, but in a very specific

way, mercy is the forgiveness message. Grace is the empowering to walk in victory message.

Hebrews 4, let's look at that. It distinguishes grace and mercy. It says, "We come boldly to the throne of grace" (Hebrews 4:16, paraphrased), and we can get both of them. We can get forgiveness, *and* we can get power. When we come to the throne of grace, we want power on our spirits. We want power on our mind. We want our mind to have a revelatory spirit. We want the Holy Spirit to give us the spirit of revelation is what I am trying to say. We want power, we want grace, *and* we want mercy. We want both mercy and grace. We need both of them.

Paragraph B.—Mercy is *not* receiving what we deserve—in other words, the removal of something negative, the wrath of God. When God gives you and I mercy, He is causing the situation—He is removing the negative thing we deserve, wrath. He is removing what we do deserve. That is like—that's good.

We need mercy all of our days. King David said, "Mercy will follow me all the days of my life, because I need mercy" (Ps. 23:6, paraphrased). We will need forgiveness up until the final moments. We need mercy all the days of our lives.

I love mercy, but people tend to confuse the two. Grace is receiving what you don't deserve—receiving an impartation of the positive, the power of God. So mercy—we avoid what we do deserve; we escape what we do deserve, wrath. Grace, we get what we do not deserve, God's power.

Grace inspires us to repent. When we touch the real grace of God, we are hungry to go deeper in our repentance. And repentance is a lifelong thing. There is no such thing as "a season of repentance". It is like in a world champion, a world-class runner, a miler, who runs the mile run. There is no such thing as, you know, the time when they work out. A world-class runner works out all around the year. The big race is coming up next year. It is not like they work out before. They work out all the time. It is like Paul paralleled his life to the life of a marathon runner, or a race or a distance runner.

Some people talk about repentance like, "Man, you know, there is a season of repentance."

I respond, "No, we repent a little bit every day, and if we get behind on it, then we might have a big season of repentance because we haven't been giving ourselves to it on a regular basis."

We will never be in a place where God is not calling us to repentance. Someone comes to me and says, "The Lord says He's calling us to repent."

I say, "Of course He is. He is calling us to repent and He is calling us to revelation. That is—every day that's the word. Of course it is."

The idea that there's a time where we are not repenting as a main thing the Lord is calling us to that week is a strange idea. Repenting is like peeling an onion. It's layer by layer and you cry each step of the way. But here's the problem with that onion. We think just kind of naturally, we assume that onion is one foot in diameter, it is an onion about the size of a basketball—but that onion is about a mile in diameter. We'll be peeling that onion our entire life, but every time we repent, literally, I mean it goes a layer more. It really does. We are crying all the way to the center. You know, five or ten years later, we think, "Wow," because we have this idea that the onion is only about the size of a basketball, but no, it is about a mile in diameter.

The Lord thinks, "Well you are eight inches down. You only have another mile to go to get through

this whole thing.” I see my sin more clearly at thirty-five years old in the Lord than I did at five years old in the Lord. I am closer to the Lord, I am walking in greater purity and greater revelation, and I have more insight as to the sin in my heart than I did ten and twenty years ago. We’re peeling an onion.

We are always called to repentance. Our entire life we are called to repentance, just like the athlete, the champion runner is called to work out as long as they’re in that career, in that pursuit of the gold medal at the Olympics-type deal.

A BIBLICAL PICTURE OF GRACE

Ok, let’s look at a couple of these verses. In 2 Corinthians 12:9, the Lord is speaking to Paul, and He says, “My grace is sufficient for you. My strength is made perfect in weakness” (paraphrased). Paul is not—I mean, Jesus is speaking to Paul the apostle in this passage. When it says, “My grace,” Jesus is speaking. Jesus’ grace is sufficient for you, Paul. He is not saying, “My *forgiveness* is sufficient for you.” He is saying, “My power on your spirit is sufficient for you to get through this trouble, this thorn in the flesh.” He’s not talking about forgiveness right here.

Let’s go down to Romans 6:14: “For sin shall not have dominion over you.” Why? “Because you’re under grace,” that’s why (Rom. 6:14, paraphrased). Sin cannot rule your life because you are under the grace of God. He is not saying, “because you are under the *forgiveness* of God.” Well, you *are* under the forgiveness of God, but that’s not his point. He says, “Sin cannot rule in your heart because you are operating in relationship to the grace of God.”

So Paul sees the misunderstanding in his day, verse 15 (paraphrased): “What then? I know what some of you are thinking; ‘We will sin more because we are under grace.’” Because they misunderstood in Paul’s day that grace meant forgiveness. He says, “No, you can’t sin more to get more grace. That is not how it works. May it never be! No, that is the wrong idea. Grace is the power to overcome sin. It’s not an insurance policy while you’re sinning. That is not what grace is” (Rom. 6:15, paraphrased).

Paragraph D—Look at the passage, Joel 2: “Turn to Me with all of your heart with fasting, weeping, and mourning. Tear your heart”—“rend” is the word “tear”—“not your garment, but tear your heart and return to the Lord” (Joel 2:12-13, paraphrased). The grace of God teaches us to tear our hearts.

As I put in my notes here, very little understanding of this is in the Western Church. The grace of God is mostly fire insurance. It’s an insurance policy to make us happy while we are sinning. That is not the grace of God. That is a distortion and a deception. Tear your heart.

Jesus said it differently; He called it spiritual violence. I am talking about Matthew 11:12. He said, “The spiritually violent will take it by force” (paraphrased). In Matthew 5 He said, “Pluck your eye out. Cut your hand off” (Mt. 5:29-30, paraphrased). He is talking about the same thing. We are talking about a seriousness about the issues in our heart. If gossip has got a stronghold in your heart, if complaining is a stronghold in your heart, if immorality is a stronghold, if alcohol is a stronghold—whatever it is, beloved, tear your heart.

“Cut your hand off. Pluck your eye out,” is the language of Jesus. Now, He did not mean to literally pluck your eye out or cut your hand off. He meant, “Be radical until you get to the bottom of this issue.”

It is not, “Well, I am under grace anyway.” That is not a Biblical approach to an unsettled sin in our lives. We are to be aggressive about getting our tongue under control, our eyes under control, and our humility in place. These are huge areas that the grace of God is able to give us power, but we have to tear our heart—meaning, when I repent of an issue that’s been a bigger issue in my life, not just the peripheral issues, it hurts. I don’t like it. I really understand what Joel meant, “Tear your heart.”

It is like, “Ouch! You got it. That cannot be grace. It hurts.” No, this will give you power to go to the end of the matter if you will stay with it. Grace is not a guarantee that it will not hurt. Grace is the power to help sustain you until the surgery is over.

Whatever areas in your life, God will give you power over it. Sin cannot have dominion over us if we will go hard after God and stay with it. It may take us some years to get to some of these core issues.

GOD’S LOVE AND PATIENCE

Let’s go to Roman numeral III. We will not finish all the notes. I will just go a couple more points here, and then we will end it and leave you with the notes to read on your own later.

Roman numeral III—Some important distinctions. God loves, God so loves the world. He loves the unbelievers, people with no regard. He loves them. He has passion. He is a Lion. He has a roaring desire. He wants the world enough for Jesus to come. God really, really loves the world. There is no question. He loves unbelievers, but that doesn’t get them off—that does not solve their problem. It provides an answer if they want it, but it doesn’t—it provides. His love is what caused Jesus to come.

Paragraph B. Ok, now we know He loves us. Let’s go to the next thing. God is patient with people who do not repent. He is tender in His patience, but beloved, don’t confuse His patience with you, or one you are ministering to, with His approval. His tender patience is not the same thing as His approval.

He’s—I mean, Paul said it right. His patience is amazing. Paul said in Romans 2:4 (paraphrased), “Do you despise the riches, the wealth of God’s goodness and forbearance?” The word “forbearance” is the same word as “patience” or “longsuffering”. The idea of patience is in both of those.

Did you know that God has a wealth of patience, that a person gets on a certain path and one year turns to two, to three, to four, to five, and the Lord has not done anything about it? I should put a verse down here, Ecclesiastes 8:11 (paraphrased), “The foolish man says because the sentence of judgment is not executed quickly, ‘God is not going to judge me.’” The foolish man says, “Because God’s letting me get away with this, hey, I might be getting away with it.” Ecclesiastes 8:11 says that the foolish man says that because the sentence of judgment is not executed quickly—because God, according to Romans 2:4, is giving you a wealth, a *wealth*, of patience. Why? To lead you to repent, to give you time to repent. He does not want things to go badly for you. He really will go the *n*th degree in His patience, but His patience is not His approval.

I have in paragraph B., Revelation 2:21, which is a very interesting passage. In Revelation 2:21, Jesus is talking to the church, and He says, “You tolerate Jezebel. You let Jezebel and her teachings on immorality, you let that teaching go in your church” (paraphrased). Jesus says, “I even gave Jezebel time to repent.” The Lord even gave *Jezebel* time to repent. Isn’t that amazing?

He continues, "If she does not repent, I will kill her, and I will kill those who participate. I will kill them physically. Believers in the church of Thyatira, if they don't repent, I will kill them with sickness" (Rev. 2:22-23, paraphrased).

"Well, Jesus does not put sickness on people." I guarantee you He does. That is not His main method of discipline, but He said, "Tell them that I will send sickness and kill them—people in the Church." The devil sends sickness, and Jesus may use the devil. You know, Jesus can do it any way He wants, but He told them, "If they don't get out of immorality, sickness will come and kill them. You tell Jezebel I have been kind to her." He does not say that, but that is the meaning of "I have given her time to repent."

Beloved, if God gives Jezebel time to repent, He is a kind God. But His patience is not supposed to make us frivolous. It is supposed to make us understand His kindness so that we will repent.

We don't despise His wealth of patience; we thank Him: "O God, I deserve, I should be in big trouble. I am—this is the week I am done, done, done," and maybe you won't be done. Maybe you will end up doing it next week too, but you mean it and you are going hard. You are doing, "Blessed are they who are poor in spirit and mourning." You are going after this thing. You're attacking it. You mean it for real, because, beloved, you do not want to take Jesus' patience for granted. The wealth of His patience, the riches of it, is to lead you and I to wholeheartedness, called repentance.

Here is the passage I talked about earlier. Jesus refuses to forgive those who ask for it if they refuse to repent. The classic passage is Matthew 7 (verses 21-23, paraphrased)—"Many,"—not a few, but multitudes; I think it will be millions—"will say to the Lord on the last day"—and He is not talking about them as someone who fell away.

He is saying, "I never knew you."

"No, I went to the revival. The evangelist said, if I said this prayer—and I did."

Jesus says, "I never—I did not say yes back. I never knew you." Multitudes will have that confusion on the last day.

WE CAN HAVE ASSURANCE OF GOD'S ENJOYMENT OF US

Paragraph D—We *can* have the assurance, and this is where we really emphasize here at the IHOP-KC Missions Base. Letter D—this is one of our real pillars here, that we can have the assurance that God enjoys us even in our flawed obedience and our weakness, but only in sincerity, though.

Someone says, "I don't know if I am sincere." Good, go make sure that you are.

"How do I know?" Well you get your Bible and go after it with God. I do not mean you are going to find verses in the Bible that say, "You are now sincere." That is not what I mean, but you search it and say, "God, I am in turmoil. I am wrestling. I don't know if I am sincere. I've got to settle this."

Beloved, a little bit of that will not hurt you. After all, it is your eternal destiny, and you're standing before the mighty God. Some people think that anything that is disturbing cannot be the grace of God. I say, no, a whole bunch of people need to get stirred.

A guy comes to me and says, "I am not sure if this is right or wrong."

And I reply, "I am not sure either, but you know what? A week or two or three, or a month or two, you'll have it sorted out. You might be really preoccupied for two or three months, but you will really sort it out. If you care enough, I promise you that you will sort it out. The Holy Spirit will bear witness to you and make it clear. You may not have peace about it for a few months—so what? You are an eternal being. He is the God of glory. It is your relationship. I think it is worth a couple months. You might even miss a few TV shows, but you know what? It is really worth the hassle."

"But that can't be grace because I am unsure. I am uncertain."

"No, that's the grace of God stirring you, because it is the most powerful thing you have—your heart, your inner man." Beloved, you want to steward it. We can have the assurance that God really enjoys us long before we mature, but it is only in context to sincerity—going hard after the Lord.

Our repentance and love for God can be sincere while it's still fragile and weak. Grace gives us confidence. I do something, say something, think something, repent of it, and grace gives me confidence *that moment* that I am a first-class citizen in God's sight. Grace gives us a new beginning as a first-class citizen, but it is when we repent.

A cry for grace without repentance is a vain cry. Someone says, "Lord, forgive me." I mean, a cry for mercy without repentance is vain. We have to repent. We really do have to repent. Jesus is a King. He is not only a "fix the Western world Christians" leader. He is a King with a kingdom, and He means it.

We *really* lose our rights over our time and money and our bodies. We *really* lose our rights, and many believers have no revelation that a King is over them and they are slaves. That has never crossed their minds, ever. They want a good deal because Jesus died, and to get on with the business and put a little Jesus salt and pepper shaker, just to kind of spice things up. They have no revelation that a King owns them and they are a slave to a King. That has never crossed their mind, because the Gospel has never been preached to them clearly.

Well, even though God enjoys us in our weakness, He will still discipline us. The fact that God enjoys us, and that God is looking at our sincerity, does not mean He will not still discipline us. As a matter of fact, in Proverbs 3 it says, "God corrects the ones He loves like a father in the son he delights in. He corrects us *because* He delights in us, *because* He is enjoying us" (Prov. 3:11, paraphrased).

Well, we could go on and on. I think we are going to end with that. Let's go ahead and stand.

I mean this really sincerely. This right approach to the grace of God will cause you to position yourself to get your spirit touched by the power of God.

This approach to Christianity that is not wholehearted has no power in it in the inner man, and we stay stuck and bored and depressed, and our spirit never becomes alive with power on it. This idea that someone is doing you a favor by changing the truth and distorting it to make you feel better today is a really terrible thing, because it is keeping your spirit powerless of your Christian life.

I want to invite anyone in the room who is saying, "Yes, I need to repent today, because, like you said, we are peeling that onion and we are going to cry all the way to the middle."

You are saying, “It is more than that. I am in a season where I need to make a fundamentally big change and begin to seek the grace of God in a whole new way. I need to really give my heart to Him in a new way, not just a little way. I really need to be wholehearted.”

He is your King. He wants that dynamic relationship with you. What you might do in your heart is renounce false ideas, lies about the grace of God: “Lord, I just never understood Your grace. I thought it was an insurance policy while I was sinning. I have never even experienced the grace of God hardly. I do not know about power on my spirit. I want to be a Christian—I mean, I want to know You, God.” Having an IHOP name badge does not mean that you are even a Christian. “I want to know You. I want to know what it means to have power on my spirit.”

Jesus, Lord, I ask You to help me. Deliver me. I need Your grace, O God.