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Kingdom of God (Part 8)



Kingdom of God - Steve Gregg

During this discussion, Steve Gregg emphasizes the importance of understanding the concept of Kingdom Grace. He emphasizes that grace is not just about receiving salvation and forgiveness but is essential in serving God acceptably and with reverence. Gregg highlights that grace is not a replacement for the law but rather a way of relating to God as servants under the reign of his grace. He emphasizes that grace is a gift from God, and it is not a license for people to continue sinning but an opportunity to live in submission to God's laws with a heart inclined towards serving Him.

Transcript

Tonight we're talking about the Kingdom of Grace. This is our eighth session in the series on the Kingdom of God, and we've been taking different aspects of what the Bible teaches on that subject. Why do I call it the Kingdom of Grace? Well, the Kingdom of God has a lot to do with obedience to the King.

And there are many who do not see how obedience and grace can belong together in the same system. And that is something we need to understand because it's very clear that the gospel of grace is the same as the gospel of the kingdom. The message of the kingdom is a message of grace.

So we read in Acts 20, verses 24 and 25, where Paul was speaking to the elders of the church of Ephesus on his final journey to Jerusalem. And he said, but he mentioned that the Holy Spirit had been testifying everywhere he went, that bonds and imprisonment awaited him. And he said, but none of these things move me, nor do I count my life dear to myself so that I may finish my race with joy and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.

And indeed, now I know that you all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, will see my face no more. Now, notice he said his activities of the previous years he summarized as preaching the gospel of the grace of God. This is the only time in the Bible that the gospel is referred to as the gospel of grace.

Normally, it's called the gospel of the kingdom. And we can see that he's not referring to

a different gospel in this case, because he mentions in the very next line, I have gone among you preaching the kingdom of God. He is obviously using the term the gospel of grace as a synonym for the message of the kingdom of God that he's been preaching.

But why? Why would the gospel of the kingdom be a synonym for the gospel of grace? Well, that's a very important thing. It's something we really need to get a hold on, because if we don't understand grace, but we try to understand the kingdom of God without understanding grace, we will become legalists. As almost all religious people eventually do, because very few, I think, ever come to understand what grace means of the grace of God.

In Hebrews 12, 28, the writer of Hebrews says, therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom, presently we receive it day by day. We are receiving this kingdom, which cannot be shaken. Let us have grace as if that's a given.

If we're receiving this kingdom, then, of course, we ought to have grace, which is associated with that kingdom by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. Now, notice he says, let us have grace by which that is by grace we can serve God as citizens of the kingdom of God. We are servants of the king, but it's important that we may serve the king acceptably.

It is necessary that we serve God, but we can't just serve him as we wish. We have to serve him acceptably. And the writer of Hebrews says, since we are receiving a kingdom, we need to have grace so that through that, through grace, we may serve him acceptably with reverence and godly fear.

The most radical thing about Christianity is grace. Jesus didn't come simply to give us a higher set of rules and standards than what Moses had given. Actually, Jesus didn't give any rules other than what you find in the Old Testament, that ethics Jesus taught are not new.

You'll find everything in the Sermon on the Mount in the Psalms or the law or in the prophets of the Old Testament. Just about everything Jesus said was old ethics. He was simply bringing to light aspects of the old covenant that were not commonly taught and were obscured by the traditions of the Pharisees.

But Jesus didn't teach some new ethic. That wasn't what his movement was about. It wasn't about new rules.

And in fact, the rules that Jesus taught aren't really that much superior or different than the rules that many religions teach. Jesus said, as you would, that men would do to you do likewise to them. Virtually every founder of every world religion has a statement that's the essential equivalent of that.

So if Christianity does not necessarily teach a higher ethic than all other religions, what

sets it apart? What sets it apart is this from John chapter one in verse 17. The law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. Now, the law, of course, is the Jewish law.

But if you change the religion, it could be the Muslim law or the Buddhist law or the Hindu law or the any law of any religion. There are rules. Every religion has its disciplines and its rules and its ethics attached to it.

And some man in the case of Judaism, the man was Moses. But in the case of other religions, it's other men have given these laws, have given these rules. Of course, the law that came through Moses was actually God's law given through Moses.

But nonetheless, it was simply law. And it was a good law. Paul said in Romans chapter seven that the law of Israel was holy, just and good.

The law Moses gave was not deficient. It was fine. As laws go, there's never been better than the law of Moses.

But what is different about Christianity, what is radically different from everything else, is that grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. Notice the way those clauses are phrased. The law was given by Moses.

Moses was the one who handed it over. You could receive it and still have it after Moses is dead because he has divested himself of it. He received it from God.

He gave it to them and then they had it, whether he was around or not. But it's different. The grace and truth come by Jesus.

In order to have them, you have to have Jesus himself. You can have the law without Moses after Moses has given it. But Jesus doesn't just come and give grace and truth.

Grace and truth comes to you through him, through having him. He is what makes Christianity radical. It's a relationship with the king.

In Hebrews chapter 10, the spirit of God is called the spirit of grace. The Holy Spirit is the spirit of grace. Grace is something that is in Jesus.

In verse 14, it says, 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. Full of grace and truth. And then it says, for the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

And then the next verse says, and of his fullness we have all received. Well, what's he full of? Grace and truth. And of his fullness, we have received even grace upon grace.

The kingdom of God is about grace, the grace that is in Jesus. And you obtain the grace

by that connection with Jesus himself. He doesn't just come and dispense grace like Moses dispensed the law.

He is the one in whom grace is here. And as you have him, you have grace. You see, Christianity is the only so-called religion.

In which the founder is the message. He's not just the messenger. He is the message.

He is what it's about. The kingdom of God is about. The king.

The message of the kingdom is there's another king, one Jesus. But when you have this king, you come into a kingdom and into a relationship that is full of grace and truth. And it is what sets Christianity apart from every other way of life.

We're talking here about the reign of Christ. The kingdom of God is the reign of Christ over his servants. His servants can serve him acceptably only if they have grace.

To do so acceptably. We read in Romans 5. Verses 20 through 21. Paul said, moreover, the law entered that the offense might abound.

But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more. So that as sin reigned in death. Even so, grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Now notice that statement as sin reigned previously. Now, what reigns? Grace reigns in the kingdom of God. It is grace that reigns.

It is the kingdom of grace because that grace is in Jesus and he reigns. But in what sense does Paul mean that grace reigned? How does grace reign? Well, he says it reigns the way that sin once reigned. But how did sin reign? Anyone before you were a Christian, were you ever reigned over by sin? And what does that mean? It means that sin dictated your behavior more or less like a master dictates the behavior of a servant.

You were a servant of sin. And sin reigned over you. Not now.

If you're in the kingdom of God. As sin once reigned, now grace reigns, which means grace now dictates your life. Romans 6 verses 14 through 22.

Paul said, for sin shall not have dominion over you, for you're not under the law, but under grace. Again, you're under the rule of grace. What then? Shall we sin because we're not under the law, but under grace? Believe it or not, there's people who actually think this is the case.

Even though Paul took steps to prevent people from making this mistake. I know many Christians who think that they can sin because they're not under the law, they're under grace. Now, they don't mean to say that it's okay to sin.

They know it's not okay. They just think you can get away with it. You can get away with doing things that aren't okay because we're under grace, not under the law.

So they think apparently that being under grace means you can get away with stuff that you couldn't get away with when you're under the law. Well, Paul anticipated people twisting his message that way and says, shall we then sin because we're not under the law, but under grace? Certainly not. Do you not know that to whom you present yourself slaves to obey? You are that one slave whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death or of obedience leading to righteousness.

Now notice. He had said before sin used to rain, but now grace rains. Now he contrasted between sin raining and obedience raining.

We're under grace. That means we're under obedience. Well, wait a minute.

I thought grace and obedience were opposites. Did you? I'll bet some of you did. But what does it mean here? What's he talking about? We're under grace now, and that means we're serving obedience leading to righteousness.

But God, we think that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. Now, being a slave of grace or being ruled by grace is being a slave of righteousness.

We've got obedience, righteousness. These are the things we're under instead of sin, which is because grace rains. Grace rains in my life now, and now my life looks like obedience to God.

My life looks like righteousness. Well, what did my life look like when I was under the law? It looked like sin. Because although the law didn't direct me to sin, the law couldn't keep me from sin.

As a matter of fact, Paul says in Romans 5 that when the law came, it stirred up into me, in my heart, all kinds of rebellious notions and tendencies that weren't there before. It's like the lady in the Church of England who complained to the vicar after church. She said she thought it wasn't a good idea for them to have the Ten Commandments up on the wall of the church.

She said it gave people too many ideas. Laws evoke rebellion in our fallen nature. When we're under the law, our life looked like sin.

When we're under grace, our life looks like obedience and righteousness. He says, and having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness and of lawlessness, leading to more lawlessness.

So now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness. For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death.

But now, having been set free from sin and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness and the end everlasting life. Now, a couple of things I want you to see here. When Paul says, shall we continue in sin because we're under grace and not under the law? His answer was certainly not.

Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey? You are that one slaves whom you obey. Now, what's he saying there? What he's saying is this. If you say, well, I'm under grace now and that's why I live under sin.

I'm not under the law. There's no law to tell me I can't do these things. And therefore I live under grace.

And that means I fornicate. That means I get drunk. That means I cheat on my income tax because, hey, I'm under grace, not under the law.

And Paul said, you're missing something here. We're not talking about being under grace in some nebulous, meaningless sense. We're not being under the rule of grace.

That as sin reigned, now grace reigns, remember? Therefore, if you are under grace, you are under its rule. And anyone can tell whose rule you are under by who you're obeying. Whoever you obey, that's whose servant you are.

If you're obeying sin, you can talk all you want about being under grace, but you're not. You're not ruled by grace if you're not obeying grace. If you're obeying sin, that's who your master is.

It's obvious. You can always tell who a servant belongs to by watching and seeing whose bidding he is doing. If you go to a house and the servants meet you at the door and you don't know the master of the house, and you wonder, I wonder who owns these servants, I wonder who owns this house, just watch the servants and see who they're getting their orders from.

Because the one that they obey is the one whose servant they are. If you're obeying sin, then you are a slave of sin still. You might be talking about, oh, I'm not under the law, I'm under grace.

No, you're still under sin if you're obeying sin. So the point here is it looks like something to be ruled by grace. Grace doesn't just mean now I can get away with stuff I couldn't get away with when I was under law or under sin.

Hebrews 10, around verse 26 or so, it says, If we go on sinning willfully after having

received the knowledge of the truth, there remains no more sacrifice for sins, but only a fearful looking for a fiery indignation that will consume the adversaries. He says, listen, he says, those who sinned under Moses law were put to death by the mouth of two or three witnesses. Of how much sorer punishment do you suppose he shall be thought worthy who is trampled underfoot, the son of God and counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, an unholy thing and has done desperate to the spirit of grace.

Now, did you catch that train of thought there? You can look it up on your own if you want to. It's in the latter part of Hebrews chapter 10. It says under the law of Moses, people were put to death.

If there were two witnesses, again, they could be put to death for violating the law of Moses. How much worse punishment will you be thought worthy of if you've trampled the son of God and his blood and the spirit of grace underfoot? You violate grace. It's far worse than violating the law.

Why? Because it's not OK to break the law, but at least it's understandable. If people have sin in their nature and the law doesn't help them change their inner nature and they violate the law, it's not OK, but it's kind of understandable. But if God has given you the spirit of grace and the son of God and the blood of the covenant by which you were sanctified, if he's given all those things and you're still doing the wrong thing, you got much less excuse.

You got no excuse because God's giving you all the resources necessary to be obedient. But notice in verse there in Romans six, where Paul says, what fruit did you have then in the things of which you're now ashamed? Notice the behavior you had when you're in sin. He calls it the fruit of your life.

It just comes like naturally like fruit on a tree or fruit like grapes on a vine. They just kind of they're produced by the nature of the tree. The nature of the vine produces predictable fruit.

If you're under sin, the fruit that your life produced was sinful and shameful. But look at that last line. And having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness.

You have a different kind of fruit. Now, the rule of grace produces a different kind of fruit, which Paul says is holiness leading to everlasting life. Now, there's no other kind of Christianity than this in the Bible.

There's not an easier kind, but it couldn't get easier than this. Because it's not about imposing a harder rule on yourself. It's about having a changed heart, a heart that wants to do good as much as you used to want to do bad.

It was easy to do bad when your heart was a slave of sin. It was the easiest thing in the

world. Well, when you're ruled over by the grace of God, your heart now wants to do good.

It says in Jeremiah 31 that God writes his laws on your hearts, which is a figure of speech that indicates that he inclines your heart to be favorable toward the law, to welcome the law of God. As easy as it is to sin when you're a slave of sin. It should be as easy to live in holiness when you're a slave of grace, but why isn't it? Why isn't it? Why is it still possible to sin when your guard is down? Well, because you've also got your flesh and Paul talks about the wrestling between the flesh and the spirit.

But if you walk in the spirit, Paul said, you will not fulfill the desires of the flesh. There is a power in the kingdom that is supernatural. The spirit of God, the spirit of grace empowers you to do what you would not otherwise be able to do.

And not to do it as a strain, but to do it as fruit produced from your new life. Titus 2 verses 11 and 12, Paul said, for the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men teaching us. Now, who's doing the teaching in this sentence? Who's the teacher here? The grace of God is the teacher, right? The grace of God has appeared teaching us.

So you've received grace, you've received a teacher. And what does that teacher teach you that you can get away with stuff? The opposite. The grace of God has appeared teaching us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously and godly in this present age.

That's what the grace of God teaches me and you. And if it isn't there teaching you, it isn't there. You see, when I meet people who are living in sin, but they're going to church and you confront them about their sin, they say, well, I don't bug me about what I'm doing.

I'm under grace. You were saved by grace. And I say, well, yeah, we are saved by grace, but you apparently aren't, because if you are saved by grace, then you have received grace.

And if you have received grace, grace will teach you to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts and to live soberly and righteously and godly in this present world. That's what grace will teach you. If grace isn't teaching you, then it's not there.

You don't have it yet. You may have had a religious experience. You might have had a change of religious viewpoints and embraced Christian truth.

But if you are not inwardly taught by the grace of God to live soberly and righteously and godly in the present world, if that's not there teaching you, then the grace of God that Paul knew about isn't there. In you remember, we saw Christ, he was as the only begotten of the father. He was full of grace and truth and of his fullness.

We have all received grace upon grace. If I'm full of grace and truth because I've received what Christ was full of and he was full of grace and truth, then am I not going to be taught inwardly? No one has to impose a law on me. The spirit of God in me, the spirit of grace who lives in me, teaches me these things.

And if there is no inclination that has changed in you when you became a Christian, then you have not yet become what the Bible calls born again. I'm not saying this in order to hurt anyone's feelings. You know, some people think the most important thing you need to do after you leave somebody to say a sinner's prayer is to make sure you give them assurance of salvation because you don't want them to have no assurance of salvation.

You've got to make sure they have the assurance of salvation. What's that mean? That means that after you've led them in a sinner's prayer, you say, OK, if you die tonight, will you go to heaven? And if they say, well, I hope so, that's not good enough. You say, now, wait a minute.

Here, let me let me let me share this verse. First, John 5, 13. These things write unto you who believe on the name of the son of God that you might know that you have eternal life.

Do you know that you have eternal life? Well, I hope so. No, not good enough. Do you know? You know, the Bible says that the spirit of God bears witness with our spirits that we're the children of God.

If somebody says a serious prayer and the Holy Spirit doesn't bear witness, then that there's the sons of God. Maybe they aren't. The Bible doesn't anywhere say you become a Christian by saying a sinner's prayer.

Do you know that there's no sinner's prayer recorded in the Bible? No advocacy of lead the sinner in the sinner's prayer. A person is convicted by the Holy Spirit and has the revelation of God. And they're going to they're going to say their own prayer.

It's going to be spontaneous because they're going to have an encounter with God. And if it's a real encounter with God, the Holy Spirit is going to come into them and the grace of God is going to come into them. And they are going to the spirit of God to bear witness with their spirit that their children are.

You're not going to convince them by quoting first John 5, 13, till you're blue in the face. You don't need to convince them by appeal to proof text that they're saved. If they are saved, something has changed.

You think the God who created the universe can come and live inside you and nothing changes and you didn't notice he arrived. I think that we have wronged the Christian community a great deal in modern evangelism by affirming to people that they are saved when they in some cases are not. They've just jumped through the hoops.

We told them to jump through. They've never really seriously done business with God. They've never had true repentance of their sins.

They've never been really regenerated, but they've said all the right words. And by golly, we want them to be in our church. But that means we have to make them think they're a Christian.

You do no one a favor by convincing them that they're a Christian. If they're not. I'm going to just say what the Bible says about being a Christian.

If that's not what you are, blame the Bible for saying so. But you'll be better off for knowing because many will say, Lord, Lord. He'll say, I never knew you.

I said, this is prayer was baptized. I went to church every week. My pastor said I was saved.

Yeah. But did the Holy Spirit tell you you're safe? Did the grace of God move in and take over? Did you come under the rule of grace in your life? And did it teach you to deny ungodliness and worldly loss? Did you when you woke up the next morning? Did you know I need to deny ungodliness and worldly loss? Not because someone told me the grace of God teaches me that. Did you get up in the morning and say, I need to live soberly and righteously and godly in this present world? If not, then where's the grace of God that's supposed to be teaching you that? Do you think that God's not on the job or is it that you settled for less than what was normative inversion? You need to come under the grace of God and you come under the grace of God.

Well, we'll show you how a little later on here. But this is what the reign of grace is. The kingdom of grace, grace reigns.

And when it reigns, it teaches you a new way of life. And it doesn't teach you from the outside with new rules. We don't need to just, you know, memorize the Sermon on the Mount and afflict ourselves for every time we are angry or have lust or something like that.

It's not the laws that Jesus gave that transform us. It's the grace that he gives that transforms us. The laws are simply descriptive of the way we will live.

You should be able to read the Sermon on the Mount and say, yeah, that's about right. That's not how I see it, too, because you're taught that inwardly. The laws and the rules Jesus taught are not there to be imposed upon unconverted people.

Against their grain. That's what the law of Moses did. It didn't help.

The law of Christ describes what it means to walk under the influence of grace. The grace of God changes you and it changes you in many ways. First of all, we need to know

that grace changes the way we relate to God because grace is the basis of our relationship with God.

And it's not performance orientation anymore. And as long as you think becoming a Christian means you become religious, you stop your smoking and you stop going to the movies and you stop drinking, you stop cussing and you start going to church. And now you're a Christian.

That's just all performance orientation. That's all legalism. Now, I'm not saying that you shouldn't stop your smoking, your drinking and the other things, too, and shouldn't be going to church.

That's not what I'm saying. I'm saying that if you thought becoming a Christian means you make those adjustments in your behavior. Then you don't know the basis of your relationship with God.

In Romans three, verse twenty one through twenty four, Paul said, but now the righteousness of God, apart from the law, is revealed being witnessed by the law and the prophets. As the law and the prophets predicted that this would come, the gospel would come. Even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ to all and on all who believe, for there is no difference for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God being justified freely by his grace.

Through redemption that is in Christ Jesus. What does grace mean? Well, the the Greek word in the Bible, in the New Testament for grace is the word Karis. Which you'd spell C-H-A-R-I-S, Karis.

It means literally means favor. And therefore, if you've heard that the word grace means unmerited favor. Well, that's true.

Actually, the word simply means favor. We receive favor from God. But on what basis? Not on works, but it's unmerited.

That's why Paul says in Romans four, four. Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace, but as debt. If you do the work.

Then there's a debt owed you. And you may get paid what you're owed, but you don't. It's not grace.

That's not what grace is. Now, Paul is not saying you can get saved by doing the work. What he's saying is since you can't do the work.

It's a good thing that there's a different basis for acceptance with God than doing the work. If it was a matter of just doing the good works. And then you'd be okay with God.

Then we couldn't call that grace. Could we? Because that'd be debt. That wouldn't be

grace.

That's debt. Likewise, in Romans 11 and verse six, Paul says, if it's by grace. Then it is no longer of works.

Otherwise, grace is no longer grace. But it is, if it is of works, it is no longer of grace. Now, what Paul is telling us here is, yes, grace means favor.

But in particular, this grace that we receive of God is unmerited favor. Because if it is merited, it's a debt that God owes you. It's not grace that's owed you.

The basis of my children's relationship with me. Is one of grace. They didn't do anything to become my children.

And they don't do anything to remain my children. And they don't really do anything to remain in my good graces. I love them unconditionally because they're my children.

Now, I do make rules for my children. And I expect them to obey them. And it would be easy for them to make the mistake of thinking, well.

Because he's given us these rules. Our relationship is based on performance. Well, that depends.

If they break the rules, do I kick them out of the family? No. Their relationship in the family, their relationship to me, is based not on their works. It's based on my favor that I bestow upon them on whatever basis I choose.

And I choose to do it on the basis that they're my kids. Now, my kids sometimes have disappointed me. They haven't always obeyed.

They haven't always lived up to what they could have done. They didn't stop being my children. But just because they're my children by grace, it doesn't mean they have no obligations.

There's something in the definition of being a child in my family. It means you're subject to me. If you're one of my children, you're subject to me.

I'm the head of the home. And if I say you do these, these, these things, then you do them. Now, doing them isn't going to make you more or less a child of mine.

That child is my child whether they do anything or not. But being a child has certain obligations attached to it. My relationship with God is not based on how obedient I am.

It is based on the grace of God which I cannot earn. But that relationship that I have is the relationship of a subject to a king or a son to a father. It doesn't matter which image you use.

The Bible uses both. You see, it's one of subjection. It's one where he's the one who gives the rule, the rules and the orders.

And I'm the one who's supposed to do what he says. That's intrinsic in the definition of the relationship. Just like my children, the definition of them being my children means that they are subject to me.

And the definition of being in relationship with God means I'm subject to him. There are expectations that come with this. But those expectations are not related to whether I'm accepted or not in him.

I'm accepted by grace through faith. And that is how I maintain and possess originally a relationship with God. It's not that I have to perform in order to be his child.

You know very well, I'm sure, Ephesians 2, 8 through 10, For by grace you've been saved through faith and that not of yourselves. It is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works.

There are expectations. God recreated us and regenerated us for the purpose of us doing good works, which God prepared before and that we should walk in them. God has prepared a path for us to walk in and we're supposed to walk in it.

We were made for that. My children were born to be part of my family and while they're young to be subject to me and to do the things I tell them to do. But they became children without obedience and they remain children on a basis other than their obedience.

Likewise, my relationship with God. I don't have a relationship with God because I'm doing good works, but I have a relationship that my task is defined as I'm supposed to be doing good works. He made me for good works.

That's what's expected. But I'm saved by grace through faith. My salvation is therefore secure so long as I have faith because of that faith through which I'm saved, that faith through which I receive grace, through which I'm saved, says Paul.

And we need to understand that grace is not just a benefit we receive. Grace is something that was seen in Jesus. He had something in him that was gracious, graceful.

He was full of grace and truth. And therefore, grace is an inward disposition. When we talk about the grace of God, we're talking about what kind of disposition God has.

He's gracious. He's not lenient. That's very important to know.

There's a difference between graciousness and leniency. A lenient parent is one who doesn't care much whether his kids do well or not. He's lenient.

He's more or less apathetic about the rightness or wrongness of his kids' behavior. He doesn't get alarmed. He's not too concerned about it.

He's lenient. God's not like that. God's not lenient.

He's very concerned about our behavior. He's very alarmed if we're going the wrong way. He expresses it in the prophets and even in the life of Jesus, he expresses it at times.

He's not lenient, but he's gracious. What's the difference? The lenient party is apathetic about right and wrong. The gracious party is not apathetic.

It's very concerned about right and wrong, but it's capable of forgiving wrong. It doesn't mean it didn't matter. As a matter of fact, it cost a great deal for God to be able to forgive us.

He couldn't just do it unilaterally. He had to sacrifice his son to do it. That's how much he's concerned about it.

It's not like he doesn't think it's very important. It's important enough to sacrifice his son. But because he is gracious and graciously disposed toward us, he was willing to make any sacrifice necessary to save us.

And that disposition can be in us and is supposed to be in us. Of his fullness, we have received also. If God's gracious disposition is exhibited in his behavior, ours should be gracious also.

In Proverbs 11, 16 through 17, it says, A woman who's got grace, who's full of grace, retains honor, but ruthless men retain riches. The merciful man, which obviously is parallel to the gracious woman in this couplet. The merciful man does good to his own soul, but he who is cruel, which corresponds with the ruthless man in the previous member of the couplet, troubles his own flesh.

Being a gracious or a merciful person is essentially an inward disposition. And grace is that if you have received grace, you will exhibit grace. The Bible, Jesus said, if you don't forgive others.

Their trespasses, your father won't forgive you yours. Forgiveness received. Brings the obligation of forgiveness extended.

If you've received grace from God, you possess it and are supposed to extend it to others. You're supposed to be gracious as God is gracious to you. Jesus said in Luke chapter six, be merciful as your father in heaven is merciful.

God is merciful to you through the back door and you're merciful to others out the front door. You become an agent. Of the kingdom of grace.

And there's a world out there, a hurting world that doesn't need anything as much as it needs grace. And we're the ones that receive it from God. We extend it to others.

That's what's supposed to be happening. In Ecclesiastes 10, 12, it says the words of a wise man's mouth are gracious. But the lips of fools swallow them up.

Gracious words. If out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks. If your words are gracious, it's because your heart's full of grace.

A disposition of grace is the Christian disposition. Paul said to the Corinthians in 2nd Corinthians, eight, seven. But as you abound in everything in faith and speech and knowledge, in all diligence and in your love for us.

See that you abound in this grace also. And in the context, this grace is referring to generosity and helping the poor saints in Jerusalem in a collection. Paul is urging them to take.

But the point here is he refers to this as grace in their lives. When they're being generous to the poor, that's grace. He says you need to abound in this grace.

You already abound in love toward us. You already abound in many good things. But you need to also abound in this grace of generosity.

You need to be a graceful person. Colossians four, six, Paul said, let your speech always be with grace seasoned with salt that you may know how you ought to answer each one. You know.

Some people don't like to witness because they're afraid they'll be asked questions they won't know how to answer. What if I don't know the answer? What if I don't know how to answer someone? People said, doesn't it scare you to go on the radio and just say, call with any question? Well, if I had to know all the answers, it'd be terrifying. I don't promise to know all the answers, but I always know how to answer.

Because the way you answer is with grace. If your speech is always with grace, you'll always know how to answer. You won't always know the answer, but you'll know how to respond.

You'll know how to answer everyone because you'll be filled with grace. Your words will be filled with grace. That's what Paul is saying.

Now, grace is a dynamic. And potent thing. In our lives.

Hebrews chapter 4 verse 16 foot. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace. That we may obtain mercy and find grace to help.

In time of need. Notice at the throne of grace. There's two things we want.

We want mercy. And we want grace to help. Now, mercy is needed when? When we've done something wrong.

When we do something wrong, we need mercy. We need God to forgive us. We come to the throne of grace and seek the mercy of God.

And find it. But after we've received mercy, we also need more than that. We need grace to help us.

Because if we don't have grace helping us. We'll just be doing the wrong thing all the time. We'll just have to keep coming for mercy again and again and again.

And we should any time we need to. But it's not like the prodigal son is supposed to be coming home several times a day. He comes home one time and he lives at home with his father.

And he lives generally in obedience to his father after that. Maybe not perfectly. There might be other times he has to ask forgiveness for things.

But it's not like he's just a perpetual loser. Who every day has to return home from the pigsty. He comes home one time and then he's home.

We're not supposed to have to be sinning as much throughout our whole Christian lives as we did before. Only just the only difference is we can go to the throne of grace and get mercy every time. God wants us to change.

He wants to give us something to help us be different. And that is grace. Grace, it doesn't only procure forgiveness.

Grace is the sufficiency of God given to us to help us in time of need. You know, in 2nd Corinthians 3, 5, Paul said, not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves. But our sufficiency is from God.

I'm not sufficient for the things God wants me to do. I can't. I don't have what it takes in myself.

But I do have sufficiency in God. God is my sufficiency. And more specifically, 2nd Corinthians 9, 8, Paul said, God is able to make all grace abound to you.

Resulting in what? That you always having all sufficiency in all things may abound unto every good work. If all grace abounds to you, if God abounds toward you and giving you all the grace you need, you will have all the sufficiency you need. That's the sufficiency.

My grace is sufficient for you. We'll see that God said that to Paul on another occasion. In fact, we'll see it very soon here.

But this grace that is given is not simply God's benevolent pardon for our sins. It is something of his own nature. Jesus was full of it and of his fullness we have received.

And now we are to be full of it. Full of grace. And therefore, that grace that is the nature of Christ himself given to us.

Christ's nature reproduced in us through the working of the Holy Spirit of grace. That enables us to do what we cannot do in ourselves. God never expects us to do anything in our flesh to please him.

Those who are in the flesh cannot please God, Paul said in Romans. But he expects us to live a life pleasing him through grace. Remember, receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved.

Let us have grace that we might serve God acceptably. If we have this grace, it enables us to serve God acceptably. It is the sufficiency that we lack without it.

It is all sufficiency in all things to abound toward every good work. You want to abound toward every good work, but you're not doing very well? The grace of God is what you need to make you sufficient for the things God has for you to do. God doesn't give rules and expect you to pull yourself up by your bootstraps and by your own discipline and become perfect on your own.

He expects to give you the grace to do what he expects to be done. And that's a supernatural enablement. We saw this verse.

Let us have grace. Hebrews 12, 28, by which we may serve God. The grace of God enables us to serve God.

It's an enabling dynamic that is given to us. And Paul said in 1 Corinthians 3, 10, according to the grace of God, which was given to me as a wise master builder, I have laid the foundation. He means of the church in Corinth.

He came and he successfully established the church in Corinth, not by his own wisdom, but according to the grace of God that was given to him as a wise master builder. He needed to be wise as a builder to lay the foundation of the church in such a corrupt town as that. And he was sufficient to the task, not by his natural wisdom, but by the grace of God that was given to him.

He received grace to enable him. In 1 Corinthians 15, 10, Paul's comparing what he has accomplished to what was accomplished by the other apostles in the context. And he says, but by the grace of God, I am what I am.

And his grace toward me was not in vain, but I labored more abundantly than they all. He means the other apostles in the context. Yet not I, but the grace of God, which was

with me.

I did more than all the other apostles did. I have labored and accomplished more than any of them did. But it wasn't me.

It looks like me because I'm out there doing the thing, but it wasn't me. I know a secret. There's a secret that you can't see.

It wasn't me. It was the grace of God that was with me, enabling me to do this. I was supernaturally enabled by the king's own grace given to me to help me to serve him and to do the thing he wants done acceptably in the way he wants it done.

You can live a moral life without God in measure. Mormons do it. Lots of people do it.

Some Muslims do it. I mean, lots of people who don't know our God live pretty, pretty moral lives. But it's not all that God wants.

God wants us to live life by the power that he gives that is by the grace that he gives us. Otherwise, it's just legalism. Otherwise, it's just flesh.

It just works. But if you receive grace and grace enables you, then it's God doing his own work through you. That's what it's about.

It's not God doing his own work through you. God doesn't want us to serve him with works that we produce. He wants us to serve him with works that he produces by the change that he makes in our life through grace in us.

In Romans 12, 6, Paul said, having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them. And he mentioned some of the gifts of the spirit. Now, what I want to point out about this is the word gifts of the Holy Spirit, gifts of the spirit.

The Greek word for gifts of the spirit is charisma. And the root of that is charis, C-H-A-R-I-S, which is the word for what in Greek? Grace. You just add ma at the end, grace ma, and you have charisma, which is the word Paul always uses for the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

We call them gifts of the spirit. Literally, the word means gifts of grace. These are the gifts that grace bestows upon us.

And what are they? They are the ability to do things for the kingdom of God that we could not do, at least not acceptably we could. Prophecy, healings, miracles are listed in some of the lists of gifts in this particular list in Romans 12. It's leadership, helps, giving, teaching, prophesying.

These are the gifts of grace, the charisma. And notice he says, we have gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us. That God gives you the grace of one gift and

gives me the grace of another gift.

But notice what's implied here. The ability that I'm calling a gift is really just grace manifesting a giftedness that is tailor-made for me. And there's a giftedness that God's grace is tailor-made for you.

And when you operate in it, it is the grace of God, not you. That's doing the thing. And therefore, when you work through the gifts that God gives, it is God working through you, through his grace, doing his work, his way.

And therefore, the gifts are connected with grace in that way. Gifts are simply manifestations of the grace of God. Peter talks about this too in 1 Peter 4, verses 10 and 11.

He says, as each one has received the gift, again, the charisma, minister, that means serve. Minister it to one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. That is, if you have a gift, that's the grace of God.

Be a good steward of that manifold grace of God. There's many-faceted, manifold, many-faceted grace of God. One gift is one facet of the grace of God.

Another gift is another facet. You have the facet that God has given you. That's a facet of the many-faceted grace of God.

And you be a steward of that by using that gift to serve. That's what it's there for. You steward it.

You use it as it's meant to be done. And he gives examples. If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God.

If anyone ministers, that means serves, let him do it as with the ability that God supplies. In other words, whatever you do for God, it's supposed to be God doing it. If you're speaking, you don't get up there and use your own wisdom.

You speak as the oracle of God. That is, if you have a gift of speaking, let the giftedness of the Holy Spirit speak through you and let God be the person speaking through you because that's the gift of God's grace operating through you. If you're a servant, if you do practical service for people, well, you can do that in the flesh, but he says don't.

Do it as of the ability which God gives. Do it trusting in God to give you the grace for it so that you do it graciously. You know, there are people who are church janitors who are more a blessing to be around because of their graciousness than the pastor might be.

But there's also church janitors who do the same amount of janitoring, but they're grumpy old crusty dudes, you know, and they're not gracious. And they're doing it, but they're not doing it as of the ability. They're not being stewards of the grace of God.

They're doing it in the flesh. You can do almost anything in the flesh that God wants you to do otherwise than in the flesh. But Peter says be a good steward of this grace in this gift that God's given you and do it as of the ability that God gives.

That's what it means. Now, there's another aspect of the grace enabling us. In 2 Thessalonians 2, 16 and 17, Paul said, Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself and our God and Father, who has loved us and given us everlasting consolation and good hope by grace, comfort your hearts and establish you in every good word and work.

Now, Paul said that the God through grace gives us everlasting consolation and hope and comfort to our hearts so that we're established in every good word and work. Now, I want to talk about this, the consolation of grace. This is the dynamic power of grace to transform the way in which you suffer.

You know, if you are a Christian, you will suffer. You know what? If you're not a Christian, you'll suffer, too. Man is born to trouble as surely as sparks fly upward, Job said.

And it doesn't matter if you're a Christian man or a non-Christian man, you're going to have trouble. The difference is if you're a Christian, you have a different resource in trouble, a very present help in trouble that non-Christians don't have. And that is the everlasting consolation that comes through the grace of God.

Ever heard people say, well, I went through a hard time, but God gave me the grace to get through it. Well, what's that mean? God gave him the grace. That just mean they survived it? Well, people who don't know God survive trials.

But again, it's a matter of whether you survived it supernaturally or in the flesh. Corrie ten Boom and her sister went through some serious trials. And those trials made them gracious and fragrant and a blessing to everyone around them.

Many other Holocaust survivors went through the same things, and many of them are bitter, resentful, angry at God, and they're not gracious at all. They went through the same thing, but they didn't have the grace for it. If God gives you the grace, you will go through your trials in a gracious manner and those trials will make you better and not bitter.

And therefore, the experience of suffering, which is a universal experience, the world is transformed by being filled with grace. I'll just tell you a story I didn't think I'd tell. But I had a wife who was killed back in 1980 up on Old San Jose Road in Soquel.

We'd been married for six months, actually. And she was walking with my daughter from a previous marriage, and she was hit by a truck on Thanksgiving Day, November 27th, 1980. Killed instantly.

I was not present when it happened, but I was only about a block away, and someone

phoned me and told me about it. So I came up on foot and ran up there. They didn't tell me she was dead.

They just said she'd been in an accident. I got there. The paramedics had already covered her up and were taking her away, and they told me she was dead.

Now, when I heard she was dead, the most uncanny thing happened to me. And all I can liken it to is when I was a child, my sister and I would go several times each summer to Newport Beach. My parents would go there.

We'd go on vacation, and we'd go out in the water when there weren't too many jellyfish, and we'd do what little kids do. We'd stand about this. People wanted to let the waves hit us in the tummy and laugh when they splash all around you and stuff.

And it would all be great fun until you saw one really big wave coming, and you could tell before it got there, this is not going to hit me in the tummy. It's going to hit me in the face. And when you're a little kid, you kind of have to assess, you know, what can I do about this? And sometimes you just jump higher, and it hits you in the chest, and it's all that funny because you beat the wave.

But sometimes you see one coming, and you know you can't jump that high, and you can't get out of the water fast enough, and so what do you do? Everyone know what you do when a wave's too big? You go under it, right? You just submerge yourself. The wave goes over, and if it's a big one, there's a lot of turbulence, but you're never hit with the full impact of it. You feel it going over, but you're not at all hurt by it, and it's, you know, you just experience it totally differently because you're submerged when the wave goes over.

And that's the vision or the impression I had exactly when the paramedic said, your wife is dead. I felt like I was just submerged in the grace of God, and I felt the turbulence of the news go past, and then it was gone. And I came out, and I said, and the Lord gives, and the Lord takes away.

Blessed be the name of the Lord, and that's all I ever said about it. And everyone was concerned. They said, you're in denial.

You're going through the first stage of the five steps of grieving. Two years later, they were still saying the same thing. Five years later, they were still saying the same thing.

It's been now, what, 27 years. I'm still in denial. Doesn't it sound like I'm in denial? I'm not in denial.

I'm in affirmation. I'm not denying anything. I never did deny it.

I received grace, and I affirmed that the grace of God is sufficient for any trial. I've been

through other trials, but nothing quite that sudden and surprising and permanent and devastating and so forth. But the grace of God was sufficient.

And that's what Paul said when he talked about the thorn he had in his flesh. He said he prayed three times that God would take away the thorn in the flesh. And God said, no, that's not what I'm going to do.

In 2 Corinthians 12, 9, here's the answer that God gave him. And you're probably familiar with it. 2 Corinthians 12, 9, instead of taking away the thorn, whatever that was that Paul was talking about, it was bad enough to make him cry out to God three times, take it away.

And he probably would have done so more times, except he got this answer back. He said to me, my grace is sufficient for you. For my strength is made perfect in weakness.

Therefore, most gladly, I will rather boast in my infirmities that the power of Christ may rest upon me. You know, Paul said through much tribulation, we enter the kingdom of God. That might sound like not a very good deal.

It is a good deal. You know what? You can go through much tribulation and not enter the kingdom of God. Lots of people do.

It's not just those who enter the kingdom of God that experience much tribulation. But it's just those ones who, in their tribulation, find that the grace of God is sufficient because they're in a kingdom of grace. And grace is the environment in which they're submerged, if they are.

Now, you might say, this all sounds very idealistic. I don't sound very much like my experience, Steve. I say, I'm sorry.

It should be, and you can get there from here, I hope. But the point is, I'm describing what the Bible describes as normative. I'm not saying you're never fearful about future problems.

I saw a movie once about Anabaptist martyrs. And one of them, I won't describe the horrible things that were done to him. It's a true story.

But I remember laying in bed that night thinking, that guy just believed what I believe. If persecution breaks out here, maybe they'll do those things to me, too. And I just thought, I can't.

I can't endure that. And I laid in bed praying, saying, God, if it comes out, I can't do that. And I felt that God said, you know, neither could they.

Neither could they without the grace of God. But with the grace of God, you'd be amazed. Richard Wurmbrandt spent 14 years in a communist prison.

Three of those years were in absolute solitary confinement. He says sometimes the presence of God was so great he danced for joy in his cell. Hadn't seen daylight for three years.

And he said he just danced for joy in his cell. That's the grace of God. Remember Corrie ten Boom when she was a little girl? Her mother died, and she was watching her mother dead.

And she said, oh, Papa, it's terrifying. You know, it's my time to die. How in the world can I stand it? I don't think I can stand it.

And you remember what her father said? He said, you know, Corrie, when we go to Germany to sell our clocks, I take you sometimes with me on the train. And when do I give you the ticket for the train? She said, well, when we're getting on the train, you give me the ticket. He said, well, that's right, because you're just a very little girl.

If I gave you the ticket beforehand, you might lose it. I'll keep it safe for you. And you always know that I have it.

And you know that you'll never have to get on the train without me having the ticket there for you. And this is the assurance that is in the kingdom of God, that there is always sufficient grace from God. If.

If what? If what? If this. If we receive grace. Now, I don't mean one time you get converted, receive grace.

And that's the end of it. You have to draw upon the grace of God continually. And there are conditions in the Bible for that.

Twice in the New Testament, it says in James 4, 6 and in first Peter 5, 5. God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble. If you are humbly trusting in God instead of in your own strength, if you are like a child saying, God, you know, I'm helpless. I depend on you.

I've got no other options. That humility God is pleased. With and he gives grace to the humble.

If people are proud, the grace apparently is withheld. He resists them. God resists the proud, but it gives grace to the humble.

James 4, 6 and first Peter 5, 5. Both say that in Romans 5 to Paul says through whom and in the context, of course, means through Jesus. Also, we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand. How do I stand? I stand in grace.

In trials, how do I stand? I still stand in grace. And I have access to this grace through what means through trusting God, through faith. By faith, we have access into this grace

in which we stand.

Ephesians 2, 8 says for by grace, you've been saved through faith. Grace is available. Sufficient grace for all things is available.

We have to humbly submit ourselves to God and we need to trust God. It's just that, that simple. We don't have to jump through a lot of hoops.

We don't have to, you know, fast and pray a certain number of hours in order to have this grace given to us. We have to be thoroughly humble before God and thoroughly trusting in God. And those are the only conditions for receiving grace.

We have access to this grace through faith. We then grow in grace as we learn to be more consistently trusting of God. Peter says in 2 Peter 1, 2, grace and peace be multiplied.

It can be multiplied in your life. Grace can be multiplied and peace can be multiplied as a result. To you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ, our Lord, as you get to know God better in your life, as you walk with him and you're more acquainted with him, grace will be multiplied in your life and peace also.

2 Peter 3, 18. This is the last verse in the same book, 2 Peter 3, 18. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, as you increase in the knowledge of God, as you increase in the knowledge of Jesus.

How? By reading about him? Well, partly that's one of the things you need to do. But by living with him, by living under his rule, by walking with him. By living with a conscious agenda of simply pleasing him in all things, as you live your life with him, you get to know him experientially.

You become acquainted with him. And the more you're acquainted with him, the more you trust him. And the more you trust, the more his grace abounds.

Because we're saved by grace through faith. That trusting faith is what causes grace to abound. And then we're able to minister grace to others.

In Ephesians 4, 29, Paul said, let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth. But what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers. When you speak, if you're full of grace, you'll have gracious words.

And what will be the result? It should be imparting grace to other people. In what sense? Well, in the sense that, A, it should bring them to Christ, hopefully. But even if they don't come to Christ, their lives should be, in some sense, affected by the grace of God that emanates from you.

From the light that shines through you. They may not receive the light. They may not

walk in the light.

But they should at least know that the light was there. There should be grace ministered through your speech. As we read in Colossians 4, 6, Let your speech be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you might know how to answer everyone.

Why? So you can minister grace. You can impart grace to others. Jesus was full of grace and he imparted grace to us.

Now we're to be filled with grace so we can impart grace to others. The whole kingdom is permeated by the grace of God. The whole definition of what it means to be in the kingdom is defined in terms of the grace of God.

Our relationship with the king is based on his grace toward us. Our obedience and service to the king is based on his giving us the grace to do so. Our entering through great tribulations is even enabled by the grace that's given.

There's no part of it that rests upon our strength or upon our innate goodness. Only our childlike trust and humility before God. If we maintain those attitudes in our relationship with God, his grace comes in the course of it.

When my wife died, I mentioned I had this immense grace. I didn't even pray for it. I didn't have time.

It happened as soon as I realized my wife was dead. Suddenly I just felt immersed. But the reason for that is that I lived my life trusting God.

If I didn't, I don't think I would have had that experience. I think I would have been tearing my hair out. But because my whole life is devoted just trusting the Lord and having a relationship with God, his grace comes when it's needed.

He knows what you have needed before you ask. But it all presumes a relationship with him. And that relationship is one of being submitted to him as your king and as your Lord.

And as the one that you look to as your entire life.