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Presentation Transcript
Growing in Grace
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Good afternoon to all of you. Good to see you again.

Because God has blessed us, we've been able to travel about quite a bit in the last year. We went to the CEM Festival site. We went to Camp Outreach, which is a service oriented camp in Kentucky. We went to the Bel Arco Family Retreat in Arkansas. We went to the Lexington Winter Family Weekend. And we visited a number of independent Church of God congregations around the country. I say we're blessed because during my travels I've had a chance to listen to many people talk about the state of the church. Because of our focus on youth and children, we also listen to them from the perspective of what's good for young people. It's really interesting, because everywhere I go, I hear two things from people. One is that they're tired of being over-controlled by organizational structure, because it limits the free flow of God's Spirit and it builds a wall around those in the organization, isolating them from the rest of the church. The other thing I hear is the wish that we could be less divided and more connected to other groups. They'd like to see more cooperation and sharing of resources. So, there's so much emphasis on all thinking and believing exactly the same thing in our group, it's kind of hard to get together. While it is really good when children and teens and young adults have the freedom to participate in the work of their congregation, and grow in their faith, it's also really harmful when they are isolated from others of like belief, and when there is political or doctrinal strife within their group. So, the freedom is good, because it allows them to grow, but the emphasis on doctrine and control and the lack of emphasis on peace and cohesiveness among us has been very bad for young people.

I've been pondering this situation for some time. In thinking about what causes it and what to do about it, I realize that many people have been concerned about these issues before me and for a much longer time. I feel as though I am coming late to the party compared to some folks. But everyone agrees that these are serious concerns and concerns for which there appears to be no solution – at least none anybody has seen to date. So things are kind of continuing on. You're either in an organization where you have doctrinal unity because there's only one way allowed, or you are in an independent group where there is freedom to believe as one believes, but there's not any

organizational cohesion and a lack of services and resources that comes from the small size of the various groups.

What's so discouraging, I think, to most of us is that the issues that caused both the division and the isolation are deeply rooted not only in our church culture, but also in human nature. So, it's quite discouraging when you think about those two things. Church culture is something that's powerful. It's hard to overcome it. And human nature – well, we're going to be stuck with that until the Kingdom comes, aren't we? So, division and isolation from the body can't be good, long term, for the church, and yet it seems like, more or less, where the church is.

I was talking to someone from the most member-autonomous organized Church of God – at least, it's that way in my mind – I won't mention the name of it. This fellow I was talking to, 25 years ago, left the largest Church of God because he saw the problem with the way it was organized. It was way too controlling for him. He didn't become independent because he said the independent groups eventually die out from a lack of connection and a lack of resources. I'm not saying we ought to do just as he did. He went and joined another organization that was less controlling. And he wasn't saying that either. He was just explaining to me how he came to be a member of his church. But his comment points up the problem. In the larger groups there are lots of programs and lots of activities and lots of resources, but it seems in most of those organizations everything is legislated, and very tightly controlled, and only a few people have input into how they are created and what gets put into them. So that causes the people in those groups to become spiritually anesthetized eventually. They never have to make any serious decisions about things in the organization that affect their lives, and they gradually become content to simply sit and listen. And they go to sleep *spiritually*. I'm speaking from experience. That nearly happened to me.

Now the smaller groups, on the other side of the coin, have freedom to exercise choice, and to let the Spirit flow freely, but it's hard for the smaller groups to cooperate and share resources. There's so much distrust and emphasis on doctrinal uniformity within the group. And then there's that group dynamic thing that always kicks in – where we always think the other group is trying to take people away from *our* group – you know, the sheep stealing – the aquarium-dipping syndrome – that we've talked about. So, any effort toward congeniality, or good will, on the part of one group can be viewed with suspicion by another – you know, “What do they want? Who are they trying to take away from us? Are they trying to cut into our income?” So you have this thing called the “scarcity mentality” that starts kicking in. The people who have oversight of these groups – no matter how small they are – start thinking that there are only so many people, and only so much money, so let's not let anyone else get any of ours.

Of course, our effort at *LifeResource Ministries* has been to stay out of all that wrangling, and to avoid those who want to wrangle and strive, and to simply provide a service and resources for those who need them. As I said, our area of focus is on youth, and we wouldn't even be talking about church politics except that the division and the isolation caused by them hinders our young children in a very profound way. Congregation health

is so essential for spiritual growth for children. So we have to talk about that in order to present our case. And we'd like to help some people avoid a millstone around the neck, and help the young people in our greater church culture take their rightful place in it. So, it's also necessary that we talk about these things.

I've been processing all that I've learned in the last year – and seen. While I was doing that I happened on a familiar scripture that set me to thinking. It's in 2 Peter 3, and verse 18.

2 Pt. 3:18 - This is Peter's conclusion to his second book, where he admonishes the church to *grow in the grace and the knowledge of our our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen.* It seems to me, thinking about my life in the Church of God since I was eighteen years old, that we've always emphasized growing in knowledge. We've been really big on studying the Bible.

Those of us who are older pride ourselves in what we know from it. Most prominently we're pleased about the knowledge that we have about God's plan, as revealed by the Sabbath and the holy days. We've studied long and hard to defend our beliefs there. Many of us, for many years, have poured over the prophecies of the Bible, and made elaborate charts, and studied late into the night. I remember one congregation that I pastored in. There was a group of older men who would get together – I think it was every Wednesday night – and from 8 to 10 pm they would study the prophecies. That was sort of the hobby that they had, if you could call it that. They had these big elaborate charts they'd lay out on the table. They really were into it. They were studying the Bible, so that can't be a bad thing, but they never got around to studying some other things that would have been helpful. They were kind of unbalanced in that, I think.

So we've talked about knowledge. And knowledge has been very important to us, but we've never talked much about growing in grace. I think when we emphasize one thing in the Bible to the exclusion of another thing – especially when both of them are weighted equally – then what happens is, we become unbalanced. *Unbalanced* – now there's a word for you, isn't it? Do you suppose we could appear unbalanced as we split and divide and argue and bicker among ourselves? While He told us strictly *not* to do those things. The fact of the matter is, as you will see, because we've *not* emphasized growing in grace, and neither have we grown in the knowledge of Jesus Christ, that we *are* unbalanced in our presentation and our practice of Christianity. I think that has a lot to do with the problems we have.

What I want to talk about today – in keeping with our *LifeResource* mission of strengthening our children – is to talk to adults about what it means to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ. This will not be a sermon filled with platitudes, but practical application of God's Word in our everyday life. Now, some people don't like that. They just want to study charts and learn history and things. That reminds me of what Dwight Moody said. He was the one who founded the Moody Bible Institute. He said that it's not the things in the Bible that he did not know that worried him, it was the things in the Bible that he *did* know that caused him to fear. So, we're going to look at some things

that we're all clearly told to do that we've never really emphasized that much. We need to start grappling with those things, because our lack of grappling with them in the past, I believe, has hurt the church, and hurt us, and hurt our children.

Let's look at that word that Peter used in 2 Peter 3:18 – the word for *grace*. It's, in the Greek, *charis*. If you want to look it up in Strong's, it's 5485. It's from 5463, which means *graciousness*. The modifiers are: “of manner or act, abstract or concrete, literal, figurative or spiritual” – and then listen to this – “especially the divine influence upon the heart and it's reflection in the life, including gratitude.” Now this word *charis* is the most often used word when the the Biblical writers wrote about the *grace* provided through Jesus Christ. The emphasis, according to Strong's, is especially the *divine* influence upon the heart *and* it's reflection in our life. So, it's not good enough to just be disposed to be gracious towards others, but it also has to be reflected in the way we live our lives.

So what Peter's saying here is, whatever attitude and action Jesus has done for us, we should be growing in that same kind of attitude and action ourselves. The way we live our lives should more and more reflect that same kind of graciousness.

Let's read what the Lonides (sp?) says this word means. “To show kindness to someone with the implication of graciousness on the part of the one showing such kindness.” So it's taking care of people – being kind to them out of a graciousness of attitude and spirit. Notice what else it says in Lonida. “It is important to note that kindness in English indicates an activity in which an individual is kind to someone. It is essentially an event involving a particular quality. The same is true of *charis*, for this is not a mere gracious disposition, but an expectation of the Lord *showing* kindness.” So, embedded in the meaning of this word is a “gracious disposition toward others” and also “the act of *treating* them graciously” as well. Did we get that? Not just the attitude, but also the *action* that comes along with it.

Okay, now bear with me for one more bit of digging into this verse before we talk about application. Let's look at the verse again. *But grow in the grace* – and let's focus on this next phrase – *and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ*. To me, for many years, it had to do with all the Bible knowledge that I learned – the knowledge of Jesus Christ. But turn with me to 1 John 1, and verse 17.

1 Jn. 1:17 – *For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ*. I think, sometimes, we confuse what Peter said with what John said. John is talking about the truth that Jesus Christ brought to us. What would that be? Well, that would include doctrines of the Bible. That would include knowledge of the Father. Jesus was a prophet. He made prophecies, so it would include that. It would include the true faith once delivered to the saints that we find in the scriptures. All those things that we valued so deeply for so many years. And I think Peter is talking about that, but I also think that he's talking about something else. So, let's consider the *whole* letter that he wrote.

Peter wrote 2 Peter for two reasons. The first one is that the Romans had just intensified their persecution of Christians. And he wrote to encourage the church in spite of all the pressure that they were under – and all the fear, the anxiety that they were experiencing as a result of this persecution. The Roman government was quite a bit different from the government that we have today. There was a Roman slave who – I can't remember the exact story – but I know that he killed someone one was prominent in the Roman government. The response of the Roman government was to incarcerate four hundred of his relatives and execute every last one of them – men, women and children. That's how they dealt with the problem. They wanted to send a strong message that slaves would not be allowed to do that. That's how they solved their problem. They had no qualms about being completely brutal. So Christians were in the gun sights of the Roman government at that time. It was scary – frightening for them.

There were, also, at that time, many people in the church who were espousing all sorts of false teachings – not unlike today, actually. Of course, for some of us, it's very hard to figure out what the false teachings are because we're so far removed from what Jesus and the apostles originally said. We have a foreign language – an ancient language – in between us and them, so it's difficult sometimes to understand exactly what the Bible means when we read it.

Notice the introduction. Let's go to 2 Peter 1, and begin in the first chapter.

2 Pt. 1:1 – *Simon Peter, a bondservant, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who have obtained like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ.* So notice that he points out that they all believed the same thing – pretty much – and that these beliefs were precious. In spite of all the differences – the minor differences – that we have in the Churches of God, we all pretty much believe close to the same thing, and we all certainly believe that our beliefs are precious to us. So that certainly *is* a part of the knowledge of Jesus Christ, isn't it? But is that *all* that he was talking about? Notice he says in verse 2:

V-2 – *Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ our Lord.* They were a lot like we are in that, too. They were not at peace. And they were not very gracious toward each other because of all the false accusations – or accusation of false teaching and the arguing that was going on among them. And so he wishes peace and grace on them. Then he says in verse 3:

V-3 – *As His divine power has given us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.* So here we see that when Peter talks about the knowledge of Jesus Christ, he's not only talking about the true doctrines – the true faith – but also about *everything* about Jesus Christ, including how He lived His life – how He was godly. The knowledge of Jesus Christ pertains to life and godliness – how we live it every day, not just the historical connections that can be made with the Bible, and not just prophecy, but how we

treat one another. That also pertains to the knowledge of Jesus Christ. He reminds them that besides being doctrinally correct – or thinking that we’re so – it’s also important to *act* like Jesus also and struggle for that divine nature that we do not, of ourselves, have.

That ought to make all of us really shake in our boots, because we don’t do very well at that. We might know some stuff, but we don’t..... I mean, we’re the picture of Christianity, aren’t we? We divide and split and argue and fight among ourselves with the best of them.

Notice that next he spells out what he’s talking about in specific terms.

V-5 – *But also, for this very reason, he says in verse 5, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue. So it’s okay to believe something and have faith, but you need to go beyond that and add virtue to that. And to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control. When somebody’s telling you that what you believe is wrong, and that they’re right, sometimes it takes a little self-control to deal with them in a gracious way, doesn’t it? And to self-control, perserverance; and to perserverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. So see, he’s tying this all up in the same package. It’s not just about being right. It’s about treating people right. Then he points out that we can be filled with book knowledge, but if the same graciousness that comes to us from Christ doesn’t flow from us to others, if the lived Christian life doesn’t radiate out from us in good works, then we have misunderstood what’s most important. That’s what he’s talking about here. We can know all about the salvation plan, the holy days, the resurrections, the truth about heaven and hell, we can know prophecy, but if the graciousness of Christ isn’t flowing out of us, all that knowledge is nullified. It doesn’t do us any good whatsoever.*

V-9 – *For he who lacks these things is short-sighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins. Therefore brethren, be even more diligent to make your calling an election sure. For if you do these things, you will never stumble. It’s all a part of salvation. Jesus is not only our Savior, He is our Lord. And we need to live like He lived and do what He says.*

V-11 – *For so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasing kingdom of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.*

So, we have to grow in the grace and the knowledge of Jesus Christ. It *is* a salvation issue. Just knowing about things isn’t sufficient. We have to *live* them.

I want to talk to you about something that happened to me awhile back. I went to visit a congregation sometime ago, and I was talking to the young people in the congregation. They were telling me about the local politics among the congregations in their town, and how much trouble it has caused them, because the adults were trying to separate the kids from each other that are in these different groups. I asked them what the solution was to their problem. One of the young girls said that the problem would take care of itself in

time because all of the controlling adult leadership was getting old and would eventually die away, leaving people her age to take over. She thought that they had seen so much damage caused by the way my generation had done things that they would not do it the way my generation had done it. Well, you know, I really admire that young girl for her insight and her ability to articulate her position and her keen intelligence – she was that – but mostly I appreciate her heartfelt desire to see the church become what it could be, and to realize what was wrong. I mean, she clearly saw the problem. However, I think in her purity and beauty of attitude, she missed one thing. There are just as many controlling self-centered, self-deceived and deceitful people her age as there are mine. And the *only* hope we have of avoiding the problems of the past is in Jesus Christ and in the power of His life lived by us here on the earth through His constant help and support. That’s the only way it’s going to change. My generation – the “boomer” generation – did not invent over control. That’s been going on since Adam and Eve. It’s not going to die out when my generation is gone either.

So, we have some problems. We have problems getting together, and working together, and living in peace. Peter tells us that’s because of something that we have forgotten. Did you catch that? What the cause of that spiritual rest was that he was talking about? He said that people that act in this bad way have *forgotten* that they were cleansed of their sins. So failure to grow in grace, and to work cooperatively with other people, and to practice the lived Christian life is, according to what Peter said, a *grace* problem. Some of us have forgotten how much has been forgiven us, and how graciously God treats us. The message there is, what’s been handed to us – that we appreciated so much – we should hand to others as well.

Let’s turn to another scripture and look at it. There are some people that have forgotten how much they have been forgiven, and then there’s another reason for the problem. It’s in Luke 7, and verse 37.

Lk. 7:37 – *Behold, a woman in the city, who was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at the table in the Pharisee’s house, brought an alabaster flask of fragrant oil, and stood at His feet behind Him weeping. And she began to wash His feet with her tears and wiping them with the hair of head. She kissed His feet and anointed them with the fragrant oil.* Now that was quite a demonstration, wasn’t it? *But when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he spoke to himself, saying, “This man, if He were a prophet would know who, and what manner of woman, this is – who is touching Him – for she is a sinner.”* This guy didn’t say this out loud. He just said it in his mind. *And Jesus answers him, and says to him, “Simon, I have something to say to you.” And he said, “Teacher, say it.”* So the guy doesn’t realize yet that his mind has just been read. Right? *“There was a certain creditor who had two debtors. One owed five hundred denari, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing with which to repay, he freely forgave them both. Tell me, therefore, which of them will love him more?” And Simon answered and said, “I suppose the one whom he forgave more.” And He said, “You have judged rightly.” And then he turned to the woman, and said to Simon, “Do you see this woman? I entered your house. You gave me no water for my feet, but she has washed my feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head. You gave me no kiss, but this woman has not*

ceased to kiss my feet since the time I came in. You did not anoint my head with oil, but this woman has anointed my feet with fragrant oil. Therefore I say to you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little.” And He said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.” Listen to this. And those who sat at the table with Him began to say to themselves, “Who is this who even forgives sin?”

They just didn't get it at all! Some of us realize how bad we've been, and some of us don't. Some of us think the other people are the bad people, and we're the good people. And that explains why we don't love God the way we should, and why we don't *live* God's life in ourselves the way we should. We're not *appreciative* of what's been done for us. That's the biblical reason *why* people are not gracious toward other people – why they're tight, and controlling, and restrictive, and mean-minded, and slow to forgive and forget.

I said, “practical application in everyday life.” Let's look at three trouble areas where we seem to have problems with this. There's always the personal issues with other people. This is probably – well, I can't say that. I was going to say that it's the least damaging to the church, but I've seen whole congregations ripped apart by personal issues with other people.

I was talking to someone some years ago, who had an issue with someone, where another person was caught doing something wrong and they tried to lie their way out of it – eye witnesses to the contrary. Eventually it came down to the one who had been caught doing something wrong fabricating a story, and they just clung tenaciously to that story, even though there were people that saw them do what they did. They were really only fooling themselves and others who wanted to be fooled. So, what to do? How do we deal with situations like this, where people will *not* admit wrong – will *not* tell the truth? Well, here's the human tendency. The human tendency is to draw a line in the sand, and say, “Everybody on your side of the line is bad, and everybody on my side of the line is good.” The problem is that both sides do this. *Both* sides do this. Everybody gets defensive and accusatory. What is the real truth? The *real* truth is, that people on *both* sides of the line have forgotten, or never understood, how much they have been forgiven. The fact is that we're always all on the *same* side of the line. You know what Paul said? He said, “Let Christ be true, though every man and every woman a liar.” Everybody has lied. We all have. And yet the gracious, generous, loving favor of God is with us to forgive us of our past lies. So, if we want to act like God in this situation, what should we do? Well, we should try to protect those that are being hurt by the lies, if there are any, and we should try to help the one who is lying, if we can, while we don't paint them as an incorrigible, terrible person, because they've only done what *we've* done. Now, I know there are lies and lies. I know that, but one lie will get you just as dead as the next one. God is alive. He can save to the uttermost those who come to Him. And He can be really persuasive in causing people to turn from their own way to His. We need to remember that.

I, a number of years ago, took an entire summer camp full of people on a backpacking trip. Some people were prepared to go on the trip physically, and some weren't. We all did pretty well on the first part of the trip, but we came to a set of steep switchbacks. And

that separated the people who had good cardio conditioning from the ones who didn't. Well, the ones who were in great shape, they got to the top of the switchbacks first, and sat waiting while the rest labored up the hill, sweating and breathing hard. When we finally got all together again, and were ready to take off, some of the ones who had gotten there first had wandered off, and were.... Actually, there were two girls that I'm particularly thinking about, that were taking a potty break behind this huge boulder. What they didn't realize was that when the group took off walking, they were going to walk right around this boulder. They did manage to get their pants up before they came into sight, I think, but they were so embarrassed, they were literally running around in circles and squealing with their faces bright red. It's everybody's tendency, when caught in the open with their pants down, to take cover. Sometimes, we just get so embarrassed by the stupid things we do that we lie. The problem with that is, that we are the ones who get hurt by that, because we're not trusted after awhile. How does God solve that problem? Well, every morning, when we get up, we can ask God for a new day – free of our past sins – and all that gets dropped. It never gets brought up again. So how incredible is that! Isn't that just the most amazing thing?

Okay, if that's what God does for us – if He let's go of all the lies we've told yesterday – how should we treat somebody that gets caught doing that? Well, we do what we can to help them and we let go of it. We trust that God will shepherd everybody involved into a greater truth and into peace. We take the high road. We rise above it. We let go of it. We drop it. We just go on. We act graciously. That's how we solve those problems. Isn't God at work in each of our lives teaching us the things we need to know? So, He'll take care of all of us.

The second area where we have a lot problems is in political issues in the church. Who's going to be in charge? Who's going to have control? Who's going to have the biggest group? Who's going to take in the most money? Who'll be the next king of the mountain? It goes all the way down to, who gets to make the coffee? With every issue, there will always be somebody that is willing to contend for it, it seems like. It's always about covetousness. How is that a grace problem? Well, that kind of thinking comes from a scarcity mentality. There are only so many roles to play in a congregation. There's only so many people that can be bossed around. There's only so much money that can be acquired, you see. Some of us think that we've committed so many sins that there's not enough forgiveness to go around. We think there's a scarcity of that, too. But you know, that's not really how it is. Jesus said, "In My Father's house are *many* mansions" – not just a few good ones at the top and the rest are kind of like government slums. No, there are *many* mansions. There's plenty of room for *everybody* to live well. And how much money is there? Well, there's more money than any of us will ever need. That's how much money there is. And how many people are there? Well, the fields are *white* with harvest, we're told – more than we'll ever be able to even reach! So, when we're confronted with the realities of the kingdom out of the Word of God, they do not square with our human natural view of things.

It's been really interesting to me, a late-comer to the independent church of God scene, to see who has that scarcity mentality and who doesn't – who's territorial and who isn't.

You always find some that are and some that aren't. Jesus said He caused the rain to fall on the just and the unjust. He's a generous, gracious God, who abundantly pardons, and He has lots of good things to pass around to everybody – more than we'll ever be able to receive. He shows us favor and lovingkindness. He's forgiven all those who did Him wrong. And He wants us to learn to do the same thing. If we will, we will be a lot happier with each and within ourselves.

The third area where we have problems is in doctrinal areas. There's a certain attitude we get in, where we kind of like to point that index finger, and the first word we say is, "You...." "You people who keep the Passover on the 14th are bad, while those of us who keep it on the 15th are good." Or visa versa. Just pick your sides. "You people who think there is a trinity, while those of us who don't are good." "You people who think military service is good, while those of us who think it's bad are good." Let's talk about a gracious way to be present with other people in spite of the fact that we don't all believe the same way. Is there a way to do that? Can we fellowship with people who don't believe just like we do? I will grant you that it's easier to fellowship with people that believe generally the way we do. That's why we're called the Church of God, and we observe the seventh day and all that. But within that group, there are lots of differing ideas.

I'd like to present something for you to think about. Do you believe that God called you into the truth? Well, the Bible does say that, doesn't it? It says that when somebody is in the true church of God – when they have the Holy Spirit – they've been *called by God* to be a part of it. So that's Biblical. I'm sorry if you don't believe that. It's still true. That happened to you. By the way, a calling from God is a calling to knowledge, isn't it? It's a call to learn something about the truth that you didn't know. It's a personal revelation to you, isn't it? There was a point when I didn't understand a lot of the things that I now understand. When I started to understand them, that's when I perceived that God was working with me and I was being called. So, that would mean that the truth that every one of us has we believe came from God. Right? Now, if somebody comes to you, and they belittle you for what you believe, or they try to coerce you into believing something else, how demeaning is that to you? How destructive, how hurtful is it? How much of a wedge does it drive in between you and them? It feels like they're meddling in something very personal between you and God, doesn't it? See, the thing is, we all feel like that. All the people you know, who don't believe just like you, also believe that what they know came from God. So when we try to meddle in other people's beliefs, we're actually trying to meddle in their relationship with God, in a way. Do we really want to do that? Why can't we simply be happy with what *we* know, and listen politely to others express their beliefs, and allow them to believe as they please?

Now, I've said this before. I don't believe I've ever met anybody in the church, who, when Christ returns, and He elaborates the true doctrines that we have tried to maintain, but have somehow gotten quite confused about...I've never met anybody who wouldn't just accept it right now. I mean, would *you* argue with Him? What if you got the Passover on the wrong day? What if He says it's the other one? Would you argue with Him? Uh-uh. No, no you wouldn't. Why do so many of us have to try to convince other people to

believe as we do? It's a grace problem. We're just not gracious enough to let people be. We need to be *kind*. We need to be *merciful*. We need to be *paitent*. We need to be *easy-going*. We need to be *open-hearted*. We need to be *loving*. We need to be *cooperative*. We need to be *trusting*.

At the Lexington Winter Family Weekend, I roomed with a gentleman, who I'd talked to on the phone before, but never met him. He comes from quite a different background than I do. And we just had the best time. We just had the best time rooming together. We had some really good talks. He believes like I do about the Sabbath and the holy days, but there's a lot of other things where his beliefs are quite different from mine. He thinks that God showed him those things, and I think that God showed me the opposite. So, we're just going to wait till Christ comes, and He'll sort that all out for us in about ten seconds. It won't be a big deal. And he's such a nice fellow that when he realizes the parts where he's wrong, he's going to say, "Oh!" And when I realize where I'm not quite right, I'll say, "Oh!" too, and then we'll be in perfect accord. But to do that, we have to be able to cut people some slack. Why would we do that? Why would we have an abundance mentality towards someone else? Because that's how God is with us and because we want to be like Him! We want to learn to be like Him!

I want to take you back and remind you of all this that we read in the beginning from Peter. He said that was more important than being right all the time and being in control. And that desire to be right and to be in control is what keeps us all upset with each other and always jockeying, and wrangling, and arguing, and always suspicious of one another. All we have to do is start doing what we've been told. The problem is *not* insoluble. It will just go away.

To close out, let's turn to Philippians 2:5. This is very interesting.

Phil. 2:5 – Paul said, *Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus. Let's act like He acted. How did He act? Who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. You know, bondservants don't try to tell the boss what to believe and how to be all the time. They know their place. They don't have to be in charge. They know they're not. They don't have to be telling everyone how it is. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. So He was willing to sacrifice Himself – to be humble.*

V-9 – *Therefore, verse 9, God also has highly exalted Him, and given Him the name, which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. Some us have kind of gotten that turned around. We want knees to bow to us now – before we've done the sacrificing. And that's just not how it works.*

When we can act like Jesus acted – as a group – as the independent and as the entire Church of God – when we can act like Jesus acted, when we can be gracious to each other, then the independent church can have the best of both worlds. We can have both freedom and unity, and we can have both peace and strength in Jesus Christ.