

A Personal Word to My Hyper-Grace Friends

All of us who know Jesus as Lord want to live in the fullness of His grace, but what exactly does that mean and how does that work itself out in our lives?

Unfortunately, there is tremendous division in the body today over the question of grace, and to address it from any angle is to wade right into controversy and potential misunderstanding.

On the one hand, there are many who have been greatly blessed by what is called “the grace revolution” or “grace reformation,” and when any of us raise concerns about some aspects of that message, we are called grace-haters and legalists and Pharisees.

On the other hand, many of those who do not endorse the “grace revolution” attack the modern grace preachers in the harshest of terms, calling them false prophets who do not even know the Lord.

Not surprisingly, as a result of my writing *Hyper-Grace*, some who identify with that message have accused me of preaching another gospel and being under a curse, while others who are critical of that message have accused me of being too soft on false teachers. It comes with the turf!

Is there perhaps a way we can communicate with each other without the name-calling and volatility? Do we perhaps have more in common than we realize? Can we perhaps learn something from each other?

Let me put a few things on the table for the purpose of open and honest discussion with those both inside and outside each “camp.”

First, let me explain the reason I use the term *hyper-grace*.

I did not want to call it counterfeit grace, because in the vast majority of cases, this is a message preached by brothers and sisters in the Lord and it is a message filled with life-changing truths. At the same time, I believe the message is preached in an exaggerated way, sometimes with dangerous errors. How then to describe it?

Since many within the hyper-grace camp use this term themselves, saying, "Yes! Grace should be hyper, and that's exactly how Paul described it in the Greek," and since for others, the term would imply an exaggerated grace message, I felt this would be the best term to use. It is descriptive and can be taken positively or negatively, depending on the perspective.

Second, those of us outside the hyper-grace camp need to ask ourselves why so many believers have been genuinely helped by this message.

Why do so many attest to having their lives transformed, to loving Jesus and His Word more than ever, to finding liberation from sin and bondage?

There's obviously something good that has happened to them, and there's obviously some important truth they have received. Shouldn't all of us be sure that we, too, are preaching those same liberating truths?

Third, those within the hyper-grace camp need to understand that there's a reason we are so concerned about error within that group.

When a movement claims to be preaching things not preached since the days of Paul, when people say, "My pastor is teaching things in the Word no one has seen for centuries," that immediately raises some concerns.

Really? Everyone else got it wrong until today, including all the great grace preachers of the past?

Not only so, but we also see lots of really negative fruit: backsliding, compromise, severe judgmentalism, divisiveness, complacency and more.

When there is a pattern like that, serious questions need to be asked. Perhaps the message is out of biblical balance? Perhaps it is reactionary? Perhaps it contains some real error?

What this means is that the millions of positive testimonies need to be taken seriously and the millions of negative stories need to be taken seriously.

Fourth, we need to recognize that not all people are the same, and we all have different backgrounds, temperaments and spiritual experiences.

More than 20 years ago, I was speaking with Pastor David Wilkerson and I told him that I never feel any condemnation from God and that I walk in a deep assurance of the Father's love 24/7.

He said to me, "Most people aren't like that."

I have sought to keep that in mind in preaching and teaching ever since.

Some people gravitate to the hyper-grace message because they have sensitive consciences or because they have been burned by legalism or because they feel as if they always fall short or because they were not raised by a loving and affirming father.

They really do love the Lord and they are not looking for an excuse to sin, and finally, hearing this message, they have found a place of rest and acceptance in the Lord, and they are actually working harder for him than ever.

Others gravitate to the message because they don't like the conviction of the Spirit in their lives or because they're looking for an outlet for the flesh or because they are rebelling against a perceived "religious system."

Of course, in the end, the only question that matters is: "What does the Word of God say? What does the Lord have to say about grace?"

But I raise these points to remind pastors and leaders on all sides of this debate not only to look at the Scriptures but also to understand the needs of the flock.

During the days of the Brownsville Revival, when millions of people were being impacted by the Jesus-exalting message of repentance and holiness preached by my dear departed friend Steve Hill, the altars would be filled every night with weeping sinners, backsliders and compromised believers. And there, on their knees, they encountered the love and grace of God.

But we also found that some of the students in our school (then, the Brownsville Revival School of Ministry, today FIRE School of Ministry) were also at the altar every night in tears, somehow feeling "convicted" too, despite their deep commitment to the Lord. Others would feel condemned because of the intense spiritual environment, despite us reminding them that Steve wasn't preaching to them but to the lost and backslidden.

We quickly realized that, given the intensity of the revival, we needed to do something different for our students who were exposed to this evangelistic preaching day and night, and so, we brought in another Steve Hill (whom we nicknamed S.J. Hill). The whole thrust of his message was the love of God. (One of his books is entitled, *Enjoying God: Experiencing Intimacy with the Father.*)

The great bulk of the student body absolutely thrived in the

midst of that glorious move of the Spirit, and many are burning bright today on mission fields around America and the world. But others, equally committed to Jesus in that very same environment, experienced burnout and discouragement.

Again, leaders need to consider carefully the needs of the flock and do their best to ground their people in the love and acceptance of the Father while also calling them to holiness and service.

So, here's a working proposal to bridge some of the gaps of misunderstanding and accusation on all sides. How about we draw up a list of all the major points we agree on? From there we can understand where, exactly, we disagree.

Why not?

Michael Brown *is the author of 25 books, including Can You Be Gay and Christian? and host of the nationally syndicated talk radio show "The Line of Fire." He is also president of FIRE School of Ministry and director of the Coalition of Conscience.*