

Is a New Grace Reformation Taking Place Today?

Is there a new reformation sweeping the Church today, a reformation as radical and important as the Protestant Reformation that rocked the world 500 years ago? According to a growing number of Christian leaders, the answer is emphatically yes.

Pastor Clark Whitten, author of *Pure Grace: The Life Changing Power of Uncontaminated Grace*, claims that, “Little has changed in the Protestant church in more than 500 years” – until now, that is. He believes that Luther and Calvin “got it right concerning justification, or how one is saved. . . . But they missed it on sanctification, or how one is perfected into the likeness of Christ.”

Whitten states that Luther and Calvin, followed by the Protestant Church ever since, taught a doctrine of “saved by grace but perfected by human effort,” an approach that has produced “a Church that is judgmental, angry, hopeless, helpless, dependent, fearful, uninspired, ineffective, and perpetually spiritually immature.”

Because of this, Whitten claims, we have failed to impact our culture and have become a laughingstock to most “casual observers.” And Pastor Whitten contends that this doctrine has also brought, “personal devastation” to countless believers who have consequently checked out on Church (or on God Himself).

John Crowder, in his book *Mystical Union*, claims that, “Just as there is a *new mysticism* on the rise, I believe it is coupled with a new reformation. The good news will be preached with such clarity that, even the days of Luther will seem utterly primitive in its concepts of grace and faith.”

Indeed, Crowder writes that “a clarity is coming to the preaching of the gospel like has not been heard since the days of the Apostle Paul.”

Other modern grace teachers share similar sentiments. In his book *GRACE, the Forbidden Gospel*, Andre van der Merwe writes, “Once again in the church there is a struggle for a theological reformation that will liberate believers to break free from the yoke of bondage that has been put on the children of God by people who may have had good intentions, but that have only taught the religious doctrines and traditions that they themselves have been taught.”

His prayer is that his book will “destroy the religious arguments and doctrines of demons forever,” referring to whatever teaching contradicts this allegedly new revelation of grace. That’s why the full title of his book is *GRACE, the Forbidden Gospel: Jesus Tore the Veil. Religion Sewed it Back Up*, and that’s why Pastor Joseph Prince, perhaps the best known modern grace preacher, calls this a “Gospel Revolution.”

Could it be, then, that there really is a grace reformation sweeping the Body today? Could it be that the Church has been so stuck in legalistic religion for the last 500 years that nothing less than a radical reformation can get us out of the rut?

It seems clear that many believers have been caught up in externally imposed religion (which is the essence of legalism), seeking to please God by following an endless list of “do’s” and “don’t’s,” never being certain of the Father’s love and looking first to their own efforts rather than looking first to the cross. Consequently, they are always falling short and never walking in the abundant life that Jesus has for them.

Within a two-day span, I heard from two women, both friends of our family and former students in our ministry school, both

married with children and active in God's service. One wrote this: "I am one of many who have been changed drastically and fantastically by the 'grace message.' Judging by the amazing fruit of it in my life and my family's life as we have gone through some very hard times, it is the fruit of the true grace message."

Speaking of one well-known, modern grace teacher, she explained that while she only agreed with about 80% of what he taught, she said that "I feel like I have taken a bath and glimpsed the beauty of Jesus and what he did for me almost every time I hear him." This is wonderful to hear, and I do not want to tamper with something so sacred and liberating.

The other ministry school grad wrote this: "I can say for me, I sure tried, and worked, and failed. Finally, almost three years ago, I finally had a 'Grace encounter' that changed my life. Can honestly say I'm more free, more confident, and more 'sin-LESS' than I've ever been. If that makes sense."

This is from the Lord!

Sadly, I have met many believers who have struggled with legalism and performance-based religion, and when I hear today that, through a revelation of God's grace, they are now living in intimacy with the Lord and overflowing with joy at His great love for them, I am thrilled.

That is truly wonderful news, and it indicates that, for many, there is a need for a fresh infusion of anointed teaching on the beauty and glory and wonder of God's amazing grace.

At the same time, I constantly hear stories from believers and leaders concerned about the modern grace message, like this one: "I have seen the effects of this message on my own loved ones. It has ruined our family and caused many of them who loved the Lord to stray."

And this, "We have seen this up close and personal with some

of our family members. Very destructive things are going on.”

And this, from a pastor, who spoke of “the three close male friends I have had in the past, all three from the grace side; two were unfaithful and then left their wives and the third just left. I have had no one close in the grace group (forgive my terms) displaying good lasting fruit.”

One young man, who had served together with a well-known hyper-grace leader wrote to me at length, wanting me to understand just how bad things were: “I heard more ‘F’ and ‘S’ words in that movement than anywhere else in my entire life. After all, you’re ‘legalistic’ if you EVER tell someone to ‘not’ do something.”

Is this simply a matter of the modern grace message being abused?

Honestly, I wish that was the case, since I love the message of grace and it would be a shame if pastors and leaders drew back from preaching grace because it was abused.

But the truth is that the modern grace message is quite mixed, combining life-changing, Jesus-exalting revelation with serious misinterpretation of Scripture, bad theology, divisive and destructive rhetoric, and even fleshly reaction. And, in all too many cases, it is being embraced by believers who are not just looking for freedom from legalism but also freedom from God’s standards.

There is no doubt in my mind, then, that the notion of a “grace reformation” (or “grace revolution”) is highly exaggerated, that some of this new grace teaching is unbalanced, overstated, at times unbiblical, and sometimes downright dangerous – and I mean dangerous to the well-being of the Body of Christ.

In short, I do not believe that we are witnessing a new grace reformation. I believe we are witnessing the rise of a hyper-

grace movement, filled with its own brand of legalistic judgmentalism, mixing some life-giving truth from the Word with some destructive error.

And that's why I wrote *Hyper-Grace: Exposing the Dangers of the Modern Grace Message*, a book for grace lovers, not grace haters, a book for those who embrace both grace and truth (John 1:14, 17). Does that describe you?

(Excerpted and adapted from *Hyper-Grace: Exposing the Dangers of the Modern Grace Message*.)

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