

The Deception of Hyper-Grace

Someone wisely stated, "The church has suffered more from her exponents than from her opponents." This is certainly the case today, as we are seeing an onslaught of dangerous teaching sweeping through the body of Christ like never before. We have the graphic and prophetic picture of the serpent in Revelation pouring water like a river out of his mouth in order to sweep away the woman (Rev. 12:15-16). This, to me, speaks of the false river the enemy is attempting to use to deceive the church in these last days. Thank God that He has promised, "When the enemy comes in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord will raise up a standard against him" (Is. 59:19, NKJV).

One of the enemy's wiles is to take something that is inherently good and seek to make it appear better. The hyper-grace message is a prime example of this. What is more amazing than grace? Nothing sets Christianity apart more than the message of grace. None of us would ever know our magnificent Savior and Lord without His redeeming, reconciling grace. There is no sect, cult or religion that has any doctrine comparable to it. Grace is found in Christ alone!

Little wonder, then, that the enemy has sought to improve on this glorious message by appearing to make it even more glorious, while at the same time lacing it with his deadly poison of deception and distortion.

Consider how you would respond to a message exhorting you to guard your mind, stay sober, be obedient, don't be conformed to your former lusts, be holy, conduct yourself in fear, obey the Word and put aside all malice, guile and hypocrisy? What if the message went on to tell you to love and read God's Word, grow up, tell others about God's goodness, avoid fleshly lusts, do good deeds, do right, don't speak about evil, be zealous for what is good and sanctify Christ as Lord?

Many within the body of Christ today would cry out against such a message, claiming it to be nothing more than a religious spirit or legalism or even fleshly works. Grace, we are told, frees you from all these works and liberates you so that you are no longer under any obligation of any kind. Grace, they say, is the gift that comes to us with no strings attached. But is that really the message of grace? Has the enemy blinded our eyes through super-sizing the true message of grace—and thereby distorting it?

It may surprise you to know that all the exhortations I've listed above were taken directly from Peter's first epistle. Now, here is a most amazing truth: Peter tells us in the closing verses of his epistle, "I have written to you briefly, exhorting and testifying that *this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it!*" (1 Pet. 5:12, NASB, emphasis added).

Here we have one of the most complete and comprehensive revelations on true grace to be found in the New Testament. Yes, grace is totally and irrevocably free, and it provides us with God's power to change us. That was its original intent. Paul, in his letter to Titus, explains it this way: "The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, *instructing us* to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age" (Titus 2:11-12, emphasis added).

Peter and Paul saw the Lord, who is the only true embodiment of grace and truth. If anyone had a correct revelation and understanding of grace, these two men certainly did.

Paul, you recall, had to correct the Romans on their tendency to abuse grace by continuing in sin. This abuse of grace has now raised its head again and is being taught in ever-widening circles within the church. Those proponents of the hyper-grace message will tell you that since your sins past, present and future have all been forgiven, there is no longer any need of repentance for the believer. Repentance, they claim, is the

acknowledgment of a sin that has already been forgiven. Why put back in the ledger what has already been erased? So the reasoning goes.

But is this really sound biblical doctrine? Paul, in his first letter to the Corinthians, scolded them for not dealing with the blatant sin of a brother who was sexually involved with his father's wife. The Corinthians took to heart what Paul wrote. Then in his second letter, he commended them for their godly sorrow that brought them to a place of repentance (2 Cor. 7:9-10). He mentions repentance twice within two verses. If we did follow this erroneous concept of grace, then why was this sexual pervert disciplined in the first place, if his sin was already forgiven? Why punish him for something that is already under the blood? Jesus obviously didn't consider this to be the case when He admonished five out of the seven churches in Revelation to repent.

Finally, as I have said many times, if we say that repentance is no longer necessary because all sin has already been forgiven, then why do we need to repent the first time in order to be saved? There is the belief by some that since all sin has been atoned for, all are saved but just don't know it. This is the old but still very much alive false doctrine of universalism or ultimate reconciliation.

Jude was greatly disturbed by these errors in his day and tells us, "contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3, NKJV). Why? Because there were those within the church who were distorting the grace of God and turning it into licentiousness. This, I believe, was also the subtle teaching of Jezebel in the church of Thyatira. I don't personally believe she was openly teaching that it was OK to engage in sexual immorality, but rather that the fruit of her distorted message led to this type of activity.

This is also my great fear regarding the hyper-grace message.

While I sincerely believe that many advocates of the hyper-grace message firmly believe they are proclaiming a fresh revelation of grace, I truly believe the fruit of their teaching will instead bring disgrace to the very God of grace they seek to magnify.

I can only plead with those who are caught up in this false teaching to re-examine their beliefs in the light of God's Word rather than get carried along by the latest trend being taught by a few popular and flamboyant pied pipers. If the fruit of this teaching does not produce a longing after God and a desire to be like Him, then we should avoid it like the plague. Grace enables us to live and walk in victory over sin, the flesh and the devil. Anything less is not the *true* grace of God.

David and Nancy Ravenhill have a rich history in ministry. David worked with David Wilkerson's first Teen Challenge Center in New York City, Youth With a Mission, and pastored one of the largest churches in New Zealand. He is now a full-time itinerant minister and author of five books, including Blood Bought.