

Why So Many People Fall Victim to the Deception of the Hyper-grace Movement

What some people call the hyper-grace message began as a result of a sort of revolt against religion and man-made rules. A portion of that message, however, went into a ditch on the other side and manifested as rebellion in some believers against every kind of discipline and godly conduct. In a word, Christians abused their liberty.

There are now so-called “liberated” churches who party and drink alcohol, all in the name of “being free” from the Law. One church had a beach party with women dressed scantily in bikinis while beer and wine were being served. Their motto: “We want people to know that we’re not religious!”

Hmmm ... what does that mean? What are some characteristics of “being religious”? Is there such a thing?

I was raised as a devout Roman Catholic. I believe I have a pretty thorough understanding of religion, the Law and legalism—all being used here as synonymous terms. I define religion (without relationship) as man-made expectations enforced upon someone as a means of defining how they may be accepted in a particular religion, church or denominational system.

“For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God” (Rom. 10:3).

Religion is man trying to reach God on his own terms through a system of works and rituals. True Christianity is God reaching down to man, and by His real and amazing grace, doing for him what he could never do on his own—forgiving him, freeing him

and transforming him.

In my Catholic upbringing, we had our own rules of coming to God from obeying the sacraments and having our good deeds outweigh our bad deeds to the extreme act of people crawling on their knees during religious festivals, to paying indulgences for their sins. It was all motivated by man's efforts to please God and get Him to accept us. It was all driven by guilt and condemnation.

What Christians have done in the extreme hyper-grace camp is to confuse conviction with condemnation. Have you ever thought about the fact that both the Holy Spirit and Satan will expose your sins and faults? How can we differentiate between the two?

Here it is. The Holy Spirit not only convicts the world of sin, but He also leads and guides the believer into all truth—which means He will lead you away from sin and the lusts of the flesh. When He convicts you it draws you closer to the Lord, causing you to be more sensitive to Him. He corrects you lovingly and points you to Jesus and His grace.

Condemnation, however, comes from Satan and is manifest through him pointing out your sins and faults while crushing your motivation to serve the Lord fervently. Condemnation draws you to yourself and makes you self-centered—beating yourself up, pitying yourself, feeling despair, hopelessness and more. You begin to fight your habits, and you try harder and use willpower to overcome. But all the time, it's the devil using religion and the Law to work you over. Condemnation is present in your mind and draws you away from God, but conviction is a force working in your spirit and draws you closer to God.

Here's where the problem has been in the extreme hyper-grace message. In an attempt to be free from religion and man-made rules and regulations, many believers stopped following the

Spirit of God. In an effort to be free from the Law written on tablets of stone, they forgot about the Law that has been written on their hearts. These so-called Christians stopped listening to the Spirit of God and stopped following the love of God that's been shed abroad in their hearts (Rom. 5:5). If they would listen to the Holy Spirit and follow after love they wouldn't act so irresponsibly, using their liberty as a license to sin, and being a stumbling block to many and exuding such indiscreet and even "dopey" behavior.

"'This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them,' then He adds, 'Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more'" (Heb. 10:16-17).

While many who promote the hyper-grace message see it as a departure from religion and the Law, which indeed it is, the extreme of it is the aforementioned example of liberal churches who forsake the Law that has been written on their hearts by the Spirit of God. In an effort to pull some believers out of one ditch, they have dug another. Can you see that?

Here is the ditch that hyper-grace teachers have attempted to bring believers out of, which began, with what I believe, were godly motivations. They recognized and rightly discerned that many believers are still too religious, and in fact, operating more from a self-righteous perspective than from the righteousness of God. Hyper-grace proponents accurately assessed that many believers still operate under a legalistic mind-set based on self-effort and have a need to properly understand the empowering grace of God. Here are some examples of a legalistic and religious mind-set present in believers today:

- A Bible school student gets up at 4:00 every morning in an effort to please God and to show Him how much he

loves Him, all the while struggling because he works two jobs while going to school. His motivation is more to receive God's approval than it is out of a pure heart to just love and commune with the Lord.

- A woman dances around the church at each service performing for God because she thinks if she dances enough that God will meet her pressing financial needs.
- A man goes to a Sunday service and fasts all day because he missed two straight Sunday services and doesn't want God to be angry with him and forget his prayer requests.
- Another man purchases a fancy car that he can't really afford because he feels it is a show that his faith is working.
- A woman never misses a church service because she wants to show God how serious she is so He won't forget her prayers for her backslidden children who are no longer serving the Lord.

We could probably come up with many more versions of these legalistic traits that portray believers as being religious and lacking a true understanding of God's love and grace.

Do you have any of the mind-sets of these aforementioned individuals? Are you depending more on your own righteousness than God's righteousness? Are you legalistic? Are you doing certain things to appease God and make Him happy with you? Are you fighting bad habits in your own strength? Are you religious?

If you are like me and were raised in a legalistic home and were reprimanded constantly because of the wrongs you did without ever being acknowledged and praised for the right, you may still be influenced by a religious, legalistic spirit more than you know.

For example, if you were told by either of your parents to do several things in a given day like clean your room, take out the garbage, sweep the floor and other tasks, and you did all but one, for which you were corrected or disciplined, then you are probably prone to be religious and have legalistic tendencies. You may still have a mind-set of trying to please men and find acceptance in others. You probably have a fear of rejection. You are probably living with a constant striving to be more and to do more in order to find love and approval from others, especially your friends. It's a vicious cycle.

Here is the escape from this mentality.

1. Realize that you are loved by God and fully accepted and approved in His Son's righteousness. You are the righteousness of God now and not in the future (2 Cor. 5:21). If righteousness is a position and a gift more than it is something you earn—if you are the righteousness of God in Christ, as the Scriptures declare, then you are as righteous as Jesus is. And God loves you as much as He loves Jesus (John 17:23). It sounds too good to be true, doesn't it? But it is. Renew your mind to that marvelous truth with the Word of God.
2. Realize that as a disciple, you are a disciplined follower of Jesus Christ. The Christian life is one of discipline, but it is a discipline born of the Spirit and of love. All God requires from us is to love Him and love our neighbor (Matt. 22:37-39). There are no external rules in Christianity. It's all internal. Be led from within. Follow your heart. Ask yourself continually: "What would the love of God say and do?"
3. Let every motivation be born out of a desire to know the Lord and be close to the Lord, and not to gain His favor and approval. This attitude will also help you overcome bad habits. Look at a bad habit as a thief that steals the sweet fellowship you enjoy with the Lord, instead of

approaching it from the standpoint of you trying to quit the bad habit. The more you try, the worse it gets. That's how religion works.

Your own efforts according to the Law actually gives more strength for you to sin. "The strength of sin is the law" (1 Cor. 15:56b). Instead of curbing sin, your own efforts to quit actually give strength to sin.

So the question remains: How religious are you?

Be free from the Law. Be free from legalism. Be free from all man-made rules and restrictions that are contradictory to the Word. Be not entangled with any yoke of bondage like that ever again.

Instead, be free to follow the Spirit of God within you. Be free to follow after love. Be free to live from within.

That's the good and fruitful life! That is what the real empowering grace of God does. {eoa}