

HYPER-GRACE AND PERSEVERANCE

by
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Introduction

Christians' interest in theological subjects ebbs and flows, often depending upon the cultural and political issues of the day, provocative books or articles on debated subjects, or whatever a favorite pastor or scholar decides to spotlight. Yet one area of theological inquiry that consistently garners attention is sanctification, and in particular people wonder, "How do I grow in my walk of faith?" The answer to this question lies in maintaining a proper balance between the indicatives and imperatives in Scripture related to progressive sanctification.

On the one hand, the indicative statements of the Bible declare what is true and present in the life of the believer. For example, all believers walk in newness of life (Rom 6:4), produce fruit leading to sanctification (Rom 6:22), serve in the newness of the Spirit (Rom 7:4), and do good works pleasing to God (Phil 2:13). In light of these kinds of declarations some have placed too great an emphasis upon them, resulting in quietism (e.g., "I can just sit back and let God do His work in me") or antinomianism (e.g., modifying the first line of P. P. Bliss's "Once for All": "Free from the law, O happy condition, now I can sin and still have remission"). On the other hand, the commands of God's Word call believers to "strive for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord" (Heb 12:14). Christians must "work out [their] own salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil 2:12), love their fellow Christians (1 John 4:21), "be all the more diligent to confirm [their] calling and election" (2 Pet 1:10), and "make no provision for the flesh to gratify its desires" (Rom 13:14). Indeed, the New Testament writers call the Christian to "Spirit-powered, gospel-driven, faith-fueled effort."² An imbalance on this emphasis, however, results in legalism (e.g., "Follow these rules in order to be spiritual") or moralism (e.g., "You need to good things in order to enjoy God's favor").

While attention to any of these errors regarding the misuse of the indicatives or imperatives of Scripture could be helpful, I would like to consider the rising river of antinomian thought that is fed by three streams. Each of these streams has its headwaters in a different model

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²Kevin DeYoung, *The Hole in Our Holiness* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 79.

of sanctification teaching.³ First, the Free Grace movement flows out of the Chaferian model.⁴ Second, Radical Grace teaching flows out of the Reformed model.⁵ And finally, Hyper-Grace theology flows out of the Pentecostal model.

My focus in this essay is to give an overview of the last, above-mentioned stream, the Hyper-Grace movement. I will do this by comparing it to its counterparts rising out of the Chaferian and Reformed models of sanctification, by providing a history of the group, by delineating its teachings, and by offering a critique of its flavor of antinomianism as compared to the Bible's doctrine of perseverance.

I suggested that antinomianism is one of the errors made by those who place too great an emphasis on the indicatives of the Christian life while neglecting the imperatives. But if I am going to discuss this antinomian river into which the three streams of Free Grace, Radical Grace, and Hyper-Grace teaching flow, a short history of antinomianism is necessary. Following this I will compare these three streams as a way of introducing Hyper-Grace theology to the reader.

The One River: Antinomianism

Simply speaking, antinomianism is “endorsing lawless behavior”⁶ by denying any role of the law in the life of the Christian. It has its roots in German Lutheranism as Luther's stark distinction between law and gospel prompted one of his friends, Johannes Agricola (1492–1566), to draw anti-law conclusions. He expounded these ideas in debates with Philip Melancthon and Luther, and Luther responded with a treatise, *Against the Antinomians*.⁷

³There are generally five schools of sanctification teaching: Wesleyan, Keswick, Pentecostal, Chaferian, and Reformed. These were first laid out in *Five Views on Sanctification*, ed. Melvin Dieter (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987). This book uses these five categories but labels one the “Augustinian-Dispensational View.” This unhelpful appellation used by John F. Walvoord, who wrote that chapter, was called the “Chaferian” view by Charles Ryrie, “Contrasting Views on Sanctification,” in *Walvoord: A Tribute*, ed. Donald K. Campbell (Chicago: Moody Press, 1982), 189–200, and this is the better term. For helpful diagrams of these models see Andrew D. Naselli, *No Quick Fix: Where Higher Life Theology Came From, What It Is, and Why It's Harmful* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2017), 7–27. Another excellent survey is William W. Combs, “The Disjunction Between Justification and Sanctification in Contemporary Evangelical Theology,” *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 6 (2001): 17–33.

⁴For a defense of this connection and a description of the Free Grace stream, see Jon Pratt, “The Free Grace Movement and Perseverance,” in *To Seek, To Do, and To Teach: Essays in Honor of Larry D. Pettegrew*, ed. Doug Bookman, Tim Sigler, and Michael Vlach (Cary, NC: Shepherds Press, 2022), 155–75.

⁵Jon Pratt, “Radical Grace,” *Gloria Deo Journal of Theology* 1 (2022): 85–109.

⁶Robert A. Pyne, “Antinomianism and Dispensationalism,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 153 (April–June 1996): 141.

⁷Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann; trans. Martin H. Bertram, American Edition (St. Louis: Concordia, 1955–86), 47:107–19. Two helpful summaries of the Lutheran debate and of antinomianism

Puritan England became the next hotspot for antinomian teaching in the seventeenth century, promoted by writers like John Eaton (1574/75–1630/31), Tobias Crisp (1600–1643), and John Saltmarsh (d. 1647).⁸ Such stalwarts as Thomas Goodwin (1600–1680), Samuel Rutherford (1600–1661), Thomas Shepard (1605–49), and John Flavel (d. 1691) responded with polemical works detailing the errors of the antinomians.⁹ Mark Jones helpfully summarizes the questions debated during these antinomian debates:

1. Are there any conditions for salvation?
2. Is the moral law still binding for Christians?
3. What is the precise nature of, and relationship between, the law and the gospel?
4. Are good works necessary for salvation?
5. Does God love all Christians the same, irrespective of their obedience or lack thereof?
6. Who is the subject of spiritual activity, the believer or Christ?
7. May our assurance of justification be discerned by our sanctification?
8. Does God see sin in believers?
9. Is a person justified at birth or upon believing?¹⁰

At the same time as these debates were raging in England, a similar antinomian controversy was taking place in the New England colonies. Notable adherents to antinomian ideas included a theologian, John Cotton (1585–1652), a politician, Henry Vane (1613–1662), and a laywoman, Anne Hutchinson (d. 1643).¹¹ In a 1637 meeting of elders to discuss this controversy, the following antinomian statements were deemed “unsafe”:

1. To say we are justified by faith is an unsafe speech; we must say we are justified by Christ.
2. To evidence justification by sanctification or grace savours Rome.
3. If I be holy, I am never the better accepted by God; if I be unholy, I am never the worse.
4. If Christ will let me sin, let him look to it; upon his honour be it.

generally are Mark Jones, *Antinomianism: Reformed Theology's Unwelcome Guest?* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2013), 1–18; and Sinclair Ferguson, *The Whole Christ: Legalism, Antinomianism, and Gospel Assurance—Why the Marrow Controversy Still Matters* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 137–54.

⁸Ferguson, *Whole Christ*, 141.

⁹For example, John Flavel, “The Second Appendix: Giving a Brief Account of the Rise and Growth of Antinomianism; the Deduction of the Principal Errors of that Sect, With Modest and Seasonable Reflections upon Them,” in *The Works of John Flavel*, 6 vols (1820; repr., London: Banner of Truth, 1968), 3:551–91.

¹⁰Jones, *Antinomianism*, 8–9. Please notice that many of these same issues are at the forefront of today’s antinomian writings. See the section below on the teachings of the Hyper-Grace movement.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 9.

5. Here is a great stir about graces and looking to hearts; but give me Christ; I seek not for graces, but for Christ.... I seek not for sanctification, but for Christ; tell me not of meditation and duties, but tell me of Christ.
6. I may know I am Christ's, not because I do crucify the lusts of the flesh, but because I do not crucify them, but believe in Christ that crucified my lusts for me.
7. If Christ be my sanctification, what need I look to anything in myself, to evidence my justification?¹²

These antinomian debates of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries serve as the foundation for an accurate *historical* understanding of the concept. However, in the centuries since, antinomian controversies have continued to raise concerns in the evangelical church. Perhaps the most famous of these (the present focus of this paper notwithstanding) is the Marrow Controversy in the Church of Scotland from 1718 to 1726.¹³ In the end the claim of antinomianism leveled against the "marrow men" was probably not as accurate as its opponents claimed,¹⁴ but there were certainly those "on the margins of nonconformity" who took their writings to an antinomian extreme.¹⁵

Moving into the present day, we can agree with Mark Jones that "the term 'antinomianism' is a lot more complex than its etymology might suggest."¹⁶ Yet, there are too many antinomian ideas and statements made by current scholars and pastors in several different contexts that we must not overlook. The teachings of these scholars and pastors make up the current antinomian river, and this river is fed by three streams in particular.

The Three Streams

As mentioned above, three streams of grace teaching flow into the river of antinomianism. They are all remarkably similar in the main points they emphasize in their writings. But the fascinating reality is that they arrive at their antinomian destination through very different routes.

First, *Free Grace* teachers espouse the Chaferian model of sanctification, and they all hold to a dispensational framework of understanding Scripture.¹⁷ So what motivates them to deny perseverance? Free

¹²Ibid., 10–11.

¹³Ferguson's *Whole Christ* provides a very helpful and pastorally nuanced perspective of the Marrow Controversy.

¹⁴Jones comments: "Hostile appellations in the context of theological debate are sometimes misplaced" (*Antinomianism*, 16).

¹⁵Ferguson, *Whole Christ*, 153.

¹⁶Jones, *Antinomianism*, 18.

¹⁷Incidentally, not all dispensationalists hold to the Chaferian model of sanctification. See Jonathan R. Pratt, "Dispensational Sanctification: A Misnomer," *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 7 (2002): 95–108, and Mark Snoeberger, "Second-Blessing

Grace teachers desire to give believers absolute assurance of their salvation, for if believers' assurance is threatened by their disobedience, they become ineffective in their Christian witness and testimony.¹⁸

Second, *Radical Grace* proponents espouse the Reformed model of sanctification, and they hail from a variety of denominational backgrounds including Lutheran, Anglican, Baptist, and Presbyterian traditions. So what motivates Radical Grace advocates to minimize or even deny perseverance? While a specific foundation is not so readily apparent as it is for Free Grace defenders, the Lutheran distinction between Law and Gospel with its accompanying emphasis on Gospel (and de-emphasis on Law) for both justification and sanctification stands as the best explanation for Radical Grace antinomianism.¹⁹

Third, *Hyper-Grace* teaching arises out of the Pentecostal model of sanctification,²⁰ and as the reader might suspect, all of its supporters fall under the theological umbrella of Pentecostalism. But how should we

Models of Sanctification and Early Dallas Dispensationalism," *The Master's Seminary Journal* 15 (Spring 2004): 93–105. Furthermore, not all Chaferians are Free Grace. For example, Charles Ryrie, a staunch advocate of Chaferian sanctification, affirms perseverance: "The new life will bear new fruit. In 1 John 2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:1, 4, and 18, some of the results of the new life include righteousness, not committing sin, loving one another, and overcoming the world" (Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology* [Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1982], 326).

¹⁸D. A. Carson, "Reflections on Christian Assurance," *Westminster Theological Journal* 54 (Spring 1992): 6. In order to avoid drowning in the details of Free Grace thinking with regard to assurance I suggest four resources for further study: Zane C. Hodges, *The Gospel Under Siege* (Dallas: Redención Viva, 1981), 9–18; David R. Anderson, *Free Grace Soteriology* (The Woodlands, TX: Grace Theology Press, 2018), 191–228; Joseph Dillow, "Finding Assurance," in *A Defense of Free Grace Theology with Respect to Saving Faith, Perseverance, and Assurance*, ed. Fred Chay (The Woodlands, TX: Grace Theology Press, 2017), 193–238; and Dennis Rokser, *How NOT to Live the Christian Life by Grace: The Free Grace Faux Pas of Justification by Grace but Sanctification by Faith Plus Works* (Duluth, MN: Grace Gospel Press, 2021), 15.

I should add that another motivating factor for denying perseverance in Free Grace teaching is the desire to protect justification by faith alone because perseverance is perceived as adding works to faith and thereby making works a condition of salvation (Wayne Grudem, "Free Grace" *Theology: 5 Ways it Diminishes the Gospel* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016], 82).

¹⁹Pratt, "Radical Grace," 90–93. See these Radical Grace proponents who support this point of distinction between Law and Gospel: Gerhard O. Forde, "Radical Lutheranism: Lutheran Identity in America," *Lutheran Quarterly* 1 (1987): 5–18; Tullian Tchividjian, *Jesus + Nothing = Everything* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 46–49; Paul F. M. Zahl, *Grace in Practice: A Theology of Everyday Life* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 26–41; Jon Moffitt, Justin Perdue, and Jimmy Buehler, *Rest: A Consideration of Faith vs. Faithfulness* (Spring Hill, TN: Theocast Inc., 2021), 17–18.

²⁰Two articles provide explanation of the Pentecostal model of sanctification: Stanley M. Horton, "The Pentecostal Perspective," in *Five Views on Sanctification*, ed. Melvin Dieter (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 103–35; and Russel P. Spittler, "The Pentecostal View," in *Christian Spirituality: Five Views of Sanctification*, ed. Donald L. Alexander (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 133–54.

define the Pentecostal movement? Allan Anderson helpfully narrows down Pentecostal identity into two characteristics: 1) they believe in the *experience* of receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit subsequent to salvation; and 2) they believe that Christians should *practice* all the spiritual gifts.²¹

Finding a motivation behind grace teaching in the Hyper-Grace camp is quite difficult. One of the most critical voices of the Hyper-Grace message is Michael Brown, and he suggests that the legalistic tendencies of the holiness-sanctification teachers who birthed Pentecostalism might have created the legalistic environment out of which antinomianism was destined to rise.²² With few alternative explanations at hand, the idea of a reaction against legalistic holiness emphases makes good sense.

This section of the paper seeks to situate where the Hyper-Grace stream fits in the antinomian river. Though the three streams of grace teaching have their headwaters in different sanctification models (Free Grace from Chaferian; Radical Grace from Reformed; and Hyper-Grace from Pentecostal) and have different motivations behind their dogma (Free Grace—assurance; Radical Grace—Law-Gospel distinction; and Hyper-Grace—legalistic holiness), they all trumpet the same basic grace message. So what are the particularities of that message for Hyper-Grace proponents? Our next two sections will seek to answer this question.

²¹Allan Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 6; idem, “Varieties, Taxonomies, and Definitions,” in *Studying Global Pentecostalism: Theories and Methods*, ed. Allan Anderson et al. (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2010), 25; Robert Mapes Anderson, *Vision of the Disinherited: The Making of American Pentecostalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 4. Walter J. Hollenweger, clarifies the second point by suggesting that Pentecostals do not merely believe in the experience or continuation of the charismata but also agree that they should be demonstrated in the church (*Pentecostalism: Origins and Developments Worldwide* [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997], 327). Donald W. Dayton argues for a fourfold definition that includes salvation, subsequent Spirit baptism, practice of physical healing, and anticipation of the second coming of Jesus (*Theological Roots of Pentecostalism* [Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1987], 20–21).

Entire books have been written on the history and definition of Pentecostalism as a movement, but here are three places one could begin such a study: (1) Vinson Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition: Charismatic Movements in the Twentieth Century*, 2nd ed (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 279–98; (2) Allan Anderson, “Varieties, Taxonomies, and Definitions,” 17–20; and (3) Jeff Straub, “The Pentecostalization of Global Christianity; Lecture One: 19th Century Antecedents to 20th Century Pentecostalism,” MacDonald Lecture Series, Central Baptist Theological Seminary (February 10, 2015). Available at <https://vimeo.com/channels/macdonaldlectures2015>.

²²Michael L. Brown, personal email to the author (7/11/2022). Also see Trevor Grizzle, who writes, “Hyper-grace Christianity emerged largely in reaction to a legalistic religion that eviscerated the life-giving gospel, corroded and toxified Christianity, and brought people under the thralldom of rules and regulations that were impossible to keep and resulted only in spiritual death” (“The Hyper-Grace Gospel,” in *The Truth about Grace*, ed. Vinson Synan [Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 2018], 32).

The History of Hyper-Grace

This historical survey will delineate the main teachers and writings of Hyper-Grace. The “movement’s most prominent voice” is Singapore pastor Joseph Prince.²³ He has 28 published books to his name; those which proclaim the Hyper-Grace message most specifically are *Destined to Reign*, *Unmerited Favor*, *The Power of Right Believing*, and *Grace Revolution*.²⁴

The next two authors have been writing about grace since the 1990s. Steve McVey, originally a pastor and now leader of Grace Walk ministries has written *Grace Walk* and *The Secret of Grace*.²⁵ Rob Rufus, who has recently retired from a 17 year ministry as pastor of City Church International in Hong Kong, has written *Living in the Grace of God*.²⁶

Clark Whitten has pastored for 45 years; he has led three mega churches and started his current church, Grace Church, in Longwood, Florida in 2005. His book, *Pure Grace: The Life Changing Power of Uncontaminated Grace*, is one of the clearest explanations of Hyper-Grace teaching available.²⁷ Paul Ellis maintains the most up-to-date website on the Hyper-Grace movement (www.escapetoreality.org), and he has also written two books well-known in Hyper-Grace circles.²⁸

Next, Andrew Wommack’s two contributions to Hyper-Grace teaching (*Living in the Balance of Grace & Faith* and *Grace, the Power of the Gospel*) are only a small part of his larger ministry (www.awmi.net).²⁹ He founded Charis Bible College in 1994, hosts a

²³This is the opinion of Trevor Grizzle, “Hyper-Grace Gospel,” 34, but based on the popularity of Prince’s many published books (most Hyper-Grace authors are self-published while most of Prince’s are not), the church he pastors (New Creation Church has 31,000 attendees), and his daily TV broadcast, *Destined to Reign*, it is an accurate assessment.

²⁴*Destined to Reign* (Tulsa, OK: Harrison House, 2007); *Unmerited Favor* (Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 2011); *The Power of Right Believing* (New York: Faith Words, 2013); *Grace Revolution* (New York: Faith Words, 2015).

²⁵Steve McVey, *Grace Walk* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1995) and *The Secret of Grace* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2014). This second book is a revised and updated version of *Grace Rules* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1998). McVey’s website (gracewalk.org) does not appear to have been updated since 2017. See www.stevemcvey.com.

²⁶Rob Rufus, *Living in the Grace of God* (London: Authentic Books, 1997). See his website www.robrufusministries.com.

²⁷Clark Whitten, *Pure Grace: The Life Changing Power of Uncontaminated Grace* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image Publishers, 2012).

²⁸Paul Ellis, *The Gospel in Ten Words* (Birkenhead, New Zealand: KingsPress, 2012); idem, *The Hyper-Grace Gospel: A Response to Michael Brown and Those Opposed to the Modern Grace Message* (Birkenhead, New Zealand: KingsPress, 2014).

²⁹Andrew Wommack, *Living in the Balance of Grace & Faith: Combining Two Powerful Forces to Receive from God* (Tulsa, OK: Harrison House, 2009) and idem, *Grace, the Power of the Gospel: It’s Not What You Do but What Jesus Did* (Tulsa, OK: Harrison House, 2007).

daily TV show called Gospel Truth TV, and directs the Truth and Liberty Coalition, a politically conservative think-tank. Andrew Farley pastors The Grace Church in Lubbock, Texas and has published 9 books in support of the Hyper-Grace message. His most significant include *The Naked Gospel* (2009) and *The Grace Message* (2022).³⁰

A number of other authors have contributed to the huge body of Hyper-Grace literature in the past fifteen years. The ability to self-publish has likely been a major reason for the plethora of these books. I list them here without further comment: Kevin Ashwe,³¹ Chuck Crisco,³² Ryan Haley,³³ Ralph Harris,³⁴ Zach Maldonado,³⁵ Matt McMillen,³⁶ D. R. Silva,³⁷ Eddie Snipes,³⁸ and André van der Merwe.³⁹

These writings have several characteristics in common. First, they are in solid agreement on Hyper-Grace teaching, sounding the same themes again and again. Second, many of the authors endorse each other's books. Third, of the 28 books cited here, 16 are self-published; 7 are (understandably) published by Pentecostal printers; and the remaining 5 are mainstream Evangelical publishers like Zondervan, Salem Books (an imprint of Regnery), and Harvest House. Fourth, all of these authors are either pastors, former pastors, overseers of Christian organizations, or lay people; none have earned doctorates in biblical or theological studies.⁴⁰ Fifth, none of these books have a Scripture index,

³⁰Andrew Farley, *The Naked Gospel: The Truth You May Never Hear in Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009) and idem, *The Grace Message* (Washington, D.C.: Salem Books, 2022). See his website, www.andrewfarley.org.

³¹Kevin Ashwe, *Should Christians Confess Sins? Effortless Deliverance from the Bondage of Sin Consciousness* (Kindle edition, 2021); idem, *Why I Don't Preach Sin: What Was Jesus Preaching that Attracted Sinners to Him? What Are We Preaching Today that Keeps Sinners Away from Church?* (Kindle edition, 2020).

³²Chuck Crisco, *Extraordinary Gospel: Experiencing the Goodness of God* (Travelers Rest, SC: True Potential, 2013).

³³Ryan Haley, *A Better Way: God's Design for Less Stress, More Rest, and Greater Success* (Fresno, CA: Ignite Press, 2020).

³⁴Ralph Harris, *God's Astounding Opinion of You: Understanding your Identity Will Change Your Life* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2007); idem, *Life According to Perfect: The Greatest Story Never Imagined* (N.p., 2018).

³⁵Zach Maldonado, *Perfect and Forgiveness: Discovering Your Freedom from Shame, Guilt, and Sin* (N.p., 2019); idem, *The Cross Worked: Why You Can Have Confidence on the Day of Judgment* (N.p., 2018).

³⁶Matt McMillen, *The Christian Identity: Discovering What Jesus Has Truly Done to Us*, 3 vols (Farmington, MO: Matt McMillen Ministries, 2018–2020).

³⁷D. R. Silva, *Hyper-Grace: The Dangerous Doctrine of a Happy God* (Havre, MT: Up-Arrow Publishing, 2014).

³⁸Eddie Snipes, *Abounding Grace: Dispelling Myths and Clarifying the Biblical Message of God's Overflowing Grace* (Carrollton, GA: GES Book Publishing, 2013).

³⁹André van der Merwe, *Grace, The Forbidden Gospel* (Bloomington, IN: WestBow Press, 2011).

⁴⁰Lest readers think that Pentecostalism has no one trained in biblical and

and if they have citations (half do not), these are always in the form of end notes.⁴¹

Up to this point I have referred at least twice to Hyper-Grace teaching without giving any description of its content. It is time to remedy this lacuna in the next section.

The Content of Hyper-Grace Teaching

Continuing our study, I will survey six major themes found in Hyper-Grace literature. Because of space restrictions, I will need to limit the number of supporting citations, but the reader can be assured that there are many more authors who could be referenced as we proceed through each theme. I will offer no scriptural critique of these themes at this stage; however, our next section will provide biblical responses to these Hyper-Grace concepts.

(1) *God has already forgiven all our sins.*

Joseph Prince writes, “You will only love Jesus much when you experience His lavish grace and unmerited favor in forgiving you of all your sins—past, present and future.... Beloved, with one sacrifice on the cross, Jesus blotted out all the sins of your entire life!”⁴² Andrew Farley concurs: “Our past, present, and future sins were dealt with simultaneously through the cross.”⁴³ While these statements sound orthodox, Hyper-Grace teachers go beyond (the connection to 2 John 9 intended) this truth and purport that there are several amazing effects in the life of the believer.

First, there is no need to confess our sins to God because they have already been forgiven.⁴⁴ Hyper-Grace teachers respond to the two texts

theological studies, they should know that Hyper-Grace teaching has been addressed extensively by several well-trained Pentecostal theologians. For example, Michael L. Brown, *Hyper-Grace* (Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 2014) has a PhD in Near Eastern Languages and Literature; this book is the best book-length critique of Hyper-Grace to date. Vinson Synan, ed., *The Truth About Grace* (Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 2018) was the premier Pentecostal historian with a PhD in American Social & Intellectual History before he died in 2020; he gathered 17 contributors for this book, all but 3 of whom have earned doctorates. Joseph Mattera has a DMin and writes about many topics including Hyper-Grace (www.josephmattera.org). Finally, David Kowalski (M.A.), whose articles appear on www.apologeticsindex.org, has written extensively on the Hyper-Grace movement; see “The Modern ‘Grace Message’—Revolution or Rebellion?” (December 3, 2014) <https://www.apologeticsindex.org/4981-antinomianism> for an excellent critique of Hyper-Grace.

⁴¹Snipes, *Abounding Grace*, is the one exception, although his footnotes are for Scripture references only.

⁴²Prince, *Unmerited Favor*, 194–95.

⁴³Farley, *Naked Gospel*, 145.

⁴⁴Whitten writes, “You are not required to confess your sin to God in order to be forgiven ever again. You already are forgiven” (*Pure Grace*, 94). Ellis understands the word, “confess” to mean “receiving grace,” and he states: “Receiving grace is simply a matter of agreeing with God. It’s thanking Him that through Jesus ‘I have been

most commonly put forward by objectors in this manner: (1) Matthew 6:12 states that we should seek forgiveness for our sins but this verse was given under the Old Covenant and now that believers are under the New Covenant and its promise of forgiveness believers need not seek forgiveness;⁴⁵ (2) 1 John 1:9 talks about confession but this is actually talking about the need for unbelievers to confess their sins so that they can be saved.⁴⁶

A second effect of being forgiven is that the Holy Spirit does not convict believers of sin because God has forgiven and “still sees [the Christian] as righteous.”⁴⁷

Third, a change of behavior as a fruit of repentance is not expected since repentance is viewed only as a change of mind; it does not refer to sorrow for sin nor to a change of behavior.⁴⁸

(2) *There is an imbalance of teaching between position and practice in sanctification.*

Throughout the Hyper-Grace literature one finds a strong emphasis on position accompanied by an equally strong de-emphasis on practice. Steve McVey's comments are typical: “The core of the Christian life doesn't revolve around *doing*, but is grounded in *being*.... As we experience the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, godly action is the consequence of His life flowing from us. It is not the result of

cleansed from all unrighteousness, and all my sins have been taken away” (*Hyper-Grace Gospel*, 33).

⁴⁵McVey, explains, “Under the Covenant of Law, a person was not totally forgiven. He or she had to receive ongoing forgiveness in order to remain in a guilt-free state. But at the cross, God poured out all His forgiveness on us. We don't need to ask for more!” (*Secret of Grace*, 135–38).

⁴⁶Whitten writes, “First John 1:9 does not say that a Christian must confess sins to God in order to be forgiven.... This verse is not directed toward believers, but toward those who need salvation” (*Pure Grace*, 94). Also see Farley: “Verse 9 is a remedy for unbelievers who have been influenced by Gnostic peer pressure and are now claiming sinless perfection” (*Naked Gospel*, 152).

⁴⁷Prince, *Destined to Reign*, 134–35. He also states, “The bottom line is that **the Holy Spirit never convicts you of your sins**. He NEVER comes to point out your faults. I challenge you to find a scripture in the Bible that tells you that the Holy Spirit has come to convict you of your sins.” Also Whitten: “In reality, there are not many biblical references to support the concept that the Holy Spirit's primary ministry is to convict believers of sin. As a matter of fact, there are no New Testament verses that refer to the concept!” (*Pure Grace*, 106).

⁴⁸Prince notes, “Because we have been influenced by our denominational background as well as our own religious upbringing, many of us have the impression that repentance is something that involves mourning and sorrow. However, that is not what the Word of God says. Repentance just means changing your mind” (*Destined to Reign*, 233). Whitten, adds, “[Repentance] essentially means to rethink your position in light of truth, or change your mind based on the fact that you thought wrongly before and need to embrace the truth of a matter” (*Pure Grace*, 98).

dedicated effort on our part.”⁴⁹ “You are like Him, my friend, and are in a permanent and unchangeable state of being of holiness.”⁵⁰

(3) *God sees Christians as perfect.*

Since Hyper-Grace teachers emphasize the position of the believer, they draw attention to God’s perception of the Christian. And how does God view His children? “When God looks at me, He doesn’t see me through the blood of Christ, He sees me—cleansed! Likewise, He sees us as holy and righteous.”⁵¹ And because God views His children as completely righteous and perfect, believers should not try to please God. As Clark Whitten reminds us, “If you are ‘working’ to please Him, you are in for a lifetime of unfinished business, and it will leave you perpetually exhausted!”⁵²

(4) *Spirituality is an effortless experience
in the life of the believer.*

Since legalism is Hyper-Grace’s greatest perceived enemy,⁵³ Hyper-Grace teachers avoid any exhortations to fight sin, seeing them as tools that place rules above relationship.⁵⁴ The solution in the battle against legalism is not diligent, Spirit-fueled effort,⁵⁵ but it is rather a type of quietism. Christians are called to “focus on our newness and Christ’s presence within us” in order to see behavior changed.⁵⁶ “There is

⁴⁹McVey, *Grace Walk*, 88.

⁵⁰Whitten, *Pure Grace*, 166. Furthermore, “I am already justified, and get this—I am already sanctified! Sanctification—having been made perfect—is a state of being, not a goal to be achieved or grow into.... The old religious approach of ‘I *am* justified, I *am being* sanctified, and I *will be* glorified’ is a lie. It is religious nonsense. Progressive sanctification is based on the theory that we can act better and better until we get to be almost like Jesus on earth, then be fully made perfect in Heaven.... God will not do anything to me in Heaven that He hasn’t already done here! (29–30). See also Prince: “You are either righteous or you are not. There is no such thing as first having ‘positional righteousness’ and then having to maintain that through practical righteousness.’ You are the righteousness of God in Christ, period!” (*Destined to Reign*, 27).

⁵¹Whitten, *Pure Grace*, 53. Furthermore, “If you are a true Christian, a believer in Christ, one who has been born again, you are righteous, you are in right standing with God, and absolutely nothing can change that. You are as righteous as Christ is righteous” (50). Also see Paul Ellis, *Hyper-Grace Gospel*, 83, “Your Father loves you 100 percent and is thoroughly pleased with you. He never changes His mind. Just as your behavior does not alter the sunlight falling on the earth, your behavior cannot alter the white-hot love of your Father for you.”

⁵²Whitten, *Pure Grace*, 40.

⁵³McVey, *Grace Walk*, 80. Whitten writes, “Legalistic Christianity is in the sin management business full-time and failing miserably at the job.... ‘Do good, God is glad; do bad, God is mad’ is the M.O. of legalistic Christianity” (*Pure Grace*, 20).

⁵⁴Prince, *Unmerited Favor*, 41.

⁵⁵DeYoung, *The Hole in Our Holiness*, 79–91.

⁵⁶Farley, *Naked Gospel*, 208. Also, Andrew Farley, *Relaxing with God: The*

nothing for you to do, nothing for you to perform, nothing for you to accomplish.... Your part in the new covenant is just to have faith in Jesus and to believe that you are totally forgiven and free to enjoy the new covenant blessings through His finished work!”⁵⁷ “When you are planted in the fertile soil of God’s Word and His grace, fruits of righteousness will manifest effortlessly out of your relationship with Him.”⁵⁸ Ultimately, these ideas fall under the umbrella of “rest,” an idea that virtually all Hyper-Grace teachers emphasize as they appeal to Jesus’s words in Matthew 11:28—Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.⁵⁹

(5) *Sin is minimized.*

While there is a woeful lack of discussion about sin in Hyper-Grace literature, it is helpful to gain a glimpse into the perspective that many Hyper-Grace teachers possess with regard to sin by noting some of their comments about it. For example, Clark Whitten states, “Christians are truly free. We are free to laugh or cry, read a novel or the Bible, eat meat offered to idols or avoid it, drink wine or water, smoke or chew, get fat or fit, attend church or stay at home, tithe or give nothing—all without condemnation from God.”⁶⁰ D. R. Silva shares this perspective: “Jesus didn’t go around picking on sinners and telling them to quit sinning ‘because the Ten Commandments say so!’”⁶¹ And since Jesus destroyed sin on the cross, “sin isn’t the issue anymore. More often the issue is the believer’s [*sic*] perspective whenever they live as if He didn’t deal with sin, thinking they are still ‘prone’ to it when Paul said to ‘consider yourselves dead to it.’”⁶²

(6) *There is Marcionite tendency to devalue the Old Testament and the moral value of the law for believers today.*

Many Hyper-Grace instructors emphasize the significance of the institution of the New Covenant by Christ in His death, claiming that

Neglected Spiritual Discipline (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014), wrote an entire book based on this concept.

⁵⁷Prince, *Unmerited Favor*, 177.

⁵⁸Joseph Prince, *The Power of Right Believing*, 204.

⁵⁹Wommack writes, “God, by grace, has provided everything that is necessary for you to accomplish what He wants you to do. It’s already been done. Now you must simply rest and trust that God has already provided everything you need. That sounds easy, but the hardest thing you’ll ever do is rest” (*Living in the Balance of Grace and Faith*, 76). Also, McVey, *Grace Walk*, 73–74.

⁶⁰Whitten, *Pure Grace*, 22. He also writes, “My bad works don’t move God any more than my good works move Him. He simply isn’t moved by ‘works’ of any kind. If you are motivated to do a great work for God, good luck!” (20).

⁶¹Silva, *Hyper-Grace*, 29.

⁶²*Ibid.*

it has totally replaced the Old Testament law. Consequently, even the teaching of Christ is seen as belonging to the Old Covenant and applying only to Jewish people, especially when He speaks favorably about the Law.⁶³ In regard to the moral value of the Law, Hyper-Grace teachers are adamantly opposed to any application of the Law to the church because law takes away from grace.⁶⁴ Clark Whitten exclaims, “The greatest constraining power against sin is love, not law! We were designed to abide in Him and bear much fruit. I am not under the law and never will be again.”⁶⁵

While all six of these themes are replete throughout Hyper-Grace literature, the emphasis on *identity* as completely forgiven (#1), on *activity* as totally resting (#4), and on *relationship* as entirely under the grace of the New Covenant (#6) are clearly the most important. Now that I have provided the reader with information about Hyper-Grace, I will offer a critique of the movement.

Evaluations and Observations Concerning Hyper-Grace Teaching

In this final section of the paper I will first offer a scriptural critique of each of the six Hyper-Grace themes treated above. Second, I will offer some observations of the Hyper-Grace movement, especially as its teaching relates to perseverance.

Scriptural Critique

In a shotgun manner, I will provide succinct critiques to each of the major themes of the Hyper-Grace message.⁶⁶

⁶³Farley, *Naked Gospel*, 84–86. Two statements from these pages strain credulity: “We often attempt to apply directly to our lives every word Jesus said, without considering his audience and purpose. But the context of Jesus’ harsh teachings must be seen in the light of the dividing line between the Old and the New. Remember that Christ was born and lived during the Old Covenant (law) era.” “Jesus’ impossible teachings of ‘sell everything, sever body parts if necessary, be perfect like God and surpass the Pharisees with your righteousness’ are not *honestly* compatible with salvation as a gift from God. Couldn’t we resolve all of this by realizing the dividing line in human history? Peter, James, John, and Paul wrote epistles about life under the New Covenant. Years earlier, Jesus was teaching hopelessness under the Old. The audience wasn’t the same. The covenant wasn’t the same. And the teachings aren’t the same.”

⁶⁴Prince argues that God had originally sought a grace relationship with Israel, but at Sinai Israel chose a different route: “The tragedy of all tragedies occurred for the children of Israel when they responded to God after hearing [His words] at the foot of Mount Sinai. They were proud and did not want the relationship God had envisioned. They wanted to deal with God at arm’s length, through impersonal commandments” (*Unmerited Favor*, 111–12). In *Destined to Reign*, Prince makes a similar argument (224–25). Since part of Prince’s argument here is based on how he reads Hebrew syntax, Michael Brown shows how wrongly Prince has interpreted Exodus 19:4–6, especially in light of his reference to Hebrew syntax (*Hyper-Grace*, 195–96).

⁶⁵Whitten, *Pure Grace*, 61.

⁶⁶Several critiques of Hyper-Grace have been published by Pentecostal authors. I

First, 1 John 1:9 clearly shows that Christians should confess their sins in order to receive forgiveness not for salvation but for harmony-in-relationship. From 1 John 1:5–2:2 John is providing a series of 3 contrasts between orthodox believers and false teachers who have been leaving (1 John 2:19), and 1:9 describes the kind of behavior true Christians demonstrate: a willingness to confess their sins.⁶⁷ Furthermore, believers are convicted of sin (Matt 18:15; 1 Cor 14:24) and should repent, not just in their minds but in their actions (2 Cor 7:8–10; James 4:1–6).⁶⁸

Second, the indicatives of salvation which declare the believers' identity and position before God are significant, and just as important are the imperatives which call on believers to bear fruit in persevering faith.⁶⁹ Both elements are so frequent in Scripture that they cannot all be listed, but here are four passages where the indicative and imperative are found in close proximity to each other: 1) Romans 6:11–12 ("consider yourselves dead to sin" and "let not sin reign in your mortal bodies"); 2) Philippians 2:12–13 ("work out your own salvation" and "God...works in you both to will and to work for his good pleasure"); 3) Colossians 3:3–5 ("you have died [to sin]" and "put to death therefore what is earthly in you"); 4) Jude 21–24 ("keep yourselves in the love of God" and God "is able to keep you from stumbling").⁷⁰ Failing to recognize this balance between the indicatives and imperatives will result in legalism or, as in the case of hyper-grace advocates, passivity.

Third, while Christians are clothed in the righteousness of Christ when they are justified, they still sin and are called to please God multiple times (2 Cor 5:9—"So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to *please* him"; Eph 5:10—"Try to discern what is *pleasing* to the Lord"; 1 Thess 2:4b—"we speak, not to please man, but to *please* God who tests our hearts"; 1 Thess 4:1—"as you received from us how you ought to live and to *please* God, just as you are doing, that you do

offer them in order of their value for further study. (1) Brown, *Hyper-Grace*; (2) Synan, ed., *Truth about Grace*; (3) David Kowalski, "The Modern 'Grace Message,'" <https://www.apologeticsindex.org/4981-antinomianism>; (4) Joseph Mattera, "8 Signs of 'Hypergrace' Churches," (June 28, 2013), <https://josephmattera.org/eight-signs-of-hyper-grace-churches-2/>; and (5) Andrew Wilson, "The 'Grace Revolution,' Hyper-Grace, and the Humility of Orthodoxy," (January 2, 2013), https://thinktheology.co.uk/blog/article/the_grace_revolution.

⁶⁷Colin G. Kruse, *The Letters of John*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 61–75; Stephen S. Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, Word Biblical Commentary (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1984), 27–41.

⁶⁸Brown, *Hyper-Grace*, 74–80.

⁶⁹Rolland McCune states, "If it is true that a believer *will* persevere, then it is equally true that he *must* persevere" (*A Systematic Theology of Biblical Christianity*, 3 vols. [Allen Park, MI: Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, 2008–2010], 3:181).

⁷⁰DeYoung, *Hole in Our Holiness*, 79–91. Defending and explaining this truth is actually the main thesis of this book.

so more and more”).⁷¹ Indeed, Christians can and should strive to bring pleasure to God by obeying His commands.

Fourth, while there is mystery when it comes to the synergistic work of the Spirit and the Christian in progressive sanctification (1 Cor 15:10), the New Testament clearly calls believers to labor in cooperation with the Spirit in their growth (Rom 12:9–21; Phil 2:12; 1 Thess 4:3–12). Such effort is not deemed as a means of attaining salvation, but it is seen as an expected response of believing Christians (2 Pet 1:5—“make every effort”; Col 1:29—“I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me”).

Fifth, believers continue to be tempted to sin by the world (Jas 1:27; 4:4), the flesh (Rom 13:14), and the devil (1 Pet 5:8–9). Christians must fight to defeat sin in their striving for holiness (Heb 12:14) because it is an enemy to be defeated (Rom 6:12) and an impediment, hindering believers from running their race well (Heb 12:1).

Sixth, even those Christians who do not hold to Calvin’s third use of the law, still believe that the Old Testament law is “holy, righteous, and good” (Rom 7:12). Christ and the apostles gave commands for believers to obey, based upon the character of God as revealed in the Law, and they expected Christians to obey the law of Christ (1 Cor 9:21; Gal 6:2).⁷² In addition, Jesus’s Great Commission includes the demand for Christians “to observe all that I have commanded you” (Matt 28:20).

Concluding Observations

While many comments could be offered after a study like this one, I offer the following with hope that this paper will help the reader not only to be better informed about Hyper-Grace but also to be reminded of the gracious working of God in the believer’s perseverance.

First, whether they deny it or not, Hyper-Grace teachers are certainly antinomian and belong in any discussion about present-day deniers of perseverance. They share many similarities with grace instructors from the other two streams mentioned earlier. Like Free Grace, Hyper-Grace advocates limit the meaning of repentance to a mere change of mind and also de-emphasize or deny perseverance.⁷³ Like Radical Grace, Hyper-Grace despises any connection to Law, and

⁷¹Jones, *Antinomianism*, 92–5; Brown, *Hyper-Grace*, 120–27.

⁷²Douglas J. Moo, “The Law of Christ as the Fulfillment of the Law of Moses: A Modified Lutheran View,” in *Five Views on Law and Gospel* (ed. Wayne Strickland; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 319–76; idem, “The Law of Moses or the Law of Christ,” in *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship between the Old and New Testament. Essays in Honor of S. Lewis Johnson Jr.* (ed. John S. Feinberg; Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1988), 203–18, 373–76; and Grizzle, “Hyper-Grace Gospel,” 35–47.

⁷³While the two groups agree on de-emphasizing perseverance, they do so for different reasons. Free Grace denies perseverance in order to preserve assurance while Hyper-Grace denies perseverance in order to preserve identity and position.

both groups make strong appeals to a quietistic approach to the Christian life (e.g., trust, believe, relax, and rest).

Second, the Hyper-Grace message, due to its connection to Pentecostalism, is likely affecting far more Christians than Free Grace and Radical Grace combined.

Third, contrary to the claims of some Evangelicals,⁷⁴ Pentecostals do critique their own. While they certainly do not criticize themselves regarding continuationism and their doctrine of baptism with the Spirit, they have raised red flags against Hyper-Grace and have usually done so from a much stronger position of exegetical acumen and intellectual rigor than their Hyper-Grace proponents.⁷⁵

Fourth, it appears that Pentecostalism has at least four significant areas of doctrinal deviation in its ranks, all requiring attention from the more orthodox scholars of the movement: oneness Pentecostalism, Word-Faith/prosperity teaching, the New Apostolic Reformation, and Hyper-Grace.⁷⁶ While there is likely overlap between some of these groups, it is virtually impossible to know what percentage of Pentecostals are connected with each of these heretical elements so vigilant pursuit of the truth must continue.

In this study of Hyper-Grace, I have sought to compare it to two other antinomian streams, Free Grace and Radical Grace, in order to show their distinctive origins. I have also provided an overview of Hyper-Grace's history as well as a delineation of its teachings. Finally, I have offered several observations, showing how Hyper-Grace dogma interfaces with the Scripture's doctrine of perseverance. My hope is that this effort has encouraged an interest in perseverance so that all true Christians can be challenged to do the good works which God has prepared beforehand for them to do (Eph 2:10).

⁷⁴John MacArthur writes, "When notable continuationist scholars give credence to charismatic interpretations or fail to directly condemn charismatic practices, they provide theological cover for a movement that ought to be exposed for its dangers rather than defended" (*Strange Fire: The Danger of Offending the Holy Spirit with Counterfeit Worship* [Nashville: Nelson Books, 2013], 235).

⁷⁵See note 66 above.

⁷⁶This is not to deny that various Pentecostal writers have addressed some of these heresies (as we have already seen with regard to the Hyper-Grace movement), but it is to call Pentecostals to keep on correcting their opponents with gentleness so that God would grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth (2 Tim 2:25).