

Hyper-Grace and Perseverance

INTRODUCTION

In February of 2019 I delivered a series of lectures entitled, “Issues in Sanctification” at the MacDonald Lecture Series hosted annually by Central Seminary.¹ After surveying five basic sanctification models and how they approached the question of spiritual growth (Lecture One), I looked at the biblical data which support the necessary connection between justification and sanctification (Lecture Two). I chose to pursue this direction in part because four of the models denied a necessary connection, thereby denying the necessity of perseverance.²

It was at this point in my preparation of the lectures that I realized that there was a more important question to be pursued. While the question of the potentiality versus necessity of fruitbearing in the life of the Christian is important,³ a larger question loomed

¹These are still available at the Central Seminary website (<https://vimeo.com/channels/macdonaldlectures2019>).

²The four models that see only a *potential* rather than *necessary* connection between justification and sanctification are the Wesleyan, Keswick, Chaferian, and Pentecostal views; the Reformed view is the only model that affirms the necessity of growth following justification. See Melvin Dieter, ed., *Five Views on Sanctification* (Zondervan, 1987) which surveys these five models, but it labels one the “Augustinian-Dispensational View.” This unhelpful label used by John F. Walvoord, who penned that chapter, was called the “Chaferian” view by Charles Ryrie, “Contrasting Views on Sanctification,” in *Walvoord: A Tribute* (ed. Donald K. Campbell; Moody Press, 1982), 189–200, and this is the preferable term.

A year after Dieter’s book, *Christian Spirituality: Five Views of Sanctification*, ed. Donald L. Alexander (IVP, 1988) appeared. It included chapters on Lutheran and Contemplative models in place of the Keswick and Chaferian models. Technically, the Lutheran view (penned by Gerhard Forde) should be taken as a subset of the Reformed view (differing especially on the “third use of the Law”) while the Contemplative view (by Glenn Hinson) is too enigmatic and quirky to be considered as a definable model. Another excellent historical survey is found in William W. Combs, “The Disjunction Between Justification and Sanctification in Contemporary Evangelical Theology,” *DBSJ* 6 (Fall 2001): 17–33.

³All five of the models agree that fruitbearing should occur in the life of the believer, i.e. all affirm the doctrine of progressive sanctification. However, they differ in that the Wesleyan, Keswick, Chaferian, and Pentecostal views all hold to a reliance on the Christian to begin the process rather than believing that the Spirit begins producing fruit *immediately* after regeneration as the Reformed view affirms. This is why the first four views see only a

on the sanctification horizon: how do we balance the Scripture's teaching about the indicatives and imperatives related to progressive sanctification? For regardless of what a particular model of sanctification teaching says about the necessity or potential nature of fruitbearing, it still must wrestle with the question of how much effort, if any, Christians expend in the progress of their sanctification. Indeed, through the centuries the answer to this question has resulted in a number of different heresies. On one end of the spectrum an overemphasis on the indicatives of sanctification results in quietism or antinomianism, while on the other end an overemphasis results in legalism or moralism.

Given these realities I chose to limit my final two lectures to current antinomian errors as seen in the Free Grace movement (Lecture Three) and in Reformed theology (Lecture Four).⁴ After the lectures one of the attendees asked if I had ever heard of "hyper-grace." I had not. That question prompted this paper, which has now become the third in a series on antinomianism in the evangelical world.

My purpose in this paper is to give an overview of the Hyper-Grace movement by comparing it to its counterparts in the dispensational and Reformed worlds, 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.

ONE RIVER, THREE STREAMS

Above 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 River of Antinomianism. Simply speaking, antinomianism is "endorsing lawless behavior"⁵ 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*.⁶

potential connection between justification and sanctification as the believers' growth is dependent upon their initiation. See Jonathan R. Pratt, "The Relationship between Justification and Spiritual Fruit in Romans 5–8," *Themelios* 34.2 (2009): 162–78.

⁴Subsequently, the third lecture became "The Free Grace Movement and Perseverance" (paper presented at the Bible Faculty Summit, Chandler, AZ, 8 August 2019). The fourth lecture became "Radical Grace," *Gloria Deo Journal of Theology* 1 (2022): 85–109.

⁵Robert A. Pyne, "Antinomianism and Dispensationalism," *BSac* 153 (April–June 1996): 141.

⁶Martin 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 generally are Mark Jones, *Antinomianism: Reformed Theology's Unwelcome Guest?* (P & R, 2013), 1–18; and Sinclair

Puritan England became the next hotspot for antinomian teaching in the seventeenth century, promoted by writers like John Eaton (1574/5–1630/31), Tobias Crisp (1600–1643), and John Saltmarsh (d. 1647).⁷ 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.⁸ 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?⁹

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, and a laywoman, Anne Hutchinson (d. 1643).¹⁰ 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.
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.

Ferguson, *The Whole Christ: Legalism, Antinomianism, and Gospel Assurance—Why the Marrow Controversy Still Matters* (Crossway, 2016), 137–54.

⁷Ferguson, *Whole Christ*, 141.

⁸For 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.

⁹Jones, *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.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 9.

7. If Christ be my sanctification, what need I look to anything in myself, to evidence my justification?¹¹

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 1726.¹² In the end the claim of antinomianism leveled against the “marrow men” was probably not as accurate as its opponents claimed,¹³ but there were certainly those “on the margins of nonconformity” who took their writings to an antinomian extreme.¹⁴

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.”¹⁵ 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.¹⁶ So what motivates them to deny perseverance? Free 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.¹⁷

¹¹Ibid., 10–11.

¹²Ferguson, *Whole Christ*, provides a very helpful and pastorally nuanced perspective of the Marrow Controversy; I highly recommend it.

¹³Jones, *Antinomianism*, 16, comments: “Hostile appellations in the context of theological debate are sometimes misplaced.”

¹⁴Ferguson, *Whole Christ*, 153.

¹⁵Jones, *Antinomianism*, 18.

¹⁶Incidentally, not all dispensationalists hold to the Chaferian model of sanctification. See Jonathan R. Pratt, “Dispensational Sanctification: A Misnomer, *DBSJ* 7 (2002): 95–108, and Mark Snoeberger, “Second-blessing Models of Sanctification and Early Dallas Dispensationalism,” *TMSJ* 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* [Victor Books, 1982], 326).

¹⁷D. A. Carson, “Reflections on Christian Assurance,” *WTJ* 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: Hodges, *The Gospel Under Siege*, Chapter 2: “Can I

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.¹⁸

Third, **Hyper-Grace** teaching arises out of the Pentecostal model of sanctification, and as the reader might suspect, all of its supporters fall under the theological umbrella of Pentecostalism. But how should we define the Pentecostal movement? Jeff Straub helpfully narrowed down Pentecostal identity into two characteristics: 1) they agree that the gifts of the Spirit should operate in the church today, i.e. they are continuationists; and 2) they believe that Christians should experience a distinct baptism with the Holy Spirit.¹⁹

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.²⁰ 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

Really Be Sure?" 9–18; Anderson, *Free Grace Soteriology*, 191–228; Joseph Dillow, "Finding Assurance," in *A Defense of Free Grace Theology with Respect to Saving Faith, Perseverance, and Assurance* (ed. Fred Chay; 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.

¹⁸Jon Pratt, "Radical Grace," *GDJT* 1 (2022): 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," *LQ* 1 (1987): 5–18; Paul F. M. Zahl, *Grace in Practice: A Theology of Everyday Life* (Eerdmans, 2007), 26–41; Jon Moffitt, Justin Perdue, and Jimmy Buehler, *Rest: A Consideration of Faith vs. Faithfulness* (Theocast Inc., 2021), 17–18.

¹⁹Jeff 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>. Straub cited Pentecostal theologian Edith L. Blumhofer, *Restoring the Faith: The Assemblies of God, Pentecostalism, and American Culture* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 1, when making this observation.

²⁰Michael L. Brown, personal email to the author (7/11/22). Also see Trevor Grizzle, "The Hyper-Grace Gospel," chapter 3 in *The Truth about Grace*, ed. Vinson Synan (Charisma House, 2018), 32, 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 thrall of rules and regulations that were impossible to keep and resulted only in spiritual death."

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.

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.²¹ 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*.²²

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*.²³ 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*.²⁴

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.²⁵ 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.²⁶

²¹This is the opinion of Trevor Grizzle, “Hyper-Grace Gospel,” 34, but based on the popularity of his 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.

²²*Destined to Reign* (Harrison House, 2007); *Unmerited Favor* (Charisma House, 2011); *The Power of Right Believing* (Faith Words, 2013); *Grace Revolution* (Faith Words, 2015).

²³Steve McVey, *Grace Walk* (Harvest House, 1995) and *The Secret of Grace* (Harvest House, 2014). This second book is a revised and updated version of *Grace Rules* (Harvest House, 1998). McVey’s website (gracewalk.org) does not appear to have been updated since 2017. At present he has espoused an idiosyncratic concept from which he has formed a weekly study group called “Quantum Life.” Here is the description: “There is a special power found at the intersection of science and spirituality. When combined alongside daily practices, like study and meditation, this intersection can help you create a happier life.” See www.stevemcvey.com.

²⁴Rob Rufus, *Living in the Grace of God* (Authentic Books, 1997). See his website www.robrufusministries.com.

²⁵Clark Whitten, *Pure Grace: The Life Changing Power of Uncontaminated Grace* (Destiny Image Publishers, 2012).

²⁶Paul Ellis, *The Gospel in Ten Words* (KingsPress, 2012); idem, *The Hyper-Grace Gospel: A Response to Michael Brown and Those Opposed to the Modern Grace Message* (KingsPress, 2014).

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).²⁷ He founded Charis Bible College in 1994, hosts a 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).²⁸

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,²⁹ Chuck Crisco,³⁰ Ryan Haley,³¹ Ralph Harris,³² Zach Maldonado,³³ Matt McMillen,³⁴ D. R. Silva,³⁵ Eddie Snipes,³⁶ and André van der Merwe.³⁷

These writings have several characteristics in common. First, they are in solid agreement in Hyper-Grace teaching, sounding the same themes again and again. Second, many of the authors endorse each other's books; they truly enjoy their grace club. Third, of the 28 books cited here, 16 are self-published; 7 are (understandably) published by Pentecostal printers; and the remaining 5 are well-knowns like Zondervan, Salem Books (an imprint of Regnery), and Harvest House. Fourth, all of these authors are either pastors,

²⁷Andrew Wommack, *Living in the Balance of Grace & Faith: Combining Two Powerful Forces to Receive from God* (Harrison House, 2009) and idem, *Grace, the Power of the Gospel: It's not What You Do but What Jesus Did* (Harrison House, 2007).

²⁸Andrew Farley, *The Naked Gospel: The Truth You May Never Hear in Church* (Zondervan, 2009) and idem, *The Grace Message* (Salem Books, 2022). See his website, www.andrewfarley.org.

²⁹Kevin Ashwe, *Should Christians Confess Sins? Effortless Deliverance from the Bondage of Sin Consciousness* (N.p., 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?* (N.p., 2020).

³⁰Chuck Crisco, *Extraordinary Gospel: Experiencing the Goodness of God* (True Potential, 2013).

³¹Ryan Haley, *A Better Way: God's Design for Less Stress, More Rest, and Greater Success* (N.p., 2020).

³²Ralph Harris, *God's Astounding Opinion of You: Understanding your Identity Will Change Your Life* (Harvest House, 2007); idem, *Life According to Perfect: The Greatest Story Never Imagined* (N.p., 2018).

³³Zach Maldonado, *Perfect and Forgiven: 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).

³⁴Matt McMillen, *The Christian Identity: Discovering What Jesus Has Truly Done to Us*, 3 vols (Matt McMillen Ministries, 2018–2020).

³⁵D. R. Silva, *Hyper-Grace: The Dangerous Doctrine of a Happy God* (Up-Arrow Publishing, 2014).

³⁶Eddie Snipes, *Abounding Grace: Dispelling Myths and Clarifying the Biblical Message of God's Overflowing Grace* (GES Book Publishing, 2013).

³⁷André van der Merwe, *Grace, The Forbidden Gospel* (WestBow Press, 2011).

former pastors, overseers of Christian organizations, or lay people; none have earned doctorates in biblical or theological studies.³⁸ Fifth, none of these books have a Scripture index, and if they have citations (half do not), these are always in the form of end notes.³⁹

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!”⁴⁰ Andrew Farley concurs: “Our past, present, and future sins were dealt with simultaneously through the cross.”⁴¹ 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.⁴² Hyper-grace teachers respond to the two texts most commonly put forward by objectors in this manner: 1) Matthew 6:12 states that we should seek forgiveness for our

³⁸Lest readers think that Pentecostalism has no one trained in biblical and 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* (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* (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.

³⁹Snipes, *Abounding Grace*, is the one exception, although his footnotes are for Scripture references only.

⁴⁰Joseph Prince, *Unmerited Favor* (Charisma House, 2011), 194–95.

⁴¹Farley, *Naked Gospel*, 145.

⁴²Whitten, *Pure Grace*, 94, writes, “You are not required to confess your sin to God in order to be forgiven ever again. You already are forgiven.” Ellis, *Hyper-Grace Gospel*, 33, 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 cleansed from all unrighteousness, and all my sins have been taken away’.”

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 forgiveness⁴³; 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.⁴⁴

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.”⁴⁵

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 refer to sorrow for sin nor to a change of behavior.⁴⁶

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 dedicated effort on our part.”⁴⁷ “You are like Him, my friend, and are in a permanent and unchangeable state of being of holiness.”⁴⁸

⁴³McVey, *Secret of Grace*, 135–38, 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!”

⁴⁴Whitten, *Pure Grace*, 94, “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.” Also see Farley, *Naked Gospel*, 152, “Verse 9 is a remedy for unbelievers who have been influenced by Gnostic peer pressure and are now claiming sinless perfection.”

⁴⁵Joseph Prince, *Destined to Reign* (Harrison House, 2007), 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” (emphasis in original). Also Whitten, *Pure Grace*, 106: “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!”

⁴⁶Prince, *Destined to Reign*, 233: “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.” Whitten, *Pure Grace*, 98: [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.”

⁴⁷McVey, *Grace Walk*, 88 (emphasis in original).

⁴⁸Whitten, *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

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."⁴⁹ 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!"⁵⁰

4. Spirituality is an effortless experience in the life of the believer. Since legalism is Hyper-Grace's greatest perceived enemy,⁵¹ Hyper-Grace teachers avoid any exhortations to fight sin, seeing them as tools that place rules above relationship.⁵² The solution in the battle against legalism is not diligent, Spirit-fueled effort,⁵³ 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.⁵⁴ "There is 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!"⁵⁵ "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."⁵⁶ Ultimately, these ideas fall under the umbrella of "rest," an idea

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; emphasis in original). See also Prince, *Destined to Reign*, 27: "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!"

⁴⁹Whitten, *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."

⁵⁰Whitten, *Pure Grace*, 40.

⁵¹McVey, *Grace Walk*, 80. Whitten, *Pure Grace*, 20, "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."

⁵²Prince, *Unmerited Favor*, 41.

⁵³Kevin DeYoung, *The Hole in Our Holiness: Filling the Gap between Gospel Passion and the Pursuit of Godliness* (Crossway, 2014), 79–91, commends diligent effort in the pursuit of holiness.

⁵⁴Farley, *Naked Gospel*, 208. Also, Andrew Farley, *Relaxing with God: The Neglected Spiritual Discipline* (Baker Books, 2014), writes an entire book based on this concept.

⁵⁵Prince, *Unmerited Favor*, 177.

⁵⁶Joseph Prince, *The Power of Right Believing: 7 Keys to Freedom from Fear, Guilt, and Addiction* (Faith Words, 2013), 204.

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.⁵⁷

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."⁵⁸ 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!'"⁵⁹ 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.'"⁶⁰

6. A 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 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.⁶¹ 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.⁶² Clark Whitten exclaims, "The greatest constraining power against

⁵⁷Wommack, *Living in the Balance of Grace and Faith*, 76: "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." Also, McVey, *Grace Walk*, 73–74.

⁵⁸Whitten, *Pure Grace*, 22. He also writes (20), "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!"

⁵⁹Silva, *Hyper-Grace*, 29.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*

⁶¹Farley, *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."

⁶²Prince, *Unmerited Favor*, 111–12, 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

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.”⁶³

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 in the final section of the paper.

EVALUATIONS AND OBSERVATIONS OF 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.⁶⁴

First, 1 John 1:9 clearly shows that Christians should confess their sins in order to receive forgiveness not for salvation but for fellowship. 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. Furthermore, believers are convicted of sin (John 16:8; 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).⁶⁵

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

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.” Prince, *Destined to Reign*, 224–25, makes a similar argument. Since part of Prince’s argument here is based on how he reads Hebrew syntax, Michael Brown, *Hyper-Grace*, 195–96, shows how wrongly Prince has interpreted Exodus 19:4–6, especially in light of his reference to Hebrew syntax.

⁶³Whitten, *Pure Grace*, 61.

⁶⁴Several critiques of Hyper-Grace have been published by Pentecostal authors. I 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.

⁶⁵Brown, *Hyper-Grace*, 74–80.

believers to bear fruit in persevering faith.⁶⁶ Both elements are so frequent in Scripture I cannot list them all here, but see Philippians 2:12–13 and Jude 21–24 for clear examples.⁶⁷

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; Eph 5:10; 1 Thess 2:4; 4:1).⁶⁸

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).

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). And Christians must fight to defeat sin in their striving for holiness (Heb 12:1, 14).

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).⁶⁹

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.⁷⁰ Like Radical Grace, Hyper-Grace despises any connection to Law and 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,⁷¹ Pentecostals do critique their own. While they certainly do not criticize themselves regarding continuationism and their

⁶⁶Roland McCune, *A Systematic Theology of Biblical Christianity* (3 vols; Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, 2010), 3:181, states, "If it is true that a believer *will* persevere, then it is equally true that he *must* persevere" (emphasis in original).

⁶⁷DeYoung, *Hole in Our Holiness*, 79–91. Defending and explaining this truth is actually the main thesis of this book.

⁶⁸Brown, *Hyper-Grace*, 120–27.

⁶⁹Grizzle, "Hyper-Grace Gospel," 35–47.

⁷⁰While 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.

⁷¹John MacArthur, *Strange Fire: The Danger of Offending the Holy Spirit with Counterfeit Worship* (Nelson Books, 2013), 235, 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

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 the Hyper-Grace proponents.⁷²

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 teachers, the New Apostolic Reformation, and Hyper-Grace. 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.

In these studies on the three antinomian streams in Evangelicalism, I have sought to give historical background and delineation of the beliefs of each, showing how they possess various unique emphases while sharing many similar theological features. My hope is that this effort has encouraged a renewed interest in the doctrine of perseverance so that all true Christians can be challenged to bear spiritual fruit until their ministry on earth is providentially completed.

exposed for its dangers rather than defended.” I suggest that the reason Reformed continuationists have not entered the fray in attacking Hyper-Grace, is that they do not consider themselves part of the Pentecostal club and have instead taken aim at Free Grace and Radical Grace proponents instead.

⁷²See note 64.