

The Hyper-Grace Controversy Part 2

The Mosaic Law

A charge which often comes up when considering the “hyper-grace” controversy has to do with the believer’s relationship to the law of Moses. Hyper-grace teachers are often accused of antinomianism.¹ Both Joseph Prince and Jeremy White have responded to this charge.

Joseph Prince wrote,

One of the things I have been accused of is being an antinomian (someone who is against the law of Moses). The truth is that I have the highest regard for the law ... I am for the law, for the purpose for which God gave the law ... God did not give the law for us to keep. He gave the law to bring man to the end of himself, so that he would see his need for a Savior.²

Jeremy White wrote,

The truth is that we are by no means antinomian (against the law of God), nor do we disbelieve or avoid teaching the Old Testament. Most of us actually esteem the power and purpose of God’s law so highly that we understand grace to be the only way of escape from its impossibly stringent demands.

The truth of the matter is that hyper-grace teachers are not guilty of promoting cheap grace at all. Rather, our critics are often guilty of promoting cheap Law! Far from being anti-law, WE are the ones who esteem God’s Law so highly as to conclude that there is no escape from its condemnation apart from faith in Christ alone! The Law is an all-or-nothing proposition. To stumble in just one aspect of keeping it is the equivalent of breaking all of it (James 2:10). The Law is a ministry of death and condemnation (2 Cor. 3:7-11). The Law is not the bad guy,

¹ Antinomianism comes from a Greek word meaning *against the law* or *lawless*. It is a pejorative term which depicts an opponent as teaching that Christians are under no obligation to obey the laws of ethics or morality. It is often used by legalists who teach that Christians are under obligation to obey the law of Moses as a rule of life. They would refer to anyone opposing their view as being “antinomian.”

² Joseph Prince, *Destined to Reign: The Secret to Effortless Success, Wholeness and Victorious Living*, 22 Media: Singapore, 2007, pp.122-3.

however. It simply points out who the bad guys are (the world, the flesh and the devil)! The Law is holy and pure and designed to show us what sin is (Rom.7:7).

But living under Law cannot save, change or transform a single heart – only grace can! And this is why we are so adamant about never mixing a law-based mentality with a grace-based mentality toward spiritual life or growth under God’s New Covenant. The New Testament repeatedly affirms that our salvation and sanctification are either completely by law or completely by grace but cannot be a result of mixing the two.³

What is the believer’s relationship to the Mosaic law? Are we to live under the law as a rule of life? Some people say, “yes!” For example, the Westminster Confession of Faith states:

Although true believers be not under the law as a covenant of works, to be thereby justified or condemned; yet is it of great use to them, as well as to others; in that, as a rule of life.⁴

Others say, “no!” The Bible scholar William Newell was a champion and defender of the grace of God. He wrote,

“It is a harmful perversion of the truth of God to teach (as did the Puritan theologians) that while we are not to keep the law as a means of salvation, we are under it as a ‘rule of life.’ Let a Christian only confess, ‘I am under the law,’ and straightway Moses fastens his yoke upon him, despite all his protests that the law has lost its power.”⁵

There certainly seems to be a sharp difference of opinion regarding the believer’s relationship to the Mosaic law which was given to Israel. When it comes to issues of law versus grace, there seems to be a distinct contrast between the two sides.

Even the apostle John noted that contrast when he wrote,

³ White, Jeremy. “Why I am Hyper-Grace: Answering Five Common Objections.” Surrendered Image. <http://surrenderedimage.com/Blog/why-i-am-hyper-grace-answering-five-common-objections-32708> (retrieved 6/19/17)

⁴ The Westminster Confession of Faith (1646); Chapter 14.

⁵ Stanford, Miles J. [*Complete Works of Miles J. Stanford*](#). Galaxie Software, 2002. Print.

For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. (John 1:17)

The apostle Paul was on the side of grace-teachers such as William Newell. He wrote in no uncertain terms,

For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace. What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not! (Rom. 6:14-15)

For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. (Rom. 10:4)

Jeremy White sums up the “hyper-grace” position on the law:

Paul taught that the power of sin is the law (1 Cor. 15:56). If a person wants to ensure that they will remain in slavery to life-dominating sin and addiction, one simple way to do that is to live under a law-based mentality. A grace-saturated life, however, frees us from the grip of sin’s mastery over us. Far from being soft on sin, we take sin very seriously. So seriously that we are pointing people unapologetically to the only Source of rescue from it! That Source is not trying harder to be a good person, culturally-espoused self-help tactics or pop-psychology. That Source is Jesus Christ and the grace He alone offers.⁶

Once again, we see an example of “hyper-grace” teachers having a clearer understanding of the truth presented in the Word of God than their opponents.

Progressive Sanctification

Some “hyper-grace” teachers have a mistaken idea about Christian growth. For example, Paul Ellis has problems with the doctrine of “progressive sanctification.” He says that he rejects the idea that sanctification is a “process.” He believes that Christians are holy, and do not become more holy. To support this flawed position, he quotes Bill Gillham who wrote,

⁶ White, Jeremy. “Why I am Hyper-Grace.”

Are Christians a truly holy people, or are we trying to *become* a holy people? ... As an oak sapling grows, it doesn't get "oakier." Oak is oak. It simply *matures into* what it is, a full-grown oak tree.⁷

Ellis adds:

You don't become an oak tree by acting like an oak tree; nor do you become holy by acting holy. Jesus makes you holy. Your part is to mature into what He has already made you. This takes time, but just as a baby never becomes more human as it grows, you will never become more holy as you mature. You simply grow into who God has already made you to be.⁸

Ellis goes on to say that maturity is a process, but he does not see sanctification as being a process. However, sanctification is a theological term for Christian growth. And to grow means to mature.

Ellis is correct in saying that Christians have already been sanctified. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor. 6:11). God's Word tells us that we have been sanctified—past tense. However, scripture also describes sanctification as being present tense as well as future tense.

We read in Hebrews, "For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified" (Heb. 10:14). As we grow in Christ, we are being sanctified—present tense.

Ellis does not seem to be able to reconcile "positional sanctification" (past tense) with "progressive sanctification" (present tense). He reasons that if sanctification occurred in the past then it cannot also be continuing on in the present. So instead he simply describes "progressive sanctification" as being "maturity."

Paul wrote to the believers in Ephesus, "For this is the will of God, your sanctification..." (1 Thes. 4:30). In other words, Paul is saying that God's desire for believers is that they might be sanctified. This cannot mean "positional sanctification" since that already occurred at the time the believer trusted in Christ for salvation.

God's Word also teaches a future tense sanctification. In Ephesians, Paul wrote:

⁷ Bill Gillham, *Lifetime Guarantee*, Harvest House: Eugene, OR, 1993, p.126.

⁸ Ellis, 76.

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify (ἁγιάσῃ) and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy (ἁγία) and without blemish. (Eph. 5:25-27)

Scripture speaks of three aspects of sanctification:

1. Past Tense: Positional Sanctification or Justification.
2. Present Tense: Progressive Sanctification or Experiential Sanctification.
3. Future Tense: Ultimate Sanctification or Glorification.

Yet Ellis says, “Sanctification isn’t a three-step process, it’s a one-step process and Jesus is that step.”⁹

Although Ellis is mistaken regarding progressive sanctification, not all “hyper-grace” teachers agree with him on this point. Joseph Prince says that “true grace does teach progressive sanctification... As believers, we cannot become more righteous, but we can become more sanctified or holy in terms of how we live our lives. ... The more one grows in grace — the more one is washed again and again by the water of the word of God’s grace — the more one grows in sanctification and holiness.”¹⁰

The charge that some “hyper-grace” teachers deny progressive sanctification is true. However, if their opponents teach that believers are under the law as a rule of life, then their concept of how Christian growth (or sanctification) happens is certainly questionable. One side denies the truth of progressive sanctification while the other side perverts the true means of progressive sanctification by putting believers under the law. Peter wrote, “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18). God’s grace is the true means of Christian growth or sanctification—not the law.

Forgiveness of Sins—Past, Present, and Future

Paul Ellis and Joseph Prince teach that God has forgiven all our sins—past, present, future. Dr. Brown strongly disagrees with this point. Regarding Joseph Prince, Dr. Brown wrote:

⁹ Ellis, 44.

¹⁰ Brown, Michael. “Hyper-Grace: Setting the Record Straight With Pastor Joseph Prince.”

Our principle area of disagreement remains his teaching that the moment we are saved, our future sins are already pronounced forgiven (in contrast with the idea that our future sins are paid for but sin is not pronounced forgiven until it is committed and brought to the Lord).¹¹

Since Dr. Brown teaches that true believers can lose their salvation, it follows then that he would have issues with this teaching. If God judicially forgave not only past sins, but also future sins then a person could never lose (or forfeit) their salvation. This is a teaching that Dr. Brown cannot accept. However, the fact is that when Jesus died on the cross all of our sins were still in the future. He did not die for only some of our sins. He died for all of them. The fact is that God's judicial forgiveness covers all our sins—past, present and future.

Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer was another champion and defender of God's grace. He wrote,

Judicial ... forgiveness covers all sin, and by it the sinner is, as to possible condemnation, pardoned forever. This pardon covers all sins past, present, or future. God the Righteous Father will, in infinite faithfulness, correct and chasten His sinning child, and the sinning child will need to confess his sin in order to be restored into fellowship with his Father; but the Father will never condemn His child (John 3:18; 5:24; Rom. 8:1; I Cor. 11:31,32). The forgiveness of God toward the sinner is ... boundless. It contemplates and includes all sin. It forever absolves and acquits the sinner.¹²

From God's judicial standpoint all our sins have been forgiven. Yet, as a child of God we do need to confess our sin so that our fellowship might be restored. This is known as "familial forgiveness." Our legal status as a child of God will never be in jeopardy. But children often misbehave. And in order to restore family relationships, children often need to admit that their actions were wrong.

Dr. Brown claims that "hyper-grace" teachers are against asking for forgiveness. Paul Ellis responded to this charge stating:

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Grace: The Glorious Theme* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1922) 14-15.

It's not wrong to ask God for forgiveness and grace in your hour of need. If asking helps you to receive what God has already provided, have the freedom to ask. What's not okay is telling people that God only forgives them because they ask, confess, repent, or do anything. The Bible teaches that we are forgiven in accordance with the riches of his grace (Eph 1:7), not our asking.¹³

On the one hand, Dr. Brown has allowed his Pentecostal Arminian bias against the doctrine of eternal security to distort his view regarding God's judicial forgiveness of future sins.

But on the other hand, Paul Ellis seems to confuse God's judicial forgiveness with God's familial forgiveness.

Dr. Constable clarifies these different aspects of forgiveness:

There are two types of forgiveness. There is judicial forgiveness that every person experiences when he or she trusts in Christ as Savior (Romans 5:1). God will never condemn us to eternal damnation for our sins if we trust in His Son (Romans 8:1). However, there is also familial forgiveness. This is the forgiveness believers need because they offend God (Matthew 6:12; Matthew 6:14-15; 1 John 1:9). In one sense, therefore, God has forgiven all our sins, but in another sense, we need to confess our sins to receive forgiveness. Judicial forgiveness makes us acceptable to God, but familial forgiveness makes us intimate with God. Judicial forgiveness removes the guilt of sin, and familial forgiveness restores the broken fellowship caused by sin.¹⁴

Ellis says that if asking helps you to receive what God has already provided, then feel free to do so. In other words, if it helps you to feel better about yourself then do it. However, he does not see any real need for believers to confess their sin. Ellis sees confession of sin as being optional, and not really necessary. The apostle John would disagree with Ellis on that.

¹³ Ellis, Paul. "Some Honest Answers for Michael Brown." *Escape To Reality*. <https://escapetoreality.org/2015/01/24/michael-brown-vs-joseph-prince/> (retrieved 6/19/17)

¹⁴ Constable, Thomas. DD. "Commentary on Psalms 51:4". "Expository Notes of Dr. Thomas Constable". <http://www.studylight.org/commentaries/dcc/psalms-51.html>. (retrieved 6/19/17)

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)

To be clear, John is speaking about familial forgiveness and not judicial forgiveness. He is telling us how our fellowship can once again be restored.

Conclusion

Many of those opposed to the teaching of so-called “hyper-grace” have their own doctrinal problems. Often, they are stuck in some form of legalism. Like Dr. Brown, they might come from an Arminian tradition and deny the doctrine of eternal security. They might come from a Reformed-Calvinistic tradition and cast doubts upon the doctrine of assurance of salvation. Or they might teach lordship salvation and pervert the gospel of grace with a message of works.

Some “hyper-grace” teachers have gone off track in some of their views of scripture. But often their views of God’s grace lines up closer to scripture than their opponents who seem to be comfortable in their bondage to the Mosaic law.

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