

The Hyper-Grace Controversy Part 1

Introduction

In January 2014, Dr. Michael L. Brown wrote *Hyper-Grace: Exposing the Dangers of the Modern Grace Message* which was published by Charisma House. In this book, Dr Brown criticized preachers of what he called the “hyper-grace gospel.” He named names, listing a number of Bible teachers—some are well-known, and some are more obscure. In his list of “hyper-grace” preachers Dr. Brown included men such as Joseph Prince¹ as well as Rob Bell.² It did not take long for the blogosphere to jump on Dr. Brown’s bandwagon in condemning this newly discovered “heresy.” Unfortunately, not everything Dr. Brown wrote in his tell-all book was exactly accurate.

In January 2017, Dr. Brown wrote an article for The Christian Post called: *Hyper-Grace: Setting the Record Straight With Pastor Joseph Prince*. Dr. Brown wrote,

On Friday, January 20, while ministering in Singapore, I had the pleasure of spending two-and-a-half hours with Pastor Joseph Prince, delving into the Scriptures in Hebrew and Greek, discussing the points on which we differed, and highlighting the points on which we agreed. Without a doubt, the points on which we agreed far outnumbered and outweighed the points on which we differed.³

Dr. Brown said that when writing his book, he did not reach out to Joseph Prince and apologized for not doing so. In their meeting, Pastor Prince told Dr. Brown his book did not accurately represent his teaching. But what grieved Joseph Prince the most was not that Dr. Brown misrepresented his position when citing him, but rather that he was cited side by side with some others whose views he strongly rejected.

I can certainly see why Joseph Prince would feel this way. When Rob Bell published his book *Love Wins*, he was criticized by a number of prominent Bible scholars such as Albert Mohler, John Piper, and David Platt. Some Bible scholars have even accused Rob

¹ Joseph Prince is pastor of the New Creation Church in Singapore. He has written a number of books on grace as well as other topics.

² Rob Bell is a leader in the emerging church movement and founder of Mars Hill Bible Church in Grandville, Michigan.

³ Brown, Michael. “Hyper-Grace: Setting the Record Straight With Pastor Joseph Prince.” The Christian Post. <http://www.christianpost.com/news/hyper-grace-setting-the-record-straight-with-pastor-joseph-prince-173553> (retrieved 6/17/17).

Bell of teaching “universalism.”⁴ Bell denies being a “universalist” but argues that Christians should leave room for uncertainty on the matter. Dr. Mohler said that *Love Wins* was “theologically disastrous” for not rejecting universalism. Pastor Prince must have been deeply saddened to see Dr. Brown lump his name together with Rob Bell.

In April 2014, Paul Ellis wrote, *The Hyper-Grace Gospel: A Response to Michael Brown and Those Opposed to the Modern Grace Message*. Ellis sees himself as a spokesperson for the “hyper-grace” view. In his book he wrote,

Since I am one of the hyper-grace preachers identified by Dr. Brown, I thought it might be helpful to respond to these accusations.⁵

In order to get a better picture of the “hyper-grace” controversy, we will compare and contrast the accusations of Dr. Michael Brown with the responses of Michael Ellis. We will also look at some of the views of other so-called “hyper-grace” teachers who differ with Ellis on some points of “hyper-grace” doctrine.

Defining Hyper-Grace

Since Dr. Brown seems to be a leading authority on “hyper-grace” it seems like he would be able to define it. Unfortunately, he offers no definition of “hyper-grace” in his book. Paul Ellis observes,

Surprisingly, those who coined the term seldom define it. You would expect that in a book called *Hyper-grace* we might be told what hyper-grace is, but we’re not. Dr. Brown recognizes that the label appeals to some and offends others, so he leaves it up to the reader to decide whether the “modern grace message” is hyper in the good or bad sense of the word (p. xiii).⁶

As you look at various blogs and websites, it seems like people are all over the map with attempting to define “hyper-grace.” Here are a few examples:

- If you believe in the doctrine of “once saved, always saved”, then you are “hyper-grace.”
- If you teach that the believer is not bound by the Old Testament law, then you are “hyper-grace.”

⁴ Universalism is the belief that everyone will be eventually saved. In other words, all people ultimately end up in heaven.

⁵ Paul Ellis, *The Hyper-Grace Gospel* (Birkenhead, New Zealand: KingsPress, 2014): 4.

⁶ Ibid. 9.

- If you are opposed to Lordship Salvation, then you are “hyper-grace.”
- If you are a dispensationalist, then you are “hyper-grace.”

Finding a common definition of “hyper-grace” that is accepted by the majority of scholars is difficult at best. Normally Wikipedia has articles on even the most obscure topics. But they have nothing on “hyper-grace.” You would think that Theopedia would be a better resource. But they have nothing on “hyper-grace” either. It’s no wonder that Dr. Brown does not offer a definition.

The website gotQuestions.org actually tries to define “hyper-grace.” Unfortunately, their definition totally mischaracterizes what so-called “hyper-grace” teachers actually believe.

In order to define “hyper-grace” let’s begin by looking at 9 accusations that opponents have made:

1. Hyper-grace preachers are against repentance.
2. Hyper-grace preachers are against confession.
3. The hyper-grace gospel is universalism in disguise.
4. Hyper-grace preachers say it’s wrong to ask God for forgiveness.
5. Hyper-grace preachers say God is not grieved by your sin.
6. Hyper-grace preachers disregard the words of Jesus.
7. The hyper-grace gospel encourages sin.
8. The hyper-grace gospel discourages obedience and holy living.
9. Hyper-grace preachers don’t talk about hell and wrath.

Of these 9 charges, how many do you think accurately represent the majority of “hyper-grace” teachers? According to Paul Ellis, who claims to represent the “hyper-grace” position, none of these charges are true. But these are the types of accusations made by people such as Dr. Brown and gotQuestions.org.

While there are many mischaracterizations of “hyper-grace” being presented by “hyper-grace” critics, there are some legitimate charges to which Paul Ellis and other “hyper-grace” teachers willingly respond with, “guilty as charged.” Let’s take a look at what they admit to teaching.

Repentance

Those teaching “hyper-grace” have been accused of not believing in repentance. Jeremy White clarifies the “hyper-grace” position:

Not only do we believe in repentance, but we seek to understand and teach it thoroughly and accurately. In the New Testament, “to repent” is a translation of the Greek verb “metanoeo” meaning “to change one’s mind or perspective.” Obviously, when we receive Christ, we have repented in the genuine sense of the term – changing our minds about our need of a Savior and receiving Christ.

Paul affirmed in no uncertain terms that God’s kindness (His expressed grace toward us) is what leads to repentance (Rom. 2:4). Far from being anti-repentance, hyper-grace theology affirms repentance and the ongoing renewal of the mind as an integral part of what it means to follow Jesus under His New Covenant.⁷

In contrast, those who teach lordship salvation say that repentance means turning from sin. They say that repentance is a requirement for salvation, therefore a person must turn from their sin in order to be saved. This is clearly a gospel of works rather than the true gospel of grace.

The “hyper-grace” position says that those teaching lordship salvation are mistaken with regard to their definition of repentance. A number of excellent free grace Bible teachers agree with the “hyper-grace” definition of repentance articulated by Jeremy White.

Dr. Charles Ryrie⁸ wrote:

The only kind of repentance that saves is a change of mind about Jesus Christ. People can weep; people can resolve to turn from their past sins; but those things in themselves cannot save. The only kind of repentance that saves anyone, anywhere, anytime is a change of mind about Jesus Christ. The sense of sin and sorrow because of sin may stir up a person’s mind or conscience so that he or she realizes the need for a Savior, but if there is no change of mind about Jesus Christ there will be no salvation.⁹

Dr. Robert Lightner¹⁰ agrees with Dr. Ryrie:

⁷ White, Jeremy. “Why I am Hyper-Grace”

⁸ Dr. Ryrie was an influential free grace Bible scholar who opposed lordship salvation.

⁹ Charles Ryrie, *So Great Salvation: What It Means to Believe In Jesus Christ* (Wheaton, Illinois: 1989), pp. 94-95

¹⁰ Dr. Lightner is another free grace Bible scholar who opposes lordship salvation.

The word repentance means a change of mind... There is no question about it: repentance is necessary for salvation. However, Scripture views repentance as included in believing and not as an additional and separate condition to faith. All who have trusted Christ as Savior have changed their minds regarding Him and their sin.¹¹

Certainly “hyper-grace” teachers such as Jeremy White are in good company with regard to their definition of repentance.

Eternal Security

Dr. Brown is Pentecostal and as a result he has a problem with eternal security. He does not believe in the doctrine of “once saved, always saved.” However, he does not like to use the phrase “lose your salvation.” He prefers the term “forfeit.” He says, “If you walked away from the Lord, either you were never saved or you have forfeited your salvation...”¹²

As a representative of “hyper-grace” teachers, Paul Ellis opposes the teaching of Dr. Brown that believers can lose (or forfeit) their salvation. Ellis wrote:

He (Dr. Brown) speaks of believers becoming enemies of God (page 79), hints that if the Jews can be cut off you can too (page 152), and on three occasions says the terrifying warnings of Hebrews 10:26–29 apply to Christians (pages 45, 46 and 105). And then on the last page of his book he suggests that if you don’t fly straight but walk away from the Lord you’ll forfeit your salvation (page 251).¹³

Those who are accused of teaching “hyper-grace” believe in the doctrine of eternal security which is also known by the acronym OSAS—“once saved, always saved.” They do not teach that a believer can lose their salvation.

Jesus said,

My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of

¹¹ Robert Lightner, *Sin, The Savior, and Salvation: The Theology of Everlasting Life*. (Nashville, Tennessee: 1991), p. 167

¹² Brown, Michael. “Is It Possible to Lose Your Salvation?” Ask Dr. Brown.

<https://askdrbrown.org/library/it-possible-lose-your-salvation> (retrieved 6/19/17)

¹³ Ellis. 53.

My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand. (John 10:27-29)

The teaching of Jesus regarding eternal security is crystal clear. How long is "eternal"? It is forever and ever and ever and ever... And once you get done with all the "ever's" it still continues on. By definition, eternal life is "eternal." Jesus did not say, "I give them *temporary* life until they mess up so bad that My Father will kick them out of His family."

On this point, "hyper-grace" teachers oppose Dr. Brown and correctly align themselves with the teaching of the Word of God.

Assurance of Salvation

A doctrine related to "eternal security" is "assurance of salvation." Some people say that you can never be 100% sure that you will be saved. They say that the "elect" will persevere in their faith and will be ultimately saved. But no one can be 100% sure that they are one of the elect. They say that if a person sins too much then that proves that they were never a "true" believer.

However, the idea that you can never know for sure if you are saved does not agree with the clear teaching of God's Word. The apostle John wrote,

And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God. (1 John 5:11-13)

John tells us that it is possible to know that we have eternal life.

In his book, *The Gospel Uncut*, Jeremy White wrote,

Among the many who espouse LS [lordship salvation], there is a general tendency to downplay the importance of our need for assurance of salvation. While I cannot pretend to speak for every one of them, this downplaying is often founded on the bizarre notion that a certain amount of insecurity may actually be beneficial in a

believer's life, at least for keeping the rebellious behaviors of some people in check.

By contrast, most who believe in the uncut gospel would affirm that assurance of salvation is not only possible, but essential for healthy spiritual growth to occur in our lives!¹⁴

Those who teach “hyper-grace” also teach assurance of salvation. On this point, “hyper-grace” teachers also correctly align themselves with the teaching of the Word of God.

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¹⁴ Jeremy White, *The Gospel Uncut: Learning to Rest in the Grace of God* (Bloomington, IN: 2012), p. 74.