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## **Hyper-Grace and the Gospel (2)** **Titus 2:11-14**

Today is the second and final message on the subject of what has come to be known as Hyper-Grace. As I indicated to you last week, I'm taking up this topic because, to use the words of J. I. Packer, I take seriously my responsibility as Bridgeway's "sewage specialist" (*Hot Tub Religion*, 13). Pastors, says Packer, by their preaching and teaching, are "disposers of spiritual sewage."

That is not all they do. If it were, I'd quit today. I don't take much delight in delivering sermons like this. I'd much rather focus on what is right in the body of Christ than to take time to identify and bring correction to what is wrong. But we can't afford to ignore error and false teaching when it appears. So, as much as I might prefer to ignore this subject, I can't. As Packer explains, my task last week and again today is "to test the water and filter out anything" that "confuses minds, corrupts judgments, and distorts the way that Christians view their own lives."

I don't want to repeat what I said last week, so let me be ever so brief in reminding you of what many advocates of so-called Hyper-Grace are saying. They believe that to focus on the urgency of obedience to God's revealed will in Scripture has the potential to undermine confidence in the finality and sufficiency of God's grace as found in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. They are so much in fear of the danger posed by religion and legalism that they have failed to acknowledge how crucial it is that we passionately pursue holiness of life on a daily basis. Therefore, they argue that God requires nothing of us other than that we receive and rely upon his grace.

There is nothing to be gained by our obedience or lost by our disobedience. We are always pleasing to God and should therefore stop striving to please him in how we live. Because Jesus has already dealt with our sin and brought us complete forgiveness, the Holy Spirit will never "convict" us of our failures and transgressions. We need never ask for forgiveness of our sins, and God will never discipline us with physical weakness because of our lack of repentance. And when we do repent, it only means that we must change our beliefs about our sin, but not necessarily our behavior.

That in a nutshell is Hyper-Grace. Not all who embrace Hyper-Grace would endorse each of these points, but they do characterize the movement as a whole.

Last week I argued that we can dispel the confusion about this issue if only we would recognize and embrace the distinction between *our eternal union with God*, on the one hand, and *our experiential communion with God*, on the other. Our eternal union is our standing, our unchanging status as God's children, forever forgiven and justified and redeemed by the blood of Christ. Our union with God is eternal in that it never changes. We cannot improve upon it or diminish it by anything we do or fail to do.

Our experiential communion, on the other hand, is always subject to change. It can increase or decrease. It can deepen and intensify through our grace-empowered obedience, just as it can diminish and suffer loss through our sinful and unrepentant disobedience. The key is in the difference between "union" and "communion". Our communion with God refers to what we experience of him day in and day out; our capacity to enjoy him and feel his presence and experience his empowering grace. *Sin can undermine our communion with Christ, but not our union with him.* Our eternal union means that we are always "in Christ". Our experiential communion means that our ability to delight in that union fluctuates; it grows; it increases and it decreases, all depending on our behavior and obedience.

*Hebrews 10:14*

Let's look at one text in Hebrews that clearly illustrates this distinction. We read in Hebrews 10:14,

*"For by a single offering he [Jesus] has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified"*  
(*Heb. 10:14*).

This is a remarkable and extremely important passage. I want to draw your attention to something that most people ignore or fail to see. This is you, Christian. He's talking about you. And he says that Christ "has perfected (you) for all time." Don't overlook the past tense. Something has happened to you through faith in Jesus that is foundational to your Christian identity and life. You "have been perfected"! It is accomplished, finished, and complete, and nothing can add to it or detract from it. And notice this is "for all time"! This "perfection" refers to your eternal union with God in Christ.

This doesn't mean you will never again sin or make mistakes or forget where you left your car keys. It doesn't mean you will never lose your temper when someone cuts you off on Broadway Extension or that you will never look upon someone with lust or envy those who have something you lack. Rather, *the "perfection" that he has in view is the forgiveness of sins*. You are "perfect" in the sense that God has forgiven all your sins and declared you righteous in his sight, and thus qualified you for acceptance in his presence. And that will never change. This is confirmed just three verses later where our author quotes the words of God himself who tells us about the blessings of the New Covenant: *"I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more"* (Heb. 10:17).

*So, how do we know that the "perfection" here in v. 14a is not sinless perfection, as if to suggest that when we embrace God's grace and believe in Jesus we cease forever to sin?* We know it because of v. 14b. There we read that *those who are "perfected" "are being sanctified."* Notice the change in tense. We *have been* perfected in the past. It is accomplished and complete. That is our eternal union. But we *are being* sanctified in the present. That is our experiential communion. If we are still in need of daily sanctification we obviously are not yet free from sin.

This is more than a little shocking when you stop to think about it. Martin Luther, the great 16<sup>th</sup> century Protestant Reformer, would often describe Christians with the Latin phrase, *simul iustus et peccator*: "simultaneously righteous/just and a sinner." We are those who have been "perfected" in that our sins are finally and forever forgiven at the same time that we battle with sin and are gradually and progressively being made more and more like Jesus in personal experience.

*We are in our eternal union with God in Christ already perfect in his sight. However, when it comes to our experiential communion with Christ we are still in process of attaining perfection. Our eternal union is an unchanging finished fact of spiritual reality. Our experiential communion is an always-changing, on-going project in which the grace of God, working through the Spirit of God, brings us progressively more and more into the image of Jesus.*

#### *The Indicative and Imperative of Christian Living*

Another helpful way of describing this dual reality is with the words *indicative* and *imperative*. The "*indicative*" of your salvation refers to what is true of you in your eternal union with Christ. The indicative means *a statement of fact*. To say, "You are justified" is an indicative assertion. The indicative must be distinguished from the "*imperative*" of Christianity. The "*imperative*" refers to *the exhortations and commands and imperatives of the Bible*. Whereas the indicative points to what "is" true, the imperative points to what "should" be or "ought" to be true.

The indicative is thus the foundation and motivation for the imperative. Why should you behave in a holy manner? Because you already are holy, having been justified by faith in Christ. Why should you respond to God as a child does his father? Because you are already adopted as a child into his spiritual family. What we do in our obedience is the fruit of what God has already graciously done in saving us.

Don't ever think that by obeying the imperatives of the Bible you enhance or increase or intensify the truth of the indicative. Rather, as you reflect on and ponder the indicative, you find strength and motivation to obey the imperatives.

There is an entire book of the NT that is built on this dual reality. In the first three chapters of Ephesians Paul talks primarily about the indicative, about the truths of what God has finally and forever accomplished for us by his grace. He talks about such things as our having been chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4), of our being adopted as sons and daughters (Eph. 1:5), of our being redeemed through Christ's blood (Eph. 1:7), of our being forgiven (Eph. 1:7). In chapter two Paul says "by grace you have been saved" through faith (Eph. 2:5, 8).

That is the indicative. That is our “eternal union” with our Triune God. But Paul then turns in chapter four to describe the “imperative”. He opens the chapter by saying, “Therefore”! That is to say, on the basis of and because of your position in Christ, because of what God has done for you in grace, because of the indicative truths of your salvation, “I . . . urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called” (Eph. 4:1). This is the “experiential” dimension to our Christian lives. Paul says it involves such things as being humble and gentle and patient and loving (Eph. 4:2). He later urges us to stop lying to one another. He says to stop stealing and to put away bitterness and anger and slander. He urges us to forgive one another and to avoid sexual immorality.

These imperatives or commands in Ephesians 4-6 are the fruit of the indicative of salvation. ***Because we are “eternally” united by grace to Christ we must “experientially” live in a way that honors him. The experiential doesn’t cause or contribute to the eternal. Rather, the truth of the eternal causes and contributes to the experiential.***

All this is what makes so remarkable what one hyper-grace author has said. The Bible, he tells us, nowhere teaches the doctrine of progressive sanctification of the believer. To his credit, this author clearly recognizes what theologians refer to as definitive sanctification or positional sanctification, the truth that we have been set apart or consecrated unto God and are now and forever more his personal, prized possession. But it is that truth that gives energy and incentive to us in the pursuit of progressive transformation by God’s empowering grace. Yet he goes on to say this:

“If you will accept the reality that you are fully sanctified and wholly acceptable to God without sin attached to you, a remarkable thing will slowly begin to happen. You begin to be transformed through the renewing of your mind into the image of God. Love begins to govern your life, love for God, love for yourself, and love for others. You begin to become who you were created to be. That is the power of the New Covenant at work in you.”

Note well: this “remarkable thing” that “will slowly begin to happen” **is** progressive sanctification! This beginning to be “transformed” **is** progressive sanctification! This “renewing of your mind” into the image of God **is** progressive sanctification! The gradual governing of your life by love and this beginning to “become” who you were created to be **is** progressive sanctification! Yet he goes on to say:

“The old religious approach of ‘I *am* justified, I *am being* sanctified, and I *will be* glorified’ is a lie. It is religious nonsense.”

Really? That’s hardly an “old religious approach.” It is entirely a *biblical* approach! Consider what Paul writes in 1 Thessalonians 4:3 – “For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality,” after which Paul gives specific instructions for how we are to live, closing this with, “For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness. Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you.”

This advocate of hyper-grace evidently thinks that by *progressive sanctification* we mean working or obeying or doing good deeds *in the power of our own flesh in order to win favor with God*. The fact is we mean that on the basis and in the strength of God’s grace alone, by faith we work and obey. We do not do so in order to be saved. We do not obey in order to win God’s love. We obey *because* we are loved. We obey by grace through faith.

The question we now need to ask and answer today is: *Does the NT teach this distinction between eternal union and experiential communion?* But before we do that, let me take a minute and say a few words about Titus 2:11-14 and what it says about the nature and purpose of God’s grace to us in Jesus Christ.

#### *The Epiphany of Grace and Glory*

This passage in Titus 2, perhaps more so than any other text in the Bible, describes for us ***the relationship between our faith in Jesus Christ and the works of obedience we do once we have come to know him in a saving way.*** You’ve heard me on numerous occasions say this, but it must be said again and again:

Good works are not the cause or the ground of our salvation but rather its purpose and goal. Salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. But this wonderful saving faith is never alone, but is always accompanied by obedience and the fruit of the Spirit, the very works that God ordained from eternity past that we should walk or live in them.

Let me illustrate this by appealing to the life of Protestant Reformer Martin Luther.

Luther was accused during his life of a multitude of sins. He was accused of being anti-Semitic and of being a drunkard (he said he would just as soon be baptized in German beer as in water). The Roman Catholic Church in his day insisted that he was sexually obsessed because he advocated marriage for priests and eventually himself married Katherine Von Bora. But of all the charges brought against Luther, the one he regarded as the most horrid and scurrilous, was that he advocated licentiousness or antinomianism. As an outspoken advocate of the sovereign saving grace of Jesus Christ that is received by faith alone Luther was accused of espousing a less than casual approach to personal holiness. It was a baseless charge. Consider his comments in his Preface to his Commentary on Romans:

“O, this faith is a living, busy, active, powerful thing! It is impossible that it should not be ceaselessly doing that which is good. It does not even ask whether good works should be done; but before the question can be asked, it has done them, and it is constantly engaged in doing them. But he who does not do such works is a man without faith.”

On this and countless other occasions Luther insisted that the grace of God in Jesus Christ that secured for us the forgiveness of sins, that grace which leads to our justification by faith alone, is a grace that necessarily energizes and encourages and sustains a life of obedience and holiness.

Now let's look briefly at how Paul unpacks this in Titus 2:11-14.

It is clear that Paul envisioned this church age in which we live as governed by *two epiphanies*, two “appearings” of Jesus Christ. The first one was characterized by *grace* and the second one will be known for *glory*.

Our concern today is with the first epiphany, the first appearing of Jesus Christ when he came to make salvation available to all people. This is unmistakable from what Paul says in v. 11. In other words, God sent his Son to manifest or disclose *the grace that brings us into eternal union with himself*. The “salvation” referred to here is our new birth, our justification by faith, our reconciliation to God, our adoption into his family as sons and daughters. This is the “eternal union” of which I've been speaking.

But note closely that *God's grace does not merely save, it also sanctifies*. In other words, God's grace not only establishes an eternal union between us and God but also sets in motion a process of progressive moral transformation by which we are changed ever more into the likeness of Jesus.

Paul makes this clear by his use of the word “training” in v. 12. He *personifies* God's grace and portrays it as if it were a classroom instructor, a professor, a mentor who gives counsel to a person in how to live in a godly way to the glory of God. So, God's grace instructs us; it teaches us; it chastens and counsels and comforts and encourages and guides us as we grow in conformity to the image of Christ. That is why anyone who even remotely suggests that God's grace releases us from obedience to God has no idea what he's talking about. God's grace is our professor, our trainer, sent by God in Christ to enable us to “renounce ungodliness and worldly passions and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives” (v. 12).

And if that isn't enough to convince you that the purpose of God's grace is not merely to establish our eternal union with him but also to energize and sustain our experiential communion as we live in obedience to his revealed will, look at v. 14. The explicit purpose of Christ's death was to redeem us “from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.”

*To be “zealous for good works” is not legalism.* To be zealous for good works does not undermine the grace by which we have been saved. Rather, that is its very purpose! The grace that established our eternal union with God continues to work within us to empower our lives such that we might grow and deepen in our experiential communion with him.

If you are *not* zealous for good works, if you do *not* turn away from lawless living, if you do *not* have a passion for purity of life, one can only wonder if you a true member of Christ's “people” whom he redeemed for himself.

### *Eternal Union and Experiential Communion*

Every time the NT authors talk about our justification by faith in Christ they are referring to our eternal union. Every time they speak of our sins having been forever and finally forgiven, that too is a reference to our eternal union. When the Bible speaks of our having been redeemed and reconciled to God, or when it speaks of believers being “in Christ” or seated with him in heavenly places, that is our eternal union. When the Bible tells us that if we are in Christ we will never suffer God’s wrath and that there is no longer any condemnation for the guilt incurred by our sin: that is our eternal union.

Likewise, every time the Bible describes the peace that is available to us or the joy that we can feel in our hearts: that is our experiential communion. When the Bible talks about the importance of fearing God and finding satisfaction in all that he is for us in Jesus, it has in view our experiential communion. When the NT authors tell us to repent, lest we fall under God’s loving discipline, they are talking about our experiential communion. When James tells us to be humble because God resists those who are proud, or when Paul prays that we would be strengthened in the inner being so that Christ might dwell in our hearts through faith in such a way that we feel ever more powerfully the love that God has for us in Jesus, that is our experiential communion. I could go on and on in describing this distinction, but I trust you get my point. So let’s look now at just a couple of texts that make this very clear.

#### *John 13:5-11*

This distinction between eternal union and experiential communion or *the distinction between, on the one hand, having been once-for-all-time cleansed of the guilt and stain of sin and, on the other hand, the need for daily, progressive cleansing from sins committed* is clearly seen in something that took place in the upper room on the night before Jesus was betrayed.

As Jesus proceeded to wash the feet of his disciples, he finally came around to Peter, who protested: “Lord, do you wash my feet? . . . You shall never wash my feet.” Jesus answered him and said: “If I do not wash you, you have no share with me.” To which Peter said, in response: “Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!” Then Jesus said something profoundly important: “The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you.” Of course, in saying that, he was speaking of Judas Iscariot.

Judas Iscariot is not “clean” but the other eleven disciples are. In saying to the eleven, “you are clean” (John 13:10), Jesus is saying, “Your sins have been forgiven. Your guilt has been washed away. You are born again. You have eternal life and have become the sons of God. You are saved!” Only Judas is excluded from this cleansing. On the other hand, “You Peter, and the others also, are clean because you are saved and forgiven. You have been washed and therefore, to use the words of v. 8, have a ‘share with me,’ that is to say, you are in eternal union with me; you are in a relationship with me that will last forever.”

However, says Jesus, even though you have this eternal union with me, even though you “share with me” in a relationship of love and righteousness that will carry you safely into eternity, *you still need to have your feet washed*. Why?

The reason you need to have your feet washed, perhaps even on a daily basis, is that although you are in eternal union with me you still have to walk the streets of this dirty, sinful, fallen world. And your feet are going to get dusty, dirty, and muddy from the sins you will still commit. Your experiential, daily communion with me can be disrupted and damaged by the dirt of sin that comes from living in a fallen world with the principle of sin still present in your soul.

*You only need to be washed once. Once you are truly washed clean by faith in me, born again and justified and declared righteous in my Father’s sight, you never need to bathe again.* Notice: “The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean” (v. 10). *The bath you have taken through faith in me has forever and finally cleansed you of all guilt that might bring you under God’s wrath and lead to condemnation.* But just because you are completely clean and now have eternal union with God *does not mean your feet won’t ever get dirty. Thus the repeated washing of the feet symbolizes the need for daily confession of our sins, daily repentance from our sin, and turning to Jesus again and again for the experiential application to our hearts of what he accomplished at the cross.*

If we want to “experience” the nearness of Jesus in new and fresh ways, if we want to enjoy fully the blessings of our eternal union with him, if we want to live in the peace and hope and satisfaction that he has died to bring us, we will need to continually keep our feet clean! There are daily sins that call for daily cleansing. And this cleansing comes about only when we respond to the convicting work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, confess honestly and openly how we have failed, and trust in the faithfulness and righteousness of God to forgive us.

#### *James 4:8*

In James 4:8 we are commanded to “cleanse” our hands and to “purify” our hearts. “Hands” and “hearts” here refer respectively to our deeds and our thoughts or affections. That is to say, James has in mind the need for repentance both in terms of our external behavior and the internal attitude that leads to it.

Let’s not lose sight of the context. James probably has in view those particular sins that he’s just noted in vv. 1-6 – quarrels, fights, covetousness, friendship with the world, etc. So his point is that if you desire to draw near to God and enjoy the depths of his intimacy and love you must confess and repent from the sins of both the “hand” and the “heart”. His description of them as “double-minded” is likely a reference to their delusion that it was possible for a Christian to be simultaneously both a “friend” of the world and a friend of God. This is a conflict of allegiance that our jealous God will not tolerate.

But wait a minute! I thought we had *already* been cleansed by the blood of Christ. I thought our hearts had *already* been purified. Isn’t that what we learned in Hebrews 10:22? There we are told to “draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.”

Yes, of course. ***But there is a difference between the once-for-all-time cleansing or purification that comes when we first put our faith in Jesus and the on-going, daily, experiential cleansing that comes when we fall into sin in the course of routine life.*** In other words, ***there is a difference between the unchanging finality of our eternal union with Christ and the always changing development of our experiential communion with him.***

If you have trusted Christ as Lord and Savior you have had the righteousness of Jesus himself imputed or reckoned to you. You are in that sense perfectly clean and pure. We call this ***justification***. But experientially, as we live each day and wage war against the power of our fallen flesh, we stand in need of regular cleansing and purification. We call this ***sanctification***. And it is sanctification that James has in mind in this exhortation.

#### *Forgiven and Forgiving*

In light of what we’ve seen in John 13 and James 4, and what we could have seen in other texts as well, in what sense do we ask God to “forgive” us for sins we’ve committed when he has already “forgiven” us for all sins when we first came to faith in Jesus?

The forgiveness we receive when we first put our trust in Christ removes the guilt that would bring condemnation and God’s wrath. The guilt of those sins and the penalty they would otherwise require has been placed on Christ and he endured God’s judgment for us. So that forgiveness occurs only once and removes all barriers between us and God. ***That forgiveness cannot be repeated. That forgiveness cannot be rescinded or lost and it cannot be added to or improved upon.***

So when we ask for forgiveness for sins committed during the course of daily life we are not asking that God do once again what he has already done once for all time. That would be absurd and altogether unnecessary. Rather, we are asking that God would remove all barriers to our ability to rejoice in our relationship with him. We are asking that God renew and refresh our experiential communion with him that our sin had disrupted. We are asking that God not look upon our sin as a reason to withhold from us the capacity to delight in him and to rest satisfied in his peace and comfort and abiding presence. We are asking that God’s fatherly displeasure be replaced by his approval and affirmation.

We are not asking for God to love us. He already does and always will. What we are asking is that ***the obstacles to experiencing and feeling and sensing and living in the warmth of that love, obstacles that we erected when we***

***sinned and failed to repent, be removed and that God once again quicken our hearts to rejoice with “joy inexpressible and full of glory” (1 Peter 1:8).***

Consider all this in the light of Ephesians 4:30 where Paul urges us to avoid unrepentant sin lest we “grieve” the Holy Spirit. To “grieve” the Spirit is to displease him. When he is grieved by our sin we undermine his ministry in our hearts to provide us with a sense of God’s presence and the joy of mutual intimacy. When we confess, repent, and seek forgiveness for the sins that grieve him we are asking that the spiritually debilitating effects of our behavior be removed. The condemning guilt of such sins has already been wiped away and forgiven. But the experientially disruptive and defiling effects of such sin must now also be cleansed from our hearts so that we might once again enjoy his abiding presence.

Concluding thoughts . . .