

Feature Article: JAF5362

JOSEPH PRINCE: UNMERITED FAVOR

by Warren Nozaki

This article first appeared in CHRISTIAN RESEARCH JOURNAL, volume 36, number 02 (2013). For further information or to subscribe to the CHRISTIAN RESEARCH JOURNAL go to: <http://www.equip.org/christian-research-journal/>

Joseph Prince, senior pastor of New Creation Church Singapore, purports that in 1997 he received “a commission from God to preach grace even more radically.”¹ During a vacation in the Swiss Alps, God allegedly told him, “Son, you are not preaching grace...You attempt to balance grace with law... and the moment you balance grace, you neutralize it...If you don’t preach grace radically, people’s lives will never be radically blessed and radically transformed.” He obeyed the voice and his church grew exponentially.² Today, Prince’s ministry has a global presence through the *Destined to Reign* television broadcast, books, videos, and speaking engagements. Did Prince receive a message from the Lord? On closer examination, one finds his message of grace is a twisted mix of truth and error.

PRINCE’S PROSPERITY GOSPEL

Much of Prince’s teaching is a repackaging of concepts from the Word of Faith movement.³ He writes, “I give thanks to God for my roots in the Word of Faith teachings. It is truly on the shoulders of great men of God like Brother Kenneth E. Hagin that we are able to see further into the Word of God today.”⁴ Just as Hagin taught “what the individual says, that shall he receive,”⁵ so Prince recapitulates, “God says to you, you have an edge, your edge is your mouth. You are righteous by faith, so speak. God’s favor is all over my business...whatever I do prospers!”⁶ Now Prince admits, “I would preach, ‘The reason you are sick is that there is something wrong with you,’” until one day God supposedly told him, “Stop disqualifying My people! My blood has already qualified them.”⁷

Nevertheless he has not completely reformed from his old ways. For example, he still thinks poor and sick believers cannot bless anyone, and maintains, “Religion will tell you that ‘God’ wants you sick to teach you character and patience. Religion will tell you that ‘God’ wants you poor, so that you will learn humility. It sounds noble, doesn’t it? But these are LIES from the pit of hell!”⁸

Prince also uses the Word of Faith tactic of twisting Scripture to buttress the claim that God guarantees unlimited health and wealth this side of eternity. He teaches,

for example, that Isaiah 53:5 means, "Sickness and diseases are not from God. On the cross, Jesus bore not just our sins, but also our sicknesses, diseases and infirmities, and 'by His stripes we are healed!'"⁹ Isaiah 53:5, however, speaks of spiritual healing, as Peter makes clear, when he writes that Christ "bore our sins on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness, for by His wounds you were healed" (1 Pet. 2:25).¹⁰

Prince likewise teaches that 2 Corinthians 8:9 means, "On the cross, Jesus bore the curse of poverty!"¹¹ However, this passage is not teaching Christians are guaranteed wealth; instead, Paul is encouraging Corinthians to be generous, as the other churches of Macedonia were generous despite their poverty (2 Cor. 8:1–6). The Christian is not promised perfect health and unlimited wealth this side of eternity. God promises incorruptible riches instead, including peace that surpasses all understanding and knowledge of Christ and the power of His resurrection (Matt. 6:19–21; Phil. 3:8–11; 4:6–7).

PRINCE'S ANTINOMIANISM

Nothing in Prince's teachings suggests that the Law, such as the Ten Commandments, has a practical use for the Christian life beyond conversion. He writes, "God gave the law for one purpose, and that is by the law, the world would have the knowledge of sin, and recognize their Savior."¹²

According to Prince, God wrote the Ten Commandments on two tablets of stone and the Devil "armed himself with the law to accuse and condemn man" (emphasis in original), but "when God nailed the law to the cross, He made a public spectacle of the devil and all the powers of darkness." After the cross "the law no longer had the power to condemn man as long as he believed on Jesus."¹³ "If you insist on being under the law," warns Prince, "you are actually arming the devil again"¹⁴ and "the devil is the one using the law to bring about death and condemnation and to put believers under oppression!"¹⁵

Prince makes the qualification, "**Anyone who is living in sin is not under grace** and has not experienced the gift of no condemnation";¹⁶ however, he rejects distinguishing between the ceremonial laws as no longer binding from the Ten Commandments or enduring universal moral law as still relevant for believers.¹⁷ It is in his understanding that "while God's law is holy, just and good, it was not meant for man to keep. Man has no ability to keep it."¹⁸ He goes so far as to say, "**The law is not for you the believer**, who has been made righteous in Christ! The law is not applicable to someone who is under the new covenant of grace" (emphasis in original).¹⁹

Prince finds the believer is unable to have "a relationship with the law," that is "with two cold tablets of stone," but only "a living relationship with Jesus," who "will put His laws upon our minds and write them on our hearts, causing us to walk in His ways that lead to life."²⁰

Prince's teaching on the Law is essentially a variety of antinomianism. It is the idea that "though the moral law can and does lead one to repentance, it has no relevance to the life of the repentant believer afterward."²¹

Now Prince rejects the charge of antinomianism, saying, “I have been accused of being...an antinomian (someone who is against the law of Moses). The truth is that I have the **highest regard for the law**” (emphasis in original).²² The problem, however, is that antinomianism is more than being “against the law of Moses.” The Law’s purpose is threefold: it restrains sin and promotes righteousness in society, it leads people to the conviction of sin and tutors them to Christ, and it serves as an ethical rule of life for believers.²³ It is, therefore, the rejection of the third use of the law that makes Prince guilty of antinomianism.

PRINCE’S REJECTION OF CONFESSION

Prince’s unbiblical view of grace leads him to reject the Christian practice of confessing sin. He writes, “In that very instance when you prayed the prayer of salvation **all** the sins that you would commit for your entire life were forgiven once and for all....Let me say this plainly: You do not need to confess your sins again and again to be forgiven” (emphasis in original).²⁴ He reasons Paul did not write about confessing sins,²⁵ and 1 John 1:9 does not apply to Christians but to Gnostics who did not believe sin existed.²⁶

Christ’s death is sufficient for making atonement for all the sins of the repentant, but when Christians stumble, confession of sin is the norm. James instructs believers to “confess your sins to one another” (James 1:16; cf. Luke 11:4).

Paul may not have explicitly given instructions to confess sin, but he does not condemn the practice. In fact, the statement, “If anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness” (Gal. 6:1) implies the fallen brother’s confession.

The idea that 1 John 1:9 applies to Gnostics but not to Christians has no basis in reality. Rather than denying sin’s existence, Gnostics believed matter is evil.²⁷ Moreover, 1 John 1 is not addressing a Gnostic error, but broadly defining darkness and light. Those in darkness say they have no sin (v. 8), but those in light confess their sin (v. 9). The idea is this: “The proper Christian attitude to sin is not to deny it but to admit it, and then to receive the forgiveness which God has made possible and promises to us.”²⁸

Joseph Prince is savvy about the errors of the prosperity gospel and antinomianism, and he even makes unambiguous statements denouncing them; nevertheless, he still continues to teach the same errors only under a different light. Compounding the problem is his rejection of Christian confession. In this sense, his distorted grace message is to be rejected.

Warren Nozaki is a researcher at the Christian Research Institute.

NOTES

- 1 New Creation Church, “History,” <http://www.newcreation.org.sg/about-us/history>.
- 2 Joseph Prince, *Destined to Reign: The Secret to Effortless Success, Wholeness, and Victorious Living* (Tulsa, OK: Harrison House Publisher, 2007), viii.
- 3 For a full-orbed treatment of the Word of Faith movement, see Hank Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis 21st Century* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2009).

- 4 Prince, *Destined to Reign*, 271.
- 5 Kenneth Hagin, *How to Write Your Own Ticket with God* (Tulsa: Kenneth Hagin Ministries, 1979), 6.
- 6 Joseph Prince, Christian Television Network, November 18, 2009.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Joseph Prince, *Unmerited Favor: Your Supernatural Advantage for a Successful Life* (Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 2010), 30.
- 9 Prince, *Unmerited Favor*, 29.
- 10 All Scripture quotations are from the New American Standard Bible.
- 11 Prince, *Unmerited Favor*, 29.
- 12 Prince, *Destined to Reign*, 16.
- 13 Ibid, 15.
- 14 Ibid, 16.
- 15 Ibid., 121.
- 16 Ibid., 166.
- 17 Ibid., 118.
- 18 Ibid., 125.
- 19 Prince, *Unmerited Favor*, 100.
- 20 Ibid., 38; cf. Prince, *Destined to Reign*, 12.
- 21 Terry Miethe, *The Compact Dictionary of Doctrinal Words* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1988), 30.
- 22 Prince, *Destined to Reign*, 122.
- 23 See Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1938), 614–15.
- 24 Prince, *Unmerited Favor*, 191.
- 25 Ibid. 186–87.
- 26 Ibid., 189.
- 27 Miethe, 98.
- 28 John Stott, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, vol. 19 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2000), 82.