

Bridge-Building or Compromising with Heresy?

In response to my article on my meeting with Pastor Joseph Prince, I was flooded with words of support and encouragement, commending us for getting together. Others were quite critical, posting comments like this: "I am so disappointed! Why are you cozying up to that cheap grace teacher Prince? Why?" (I imagine Pastor Prince heard from critics who were upset that he met with me, perhaps branding me a legalist or worse.)

An old friend wrote to me after reading the article and said, "it's so clear that God has put an anointing and even a mantle on your life to be a bridge-builder." Conversely, another old friend of mine was challenged by a supposed spiritual watchdog website (which I will not publicize here), urging him to confront me on my embrace of allegedly heretical preachers.

The comments on my Facebook page reflected polar perspectives as well, including posts like this, on the positive side: "As a Pentecostal/Charismatic Pastor I have to say that I was blessed by your article on your meeting with Pastor Prince. It was an amazing story of what can happen when we get together and share our hearts with each other." And, conversely, on the negative, posts like this: "The church cannot function properly in the context of the social issues we face today with people like Joseph Prince in its midst. He's a false teacher, and, as Paul did with false teachers in the New Testament, we need to place him outside godly fellowship if or until God grants him true repentance."

So, which is it? Was my meeting with Joseph Prince an act of godly bridge-building, for the glory of Jesus and the edification of His people, or was it an act of compromise?

When I wrote *Hyper-Grace*, I emphasized “that those I’m differing with in this book are brothers and sisters in the Lord—at least, to the best of my knowledge—and with rare exception, I find much in their writings and messages that thrills my soul and blesses me deeply. Often, as I would be reading their books, I would be shouting amen on one page, only to groan on the next page as a verse was misused or a key truth overlooked or a falsehood stated as if it were true.”

When I mentioned Pastor Prince’s book *Unmerited Favor*, I said that, “I found much in his book that was excellent.” I also stated that, “He writes like a man who knows the Lord and has experienced God’s goodness, like a man who takes delight in God’s Word and who knows what it is to worship and love Jesus.” And I affirmed that “My heart resonated with much of what he wrote.”

So, even while expressing my strong differences with a number of Pastor Prince’s positions, I did so recognizing him as a brother who loved the Lord and who had many good things to say. On the flip side, Pastor Prince always recognized me as a brother in the Lord.

This, then, begs the question: How can it possibly be wrong for two well-known leaders to sit face to face, in humility and respect, and discuss their theological differences? How can this be compromise (on either side), especially if we agree on the essentials of the faith?

To be perfectly clear, the last thing I’m looking for is human approval. (If you know me at all, that’s self-evident.) Rather, I write this to help other believers (and especially leaders) who have differences to follow our lead and sit face to face for dialogue and discussion.

Perhaps, when you meet with that brother or sister, your views will be closer than you realize, or perhaps you’ll discover there are some serious misunderstandings between you. Or maybe

one of you can help the other see the light, or maybe one of you needs to be warned about major error.

This much is sure: It is better to come together with humble and open hearts before the Lord, talking face-to-face, than to ignore each other or attack each other from a distance.

If Pastor Prince does have some serious errors in his teaching, I'm now in a position to help him directly. Conversely, if I have some serious errors in my teaching, he's now in a position to help me directly. Again I ask, how can this be wrong before the Lord?

Ironically, some of those who criticized me for meeting with Pastor Prince and posting my article (which, again, was edited by him until we came to agreement on the final text) belong to camps whose leadership refuses to meet with me to have theological dialogue.

Not only so, but some of those attacking me for interacting with Pastor Prince hide behind anonymous websites and identities, so we have no idea who we're dealing with, no idea of whom they're submitted to (or with whom they're connected in the Body), no idea of their own spiritual and moral history.

As one who loves truth and has sought to confront error for decades, I find this anonymous, self-appointed spiritual policing to do more harm than good.

Some readers will say to me, "We have no issue with you getting together with Joseph Prince. We take issue with you embracing him as a brother and proclaiming your areas of agreement. That's where you're deceived."

The fact is that he is a brother, he does love the Lord, he is a serious student of the Word, he does have a burden for the lost, and he truly wants to confront counterfeit grace. (Note carefully that I chose the term "hyper-grace" in writing my

book rather than “counterfeit grace,” since I never believed that Joseph Prince or most of the leaders I critiqued in my book taught “counterfeit grace.” I also chose the term because some of those I identified as hyper-grace preachers embraced the term, saying, “Yes, God’s grace is hyper!”)

In *Hyper-Grace*, I wrote, “Without a doubt, many believers have been transformed listening to Joseph Prince and others teach about grace, and it is because much of what they are saying is biblical. I affirm that part of the message wholeheartedly, and I wish I could recommend their material without reserve. The problem, I believe, is that he and other hyper-grace leaders sometimes teach about grace in exaggerated form or, worse still, mixed with serious errors, and that’s why there are all too many casualties and divisions among the listeners and readers.”

Pastor Prince stressed in our meeting (and in my article) that those who listened to his message and then lived in compromise and complacency had really not heard or understood the message of grace. I stressed my conviction that there were errors in his message that produced the bad fruit, while the biblically-accurate content of the rest of his message produced the good fruit. Which of us is right?

In my view, by emphasizing our very important areas of agreement, it will be more difficult for people to misunderstand either of us, and the door is now open for honest dialogue about key verses and truth, with both us expressing a desire to follow the Lord and His Word wherever that leads. And we both want to expose what we do agree on: the very real dangers of counterfeit grace, some of which is growing in the midst of the hyper-grace camp.

Again I ask: In our heavenly Father’s sight, how can that be wrong?

I have no desire to placate my critics, nor do I have any

interest in a broad-based, theologically-loose, skin-deep unity. I am running after God's heart and mind with all my might, and I know that truth-based unity is of great importance to Him. That requires honest dialogue and interaction with others in the body with whom we have differences. {eo}