

My Meeting With Pastor Joseph Prince

On Friday, Jan. 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 those on which we differed.

When I wrote the book *Hyper-Grace: Exposing the Dangers of the Modern Grace Movement*, I reached out to the main authors I quoted in the book, asking them for permission to quote their writings if I went beyond the normal publishing guidelines, also asking them if they would like to reconsider any of their positions.

But I did not reach out to Pastor Prince, wrongly assuming he would not be interested in dialoguing with me based on my experience with some previous leaders who refused to interact. I apologized to him for my failure to do so, and he graciously received that apology.

He also wanted to make clear that he strongly differed with the positions of some of the others I quoted in my book, and what grieved him was not that I misrepresented his position when citing him but rather that he was cited side-by-side with some others whose views he strongly rejected.

Additionally, Pastor Prince felt that I have not accurately represented those who follow his Bible teachings regularly and how this has helped many around the world lead disciplined, holy, victorious and Christ-centered lives. He explained that his ministry office regularly receives testimonies from people who have been set free from the destructive bondage of sin,

from those who have been liberated from the shackles of pornography and from those set free from severe drug addictions through his preaching of the gospel of grace.

Although I gladly acknowledged those testimonies and said I also heard similar stories from those who follow his teachings (because of the wonderful truths he delivered) I reiterated that I had also heard opposite stories from those who had become complacent and fleshly (because of what I believed were errors in his teaching).

Pastor Prince maintains clearly that those who have become complacent and fleshly do not understand the gospel of grace, and he would be the first to warn them that they are not living under God's grace and to share with them Romans 6:14: "For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under the law but under grace." He believes beyond a shadow of a doubt that people who have an accurate revelation of God's grace have the power to lead holy and victorious Christian lives. For Pastor Prince (and of course, for me as well), grace is not the license to sin; it is the power to break free from the bondage of sin.

Our principal 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). But to repeat, our areas of strong and vibrant agreement are much greater than our areas of disagreement, and I want to shout out those areas of agreement to the world.

First, we both agree that it's all about Jesus. He must be central. He must be the focus of our lives. We must draw all people to Him and His atoning work on the cross. Pastor Prince also said that, rather than just say, "Jesus, Jesus" all the time, we should get back to the biblical emphasis: Lord Jesus. And I say Amen to exalting Jesus as Lord.

Second, we both agree that many (if not most) believers often struggle with guilty consciences, failing to realize the depth of God's love for them and failing to understand what Jesus did on their behalf, and so it is essential to ground them in grace. I also shared with Pastor Prince that whenever I teach on the errors of hyper-grace, I begin by extolling God's true grace, seeking first to open us that glorious revelation. And I told him that, at FIRE School of Ministry, in the first semester, we do our best to ground our students in the love of God and in their identity in Jesus.

Third, we both agree that God calls us to holiness, sin is terribly destructive, and true grace will be manifest in a holy life. Prior to our time together, he sent me a compilation of video clips in which he stated plainly that if a man in his congregation claims to be a believer and is living in adultery, he will tell that person plainly he is not living under grace (otherwise sin would not have dominion over him) and needs to repent, drop that other woman and go back to his wife. He said he would also question whether that man was a real believer, since a true believer may fall into sin but will not practice sin.

In his own words (from a forthcoming chapter he wrote for a joint compilation on grace), "If you hear of any 'grace' teaching that tells you it is all right to sin, to live without any regard for the Lord, and that there are no consequences to sin, my advice to you is to flee from that teaching. You have just been exposed to counterfeit grace. Genuine grace teaches that believers in Christ are called to live holy, blameless and above reproach. It teaches that sin always produces destructive consequences and it is only through the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ that one can be set free from the dominion of sin."

He then asks, "So how do we know if someone is truly living under the grace of God?"

His answer: "We look at their lives."

And so, "If someone is leaving his wife for his secretary and tells you he is under 'grace,' tell this person that he is not under grace but under deception! ... Genuine grace doesn't compromise God's holy standards and condone sin; it is the answer that gives people power to live glorious lives zealous for good works."

Fourth, we both agree that sanctification is progressive, meaning the moment we are saved, we are forgiven, declared righteous, and set apart as holy, but now we must grow in holiness. To quote his own words again, "true grace does teach progressive sanctification," and, "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."

He rejected strongly the idea, put forth by another "grace teacher," that progressive sanctification is a "spiritually murderous lie."

Fifth, we both agree that the Lord corrects us, and even disciplines us, and we both agree that included in the preaching of grace is the calling to "exhort, and rebuke with all authority" (see Titus 2:15). We agree that true born-again believers will feel uncomfortable in their sins (because of their born-again spirits and because of the Holy Spirit) and will have a genuine desire to find a way out of sin. We agree that the only way out of sin is to point people to Jesus.

Pastor Prince believes the primary role of the Holy Spirit is to remind us we are the righteousness of God in Christ (see 2 Cor. 5:21, John 16: 10) and that this understanding is critically important in helping people to turn from sin. While I also believe that this is an important role of the Spirit, I

believe His primary role when we sin is to lovingly reprove and correct us, thereby pointing us back to the Father (see Rev. 3:19, 22). Obviously, these two emphases go hand in hand.

Sixth, we both agree that God's Law is glorious and holy and beautiful and that, in Pastor Prince's words, "True grace teaching upholds the moral excellencies, values and virtues espoused by the Ten Commandments." But we understand that, "The Ten Commandments are so perfect in [their] standard and so unbending in [their] holy requirements that Galatians 3:11 states that no man can be justified by the law in the sight of God. Justification before God can only come by faith in Christ."

The Law, as designed by God, exposes our sin and brings us to the end of ourselves, thereby bringing us to the foot of the cross where grace and mercy flow. Not only so, but "when God's people are under grace, not only do they fulfill the letter of the law, but they also exceed it or go the extra mile."

Seventh, we both agree that any form of universalism or any denial of future punishment for the lost must be categorically rejected, and we agree that as recipients of grace, we share a burden for the lost, wanting to reach everyone with this glorious message, also believing in Romans 1:16, to the Jew first.

Eighth, we both agree on the importance of commitment to the local church and the authority of the local church, recognizing how many so-called grace preachers have broken away from both, to the harm of their own souls.

In our meeting, we shared our mutual love for the people of Israel and our desire for them to be saved, we shared our abhorrence of counterfeit grace, and we each lovingly challenged the other to consider certain points before the Lord. And, in the midst of our current differences, we agreed to do our best to expose what we both believed were

counterfeit grace errors.

It is my prayer that these errors will continue to be exposed and that God will use us to point His people to His glorious grace that has appeared in Jesus, which “teaches us to say ‘no’ to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age” (Titus 2:12, NIV). And where I have a blind spot or a misunderstanding of God’s Word, may the Lord give me grace to see it, and where my brother has a blind spot or a misunderstanding of God’s Word, may the Lord give him grace to see it.

I’m sure Pastor Prince will come under attack for meeting with me and welcoming me warmly as a brother, and I’m sure I will come under attack for doing the same with him. And so, to each of you who find fault with us for having this dialogue in the Lord, I encourage you to pray for us and, more importantly, to ask yourself if you too agree with our points of agreement here. If so, join us in shouting them out to the rest of the church.

May God’s true grace be exalted; may counterfeit grace be exposed. {eoa}