

Some Honest Questions for Joseph Prince

On a regular basis, I hear reports about believers who have been transformed through the ministry of Joseph Prince, and I thank God for every one of those good reports.

Without a doubt, his message of grace is liberating many from legalism, performance-based religion and a spiritual inferiority complex, and for all of this, I am grateful.

In 1992, God spoke to me to do a fresh study of grace, and the results of that study were eye-opening, to the point that one of the chapters in my 1997 book *Go and Sin No More* is called "It's All Grace" while another is called "The Letter Kills."

So as much as I have been known as a repentance and holiness preacher (which is correct), my preaching flows out of and into God's grace as it is expressed most fully in Jesus.

It is because I am so jealous for God's true grace (see 1 Pet. 5:12) that I wrote *Hyper-Grace: Exposing the Dangers of the Modern Grace Message*, and while agreeing with many things that Pastor Prince teaches, there are strong area of disagreement as well. (For the record, a mutual colleague of ours delivered a signed copy of *Hyper-Grace* to Pastor Prince, but I have been unable to secure a personal audience with him.)

Critics of *Hyper-Grace* have accused me of misunderstanding or misrepresenting their message, despite the fact that I quote the relevant authors, pastors and teachers directly throughout the book, fairly and in context.

But since we all agree that clarity and humility are of the utmost importance in our interaction and that we should strive for unity and understanding wherever possible, I submit these questions for discussion.

My intent is not to stir up ugly debate, nor is it to mock. It is to understand where we truly differ and where we don't, so here are my questions for you.

1) Does God require anything from you as His child? Is there anything He says that you must do as His child other than receive His grace? If so, are there spiritual benefits that come through obeying these requirements and spiritual losses that come from ignoring them?

2) The New Testament writers often exhort us to live in ways that please the Lord. Does that mean that it is possible for us to displease Him? We agree that He relates to us as His beloved children, but is He always pleased with us? And since Paul urges us not to grieve the Spirit, does that mean that we can, in fact, grieve Him?

3) Is there anything you can do to disappoint the Lord? If the Lord always sees you as perfect in His sight, is there any way for you to disappoint Him? I've heard it said that we can only grieve or disappoint Him by not trusting His grace, but according to your message, hasn't that sin been forgiven as well?

4) If God has pronounced your future sins forgiven in the same way He has pronounced your past sins forgiven, why do Paul and other New Testament writers address these very sins in their letters, and why does Jesus address them in Revelation 2-3? We know that God doesn't bring our past sins up to us, since He has forgiven and "forgotten" them. Why then does He bring our present sins up to us in the New Testament, even warning us about the dangers of walking in those sins, if they have also been forgiven and forgotten in advance?

5) A leading hyper-grace teacher claims that the doctrine of progressive sanctification is a "spiritually murderous lie." Does that mean that grace preachers like Charles Spurgeon, who believed in progressive sanctification, taught this alleged

lie? And if “progressive sanctification” simply means to walk out our holiness with the help of the Spirit, what is so dangerous about this teaching? Put another way, do you reject the concept that the one who made us holy now calls us to live holy lives in thought, word and deed, thereby “completing our sanctification in the fear of God” (2 Cor 7:1)? Doesn’t Paul say we are called saints (that is who we are) and called to be saints (that is how we live)? (See 1 Cor. 1:2.)

6) We agree that the Holy Spirit never condemns us for our sins as believers, but does He ever make us uncomfortable when we sin? To me, this is a very loving act of the Father, not wanting us to get comfortable doing things that could destroy our lives and the lives of others. Isn’t that something to be embraced? And doesn’t that drive us to the cross rather than away from it?

7) We agree that we do not need to confess every sin we commit each day in order to “stay saved,” but is any type of confession and request for forgiveness appropriate? For example, is it appropriate for believers to say, “Father, I’m sorry for sinning and I ask you to wash me clean”? Is it OK for us to get our feet washed (using the language of John 13) when we feel the need to? Are we denying God’s grace or showing an ignorance of God’s grace when we confess our sins to Him, asking Him to forgive us?

8) Since you believe we are not to judge our salvation by our conduct, how can we avoid self-deception? I know that you are against certain types of self-examination lest you become “sin conscious” and take your eyes off the finished work of the cross, but what do you make of verses that state that we know we have passed from death to life only if we live a certain way (like 1 John 3:14)? If I understand you correctly, you would question the salvation of someone who demonstrated no change of life and continued to walk in unrepentant sin. But doesn’t this mean that, on some level, you are looking at your “performance” to verify your salvation?

9) Do you think there's any danger in claiming that the teachings of Jesus before the cross don't apply to us as believers today? I take a lot of time on this subject in my book, exposing what I believe to be the very real dangers in doing this, but for the moment, I'm wondering if you could tell me why grace preachers like Spurgeon (whom I mentioned above) or D.M. Lloyd-Jones gloried in the Sermon on the Mount and considered it to be choice material for believers today, whereas you reject it as being applicable to us. Were they missing something?

10) What does it mean for you to walk in the fear of the Lord? We agree that we are not to live in servile fear before our Father, especially since fear has to do with punishment (1 John 4:18). But what do you make of verses like these, addressed to believers? "And if you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your sojourning. For you know that you were not redeemed from your vain way of life inherited from your fathers with perishable things, like silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Pet. 1:17-19).

11) Do you see any possible danger in emphasizing that it is impossible for a believer to lose his or her salvation? Of course, we could debate whether the Bible teaches this at all, but simply as a matter of experience, many of us have encountered very lost people—drunkards, fornicators, without the slightest interest in God (see 1 Cor. 6:9-10)—who have then assured us that they were saved because it was impossible for them to lose their salvation. So on a practical level, do you feel it's important to add any scriptural caveats to your teaching of eternal security and, if so, how can you do this without putting an emphasis on "performance"?

Again, in posting these questions, I am not trying to be contentious, nor have I worded them so as to set some kind of

trap. I am genuinely asking for honest responses from Pastor Prince and those who embrace the modern grace message for the sake of clarity and understanding and, where needed, self-correction.

May we all walk in the fullness of God's grace and love!

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