

The PenCC Local Church Online Resources

A Brief Book Review of Joseph Prince's, *Destined to Reign*

By Michael Podhaczky

Some General Comments

After reading Prince's book, I wondered regarding the context of his comments concerning a strict upbringing. Apparently, his father was from a Sikh background, his mother was Chinese (although we are not privy to her beliefs), and Prince was schooled in Malaysia. The young Prince had a severe stutter, which must have affected him as a youngster. When older "He used to work as an IT consultant and nobody could pronounce his given name of Xenonamandar Jegahusiee Singh,"¹ so he changed his name during this time. Documentation as to his educational background is scarce; yet he would have to have had training to work in IT and teach secondary education. As to his biblical or theological training, I could not find anything (most people mention something regarding their qualifications), so it would seem that he has had either no training or very little training. This lack of training is reflected within his book, although the book is brimming with his current achievements as the senior pastor of New Creation Church and his recommendations to purchase his sermons.

Some Theological and Biblical Comments

Towards the end of his book, Prince nails his theological colours to the wall when he states that,

"I give thanks to God for my roots in the Word of Faith teachings. It is truly on the shoulders of great men like Brother Kenneth E. Hagin that we are able to see further into the Word of God today. Growing up, I learned a lot about faith from Brother Hagin who has truly had a special revelation of faith from the Lord. I deeply honour him for all that he has taught me... Some years ago, I had the opportunity to fellowship with a Word of Faith preacher who pastors a church in Bergen, Norway."²

E.W. Kenyon was a major initiator of the Word of Faith teaching, who studied the metaphysical 'New Thought' teachings of Phineas Quimby. The Word of Faith teaching was later popularised by the likes of Kenneth Hagin, Benny Hinn, Kenneth Copeland, Paul and Jan Crouch, and Fred Price.³ This movement embraced the idea and portrays it in healing and prosperity (which is proposed to have come through the atonement and sacrifice of Jesus Christ), and is affirmed by faith and positive confession. This teaching claims that believers are heirs of the covenant through identification with Abraham's offspring because of Jesus Christ as portrayed in Galatians 3:29.

So, the theological premise that Prince intended to expound was that the believer is 'Designed to Reign.' I agree with him on this point: this is a great declaration and topic for a book. In developing this topic, he offers what he calls 'The secret to effortless success, wholeness and victorious living.' This theological premise is based on the chosen proof text

¹ "Does anyone know why Joseph Prince changed his name?" <http://answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20090904085910AA0zfcI> (3rd September, 2012).

² Prince, Joseph. *Destined to Reign*. (Singapore: 22 Media, 2007), 271, 287.

³ "Is the Word of Faith movement biblical?" <http://www.gotquestions.org/Word-Faith.html> (3rd September, 2012).

of Romans 5:17 and the rest of the book is his thesis as to his perceived meaning of this premise. His chosen theological methodology for expounding his thesis is to contrast the Mosaic Law and Grace. This is a worthy and suitable theological method. But, in contrasting the Mosaic Law and Grace, Prince proposed that Law is now irrelevant and superseded by Grace. To examine these two contrasting theological positions of Law and Grace, Prince used the 'Finished Work' theology. This is not new idea, as it can be found in the works like John Wesley and his Christian perfectionism, and came into Pentecostalism via Charles Parham in about 1907-1910. Fundamentally, it proposes that sanctification was completed at the cross in Justification. So there is nothing more for the believer to do except to live from the grace received and the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ.

Prince's claim on pages 121ff not to be 'Antinomian'⁴ is true; actually, he is far from it. In fact, this was an accusation made against Paul that he dealt with in passages like Rom 3:8; 6:1,15 etc. I agree with Prince, he is not antinomian in his theology. However, in his attempt to rightly divide the Scripture and show the wonderful riches of Grace, he actually holds to an extreme grace, thereby abusing it by turning it into a silver bullet. The opposite of antinomianism is legalism, and it is possible that this is what Prince was trying to deal with in his own life. In doing so, it seems that he actually perceives everything through a lens of Pauline theology of Law and Grace, but at the expense of the Old Testament and the possibly even the Gospels. However, although there is a contrast between the Mosaic Law and Grace in the New Testament, the Law is not irrelevant, rather fulfilled by the redemptive death, resurrection, ascension and session of Jesus Christ. Yet, Paul plainly states that,

⁷ "But if the ministry of death, in letters engraved on stones, came with glory, so that the sons of Israel could not look intently at the face of Moses because of the glory of his face, fading as it was, ⁸ how will the ministry of the Spirit fail to be even more with glory? ⁹ For if the ministry of condemnation has glory, much more does the ministry of righteousness abound in glory. ¹⁰ For indeed what had glory, in this case has no glory because of the glory that surpasses it. ¹¹ For if that which fades away was with glory, much more that which remains is in glory.

¹² Therefore having such a hope, we use great boldness in our speech, ¹³ and are not like Moses, who used to put a veil over his face so that the sons of Israel would not look intently at the end of what was fading away. ¹⁴ But their minds were hardened; for until this very day at the reading of the old covenant the same veil remains unlifted, because it is removed in Christ. ¹⁵ But to this day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their heart; ¹⁶ but whenever a person turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. ¹⁷ Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. ¹⁸ But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit." (2 Cor 3:7-18 NASB)

⁴ "The word antinomianism comes from two Greek words, anti, meaning 'against;' and nomos, meaning 'law.' Antinomianism means "against the law." Theologically, antinomianism is the belief that there are no moral laws God expects Christians to obey. Antinomianism takes a biblical teaching to an unbiblical conclusion. The biblical teaching is that Christians are not required to observe the Old Testament Law as a means of salvation. When Jesus Christ died on the cross, He fulfilled the Old Testament Law (Rom 10:4; Gal 3:23-25; Eph 2:15). The unbiblical conclusion is that there is no moral law God expects Christians to obey." "Antinomianism." <http://www.gotquestions.org/antinomianism.html> (3rd September, 2012)

Finally, most of Prince's problems appear to stem from his exegesis⁵ and hermeneutics,⁶ which is weak and lacks training. He repeatedly encourages the reader to interpret passages within context, but he does not support this by his processes and practical outworking. Repeatedly he proof texts passages to support a theological premise, rather than letting the text in context confirm theology. Prince's use of typology and metaphor is spurious at best, while some of his biblical conclusions lead to a faulty hermeneutic. He makes a curious implication, claiming that the Old Testament is of little or no value for New Testament believers. In fact, Prince states that even Jesus Christ's life and work was an Old Testament work. Hence, it is not until Paul's writings that he finds any biblical literature of value to New Testament believers. With this in mind, the Bible according to Joseph Prince sounds like a neo-Marcion canon by means of his rejection of the Old Testament and the Gospels, and finding the main theological worth in the Pauline literature. This being the case, his theological premise which intends to expound the idea that the believer is "Destined to Reign," was undermined by his poor and suspect exegesis and hermeneutics.

Some Concluding Thoughts

Paul asked the same question as Joseph Prince, i.e. 'Is there still any place of the Mosaic Law in the plan of salvation for NT believers' (Gal 3:3-4; 4:10; 5:2,3,4)? However, Paul, in dealing with this matter, comes to a different conclusion to Prince. The letter to the Galatians was a defense of the Gospel of Grace. Paul used the idea of the Law extensively in the letter as an important backdrop to declare the power of Grace, but did not present it up until chapter two (for example, Gal 2:16,19,21; 3:2,5, 10,11,12, 13,17,18,19, 21,23,24; 4:4,5,21; 5:3,4,14, 18,23; 6:2,13). Paul also used an example from the Old Testament (Gen 15:6) of Abraham, to demonstrate that, as with Abraham, believers are justified by faith and not by works (Gal 3:6-9; cf. also Rom 4:3,5,9,22; Jas 2:23). As a result, justification was (and still to this day is) by faith, and not by the Law of Moses (2:14-16; cf. Gal 3:10-4:11).

"Nevertheless knowing that a person is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified" (Gal 2:16 NASB).

The Galatians had received and were to continue receiving the blessings of salvation, which are from God solely by faith and not by trying to keep the law. As glorious as the law once was, the new covenant is much more (Gal 4:12-20). Consequently, the Law of Moses and grace cannot be present at the same time, if one is to grow in the things of God (Gal 4:21-31), but Paul saw the law as the backdrop to the glory of the new covenant.

In addition to this, although the believer has received the gift of Grace and the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ, it in no way negates the ongoing work of sanctification by the Spirit in the life of the believer. Prince seems to have confused sanctification with justification, not distinguishing these as two aspects of salvation. Justification is a forensic act by the sovereign God. Justification deals with the problem of our accountability to punishment for sin. As a result,

⁵ That is, to draw out and make the sense clear to make known what you are reading according to the intended meaning of the author and as understood by the first readers. Hernando, James D. *Dictionary of Hermeneutics*. (Springfield, MI: GPH, 2005), 20.

⁶ This covers the theory, principles and method used to interpret texts especially the Bible. Hernando, *Dictionary of Hermeneutics*, 23.

“Justification by faith in Christ means that the believer trusts Christ to do for him what he cannot do for himself... Justification is not simply an escape from sin; it is deliverance from sin...a new standing of the believer with God and a clean break with the evil that had previously made the future hopeless”⁷

Whereas sanctification necessarily follows and is separate from but dependent on justification, i.e. it is the continuing process of salvation. This is understood in Scripture as the process where the believer in Christ works out their salvation in the power of the Holy Spirit with “fear and trembling” (Phil 2:12,13). The importance of sanctification is highlighted by “Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord” (Heb 12:14 NASB). Hence, sanctification refers to both a status (a changed life through justification) and experience (holy living through sanctification) through the power of the Holy Spirit.

What Prince seems to have missed is that sanctification is both an act and a process. That there are three time elements of sanctification:

- The Bible teaches that, when a person believes in Jesus, they are sanctified: 1 Cor 3:3; 6:11; 2 Cor 7:1
- As a process sanctification continues throughout the believers’ life: Col 3:8-11; 1 Jn 3:8-9
- Sanctification will also be complete in the life of the believer, i.e. the finality of sanctification can only be realised when we are in our eternal state: Rom 8:23; 1 Cor 13:10; Rev 22:11

So, it can be summed up by saying that contact and relationship with God both demands and imparts actual holiness. Erickson suggests that holiness is, “bearing an actual likeness to God.”⁸ The believer is compelled to live a holy life because of their relationship with a Holy God. This correctly suggests that God is Holy and the redeemed person in the process of sanctification takes on the likeness to God. In other words, a person becomes like or takes on the image of what they worship. So, the theological premise that Prince intended to expound was that the believer is ‘Designed to Reign.’ However, he seems to have missed his objective and become side tracked within his own struggle between Law and Grace.

⁷ Tenney, M.C. *Galatians: The Charter of Christian Liberty*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1982), 119, 120.

⁸ Erickson, Millard. *Christian Theology*. (Grand rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1998), 968.