

# Prince of Milk

7/7/2017

## Introduction

While I was working on a booklet, *A Tribute to Grace*, to describe my Dad's transition to *Free Grace* (FG) theology, my brother, Phil, asked me about Joseph Prince's interpretation of 1Jn 1:9, which Phil had read in Prince's book, *Glorious Grace*.<sup>1</sup> My Dad promotes a similar perspective regarding confession. According to Prince, Christians do not need to confess their sins in order to have fellowship with God. According to my Dad and Prince, the forgiveness of believers, even in terms of fellowship, is not conditioned upon believers confessing their sins (since Dad and Prince perceive forgiveness to be a one-dimensional affair). I told Phil that I disagree with that interpretation. After all, I had written a book, *4D Forgiveness*, which details four levels of forgiveness, demonstrating that our familial forgiveness is conditioned upon our confession of our sins and our walk with the Lord.<sup>2</sup> And I had dealt with some of the counterarguments (by those who deny this family-fellowship forgiveness is conditioned upon ongoing confession) and demonstrated that their rationale is false. Nevertheless, I had not read Prince's book. And since I was writing a booklet to summarize my Dad's transition to the FG position, reading Prince's book seemed prudent because it advocated a similar view regarding confession.

## Lazar's Review of Reign and Favor

Years before, I had shared a GES article with my Dad written by Shawn Lazar entitled, "Is Joseph Prince 'Free Grace'?"<sup>3</sup> Lazar had read two of Prince's books: *Destined to Reign* and *Unmerited Favor*. Lazar's initial suspicion was that Prince is a health-and-wealth FG sheep in wolf's clothing, with the negative connotation evidently being justified, to some extent in Lazar's opinion at least, by Prince's health-and-wealth message. Still, even this negative impression was mitigated, to some extent in Lazar's estimation, by the fact that Prince's health-and-wealth teaching is unusual in that, according to Prince, success in these areas is completely unmerited, being conditioned solely upon our reckoning our free *soteriological* benefits as true on an ongoing basis, thus being experienced by a walk of faith.<sup>4</sup> Prince believes that the solution to carnality is for believers to realize that God does not judge or punish believers. Accordingly, this realization will allow them to develop an appreciation of God's unmerited grace. Fellowship with God is unconditional and unbroken for the believer. Lazar would take exception to Prince's position on these matters, as would I.

## Blessings are Gift-Rewards

For present purposes, I will briefly review Prince's book *Glorious Grace* and be content to label his presentation therein as a hyper-grace, kiddie-pool presentation of FG milk. To be sure, there is a place for FG milk, and there is a danger when giving FG meat. Whereas I might have a tendency to choke believers with FG meat, Prince, on the other hand, in this book at least, seems to drown believers in FG milk. The principle problem with his approach is that it may prevent his readers from progressing to FG meat. The purpose of drinking milk is to grow (1Pet 2:2). Failure to progress from milk to meat brings disdain (1Cor 3:2; Heb 5:12-13).

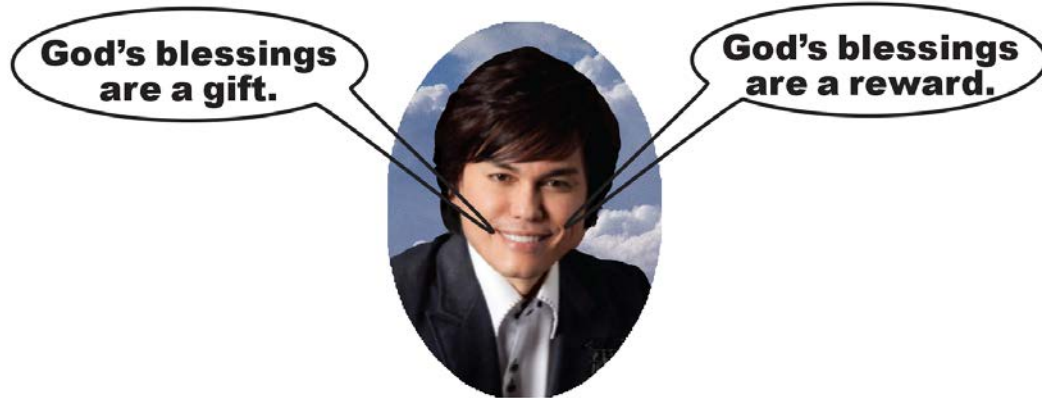
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<sup>1</sup> Prince, Joseph. *Glorious Grace: 100 Daily Readings from Grace Revolution*, Kindle Edition.

<sup>2</sup> Also see a brief excursus on 1Jn 1:9 in my book, *Trichotomy*.

<sup>3</sup> See [https://faithalone.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/GIF\\_JanFeb\\_2015\\_web.pdf](https://faithalone.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/GIF_JanFeb_2015_web.pdf). Accessed 4/28/2017.

<sup>4</sup> The reader is already familiar with the word *theology*, which is based on a combination of two biblical Greek words: *theos* (*God*) and *logos* (*teaching*). Thus, theology refers to biblical teaching about God. In similar fashion, *soteriology* is based on two biblical Greek words, *soteria* (*salvation*) and *logos* (*teaching*), and correspondingly refers to biblical teaching about salvation. Although the biblical concept of salvation includes many dimensions other than deliverance from Hell, it is this aspect of salvation to which writers refer frequently when they use the word *soteriology*. Thus, salvation from Hell (or more specifically, from eternal damnation in the Lake of Fire) will be referred to as *soteriological salvation* or *eternal salvation*. A *soteriological* interpretation of a passage thus would treat the passage as dealing with eternal salvation from the Lake of Fire (Rev 20:14-15).

*Illustration 1. Blessings are Gift-Rewards*

Living by faith is a rewardable activity, and rewards are based on works. Therefore, living by faith is a work. Consequently, contra Prince, being blessed (rewarded) by God as a result of living by faith is not an unmerited benefit. Such blessings are a merited benefit, not strictly of course, but at least partially (more specifically condignly and congruently).<sup>5</sup> If Prince affirms rewards, which seems to be the case,<sup>6</sup> then his whole argument for exclusively unmerited blessings immediately collapses. And if he does not affirm eternal rewards, then he is an antinomian teaching misthological heresy.<sup>7</sup> Even assuming the former rather than the latter, I would still be inclined to think that he is at least a soft antinomian in his apparent denial of three things: (1) God's temporal punishment, (2) God's conditional fellowship, and (3) God's misthological punishment. At the very least, he contradicts himself by insisting that God's blessings are an unmerited gift while affirming that they are rewards. He speaks out of both sides of his mouth and refutes himself in doing so.

*Rewards*

According to Prince, God blessing you and being pleased with you are conditioned solely on Jesus' obedience, not yours: "Under the law, you are disqualified by your disobedience; under grace, you are qualified by Jesus' obedience" (p. 17). Not true. Prince fails to distinguish between pleasing God soteriologically and misthologically with his oversimplification. Pleasing God misthologically is a reward conditioned on your faith and diligence (Heb 11:6).

*Blessing then Repentance*

Certainly, the grace of God can lead us to repentance (Rom 2:4), just as Prince emphasizes:

Blown away by what he was witnessing, Simon Peter knelt before Jesus and proclaimed, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!" (Luke 5:8).

Let me ask you this question: which came first—Peter's repentance or God's blessing? Under the new covenant of grace, God blesses you first, and His blessings, favor, and overflowing love lead you to repentance! (P. 27.)

What Prince fails to acknowledge, though, is that sometimes the relative sequence is reversed. Repentance can lead to God's blessings. We see this clearly and repeatedly in Rev 2-3, in two chapters written to the church and thus directly applicable to NT believers within the church age.

<sup>5</sup> For discussion of strict merit as opposed to condign and congruent merit from a FG perspective, see my book, *Mere Christianity and Moral Christianity*.

<sup>6</sup> See "The God That Rewards - Pastor Joseph Prince Sermon Notes Online." Available at <http://www.miltongoh.net/miltongoh-blog/godisarewarder>. Accessed 4/28/2017.

<sup>7</sup> *Misthology* is a coined term derived from the Greek words *misthos* (reward) and *logos* (teaching) and refers to the doctrine of temporal and eternal rewards but is used primarily in relation to eternal rewards in Heaven. See [http://misthology.org/pdf/articles/Definition\\_of\\_Misthology.pdf](http://misthology.org/pdf/articles/Definition_of_Misthology.pdf).

*Effective Ministry*

Notwithstanding, as a spiritual pediatrician of FG milk, Prince does some things very well. He teaches that our focus is to be on Jesus, not a set of rules: “The grace revolution is all about bringing Jesus back to the forefront. For too long the Christian faith has been reduced to a list of dos and don’ts. That’s not why Jesus came. That’s not what Christianity is all about” (p. 3). Mature FG readers of GES material would agree: “Maturity in Christ is a matter of looking to Jesus. It is not accomplished by doing a list of dos and don’ts.”<sup>8</sup> Wilkin expounds:

...I think Romans 7 makes it clear that a fixation on the commandments, even the commandments for us today, will not result in godliness, but in defeat. Our focus must be on the Commander, not the commands. As we focus on Jesus, we fall more in love with Him and we long to please Him and we are transformed (2 Cor 3:18). Of course, we are to study the commands we are under and to pray for the Spirit of God to empower us to keep them. When we confess our sins (1 John 1:9), we are admitting that we broke one of the commands and that we desire to keep it.<sup>9</sup>

Prince insists that living by grace will free you from the domination of sin (Rom 6:14), which is also true. In fact, the major strength of Prince’s book is that he supplies ample testimonies where his readers and viewers have experienced victory over the tyranny of sin by embracing this biblical teaching under his ministry. I have no doubt that these claims are valid because this is a solid FG truth. His message is powerfully effective for many, not because his theology is without flaws but because it gets some fundamental aspects of FG theology correct. We are not saved from Hell by works, and we are not kept saved by works. Prince does very well in his repeated affirmations of unconditional security. Obviously, since my website is [www.unconditionalsecurity.org](http://www.unconditionalsecurity.org), I am very pleased with his statements in this regard. Unfortunately, though, he has a propensity to overstate his claims in other areas and shortchange the true range of grace as a result.

Imagine someone who is dying of thirst in a legalistic desert who then comes across a kiddie pool of FG water. Wow! Such a person would think that such a pool is truly great, genuinely finding it lifesaving and refreshing. In like manner, many of those to whom Prince is ministering are genuinely being set free from legality and carnality by his message of grace. Why? Because everything he is teaching is true? No, but because passages such as Rom 6:14 are true. And he gets the basics right on many such passages. If you live by grace, you eventually will find liberty (cp. Jn 8:32). However, he overpromises: “So you can say it this way: sicknesses, diseases, eating disorders, addictions, and any form of oppression or bondage (all examples of our missing God’s mark or standard for a glorious life) shall not have dominion over you. When? When you are not under the law but under grace!” (p. 23). Such assurances will prove true in many cases. Yet what about those believers, like Joni Eareckson Tada, who are permanently crippled or who are suffering some form of sickness? Are we to conclude that the reason they are not healed is because they are failing to live by grace? No! Yet, with his sweeping simplistic statement, Prince gives the false impression that their sickness would be attributable to their failure to live by grace. In contrast, I take issue even with Lazar over this issue.<sup>10</sup> Since Lazar is rightly critical of Prince’s health-and-prosperity-gospel, Lazar should have deduced that faith is not a rub-of-the-magic-genie-bottle that always gets us what we want. Sometimes believers must endure trials throughout the course of their lives and even lose their lives prematurely—sometimes because of the sins of others, not because of their lack of faith.

*Quit Trying*

Similarly, Prince gives the false impression, at times through the voice of those giving supporting testimony, that our effort is not involved when it comes to experiencing God’s victory and blessings: “I quit trying to quit and decided that His grace was enough for me! Today, I have been set free from both addictions! I didn’t try to quit; it just happened” (p. 24). Likewise, another supporter says, “I heard Pastor Prince preach a sermon where he said that the solution was to quit trying to win *on my own* and to confess to the Lord, ‘Lord, I cannot, but You can.’ This became my motto and *I quit trying* to quit using tobacco.” (p. 39).

The inverse implication of such teaching is that those having to exert some effort to quit addictions are failing to trust the Lord, which is not true. Further, it is irrational. Equating *trying to quit* an addiction with doing something

<sup>8</sup> See p. 109 of book review at [https://faithalone.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/JOTGES\\_Spring2014\\_book.pdf](https://faithalone.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/JOTGES_Spring2014_book.pdf).

<sup>9</sup> Bob Wilkin, “Are Believers Under Law Today?” Available at <https://faithalone.org/blog/are-believers-under-law-today>.

<sup>10</sup> See my article, “Seven Ways God Answers Prayer” Available at <http://mishthology.org/pdf/articles/Seven-Ways-God-Answers-Prayer.pdf>.

*on our own to quit* fails to consider the possibility of *trying to quit through God's enabling power*. Granted, appropriating our victory in Christ is the first step and sometimes may make experiencing the victory seem effortless. Even so, in many cases, this first step will not be the only step necessary. Learning to appropriate God's enabling grace and then moving on to exert God-enabled effort will frequently be necessary to achieve the desired outcome.<sup>11</sup> In saying that we quit trying, Prince fails to address such cases adequately. He acts as if it is all of God and none of us, making a false dichotomy in the process: "The power to live above defeat and experience lasting breakthroughs is not contingent upon my willpower; it is contingent upon the power of the Holy Spirit" (p. 39) He poses a false dichotomy between our willpower and God's enabling power. Many times, victory will be contingent upon a synergy of the two and thus on our God-energized willpower. We are energized by the Holy Spirit and work synergistically with His enablement. His energy provided the grounds for our synergy.<sup>12</sup>

More wisely, Prince will imply synergy subsequently: "The right living Robert wanted to experience became a reality not when he was trying to make it happen *on his own*, but when he discovered and then kept returning to grace whenever he was weak. This is the key to overcoming sin" (p. 41) His more accurate statement here corrects his previous statement to some extent. True, we are not to try on our own, but this does not mean that we are not to try via the Spirit's enablement. Accordingly, victory may be a gradual process: "You will find every sinful urge gradually leave until they all leave for good" (p. 42). Spirit-enabled synergy implementing biblical neuroplasticity can generally be expected to involve chronicity.<sup>13</sup>

### *Forgiveness and Fear*

By ignoring the context and the sense of the verse, Prince uses the promise of God forgiving those "who fear Him" in Ps 103:11 to drive a wedge between fearing the Lord and being forgiven by Him (p. 47), despite the fact that the passage conditions the Lord's mercy and forgiveness on fearing Him, that is, keeping His commandments (Ps 103:17-18). Since I deal with this passage at some length in *4D Forgiveness*, I will not do so here. Suffice it to say that God's forgiveness in this context is a reward, a point that Prince royally misses and which is completely detrimental to his assumption that God's forgiveness is always an expression of God's unmerited grace.

### *Gospels*

Prince correctly affirms that the Gospels show us what Jesus is really like: "Thank You for inviting me to read Your Word in the Gospels so that I can see Jesus and know what You are really like" (p. 51). The Jesus of the Gospels is a picture of grace (Jn 1:17). But if the Gospels apply to the age of grace, then so does their picture of the Bema. That being the case, Prince's contention that God's forgiveness is always unmerited or that Jesus does not punish His lazy servants is immediately disproven (cp. Mt 25:30).<sup>14</sup> The unmerciful servant found out the hard way that forgiving others is required for misthological forgiveness (Mt 18:23-35). In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught that Daddy forgiveness (i.e., familial forgiveness) is conditioned on our forgiving others: "For if you forgive men for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions" (Mt 6:14-15).

Some wrongly assume that the Gospels in general and the Sermon on the Mount in particular have no direct application to the age of grace. Not true. In the very next verse Jesus continues to say, "And whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites do, for they neglect their appearance in order to be seen fasting by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But you, when you fast, anoint your head, and wash your face so that you may not be seen fasting by men, but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will repay you" (Mt 6:16-18). The primary purpose of the Sermon on the Mount is to teach believers how to have rewards in the kingdom. Thus, Jesus immediately adds, "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal" (Mt 6:19-20).

As for fasting, Jesus' statements in the Sermon did not apply to the time He was on Earth but to the time when He was taken up to Heaven, and thus to the age of grace: "Then the disciples of John came to Him, saying, 'Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?' And Jesus said to them, 'The attendants of the bridegroom cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them, can they? But the days will come when the

<sup>11</sup> For example, see my discussion of *doing your best* in 2Pet 1:10, in my book, *Mere Christianity and Moral Christianity*.

<sup>12</sup> See my discussion of synergy in my book, *Fallen from Grace but Not from Perfection*. Also see *Soteric and Mistholic Faith* when released.

<sup>13</sup> Neuroplasticity can be positive or negative. See excurses on the subject in my book, *Trichotomy*.

<sup>14</sup> See my book, *The Outer Darkness*.

bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast” (Mt 9:14-15). Some erroneously claim that fasting does not apply to the age of grace because Paul, the apostle of grace, did not fast. Yet Paul was commissioned by those engaging in fasting (Acts 13:2-3). Paul himself fasted when commissioning others (Acts 14:23). Paul expected believers to engage in prayer and fasting on special occasions (1Cor 7:5; KJV; MT). Because of his circumstances, Paul frequently fasted (2Cor 6:5; 11:27; KJV).

#### *Sermon on the Mount*

Prince is so happy that after Jesus “preached the Sermon on the Mount and then He came down” (p. 20) because Prince seems to think that the focus of the Sermon is to use the OT Law’s impossible standards to bring us to faith in Christ. While some of that is probably going on in the Sermon, Prince misses the fact that the focus of the Sermon is for kingdom greatness, not kingdom entrance. For a great, mature, FG discussion of the Sermon on the Mount, see *Keys to Kingdom Greatness: An Exposition of the Sermon on the Mount* by Steve Elkins. Hopefully, Prince’s milk-approach to the Sermon will not prevent his readers from achieving greatness in the kingdom, but it very well may. For example, in a passage talking about laying up rewards and treasures in Heaven and trusting God with your daily needs in the meantime, Jesus concludes: “Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you” (Mt 6:33). Prince misconstrues this verse to be talking about “His gift of righteousness” (p. 179) because in Prince’s estimation “you cannot be more righteous because you are already 100 percent righteous by Jesus’ blood” (p. 167). He is correct that believers cannot be any more righteous soteriologically, but he is wrong to think that this is the only type of righteousness available to believers. To the contrary, by becoming righteous in their behavior, believers can qualify for rewards in Heaven, such as the crown of righteousness (2Tim 4:8). Misthological righteousness is conditioned on practical righteousness. Prince’s one-dimensional view of righteousness may result in some believers not pursuing misthological righteousness and thus failing to win the crown of righteousness. Why run the race to win the crown of righteousness if you are going to be given this righteousness even if you do not run the race? Gratitude for the gifts already unconditionally assured are not the only motivation for running the race. The NT expects us also to show gratitude for the future conditional rewards yet to be won by running to win.

#### *Unmerited Love*

Like so many others, Prince assumes that all levels of God’s love are unconditional: “I don’t have to work for Him to love me. I just crawl into His lap and let Him love me” (p. 67). The problem with this statement, like many other statements in his book, is that it is a partial truth. Yes, at a basic level, God loves His children unconditionally. However, a mature FG understanding of God’s love would acknowledge that Jesus conditions intimate experiences of His love on loving obedience (e.g., Jn 14:23). Prince’s milk-teaching may prevent his parishioners from being able to digest such meat.

#### *Fusion is Confusion*

Prince smashes everything down to one level so that he can fuse various elements together: “Because Jesus’ blood continually cleanses you, you cannot bounce in and out of the light of Christ, in and out of being seated in the heavenly places in Christ, in and out of being forgiven, justified, and made righteous, and in and out of fellowship with God. It is not a sometimes-yes-sometimes-no salvation” (p. 88). He merges positional truth with experiential truth at the expense of experiential truth. But this error is a two-way street. *Lordship Salvation* (LS) makes the same fusion but affirms the experiential truth at the expense of the positional truth. In the LS estimation, if your practice is questionable, then so is your position in Christ. In Prince’s opinion, if your position is unquestionable, then so is your practice. Both errors cause confusion with their fusion of position and experience.

Prince is like a wrecking crane that, after knocking down a three-level house, claims it is a one-level house. The Bible presents various truths at three basic levels: soteriological, experiential, and misthological. Prince knocks them all down into one heap and then makes a leap to claim that everything is free. Well, of course, it is—if you collapse everything down to the soteriological level.



*Illustration 2. Wrecking Crane*

Thankfully, depending on the context, and contrary to Prince, such things as being forgiven, justified, and made righteous are sometimes-yes-sometimes-no in regard to being free. If the context is talking about these items at a soteriological level, then, yes, they are free. If, however, the context is talking about these things at a mithological level, then, no, they are not free.

*No Punishment*

When it comes to a passage such as Heb 10:26, Prince claims,

...the book of Hebrews was written to the *Hebrews*, or Jewish people (which included believers as well as nonbelievers). Hebrews 10:26, in particular, is addressing Jewish brethren who had received “the *knowledge of the truth*” (the Lord Jesus as their Messiah and His finished work), but never received this truth *into their hearts*. (P. 90, emphasis his.)

I strongly disagree with his position. The warnings in the book of Hebrews are addressed to believers, not unbelievers. See my discussion in *The Outer Darkness*. Notwithstanding, there are those in the FG movement, such as Seymour and Phillips, who would concur with Prince that this passage is not addressing the genuine believers.<sup>15</sup> Yet I would not accuse these teachers as being hyper-grace, much less antinomian, because they hold to a strong sense of eternal rewards. In fact, Phillips’ sermon on *The Judgment Seat of Jacob* (Gen 49) is stupendous and draws strong parallels to the *Judgment Seat of Christ* (2Cor 5:10).<sup>16</sup> If Prince were to affirm a strong doctrine of rewards, then I could let his comments on Heb 10:26 pass without voicing an objection. As it is, given his absence of any such emphasis in *Glorious Grace*, I voice my concern that his discussion, as presented in this particular book of his, smacks of hyper-grace antinomianism.

*Only Verbal Correction*

Although Prince denies that God punishes, he affirms that God corrects us:

<sup>15</sup> Richard A. Seymour, *The Gift of God*. Compare John Phillips, *Hebrews*.

<sup>16</sup> This well-known sermon by Phillips may be found at <http://archive.org/details/Dr.JohnPhillipsArchive>. Accessed on July 5, 2012.

There are also those who teach that being holy and receiving correction are not important since we are under grace. Let me just say this: such “teachers” are propagating error! True grace produces true holiness. The more you are under grace and established in your righteousness in Christ, the more you will want to live a holy life and be open to God’s correction.

So is there correction under grace? Absolutely. But I want you to be established in the fact that under the new covenant of grace, God does *not* correct His children by using accidents, sicknesses, and diseases. Correction in the new covenant takes place through His Word. Paul tells us, “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness” (see 2 Tim. 3:16 NASB). Notice how correction through God’s Word includes “training in righteousness,” which is believing right that you have been justified or made righteous by faith in our Lord Jesus. (Pp. 164-165; emphasis his.)

Would a father correct a child in whom he delights by inflicting pain and suffering on that child? Of course not! In the same way, our heavenly Father corrects us not by inflicting pain and suffering but with His Word (see 2 Tim. 3:16). Correction may come through the preaching of His Word, or through godly leaders. (P. 207)

The impression conveyed by Prince is that if you do something wrong, God will just give you a good talking to; He would not take the belt to you, so to speak. In contrast, I did more than just talk to my boys when they were coming up. If they needed correction, I administered it. I may not have used a belt, but I did use fly flaps. My boys told me that fly flaps were supposed to be for killing flies. Well, I found that they were helpful to keep little boys in line too. Spare the fly flap and spoil the child (cp. Prov 13:24). I believe God, likewise, takes a hands-on approach to discipline when necessary (Heb 12:5-11). And contrary to Prince, the Bible does indicate that sickness and death can be part of His approach (Acts 5:1-5; 1Cor 11:27-32; Jam 5:14-20; 1Jn 5:16-18; Rev 2:20).

#### *No Judgment*

Prince argues:

The Greek word for “judgment” in Hebrews 10:27 is *krisis*, which means a sentence of “condemnation and punishment.” Now, turn with me to John 5:24 and read Jesus’ own words: “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment [*krisis*], but has passed from death into life.” The same word for “judgment” (*krisis*) used in Hebrews 10:27 is used here in this Scripture regarding believers.

My friend, can anything be clearer and more transparent? What is it that God wants us to be assured of? That we believers will *never* come into *krisis* judgment! (P. 91, emphasis his.)

Not true. A merciless *judgment* (*krisis*) at the Bema is in store for those believers who have not shown mercy (Jam 2:12-13; cp. 5:12).<sup>17</sup> Believers will not come into soteriological judgment, but they will be subject to a misthological judgment. Context is king, and Prince has not submitted to the king.

#### *Confession of Sin in 1Jn 1:9*

Prince appeals to Vine’s dictionary in his attempt to circumvent John:

According to well-known Bible scholar William Vine, *hamartia* (“a missing of the mark”) indicates “a principle or source of action, or an inward element producing acts... a governing principle or power.” In other words, it refers to the sin principle, or our sinful state on account of Adam’s sin. By using the noun form of this word, John was clearly not referring to our committing of individual acts of sin, or he would have used the verb form, *hamartano*. (p. 93).

<sup>17</sup> For discussion of these texts, see my book *Salvation* when released. For discussion of *krisis*, see *The Outer Darkness*. For punitive judgment, see *4D Forgiveness*, and *Is God a Communist?* and chapter 30 of *The Outer Darkness*.

Prince claims, supposedly with Vine as his authority, that sin as a noun means to miss the mark and refers to the sin principle rather than our sinful acts. Wow, scholarship proves Prince's point, right? Not at all! First, you can see for yourself what Vine actually says since his dictionary is available online.<sup>18</sup> For starters, Vine notes that the etymological meaning of *hamartia*, to miss the mark, is "largely lost sight of in the NT." Sin refers more so to moral deviation. As to the sin principle, Vine does give the definition provided by Prince, but Vine only lists this reference to the sin principle as one of four possible meanings. His second meaning is related to it. But his third definition for *sin (hamartia)* as a noun says that it is "a generic term...sometimes inclusive of concrete wrong doing," and **Vine lists 1Jn 1:7-8 in this category! In these verses, being forgiven for sins in general, that is, for our moral failings, is conditioned on believers walking in the light.** This forgiveness is experiential, familial, not soteriological. Prince's claim that John would have to use the verbal form of sin to refer to sinful acts is false. The very authority that he cites refutes his claim. Moreover, in his fourth definition of the nominal form, Vine says that *hamartia* can refer to an act of sin and cites 1Jn 5:16a as an example.<sup>19</sup> Lexically, Prince's argument thus fails repeatedly. Furthermore, Prince's claim that 1Jn 1:9 is referring to our sinful state rather than our sinful acts is refuted by the plural form of the noun for *sins* in this verse. John is talking about the confession of our plural *sins*, not of our singular sinful state. Every example that Vine supplies of sin in his first category as referring to the state of sin uses the singular form of sin, naturally. But John is not using the singular form in 1Jn 1:9. Prince misconstrues Vine's analysis badly on multiple fronts. In terms of plurality, Prince's argument fails grammatically.

### *Confessing as Forgiven*

Prince misrepresents the opposing viewpoint to make his point:

My friend, do you know how dangerous it is to believe that being right with God hangs on your ability to confess every sin? Without the assurance of complete forgiveness, believers are sin-conscious, burdened with guilt and shame, condemned by the enemy, joyless, and totally insecure about their salvation. I know. I've been there.

So is Joseph Prince against a Christian confessing his sins? Let me say this clearly: I do believe in the confession of sins and I still do confess my sins. But there's a big difference now—I confess my sins knowing that all my sins are *already* forgiven. I don't confess my sins to *be* forgiven. (P. 96, emphasis his.)

I have no problem with confessing our sins (talking openly with God about our failings), but that if you believe you must confess every sin you commit in order to be forgiven, it will put you under an impossible standard to live by and on a never-ending treadmill that leads to perpetual sin-consciousness. Not only that, it will also make you more susceptible to temptations because you are constantly feeling like a dirty sinner....

Let me now deal with a teaching that brings believers under bondage as it attempts to segment God's forgiveness. This teaching argues that there is a difference between "judicial forgiveness" and "parental forgiveness." Judicial forgiveness refers to God's forgiveness of all our sins because of the penalty that Jesus paid on our behalf on the cross. However, while all our sins are forgiven *judicially*, we are out of fellowship with God when we commit a sin—until we confess that sin to receive *parental* forgiveness. The end result of believing this teaching is the same as what I described earlier.

If you go by this teaching, you will always feel you are lacking in parental forgiveness, simply because there will always be sins (in thought or deed) you have not confessed. And if you live by this doctrine, you can't conveniently pick and choose which sins you need or want to confess. The bottom line is that you won't have full assurance of your forgiveness in Christ. You will always be sin-conscious and doubt your forgiveness, and both your conscience and the devil will exploit this. (Pp. 266-277, emphasis his.)

<sup>18</sup> See [http://studybible.info/vines/Sin%20\(Noun%20and%20Verb\)](http://studybible.info/vines/Sin%20(Noun%20and%20Verb)).

<sup>19</sup> BDAG, the standard Greek lexicon of our day, puts sin in 1Jn 1:9 and 5:16 in the same category, as dealing with the sinful *action itself*.



Nonsense. In contrast to Prince, like many others I believe that my fellowship with God is conditioned on my confessing my sins. Does this mean that I have to confess every sin? Not at all. His argument fails pragmatically. His argument also fails syntactically. John says, “If we confess our *sins*, He is faithful and righteous to forgive our *sins* and to cleanse us from **all** unrighteousness” (1Jn 1:9). John does not call upon us to confess all our sins, which would be logically impossible. John is not instructing us to do the impossible. Contextually, believers need only confess the sins that would hinder their fellowship with God, which would be the sins of which they are aware. They acknowledge their known sins, and God cleanses them from all sins, even the ones that they do not know about. We simply confess the sins of which we are aware, and God forgives us of those sins and cleans us from *all unrighteousness*, that is, God cleanses us of even the sins of which we are not aware. This is a common understanding of the text. Prince is attacking a strawman.

For Prince, to confess means to acknowledge that we have done wrong. Basically, we might say that it means to acknowledge you are sorry for what you did. Technically, it may be conceded to Prince that you do not actually have to say, “Please forgive me.” For example, you might say to your wife, “I’m sorry,” for some boneheaded thing you said. Adding, “please forgive me,” may not be really necessary. In normal conversion with friends and family, one might frequently just say, “I am sorry,” without adding, “please forgive me.” For those in fellowship, adding the please-forgive-me tag at the end is not necessary to maintain the fellowship. I would allow that Prince’s basic idea of confession suffices for those believers walking in fellowship with the Lord. They acknowledge their sin and appropriate the Lord’s forgiveness, a forgiveness made possible by the forgiveness already granted them when they first believed. Both he and I might say, for example, “Lord, I sinned. Thank you for Your forgiveness.” Inserting, “please forgive me” between the two statements is not exegetically or pragmatically necessary. Whereas my understanding of what is entailed is more detailed than his, nevertheless, like him I would be content with this simple confession and appropriation. Therefore, his argument also fails pragmatically to be superior to the conditional paradigm.

Repeatedly, he tries to paint his position in the most positive light while mischaracterizing the conditional paradigm in order to put it in a very negative light:

So is Joseph Prince against a Christian confessing his sins? Let me say this clearly: I do believe in the confession of sins and I still do confess my sins. But there’s a big difference now—I confess my sins knowing that all my sins are *already* forgiven. I don’t confess my sins to *be* forgiven. Because we have a close relationship with our heavenly Father in the new covenant, I can be honest with Him when I’ve done wrong. I can talk to Him about it, receive His grace for my weakness, and move forward knowing full well that He has already forgiven me through His Son’s sacrifice.

Beloved, our forgiveness was purchased perfectly with our Lord’s precious blood. It is not contingent on how perfectly we are able to confess our every sin. How can our forgiveness be dependent on the consistency, frequency, and quality of our confessions? That is bound to fail! Our forgiveness is dependent on our faith in the quality of our Lord’s sinless blood that was shed at the cross. There is a world of difference between these two bases for our forgiveness, and it results in a world of difference to your peace of mind! (P. 96; emphasis his.)

Pragmatically, note the similarities in the approach taken by Prince and myself. When I am aware on any sin, I simply confess it to remain in fellowship. Because I have a close fellowship with my heavenly Dad, I can talk with Him about what I do wrong and appropriate His forgiveness, knowing full well that it does not hamper either my relationship or fellowship with Him, realizing that I am already forgiven in terms of my relationship and that my confession of my known sins allows us to remain in unbroken fellowship. In no way is my fellowship conditioned on my ability to confess all my sins. Many days I do not confess any sins because I am not aware of any sins to confess. And when I do become aware of a sin, I simply can say, “Lord, I sinned. Thank you for Your forgiveness.” I have perfect peace of mind that my fellowship remains unbroken and my relationship is unbreakable. So where is the alleged “world of difference” in our experiences? There is none. Pragmatically, Prince’s hyper-grace view of confession fails to be superior to a mature FG position. His failure to acknowledge the difference between judicial and parental forgiveness is inexcusable. His approach may give some comfort to a legalist who is on the treadmill he describes, but it fails to do justice to various biblical texts and is useless, even harmful, for those who are seeking a mature FG understanding.

*Pure in Heart*

As evidence of the potential detrimental effect of Prince’s teaching, consider his statement about a purity of heart:

How are we made righteous today? How are our hearts purified today? By faith in our Lord’s finished work at the cross! Jesus said, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Matt. 5:8).

Now, *who* are the pure in heart? Those whose hearts have been purified by faith. Amen! (P. 279, emphasis his.)

The context is talking about rewards, not gifts (cp. Mt 5:12). One can rightly tell a Christian who is struggling with an impure heart, such as pornography, that seeing God in the manner described by this passage is a reward. We need to exhort each other to overcome impurity so that we can have this special degree of intimacy with God. The passage encourages us to be pure in heart experientially so that we can have this intimate experience with God mythologically. Yet Prince’s council would undercut this encouragement, giving the false impression that overcoming impurity is unnecessary to experience this benefit.

*Unrighteous Believers*

Prince’s theology not only undercuts the promises of Scripture but the warnings as well. For example, Paul warns believers that if they practice unrighteousness, they will not inherit the kingdom: “Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, shall inherit the kingdom of God” (1Cor 6:9-10). Paul gives similar vice-lists in Gal 5:19-21 and Eph 5:4-5, warning Christians in each passage those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But Prince simplistically remarks, “He has placed us in a covenant where we cannot be made unrighteous” (p. 297). By failing to acknowledge the difference between soteriological and experiential righteousness, Prince’s teaching would give a false assurance to those believers who are living unrighteously that they are not in danger of failing to inherit the kingdom.

He correctly notes the problem caused by legalists trying to establish their own righteousness: “We have recognized that there is a division today in Christianity between those who believe in the Lord as their righteousness and those who believe that they have to be their own righteousness” (pp. 302-303). This dichotomy is valid as a criticism of legalism but fails as a criticism of *Mature FG* (MFG) theology. MFG is a mediation between legalism and antinomianism. MFG recognizes the need for practical righteousness to acquire mythological righteousness. Not all believers will be given the crown of righteousness (2Tim 4:8). His *Simpleton FG* (SFG) theology lacks the depth to address such issues adequately. He urges his readers not to be dismayed by his SFG: “Beloved, just because you don’t know the Bible from cover to cover, don’t be intimidated by learned theologians who use very high-sounding theological words to try to dismiss the gospel of glorious grace” (p. 305). One does not need big words to show the inadequacy of his theology. Like Lordship Salvationists, he confuses a gift with a reward. Whereas LS does so to the detriment of the gift, he does so to the detriment of rewards. For those believers who need MFG theology to maximize their heavenly rewards, his theology could prove detrimental and result in their receiving minimal rewards instead.

*Legalism Results in Separation*

As Prince correctly observes regarding Gal 5:4, legalism separates a Christian from God in terms of intimacy: “Putting myself under the old covenant of law creates separation between God and me, whereas seeing myself under the new covenant of grace brings intimacy between God and me” (pp. 189-190). But legalism is a sin. If being forgiven of all sins at the point of conversion prevents sins from being an obstacle to fellowship, then legalism should pose no problem to intimacy. Prince fails to connect such dots, however. Consider an OT and NT passage on separation. In one passage, sin causes the separation. In the other passage, legalism causes the separation. But is legalism not a form of sin?

Is 59:2	Gal 5:4
But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He does not hear.	You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.

Note the connection between separation, sin, and legalism. Separation is caused by sin. Legalism is a sin. Therefore, legalism causes separation. God's children can experience separation from their Father in terms of fellowship if they are seeking to be justified by the law. Being forgiven of all their sins in terms of relationship does not mean that those sins cannot cause a separation in terms of fellowship.

*Conclusion*

Prince documents many people who have experienced wonderful results with this teaching. I am not surprised. Grace beats legalism; therefore, even antinomianism beats legalism. Many legalists will find the grace he espouses liberating. However, even many legalists claim that their theology yields similar results, even the physical healings. Again, I am not surprised. Healthy neuroplasticity results in a healthy body. Such results can even be achieved apart from Christianity.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, I am unimpressed by the claims of legalists and antinomians who think that the fruit of a healthy mind and body proves that the underlying theology is correct. Jesus warned those who pointed to their fruit as proof of their root that they could be tragically mistaken (Mt 7:20-23). I would issue the same warning.

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<sup>20</sup> See my brief excursus neuroplasticity in *Trichotomy*.