

AN ASSAULT ON THE GOSPEL

Joseph Prince's Wholesale Rejection of Jesus's Teaching in the Gospels

In an extraordinary passage of his book 'Destined to Reign', Joseph Prince teaches Christian believers not to obey the commandments of the Lord Jesus Christ. Whereas Prince claims to be rejecting only 'some' of Jesus's words as inapplicable to the church of Jesus Christ today, the clear implication of his argument is that none of Jesus's teachings in the gospels are of benefit to the church today. This is what Prince calls 'rightly dividing the word'.

The following extracts (with blue background) from pages 92-94 of Prince's book contain the entirety of a section entitled 'Rightly Dividing The Word', and the first paragraph of the immediately succeeding section called 'Feed On The Letters Of The Apostle Paul'. I have taken a part of one sentence out of one paragraph, and placed it with the following paragraph, to make Prince's reasoning clearer. The original text can be found at the end of this short document.

Rightly Dividing The Word

There is a lot of confusion and wrong believing in the church today because many Christians read their Bibles without rightly dividing the old and new covenants. They don't realize that even some of the words which Jesus spoke in the four gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) are part of the old covenant. They were spoken before the cross as He had not yet died. The new covenant only begins after the cross, when the Holy Spirit was given on the day of Pentecost.

Prince says first of all that 'some' of Jesus's words are 'part of the old covenant'. He says that they were spoken before the cross, indicating perhaps that those spoken after the cross might be viewed as part of the new covenant. However, in the next sentence, he says that the new covenant began on the day of Pentecost, after the ascension, leaving the reader uncertain as to his meaning, since all the words Jesus spoke in the gospels came before that.

I know that our Bibles are divided into the Old Testament and the New Testament, which begins with the four gospels. However, it is important to realize that **the cross made a difference!** Some of what Jesus said **before** the cross and what He said **after** the cross were spoken under completely different covenants.

The last sentence is unclear. The intended meaning could be that 'some' of what Jesus said before the cross belongs to the old covenant, whereas what he said after the cross belongs to the new covenant. This would place the Great Commission and other very important words of the Lord in the new covenant, in contradiction to the first paragraph.

You also need to see who Jesus was speaking to. At times, He was speaking to the Pharisees, who boasted in their perfect law-keeping. With them, Jesus brought the law to its pristine standard, such that it was impossible for any man to keep.

Now Prince introduces a second criterion to determine whether Jesus's words apply to us today. He says that some were spoken to the Pharisees for the purpose of bringing the law to its 'pristine standard'. Since the primary meaning of 'pristine' is 'in its original condition', one might expect Prince to be referring to words that Jesus spoke to remove human traditions and recover the law of Moses as given by God on Mount Sinai. On the contrary, however, it transpires in the next paragraphs that he

has something else in mind.

"But Pastor Prince, I believe that we should do everything that Jesus said!"

My friend, Jesus said, "If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you... And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell." Have you done that?

Do you think that Jesus expects us to do all that,...

... If the church were to obey everything that Jesus said in that passage, then it would look like a huge amputation ward! (I hope that I don't hear you saying, "Pastor Prince, you should have written this book earlier — I have already plucked out one eye and severed one arm!")

Prince gives an example of a teaching of Jesus, which he says we should not consider to be directed to Christian believers, since its application would result in awful and apparently negative consequences.

This is a surprising argument, since I think it is fair to say that Christians through the ages have experienced little difficulty in comprehending Jesus's meaning, and historically only a small minority of professing Christians have dared to claim that He was not addressing all who would choose to follow Him¹. Almost all have understood him to be warning us that we must take radical action to cut sinful actions and habits out of our lives. If we don't then we are in danger of eternal punishment. Even if we take Jesus's words very literally, no great difficulty in comprehension arises, since:

a) It is literally true that if our right eye or hand causes us to sin, it would be better for us to cut it off than to continue in the sin.

b) If any of us were in fact faced, quite literally, with the choice of chopping off one's right hand, or giving up the sinful habit that we were employing it for, then almost all of us would choose to keep our hand. To the objection that we might not have the inner strength to do so, one may answer that God always answers the cries of the desperate, and that we believers have precious promises of answers to prayer in the name of Jesus. The happy parenthesis in this extract from Matthew Henry's commentary points us to the grace of God as the means of rescue from our helpless predicament and dilemma:

“If thy right eye offend thee, or cause thee to offend, by wanton glances, or wanton gazings, upon forbidden objects; if thy right hand offend thee, or cause thee to offend, by wanton dalliances; and if it were indeed impossible, as is pretended, to govern the eye and the hand, and they have been so accustomed to these wicked practices, that they will not be withheld from them; if there be no other way to restrain them (which, blessed be God, through his grace, there is), it were better for us to pluck out the eye, and cut off the hand, though the right eye, and right hand, the more honourable and useful, than to indulge them in sin to the ruin of the soul.”

¹ It is true that many dispensationalists have rejected the Sermon on the Mount as medicine and food and life for their own souls. In so doing, they too have rejected Jesus Himself, in my opinion.

Do you think that Jesus expects us to do all that, or does He want us to rightly divide the Word, and understand who He was speaking to in that passage and what He meant?..

... Come on, Jesus said all that to bring the law back to its pristine standard, a standard that ensured that no man could keep the law. He said all that so that man would come to the end of depending on himself and begin to see that he desperately needs a savior. So when we read the words of Jesus in the four gospels, it is necessary for us to rightly divide the Word and understand **who** Jesus was speaking to.

As well as denying that this teaching of Jesus can be applicable to Christian believers today, Prince says twice that we need to understand who it was that He was speaking to. He also says that the purpose of this passage was 'to bring the law back to its pristine standard, a standard that ensured that no man can keep the law'. Now he has previously stated that with the Pharisees he 'brought the law to its pristine standard, such that it was impossible for any man to keep.' It is clear that Prince himself believes that he knows who Jesus was speaking to, since otherwise he would hardly tell the reader that they need to have that understanding. The only audiences that he has referred to are, firstly, Christian believers, and secondly, the Pharisees. Having already said that Jesus can not be speaking to Christians, the only visible option is the Pharisees, and this inference is confirmed by the exact correspondence between Prince's view of Jesus's purpose in this passage, and of His purpose when addressing the Pharisees.

We know from Matthew 5:1-2 (and Matthew 7:28) that Jesus was addressing His disciples and the people. Moreover, from we know from Matthew 5:20 ('..unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees..') that He was not addressing the Pharisees.

Let me give you another example. You may have heard some preachers yelling at unbelievers and using the term "a brood of vipers". But Jesus **never** called sinners — not even the prostitutes and corrupt tax collectors — "a brood of vipers". Never! Those harsh words by Jesus were reserved only for the Pharisees, whose fixation on the law blinded them from seeing God in the flesh — Jesus, who gave the law in the first place and who came to fulfill the law on man's behalf. So learn to rightly divide the Word of God whenever you read the Bible.

Prince now invites the reader to consider some other words of Jesus, which were actually spoken to the scribes and Pharisees, and points out that it is inappropriate for evangelists to address them to unbelievers. What is his purpose in so doing? The matter at hand is whether Jesus's teaching in the gospels is applicable to Christian believers today. Their applicability to unbelievers is not at issue here. And it can hardly be the case that believers are prone to fear that Jesus is speaking to them in these passages. So why does Prince direct our attention to Jesus's condemnation of the Pharisees? It seems to me that he may be trying to divert our attention away from the matter of who the previous passage was really addressed to, and perhaps to reinforce the notion that must have formed in the minds of inattentive or simple-minded readers that it was addressed to the Pharisees, just as these latter words were.

Not everything that Jesus said was spoken to the church.

It is hard to know how to read this statement since, taken at face value, it merely states the obvious, since nothing in the gospels was spoken to the church, since it had not yet come into being. If Prince means that not everything in the gospels is applicable to the church today, then one might expect him to make clear which of Jesus's teachings are to be applied today and which are not. How could we follow Him, without knowing which of His commandments to obey? He has stated that

the new covenant began on the day of Pentecost, so it would seem to follow that Prince should reject all of Jesus's teaching in the gospels (and Acts 1), if he is to be consistent. He has told us that he rejects Matthew 5:29-30, and he has not told of us of any teaching that he does in fact accept, so without further clarification this may be the right conclusion to draw.

Feed On The Letters Of Apostle Paul

Pauls letters were written to the church and are thus for our benefit today.

Prince draws a contrast between Jesus's words which were not 'spoken to the church', and Paul's letters which, on the contrary, 'were written to the church.' He says that because they were written to the church, they are for our benefit today. There is a clear implication that if they had not been written to the church then they would not be for our benefit today. The further clear implication is that since Jesus's words were not 'spoken to the church', then likewise they are not for our benefit today. As argued above, this seems to include all of Jesus's teaching in the gospels.

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Paul was appointed by the Lord Jesus to be a teacher of the nations in faith and truth. He wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Some or all of the instructions he gave for the communion service may have been granted to Him directly by the Lord, but in general it is rather strange to speak of Paul writing 'the words of the ascended Jesus.' It was John who was given that privilege, as written for us in Revelation 2-3.

That is why, when it comes to reading the Bible, I always encourage new believers in our church to begin with the letters of Paul. (Many new believers like to start with the book of Revelation or Genesis, without first getting a foundation in the gospel of grace through reading the letters of Paul.)

I think it is true to say that most new believers in Jesus begin their bible reading with one of the gospels. They are called gospels since they contain the good news about the Lord Jesus Christ, all the wonderful things he did and said, the terrible suffering and death He underwent on our behalf to rescue us from our hopeless state, and His glorious resurrection. How can we follow, love and serve Him if we have not read them? Prince claims that it is away from the books of Genesis and Revelation that he is steering new believers. Whether or not that is true, he makes it clear that he also directs them away from the gospels to Paul's letters, since that is where he encourages them to begin their bible reading. How can this be, that Christian leaders are validating and facilitating and promoting the ministry of a man who leads babes in Christ away from the loving arms of the holy and righteous Son of God, who redeemed us from the pit of hell, and brought us out into His kingdom of peace and joy?

In Jesus Christ,

Andrew Chapman
Oxford, England
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believer. You see, in reading the Bible, it is important to note who the words were spoken to and to ascertain if the words are relevant for the believer. In this case, Jesus was speaking to the Pharisees who had rejected Him and who even made claims that He had an unclean spirit. Imagine their audacity! As for you, my friend, have full assurance in your heart that it is impossible for a believer to commit the unpardonable sin. A believer has already received the gift of eternal life and will never be “subject to eternal condemnation”.

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Do you think that Jesus expects us to do all that, or does He want us to rightly divide the Word, and understand who He was speaking to in that passage and what He meant? If the church were to obey everything that Jesus said in that passage, then it would look like a huge amputation ward! (I hope that I don't hear you saying, “Pastor Prince, you should have written this book earlier — I have already plucked out one eye and severed one arm!”)

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vipers". But Jesus **never** called sinners — not even the prostitutes and corrupt tax collectors — "a brood of vipers". Never! Those harsh words by Jesus were reserved only for the Pharisees⁶, whose fixation on the law blinded them from seeing God in the flesh — Jesus, who gave the law in the first place and who came to fulfill the law on man's behalf. So learn to rightly divide the Word of God whenever you read the Bible. Not everything that Jesus said was spoken to the church.

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Have you noticed that Paul never mentioned the unpardonable sin? Not one time, in all his letters to the churches, did he warn Christians about the unpardonable sin. If Christians could commit the unpardonable sin, he should have mentioned it in every epistle that he wrote. On the other hand, Paul emphasized that Jesus, by His death on the cross, has made us "alive together with Him, having forgiven you **all** trespasses"⁷. I have checked the original Greek word for "all"⁸ in this verse and guess what? "All" means ALL! Jesus, with His own blood, has forgiven you of ALL your sins, so there is **no** sin that is unpardonable! By one

perfect sacrifice, Jesus has cleansed you of the sins of your entire life and you are now sealed with the promise of eternal life! Now, this is good news that will establish your heart with grace and confidence.

God does not leave you wondering whether you are saved or not. He tells you outright that you are His and that nothing can ever separate you from the love of Christ. Not even sin because His blood is greater than your sin! Knowing that all your sins are forgiven is crucial for your health, peace of mind, wholeness and wellness. My struggle with the unpardonable sin during my teenage years is a case in point. The more you believe that all your sins are forgiven by the blood of Jesus, the more you will become whole — body, soul and spirit!

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I hope that by now, you can see the dangers of lifting the Word of God out of its context. We have to be careful not to take a verse out of its context and build a teaching or doctrine around it. Bible teachings have to be confirmed by several supporting verses and these have to be studied within their proper contexts. When you hear teachings that put fear in your heart and place you under bondage, don't just swallow them hook, line, sinker, fisherman and boots. Look at the context of the verse, and see if it is a new covenant truth or an old covenant teaching. Who was the verse spoken or written to, and how is it applicable to you today? Just remember that all new covenant truths exalt Jesus and His finished work. Hallelujah!