The Law is Holy, Just, and Good:
An Evaluation of Joseph Prince’s Approach to Law and Gospel

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Introduction

As a new Christian, I had come to Jesus having already realized the desperate wickedness of my heart, feeling the weight of my sin against God and my neighbor, and knowing full-well that I deserved an eternity in Hell; this is precisely why the word of the true Gospel, the justifying work of Jesus Christ on the cross for me, was so effective. In fact, through reading the book of Luke, and studying the Nicene Creed, the truth of the good news changed my heart of stone into a heart of flesh. This good news came to me by no merit of my own, but only by the grace of God through Jesus Christ. This very Gospel message is the foundation upon which every Christian church is built.

Joseph Prince, the senior pastor of New Creation Church in Singapore, has quickly risen to pop-Evangelical stardom. With best-selling books such as The Power of Right Believing, and Unmerited Favor, Prince has become a national bestseller. He is a self-proclaimed “gospel-preacher,” due to his unconventional belief that through preaching only the Gospel (devoid of the Law), people will repent,¹ they will make a decision for Jesus,² and they will receive all of the benefits of being justified by Christ: forgiveness, health, prosperity, and dominion over all sin in this life. These effects of the Gospel will then change the will of the believer, causing them to live a holy life apart from the instruction of the law.

Distinguishing, then, between Law and Gospel is imperative. In my case, the Gospel was needed to mend the wounds of my Law-ravaged heart. However, there are many nonbelievers who are content in their sin, and need to first be shown their need for a savior through the condemnation of the Law. One of the most well-articulated doctrines of the

¹ Prince defines the word “repent” when he writes, “[F]or all of you who feel that there should be more preaching on repentance, do you know what the word ‘repent’ means in the first place? The word ‘repent’ is the Greek word matanoeo, which according to Thayer’s Greek Lexicon, simply means ‘to change one’s mind.’ But because we have been influenced by our denominational background as well as our own religious upbringing, many of us have the impression that repentance is something that involves mourning and sorrow. However, that is not what the Word of God says. Repentance just means changing your mind.” Prince, Joseph. Destined to Reign: The Secret to Effortless Success, Wholeness, and Victorious Living. Tulsa, Oklahoma: Harrison House, 2007.

² “Jesus died for the whole world, but that does not mean that the whole world is automatically saved. Each individual must make a personal decision to receive Jesus as his Savior.” Prince, 137.
Lutheran Church is the proper distinction between Law and Gospel. Through a Biblical exploration of this doctrine, Joseph Prince’s errors are revealed.

This paper deals exclusively with Prince’s Book entitled *Destined to Reign* and the theological statements made therein. Through studying this book, Prince’s theological system proves problematic in a number of ways: first, Prince’s view of Scripture promotes a false distinction between the Law and the Gospel based on the old and new covenants, rendering it a functionally unsound hermeneutic; second, Prince only allows for one use of the law, when there are, in fact, three; and third, he cheapens the Gospel of forgiveness of sins by adding to its effects that are not Biblical, such as health and prosperity. To correct these problems, it is imperative to look at what Scripture says regarding the proper distinction between Law and Gospel, and to historic Lutheran writers who have written on the topic extensively for our benefit.

**Dividing Scripture into Law and Gospel**

The doctrine of Law and Gospel is foundational to all theology. All Christian theological systems must account for the Law of Moses and the good news of Jesus Christ. The Law is defined by Pieper in Volume Three of his Dogmatics as: “[T]he Word of God in which God demands of men that in their nature and in their thoughts, words, and acts they conform to the standard of His commandments and pronounces the curse on those who fail to comply.”³ And, conversely, the Gospel is defined as: “[T]he Word of God in which God makes no moral demands whatever on men, hence reproves no transgressions, but, on the contrary, promises His grace for the sake of Christ’s vicarious satisfaction to such as have not kept the divine Law.”⁴ The doctrine of Law and Gospel seeks to divide the two without negation or conflation.

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Both must stand in Scripture. Without the condemnation of the Law, the Gospel is not freeing; without the whole, unbroken Law being necessary to obtain eternal life, Christ’s death on the cross would have accomplished nothing. Without the freedom obtained for us in the Gospel, the Law would still be binding, and we would suffer eternal separation from God because we cannot, of our own volition, keep the Law.

Most problematic theological systems do not understand that Christ fulfilled the Law, rendering our efforts to merit salvation useless. In doing so, they purport some kind of holy living as the means by which we obtain everlasting life with Jesus. The problem with Prince’s theology, however, is not this. He very clearly articulates the importance of faith in Christ as the means by which we obtain everlasting life, and outrightly condemns any law-abiding as the way to salvation. Prince articulates the Gospel clearly and concisely: “Jesus’ death has fulfilled the righteous requirements of the law and of the old covenant. The Word of God tells us that the ‘handwriting of requirements’ has been nailed to the cross. Jesus came to fulfill all the requirements of the law on our behalf, so that the way to God is now opened. Hallelujah!” He even explains, in less concise terms, the substitutionary atonement: “The only reason Jesus could cry out ‘It is finished!’ on the cross was that the full anger of God against sin had been totally exhausted on His body. Jesus cannot lie! And if the anger of God has already been completely exhausted, how can God be angry with you today?” Prince very clearly understands the Gospel message, and believes—rightly—that the Law cannot save us.

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5 This is common in the Roman Catholic church with their idea of “merit,” but there are, of course, many other examples in contemporary Christianity. For example, in the Reformed tradition, Mark Jones has recently come out with statements that agree with the notion of law-abiding being necessary for salvation. For more information on Mark Jones see his book entitled Antinomianism: Reformed Theology’s Unwelcomed Guest.

6 Prince, 13.

7 Prince, 39.

8 To be clear, Prince’s formulation of how we receive the Gospel is problematic, and should be noted. He claims, “All of your sins—past, present, and future—have been washed clean by His precious blood. You are completely forgiven and from the moment you received Jesus into your life, you will never be held liable for your sins ever again.” (Prince, 29). Oddly enough, by making salvation a decision, Prince makes obtaining salvation a work. It is obvious that Prince has been influenced by the Law-driven religion that promotes “making the right decision for Jesus.” The Gospel is free of conditions for Christians, Prince makes very clear, but we must first do the receiving of Christ into our lives to make that a reality. Prince, then, unconsciously makes receiving the Gospel into a man-made Law.
Although Prince does indeed understand the Gospel, the way he interprets Scripture through the lens of Law and Gospel reveals foundational issues with his theology. Fundamental to any theological system is the hermeneutic used in drawing out meaning from a Biblical text. Rightly understanding a Biblical text in context is imperative to right theology. Instead of seeking to draw out what the texts actually say in the context that the words appear in, Prince stresses a Two Covenant system that must be applied to the Biblical texts, and claims that this particular framework is the only way to properly understand anything written in the Bible, including the words of Jesus. In contradistinction to this, a Lutheran approach seeks to draw out meaning based on the historical context, the grammatical uses of the original languages, all while using Scripture to interpret Scripture. The goal of the Lutheran approach is not to throw away any passages, including what was fulfilled by Christ—namely, the Law—rather, the goal is to see the Law in its proper place, and to see the Gospel in all its glory. While Prince asserts a Two Covenant scriptural interpretation that posits Law exclusively in the Old Testament and Gospel exclusively in the New Testament, the Lutheran hermeneutic acknowledges Law and Gospel as themes throughout all of Scripture.

Prince’s Two Covenant Approach

Prince claims that the dividing line in Scripture is the cross of Jesus Christ; before it, the old covenant is strictly Law and is no longer applicable in the Christian life, and after it, the new covenant reveals only God’s love and mercy toward his people. Prince explains:

God wants us to be able to rightly divide the Word. He wants us to be astute in rightly dividing and clearly separating what belongs to the old covenant of law and what belongs to the new covenant of grace. He wants us to be able to distinguish what

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9 The title “Two Covenant” system is my own, and does not appear in Prince’s writings. The term seeks to describe the hermeneutic that Prince uses when he divides the Bible into two separate covenants.
occurred before the cross from what occurred after the cross, and to understand what difference the cross made.\textsuperscript{10}

He delves into this distinction later in the book, by claiming that, “God Himself found fault with the old covenant of law and the Ten Commandments.”\textsuperscript{11} The Law of God is therefore not an expression of the nature of God himself, but some sort of accident that God made. He goes on, “In other words, with the advent of the new covenant of grace, the Ten Commandments have been made obsolete.”\textsuperscript{12} By rendering the Ten Commandments obsolete, Prince does a disservice to the entirety of Scripture. He throws out the Scriptures prior to the cross as “law,” and retains the Scriptures after the cross as consoling “Gospel.”\textsuperscript{13}

To put this Two Covenant hermeneutic into practice, Prince, in a larger context of explaining that God does not punish us for our sins in the new covenant, brings up King David. He references David’s punishment for his sin. As is written in 2 Samuel 12:11-14:

[Nathan continued], “Thus says the Lord, ‘Behold, I will raise up evil against you out of your own house. And I will take your wives before your eyes and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun. For you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel and before the sun.’” David said to Nathan, “I have sinned against the Lord.” And Nathan said to David, “The Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die. Nevertheless, because by this deed you have utterly scorned the Lord, the child who is born to you shall die.” (ESV)

Prince answers the question: “But Pastor Prince, didn’t God punish King David for his sin and he lost his child?” by writing, “Don’t forget that David, like Elijah, lived before the cross of Jesus. You will never find an example of God punishing a believer for his sins in the new

\begin{footnotes}
\item Prince, 51.
\item Prince, 121.
\item Prince, 122. Emphasis retained from primary text. The negation of the Ten Commandments in the life of the Christian and its effect on how Prince understands the Law is dealt with later in this paper in the section entitled “The Uses of the Law.”
\item He does, however, at one point in the text (page 191) make the clarification that the whole of Scripture is about Jesus, including the Old Testament. Although, he never says that the Gospel promises are for those who lived in Old Testament times; instead, he claims that all of Scripture points to Christ for us in present times throughout all of Scripture.
\end{footnotes}
covenant." Instead of dealing with the text honestly, showing that God did indeed forgive David of his sin, so much so, that David could, in fact, write the words, “Blessed is the man to whom the Lord shall not impute sin” about himself, Prince argues:

Do you know who David was describing when he said, ‘Blessed is the man to whom the Lord shall not impute sin?’ Since it’s clear that sin was imputed to David, he could not have been describing himself as some scholars claim. No, he was looking prophetically into the covenant of grace. He was describing you and me — a new generation of people who are under the covenant of grace!

Prince does not understand that while there can be temporal punishment for sin, there can be at the same time no eternal imputation of sin; the two can stand together without contradiction. David, while righteous in the eyes of God, was no longer righteous in the eyes of his people. Temporally, God punished David for his sin because what he had done was a testimony against God in the eyes of the people. The text obviously explains a distinction, that although there are earthly consequences for David’s sin, he is still forgiven by God. It is therefore clear that Prince is willing to sacrifice right Biblical interpretation in favor of a hermeneutic that makes every Gospel text in the Old Testament about believers in current times, and not about the believers in the Old Testament.

Along with confusing the deliverance of those in the Old Testament with those in current times, Prince goes even further with his distinction between the Law of the Old Testament and Gospel of the New Testament:

14 Prince, 57. Emphasis retained from primary text. This is also not true. In Acts chapter 5, Ananias and Sapphira are punished for “lying to God” (Acts 5:4) by keeping some of the proceeds from the selling of their land. They aren’t simply punished temporally, they die (Acts 5:1-11). This is an even harsher punishment then David faced. Another instance of Christians being punished in the New Testament is in Corinth where the Corinthians were becoming sick and dying by taking the Lord’s Supper wrongly (1 Corinthians 11:27-32). To say that there are no cases in Scripture of people being punished in the new covenant is, simply put, wrong.


16 Prince, 57.

17 Although we would agree with Prince that the deliverance of those in the Old Testament shows our future deliverance in Christ, we would say that this does not negate the actual saving of those in the Old Testament by belief in the promise of Christ.
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.\textsuperscript{18}

This is to say that the words that came from Jesus’s own mouth may not be binding. This should raise many red flags. If the words from Jesus Himself cannot be taken at face-value, how can we know exactly how to rightly understand the Scriptures? Prince explains that he came to know this Two Covenant approach to Scripture alone—he received the revelation directly from God, he says—so, how can we trust that this is right when it is not self-evident in the Biblical texts?\textsuperscript{19} The short answer: we cannot. Not only has Prince invented an approach to Scripture that is not presented in the Biblical texts, he has proven to be willing to throw out key passages that should be used for interpretation in favor of a Two Covenant hermeneutic that essentially negates the larger half of the Bible.

The Lutheran Approach

Contrary to Prince’s incorrect Two Covenant approach to Scripture, Lutheran theology posits a correct, and consequently much more nuanced hermeneutic. Therefore, a full exposition of the Lutheran approach to Scripture cannot be done within the confines of this paper.\textsuperscript{20} Instead, the

\textsuperscript{18} Prince, 92. Emphasis retained from primary text.

\textsuperscript{19} Prince writes regarding his Christian upbringing on pages 61-62; 89-90; and 169. He also, on many occasions, cites his own personal revelation from God as the basis of his teachings. The Foreword to his book begins, “It all began in 1997, when I was on vacation with my wife Wendy...Then I distinctly heard the voice of the Lord on the inside. It wasn’t a witness of the Spirit. It was a voice, and I heard God say this clearly to me: ‘Son, you are not preaching grace.’” Prince, vii.

\textsuperscript{20} For more information regarding Lutheran hermeneutics, see Kuscke’s book entitled Biblical Interpretation: The Only Right Way, or What Does This Mean?: Principles of Biblical Interpretation in a Post-Modern World by James W. Voelz.
goal of this section is to give a brief overview in response to the particular issues presented in Prince’s approach.

In contrast to Prince’s Two Covenant system, it is pertinent to note that Law and Gospel are not divided between Old and New Testaments exclusively. The Gospel message is given as early as the proto evangel in Genesis 3:15, and the covenant that God makes with Abraham is exclusively Gospel as well. Throughout the Old Testament, God continually shows mercy when He could have justifiably shown wrath. This is to say, the dividing line between Law and Gospel in understanding Scripture can be understood as such: the Law is that which reveals our sin, it is that which we must do, and that which concerns us to obey, love, and honor God above all things, as in the Mosaic Law; the Gospel is that which concerns Christ’s suffering on our behalf, having fulfilled the commands of the Law perfectly, and the free offer of righteousness that is not our own. The Law demands our merit, while the Gospel is entirely unmerited. We cannot draw a hard line at the cross, rendering the former portion of Scripture moot; instead, we should seek to place each individual passage in context to evaluate whether the text portrays the Law or the Gospel. Walther, in his extensive treatment of the doctrines of Law and Gospel writes, “Nor is this the difference [between the doctrines], that only the Gospel is necessary, not the Law, as if the latter were a mere addition that could be dispensed with in a strait. No, both are equally necessary. Without the Law, the Gospel is not understood; without the Gospel the Law benefits us nothing.” This is most certainly true. He goes on to say, “[T]here are Gospel contents in the Old and Law contents in the New Testament.” This is directly opposed to the arguments that Prince makes regarding rightly dividing Law and Gospel in Scripture.

In addition to this, we must take into account the historical and grammatical contexts of passages while reading the Bible, and clear Scripture should always interpret unclear

21 Genesis 15.


23 Walther, 7.
Scripture. The Bible does not contradict itself, neither does it negate itself. This is another place where Prince’s Two Covenant approach falls extremely short. He, as stated in the above section, shows that words from Jesus’s own mouth are not binding on believers because they portray the Law of the Old Testament. Rather than take Jesus at his word, Prince seeks to rip God’s Word out of context to suit his own agenda. It is important to note: “While the Law and the Gospel must... be carefully distinguished, as two portions of the one Word of God, they are not contradictory. The one is only preparatory to the other. Everyone who inherits everlasting life does so through the fulfillment of the Law.” This fulfillment of the Law is not by our own doing, but by Christ’s vicarious satisfaction on the cross.

The Uses of the Law

In Lutheranism, there is posited a threefold use of the Law. The first use of the law is the civil use; the second is to reveal our sin and need for a savior; the third is to instruct the Christian in holiness. Although the second use is primary, the other two uses are retained because they are important and because they are made clear in Scripture. Joseph Prince does a great

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24 Prince has a habit of citing Greek words out of context as well. He does this by saying that the Bible is normally translated a certain way, but every translator is wrong because the real meaning of the word is the alternate dictionary definition (see footnote 1 concerning the word ‘repent’ for example). He does not cite any scholarship to prove these assertions, but instead simply claims it. He goes as far as to say that the editors of the New King James Bible added text for theological reasons, when the text he cites is, in fact, a textual variant. “The question we should be asking is, ‘Did Jesus tell us to fast?’ Now, I know that when Jesus’ disciples were unable to cast out a certain spirit from a boy, the NKJV (as well as the KJV) Bible does record that Jesus, in reference to the spirit, said, ‘This kind can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting.’ So people have read this one verse and concluded that the secret to spiritual power is fasting. But do you know that in the original Greek text, the word ‘fasting’ does not appear in that verse? It was added by the translators!” page 275. This particular method of argumentation has caused deep unrest in some laypeople that I know who have read this book; one woman in particular has been terrified to read any translations of the Bible because she thinks translators are lying to her by negating and adding certain words to the Biblical texts.


26 The third use of the law is dealt with later in the paper concerning Christian living under the heading “The Effects of the Gospel.” It should be noted that Prince does not allow for the first use of the Law in his book, but the discussion concerning the first use is not directly pertinent to the content of the book, nor the goal of the argument made in this paper, so I have left this discussion out.
disservice to all those who read Destined to Reign by maintaining that the only function of the law is to condemn prior to conversion, and after conversion, the law has no use whatsoever.

A reoccurring theme with Prince is: “[T]he law is holy, just and good...But even though the law is holy, just and good, it has no power to make you holy, just and good. You see, the law was designed to expose your weaknesses, your sins, and your inability to be holy, just and good.”27 This is exactly right. Romans 3:10 explains the depth of our sin, “None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one” (ESV). We also know that the Law has no power to make us right with God, it is only by grace through faith.28

In conjunction with Prince’s assertion that the Law only condemns, he also, and more jarringly, contends that the Law only condemns non-Christians. This is key to Prince’s theology. Once a person is converted, and because there is “[therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus;” (Rom 8:1 ESV) there is, for Prince, no place for the second use of the Law in the Christian life. In fact, he posits that feelings of condemnation in the Christian life actually bring about suffering; this is not because God punishes us for not following his commands, but because by focusing on our sin, we do not trust God’s promises enough. Prince explains that we should not even be so aware of our sins as to confess them before God:

Beloved, confessing your sins all the time will only make you more sin-conscious. But knowing that you are under Jesus’ waterfall of forgiveness will keep your forgiveness-conscious. And knowing that you are forgiven of all your sins will give you the power

27 Prince, 16.

28 “But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast” (Eph. 2:4-9).
to reign over every destructive habit and live a life of victory!²⁹

Later in his book, Prince explains a diagram of a plant.³⁰ In this picture, there is a plant above the soil with leaves labeled: “sickness,” “destructive habits,” and “financial lack.” Under the soil, there is an even larger root system. These roots are labeled: “stress,” and “fear,” with the deepest root called “condemnation.” This picture symbolizes Prince’s ideas about focusing on sin in any capacity in the Christian life. The Christian should therefore never feel any condemnation for his sin, even if it points him to Christ, because condemnation is only meant for unbelievers. Condemnation in the Christian life therefore brings about suffering by way of sickness, destructive habits, and financial lack.

Although Prince understands the impossibility of fulfilling the Law, and is correct in asserting that we are powerless to fulfill it without the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, he goes too far and makes the Law the tool of the devil exclusively. In Scripture, the Devil is called the “accuser,” and for good reason. The Devil does use the Law to show us our sin and to make us doubt our standing with God. However, Prince goes a too far by saying:

The bottom line is that the Holy Spirit never convicts out of your sins. He NEVER comes to point out your faults. I challenge you to find a scripture in the Bible that tells you that the Holy Spirit has come to convict you of your sins...many believers don’t understand that the Holy Spirit is actually in them to convict them of their righteousness in Christ.³¹

Scripture is clear that the Holy Spirit does, in fact, convict us of our sins. John 16:8-11 states: “And when [the Holy Spirit] comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgement: concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; concerning righteousness, because I got to the Father, and you will see me no longer; concerning judgement, because the ruler of this world is judged” (ESV). It is also true that the Word of God convicts of sin as well,

²⁹ Prince, 109.
³⁰ Prince, 131. This particular illustration, he claims was direct revelation from God.
³¹ Prince 134-135. Emphasis retained from primary text.
and the Bible was inspired by the Holy Spirit: “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16, ESV). This is important because it gives us clear reason to believe that the law is beneficial for Christians in both the second use—showing us our sin—and in the third use, so that we can be instructed in Christian living. If the Law is reduced to being a tool of the devil exclusively, there is no room for a right use of the Law in growing in holiness as a Christian.

Contrary to Prince’s Lawless Christianity, Walther explains that the Law is, in fact, necessary in the Christian life, and to throw away either Law or Gospel for the Christian would render the person a nonbeliever: “Even for the Christian the Law still retains its significance. Indeed, when a person ceases to employ either of these two doctrines, he is no longer a true Christian.”

The Effects of the Gospel

The primary effect of the Gospel is the forgiveness of sins. Justification by faith alone in Christ alone accomplishes this perfectly, without any contribution of holiness on the part of the believer. G. H. Gerberding, in his book The Way of Salvation in the Lutheran Church describes the effects of the Gospel when he writes: “By [Christ’s] death or suffering obedience, He worked out a negative righteousness, the forgiveness of sins. By his life, or active obedience, He won a positive righteousness. The former releases from punishment. The latter confers character, standing and honor in the kingdom of God.” Not only, then, have we received the forgiveness of sins, but we have also been adopted as sons. We have been granted an esteemed standing before God on account of Christ. The faith that justifies us does so not because it is

32 Walther, 7.

“an act that merits or earns justification. No! In no sense. Christ has earned it. Faith only lays hold of and appropriates Christ and a ‘gift of God,’ as the Scriptures declare."34 This particular truth of the Gospel is articulated by Prince in a concise, orthodox way. He makes it very clear that there is nothing a person can do to merit salvation. He therefore understands the negative righteousness conferred on the believer, but abuses the positive righteousness, making the positive righteousness about temporal blessing, rather than an honorable standing before God. First, he abolishes the Law for the believer in every sense, and maintains that good works are to be both inspired and instructed from the Gospel only; second, he claims that there are many more immediate effects of the Gospel that are not promised in Scripture, such as health, wealth, and prosperity.

Good Works and Christian Living

Good works are an effect of a changed heart and mind by the Gospel, and are integral to the Christian life. Being changed people, Christians produce good works. A popular way of discussing such a phenomenon is by using a metaphor of an apple tree. The apple tree is not an apple tree because it produces apples; rather, the apple tree produces apples according to its nature as an apple tree. Such are good works for Christians. In Mark chapter 4, verse 20, Jesus explains the parable of the sower: “But those that were sown on the good soil are the ones who hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold.” Good fruit, Christian good works, flow from our changed nature. The Lutheran approach allows for instruction through the moral Law of Scripture to aid in good works, while Prince says that good works should only come from the Gospel because the Law can only condemn.

Good works and Christian living therefore follow necessarily from a right understanding of the Gospel. Because God first loved us and gave his son to die for us by no

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34 Gerberding, 144.
merit of our own, we are now free to go out and love our neighbor, serving him in all that we do. Jacobs explains:

A good work is a fruit of faith in act, whether that act is within the heart, or in the outward life. It is a free act of a justified person, which he performs out of love to God. It has both its source and its standard in the Word of God. Faith acts not upon its own impulse, but as it has received a word of God. Hence good works are not self-chosen acts of self-denial or heroism, but they are simply the fulfilling of the Ten Commandments. In these Commandments, there is comprised for all time the full sum of man’s duty. They are repeated and expanded and expounded by our Lord in the Sermon on the Mount, whose aim is particularly to present the spiritual side of the Commandments.35

This shows that the Ten Commandments are not only a list of requirements that condemn us, but after being freed by the Gospel, the Ten Commandments truly do instruct the Christian in what good works are.

The distinction between passive and active righteousness is also extremely helpful in understanding the relation between good works and our justification by God. Although we have no part in our passive righteousness received from God “vertically,” we do have a part in our active righteousness “horizontally.” This is to say, we have a responsibility and freedom to serve our neighbor with our good works. These are truly good works because we have already been justified by Christ, and they spring from our new nature that has been created in us by God through our justification. The Law, then, functions for the Christian to instruct us in those good works, not as an unattainable standard as before conversion, but as a guide. For this reason, it is necessary to look to the Law as Christians. Pieper explains:

The Law is the only source from which the Christian theologian teaches what good works are, even as Christ Himself pointed to the Law when He answered the question which works are commanded by God and therefore God-pleasing (Matt. 15:1 ff.; 22:35 ff.; 19:16 ff.). Christians, too, need the Law in this respect, for, because of their old Adam, they are prone to take commandments of men, such as the commandments

35 Jacobs, Elements of Religion, 205.
concerning meat and drink, celibacy, etc (Col. 2:16-22; 1 Tim. 4:1 ff.), to be commandments of God.36

Following, then, in the footsteps of Jesus, it is necessary and good to look to the Law as a guide for holy living as Christians.

Contrary to this, Prince asserts that Christian living is not informed by the Law in any sense because the Law only condemns. Because the Law only condemns, that condemnation only brings about suffering in the Christian life. Instead, Prince asserts that the Gospel is that which inspires and instructs good works. This is distinct from the Lutheran understanding because, although we posit the Gospel to be that which frees us and inspires us to do good works, we still retain the Law in order to reveal God’s will to instruct our good works. Prince shows that the Gospel is all that is needed to bring about good works in the Christian life:

Sin loses its appeal when you encounter the Person of grace, Jesus Christ, and realize all that He has blessed you with and done for you on the cross...Now, what happens? Does this encounter with Jesus cause you to want to go out and sin? Of course not! On the contrary, it will cause you to fall in love with Jesus all over again. It will make you a better husband, a better father, a better housewife, a better student.37

The “encounter” of the Person of Jesus through the Gospel, then, necessarily makes you want to be a better person. This is not because you have looked at the Law written in the Bible as a guide, but because you have fallen so in love with Jesus, you can now love other people spontaneously.

Prince also maintains that once a person has converted, God grants the new believer victory over all sin. Therefore, the Gospel empowers you to overcome sin without any concrete instruction about what that means, or how that looks in practical living. He asserts:

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37 Prince, 30-31.
I don’t believe for one moment that a believer who has truly encountered the complete forgiveness of Jesus and the perfection of His finished work would desire to live a life of sin. It is His grace and forgiveness that gives you the power to overcome sin. The Apostle Paul said, ‘Sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.’ When you are under God’s grace and His perfect forgiveness, you will experience victory over sin.38

This shows that the only way a Christian could choose to live a life of sin is by not having “truly encountered” the forgiveness of Jesus. Of course there is a distinction to be noted between those who choose to live a life of sin, and those who struggle with sin. Those who struggle with sin, then, simply have not trusted the promises of God enough:

It is clear that if a person lacks good Christian qualities like self-control, godliness and brotherly kindness, it is not because he lacks discipline, but because he has forgotten the main clause of the new covenant...Beloved, if you remind yourself daily that you have been cleansed from all your sins, you will exhibit more and more of these Christian qualities. Your heart will overflow with self-control, godliness, perseverance, brotherly kindness and love.39

This belief is similar to the beliefs of Johannes Agricola, the subject of the first Antinomian Controversy in 1525. Pieper addresses this belief when he writes:

Agricola wants contrition or repentance taught from the Gospel and not from the Law, because a contrition or repentance from love of God can come only from the Gospel. The last part of this sentence is true, of course. But when he then says of the contrition which flows from love of God: This is ‘the first rung of the new birth, the real blowing and breathing upon by the Holy Spirit; after that the heart gains the sincere confidence in God that He will overlook its foolishness,’ he is actually making trust in god, or faith in the remission of sins, follow on the contrition which proceeds from love of God, hence dependent on renewal and sanctification.40

38 Prince, 45.
39 Prince, 103.
Pieper points out that a new form of the Law is created when good works are attributed only to the Gospel. Instead of being freed by the Gospel to do good works instructed by the Law, there is instead a new Law dependent on the feeling of the believer, as Prince shows. The believer must meditate on God’s love for him so much so that he gains victory over sin without confessing his sins or repenting of them to God, because to do so would increase awareness of sinfulness, bring about condemnation, and cause suffering.

Prince’s misunderstanding of the function of the Law in the Christian life makes it impossible to ask the important Christian questions regarding: “Is this action or practice sinful?” Instead, these questions can only be answered by emotion. Does this action or practice make you feel like you love God less? Does this action or practice make you feel bad, or have temporal consequences that make you feel bad? This is a huge problem. By looking to the Law as freed people, the Law becomes something Christians can strive to follow in joy. I can, as a Christian, in good conscience ask if a certain action or practice is sinful, and look to Scripture for a correct answer. This does not heap condemnation upon me, but instructs me in my Christian walk so that I can learn how to better love and serve my neighbor.

Health and Wealth

The main contention in Destined to Reign is that the Christian, having accepted Jesus into their heart, now reigns in life. While this is true in a sense, Prince describes what this reigning looks like: “You are destined to reign in life. You are called by the Lord to be a success, to enjoy wealth, to enjoy health and to enjoy a life of victory. It is not the Lord’s desire that you live a life of defeat, poverty, and failure.”\(^1\) Prince therefore takes all of the implications of having an eternal life with Jesus, and says that all of these good things must necessarily happen in our temporal lives.

\(^1\) Prince, 1.
Do you seriously think that your heavenly Father will bless you with a meager hand when the streets of heaven are made of pure gold? Listen carefully: The streets of heaven are not plated with gold. They are made of solid gold! Think about this for a moment. If you on earth know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more your Father in heaven! 

It is true that eternal life after death will be free of all sickness, sin, and despair. This, however, does not necessarily mean that these implications will take place now. In some sense, the eschatological reality of our justification in Christ is true today. We have received the forgiveness of all of our sins, although we still sin. We have received a righteous standing before God on account of Christ’s righteousness, even though we conduct ourselves unrighteously. We have received the Holy Spirit who inwardly changes us and sanctifies us. We have received the benefits of Holy Baptism, the Lord’s Supper, and the Word of God as present reality, even though sin still permeates this life, and death is inevitable for all people. God has instituted means of grace to preserve us in the faith and to grant us security this side of heaven. These are the things we Christians should be focused on as what is guaranteed by the Gospel, not temporal blessings that will be left behind when we pass from this life.

Prince’s “Gospel” is therefore tainted by the prosperity message. He defends himself against this allegation, however, by saying:

My friend, there is no such thing as a ‘prosperity gospel.’ There is only one gospel in the Bible and that is the gospel of Jesus Christ. However, when you believe the gospel of Jesus, which is based entirely on His grace, it will result in health and prosperity. In fact, the gospel of Jesus Christ leads to blessings, success, healing, restoration, protection, financial breakthroughs, security, peace, wholeness and MUCH MORE!”

This clearly makes prosperity and all of the other temporal blessings enumerated by Prince a necessary result of the Gospel. Jesus addresses the distinction between temporal wealth and heavenly blessings when he says:

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42 Prince, 22. Emphasis retained from primary text.
Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on 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 and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also...No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money (Matthew 6:19-21, 24, ESV).

It is clear, therefore, that if our hearts are set on temporal blessings, even if those temporal blessings are viewed as a result of right belief, we will inevitably become devoted to the one master—money—and despise our one true master: God.

In conjunction with this, it is clear that, if anything, the Scriptures show that suffering is more likely than comfort in the Christian life, especially if we take into account that the apostles themselves suffered and died because of their faith. In fact, Scripture speaks boldly about the nature of suffering in the Christian life. For example, 1 Peter 4:12-19 says:

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name. (ESV)

Similarly in 2 Corinthians: “We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies” (4:8-10 ESV). Furthermore, the theology of “bearing your own cross” in the Christian life clearly indicates a necessary burden that the Christian must bear. Even though “Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:27 ESV), it is also, at the same time, true that, “my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:30 ESV). We need not fear suffering in the Christian life, like Prince advocates. Instead, we should
seek to love and serve God and our neighbor as best we can despite the suffering the Scripture claims we will have to endure.

**Conclusion**

Properly distinguishing between Law and Gospel is therefore imperative for the Christian. The binding of the Law is necessary to drive us to Christ, and the instruction of the Law is invaluable in the Christian life. To negate these two functions of the Law for the Christian is not only problematic, but can drive people into false contentment while living a life of unrepentance. Through his faulty Two Covenant hermeneutic, and his beliefs about the Law having no function in the Christian life, it is glaringly obvious that Joseph Prince promotes a historic antinomianism in line with Agricola. This historic antinomianism that he promotes seeks to place the Gospel in the position of the Law in the life of a Christian to both instruct and encourage good works, and thereby makes the believer’s personal emotive reception of the Gospel promises into a new Law. Although what Prince promotes may seem freeing at first glance, by improperly dividing Law and Gospel, he creates a man-made Law that continually condemns believers.

The historic Lutheran tradition seeks to properly divide Law and Gospel, acknowledging the place for both in the Scriptures and in the Christian life. Through the teachings of the Lutheran church, it is apparent that Prince incorrectly divides Law and Gospel by making the only dividing line the cross, and by promoting the false teaching that the Law should never be preached to the Christian. In addition to this, Prince ascribes extra effects to the Gospel, promising health and prosperity when Scripture contrastingly speaks of “taking up your cross.” It is apparent that Prince’s teachings are not compatible with Lutheran theology, and should be warned against and barred from being used in the Lutheran church.
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