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Become a Better You: Reflections on Joel Osteen's Latest Book

By Michael S. Horton

It was a pleasant afternoon a few years ago in my back yard, writing an article, when Modern Reformation executive editor Eric Landry informed me that he had scheduled me for an interview on Joel Osteen for "Dateline NBC." Knowing nothing about Mr. Osteen or his message at that time, I declined-with no effect whatsoever on Landry's force of will. "Here's the book: Your Best Life Now. So you'd better get reading!"

Little did I know then that Osteen already was a phenomenon and would only become a greater one as months wore on. In retrospect, I am glad to have had the opportunity to talk to so many people who are confused about the message that Osteen preaches and that seems to pervade so much of ordinary American preaching and spirituality in our day.

A CBS "60 Minutes" interview sparked more recent requests for comment concerning Osteen's new book, *Becoming a Better You: 7 Keys to Improving Your Life Every Day*. I took it with me on a recent flight and I offer the following reflections

Heavier Emphasis on the Prosperity Gospel

Under the Library of Congress identification, this book is classified as "1. Self-actualization (Psychology)-Religious Aspects-Christianity." Even the Library of Congress seems to know what sort of message this represents. "You can be better," Osteen invites. "The question is: 'How? What must I do to become a better me?' In my first book, *Your Best Life Now*, I presented seven steps to living at your full potential." But with *Becoming a Better You*, he wants to go a little deeper. "I'm hoping to help you look inside yourself and discover the priceless seeds of greatness that God has placed within you. In this book, I will reveal to you seven keys that you can use to unlock those seeds of greatness, allowing them to burst forth in an abundantly blessed life."

Remember, God has put in you everything you need to live a victorious life. Now, it's up to you to draw it out...What does it mean to become a better you? First, you understand that God wants you to become all that He created you to be. Second, it is imperative that you realize that God will do His part, but you must do your part as well. To become a better you, you must:

1. Keep pressing forward.
2. Be positive toward yourself.
3. Develop better relationships.
4. Form better habits.
5. Embrace the place where you are.
6. Develop your inner life.
7. Stay passionate about life.

The theme is "coming up higher." From beginning to end, Osteen addresses his vast readership as though each person is "a child of the Most High God."

God has breathed His life into you. He planned seeds of greatness in you. You have everything you need to fulfill your God-given destiny...It's all in you. You are full of potential. But you have to do your part and start tapping into it...You have the seed of Almighty God on the inside of you...We have to believe that we have what it takes.

It is indeed true that there are appeals to the Bible scattered throughout this book. However, in nearly every case a verse is either torn from its context and turned into a "fortune-cookie" kind of promise that one can name-and-claim for oneself or it is actually misquoted to serve Osteen's point. For example, we read that when God confronted Adam and Eve after their sin, "He said, 'Adam, who told you that you were naked?' In other words, 'Who told you that something was wrong with you?' God immediately knew the enemy had been talking to them. God is saying to you today, 'Who told you that you don't have what it takes to succeed?'"³ Where, in the passage he refers to (Genesis 3:11), God asks Adam this question in order to convict him of his sin, Osteen makes it sound as if it were Satan who told Adam that he had failed the test. As in his earlier book, Osteen here never speaks of sin as falling short of God's glory, but of falling short of God's best for your life. In fact, Osteen's attachment to the prosperity gospel is even more explicit in *Become a Better You*. Just as Ke

neth Copeland, Benny Hinn, and other "faith teachers" speak of believers as "little gods" who share God's nature, Osteen has an entire chapter devoted to "The Power of Your Bloodline." "You have the DNA of Almighty God."⁴ It's "what's in you" that is divine seed, he says.⁵ It is not that God has imputed Christ's righteousness to us and adopted us as his children. We are not saved by an external and alien righteousness, but by an internal and essential righteousness that belongs to us simply by virtue of our being created in his image. Therefore, throughout the book Osteen can address all of his readers as semi-divine without any reference to faith in Christ.

As if the fall never happened, Osteen writes, "He has programmed you with everything you need for victory. That's why every day you can say things like, 'I have what it takes. I am more than a conqueror. I am intelligent; I am talented. I am successful; I am attractive; I am an overcomer.'"⁶

Where Paul, in Galatians 3:29 argues that the inheritance of eternal life comes through the promise (i.e., Christ) rather than by the law, Osteen again lifts a single verse out of its context as a promise of temporal prosperity:

I love the Scripture that says, 'If we belong to Christ, we are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.' That means that we can all experience the blessings of Abraham. If you study Abraham's record, you'll discover that he was prosperous, healthy, and lived a long, productive life. Even though he didn't always make the best choices, he enjoyed God's blessings and favor.⁷

This is a clear example of how Osteen turns even the most obvious references to Christ (as the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy) into timeless examples of what can happen to us if we name and claim our blessings. He does not interpret Scripture; he uses it as a book of quotations to serve his own prosperity message.

The book is shot through with the lingo of the prosperity gospel: we are to "declare" God's blessing, "speak" prosperity, and "prophesy" health, wealth, and happiness into our lives. All of this creates the impression that God has set everything up for our victory, but it is up to us to actually plug into the power-source and create our blessings by following the proper principles and procedures.

So in spite of the supernatural rhetoric, at the end of the day it all sounds deistic: God has set everything up, with the laws of prosperity in place, and now the ball is in our court. Following a well-worn path of "victorious life" teachers, Osteen speaks of "tapping into" the eternal realm. In this way, even religion becomes a species of technology: by knowing the right principles, formulas and steps, prosperity, blessing, and favor can be yours here and now. Once again, the Gnostic brand of spirituality is readily apparent.

He wants us to have a little heaven on earth, right where we are...you can accomplish your dreams before you go to heaven! How can you do that? By tapping into God's power inside of you...Please understand that those are all things from which you have already been set free. But here's the catch: If you don't appreciate and take advantage of your freedom, if you don't get your thoughts, your words, your attitudes going in the right direction, it won't do you any good. You may be sitting back waiting on God to do something supernatural in your life, but the truth is, God is waiting on you. You must rise up in your authority, have a little backbone and determination, and say, 'I am not going to live my life in mediocrity, bound by addictions, negative and defeated.'⁸

I'm all for positive thinking-as long as we don't call it the gospel. I come from a long line of Wild West pioneers and can identify with Osteen's commendation of his parents as a major source of an optimistic outlook. The problem is when we blindly ignore the reality of our condition before God. Whatever good things there may be about me, none of them commend me before God's righteous judgment.

Moving beyond positive thinking, Osteen embraces "positive confession," the prosperity doctrine that says if you not only believe for something but declare that it is already yours, the desired blessing will become true. God may be the source of this blessing in an ultimate sense, since he set things up, but whether we actually receive God's favor and blessings depends entirely on our attitude, action, and obedience.

Osteen devotes a chapter to "Making Your Words Work for You." "Every day, we should make positive declarations over our lives," he writes. "We should say things such as, 'I am blessed. I am prosperous. I am healthy. I am talented. I am creative. I am wise.'"⁹ Joe's wife could not carry her pregnancies to full term, so Joe changed his name to the fuller name, "Joseph," meaning "God Will Add." "Several months after Joseph began believing his name," Osteen tells us, "his wife became pregnant again. And for the first time in ten years, she carried the child full term, and gave birth to a healthy baby boy...With our words, we can prophesy our own future."¹⁰ "Something supernatural happens when we speak it out. That's how we give life to our faith...Declare it by faith and use your words to change that situation."¹¹

This means that whatever God has done to make all of this possible, the victory that we are actually able to achieve and the blessings that we are actually able to receive depend on our effort. So in a chapter titled, "Have Confidence in Yours

elf," Osteen repeats his mantra, again misquoting the Bible:

The Scripture says, 'Our faith is made effectual when we acknowledge everything good in us.' Think about this: Our faith is not effective when we acknowledge all our hurts and pains. It's not effective when we stay focused on our shortcomings or our weaknesses. Our faith is most effective when we acknowledge the good things that are in us.¹²

The closest thing that I have been able to find to the wording cited by Osteen is Paul's statement in 2 Corinthians 12:9: "But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.' Therefore, I will most gladly boast all the more about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may reside in me."

Of course, if this is the verse that Osteen has in mind, it says exactly the opposite of Osteen's paraphrase. In fact, it is part of a larger explanation of why Paul, in contrast to the "super-apostles" who were leading the Corinthians astray with their "smooth talk and flattery," would "not boast about myself, except of my weaknesses." In fact, Paul says that God gave him a "thorn in the flesh, so that I would not exalt myself" (2 Cor. 12:5-10). In times of weakness, distress, and difficulty, Paul says, where we lose our self-confidence to handle our situation before God, we are actually in the best position for God to show his power.

Redefining the Christian Message

In the only clear reference to trusting in Christ that I came across in this book, Osteen still feels compelled to include us as the object of faith: "When we believe in God's Son, Jesus Christ, and believe in ourselves, that's when our faith comes alive. When we believe we have what it takes, we focus on our possibilities" (emphasis added).¹³

Even when the concepts of sin and redemption are employed, they are redefined. Sin is not a condition of rebellion that we inherit from Adam, but diseases, poverty, and bad attitudes that we inherit from our family line. In the Bible, a "curse" has its proper place in the context of the covenant. For example, in Ancient Near Eastern treaties, which form the pattern of covenantal thinking employed in the Bible, an emperor would bring down his judgment on a rebellious tribe or nation under his rule. This sanction would be called a "curse." However, in the prosperity gospel, "curse" is more nearly related to the world of magic—the way we usually speak of curses in our culture today. So where the curses that God invokes upon humanity as a result of Adam's sin in the garden are a judicial sentence, Osteen speaks of "generational curses" that have no obvious reference to divine judgment. You may have inherited your grandmother's genes, which included the curse of diabetes. However, "You need to put your foot down and say, 'Grandmother may have had it. Mother may have had it. But as for me and my house, we're redeemed from diabetes. I'm going to live under the blessing and not the curse.'"¹⁴

A doctor named Vanessa refused to accept her joint disease and she was eventually delivered of it, Osteen relates. "This type of blessing is for believers, not doubters."¹⁵ His father had high blood-pressure, but kept saying, "Joel, I will never have a stroke." "He was saying that by faith because he struggled with high blood pressure his entire life. He would say, 'I'll never be incapacitated. I'll never come to the place where I cannot preach.' And true to his faith, my father preached just eleven days before he went to be with the Lord."¹⁶ It would not be surprising, then, if such teaching led a sincere follower to conclude that a failure to be healed or to become financially prosperous was the result of one's own disobedience.

If I am diagnosed with Grandma's diabetes, am I a doubter rather than a believer? "The Bible calls it an iniquity," Osteen writes.¹⁷ It is a curse from generation to generation "until somebody rises up and puts a stop to it. For example, when Adam and Eve disobeyed God, that decision didn't just affect them; it affected their children. Do you know who the first murderer was in the Bible?...The iniquity kept getting passed down through generations of Cain's offspring."¹⁸

Therefore, in the place of the Christian doctrine of original sin (viz., the whole human race being guilty and corrupt in Adam) is the notion of "iniquity" as a genetic trait that someone in one's family tree allowed into the bloodstream. Quite literally, Osteen believes, the curse is in the blood, just as each person has God's DNA. The generational curse is lifted by our obedience, when someone in the family line finally "takes authority" over it. Absent is any reference to sin as a condition of being opposed to God, guilty before God, and corrupt in heart, mind, soul and will. The ethical character of sin as both a condition and specific actions of transgressing or failing to conform to God's law is exchanged for a magical conception.

At the same time, our victory over generational curses is entirely manageable. We can overcome the "iniquity" that has been passed down to us: "God has given you free will. You can choose to change...People who have been abused are the most likely to become abusers. Why is that? It is not because they want to. They know how destructive it is. It's because that negative spirit keeps being passed down. Thank God, you and I can do something about it."¹⁹

Just as sin is redefined as a failure to attain prosperity in all areas of life, redemption is now understood as freedom from pain, illness, poverty, as well as the bad attitudes and negative habits that our parents or grandparents passed on to us.

Think of it like this: Each of us has a spiritual bank account. By the way we live, we are either storing up equity or storing up iniquity. Equity would be anything good: our integrity, our determination, our godliness. That's storing up blessings. On the other hand, iniquity includes our bad habits, addictions, selfishness, lack of discipline.²⁰

"Your faithfulness is noticed in heaven. You are storing up equity for both yourself and generations to come."²¹ A more thorough-going works-righteousness is difficult to conceive:

Get up every day and give it your best effort. If you will do that, not only will you rise higher and accomplish more, but God has promised that your seed, your family line for up to a thousand generations, is going to have the blessings and the favor of God—all because of the life that you've lived.²²

So we see once again that Osteen has not abandoned the "legalism" of previous generations. If anything, he intensifies it, but his followers do not recognize the tightening noose or the mounting burden because he makes it sound so easy. It is not easy, however, to be told that one's health, wealth, and happiness—as well as one's victory over sin and death—depend on the extent of our determination and effort. A weak view of sin fails to bring us to the end of our rope; instead, it encourages us to try just a little bit harder to save ourselves. It's easy. Really.

Therefore, Osteen advises, we need to stop listening to accusing voices. Any voice that accuses, convicts, or condemns is the voice of Satan, according to Osteen. He nowhere suggests that this may be the voice of the Holy Spirit, showing us our guilt and helplessness before God's law in order to drive us to Christ. We are not morally bankrupt before God. Sin is reduced to certain attitudes and actions that we can put a stop to whenever we want. Therefore, we do not need a one-sided rescue operation outside of us. The seed of goodness is still within us, waiting to explode if we will just nurture it.

One wonders what Osteen would do with passages such as the following: "Our righteousness is like filthy rags" (Is. 64:6); "There is no one righteous; there is no one who does good, no not even one" (Rom. 3:10). Where Jeremiah says "The heart is more deceitful than anything else" (Jer. 17:9), Osteen says that his confidence before God is in the righteousness of his own heart: "I may not have a perfect performance, but I know my heart is right.... Similarly, as long as you're doing your best and desire to do what's right according to God's Word, you can be assured God is pleased with you. Certainly, He wants you to improve, but He knows that we all have weaknesses." Sin is reduced to "human foibles and imperfections" that "poke through our idealism...."²³ "As long as we're doing our best, we don't have to live condemned even when we make mistakes or fail."²⁴

Although he does mention God's forgiveness and mercy, this divine grace is not understood as something that comes at the price of Christ's atoning sacrifice. It is not because God has reconciled us to himself through the death of his Son, but because he is an indulgent father who lets bygones be bygones, that we can receive his forgiveness and move on.

Even Paul's experience in Romans 7 is reduced to a "nobody's perfect" kind of speech. "The Apostle Paul once said, 'The things I know I should do, I don't. The things I know I shouldn't do, I end up doing.' Even this great man of God who wrote half the New Testament struggled in this regard. That tells me God does not disqualify me merely because I don't perform perfectly, 100 percent of the time. I wish I did, and I'm constantly striving to do better. I don't do wrong on purpose, but like anyone else, I too have weaknesses."²⁵ However, this trivializes Paul's travail in that chapter, where he laments not simply his failure to score a perfect 100, but his failure—even as a believer—to gain victory over his sins. This does not lead him to say, in effect, Let's brush ourselves off and do our best anyway. He does not say, "Nobody's perfect. At least my heart is right," but rather, "Oh, wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" Only this deep anguish over the depravity of his own heart can lead him to look not within but outside of himself: "I think God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Rom. 7:24-25).

There is no clear sense in Osteen's message that God has forgiven and justified us because even though we stand condemned according to the law we are declared holy by Christ's imputed righteousness. Rather, God just ignores our guilt and focuses on the good things he apparently sees in us. "However, God does not focus on what's wrong with you. He focuses on what's right with you. He's not looking at all your faults and weaknesses."²⁶ Again, the "good news" according to Osteen is that God does not judge us according to his law (the 100 percent rule), but looks at our heart and sees something decent in all of us. "I am bold enough to believe that I am a friend of Almighty God, and that he is smiling down on me right now. I've accepted the fact that I don't perform perfectly all the time, but I know my heart is right. To the best of my ability, I'm doing what pleases Him."²⁷ His forgiveness is due not to Christ's having borne our debts, so that there is no more guilt to be judged, but to God's decision to overlook our faults: "He chooses not to remember your mistakes, your sins, your failures."²⁸ "God approves you unconditionally, just as you are." Again, no mention of Christ. "Frankly, it's not because of what you have or haven't done; God loves you because of who you are and because of who he is. God is love."²⁹

We do have to be careful here. Of course, God is love. He is also righteous, holy, and just. God's love and justice are fully realized together-not by overwhelming these other attributes with his love, but by sending his own Son to live a perfect life in our place, suffer judgment in our place, and be raised for our justification. By setting the justice aside, Osteen actually obscures the glory of the cross and greatness of God's grace.

Instead of acknowledging that we are still sinners, though justified and renewed in Christ, we need to confess that we are "no longer poor old sinners, we are sons and daughters of the Most High God."³⁰ Osteen confuses the bad preaching of the law as scolding with the proper preaching of the law as driving us out of ourselves to Christ. "Sometimes religion tries to beat people down and make them feel bad about themselves. 'You've done this and you failed here, and you didn't treat this person right, and you didn't raise your kids as well as you should have.'...'Why don't you lighten up and give yourself a break?...If you've made mistakes, just say 'God, I'm sorry; I repent. Help me to do better next time.'"³¹

Instead of pointing us to Christ, where God's record-keeping was justly satisfied and the court transcription was nailed to the cross (Col. 2:14), Osteen just gets rid of the idea of any negative record. God is certainly recording our good works, but not our sins. If this is the case, however, why do we need Christ at all? We certainly do not need him to live a perfect life in our place, but do we even need him to offer himself to death in our place if the only record-keeping that counts is the good things that we have done? Osteen adds,

He's not keeping a list of your shortcomings. God is not looking at everything you've done wrong over your entire life or your disobedience last week. He's looking at what you're doing right. He's looking at the fact that you have made a conscious decision to be better, to live right, and to trust Him. He is pleased that you are kind and courteous to people.³²

Far from the struggle of Paul in Romans 7, Osteen makes it sound as if we can manage the sin-problem by our own positive outlook. "If you want to sin, you can sin. I sin all I want to," he says. "The good news is that I don't want to...Stop dwelling on everything that's wrong with you and taking an inventory of what you're not. The Scripture says in Hebrews, 'To look away from everything that distracts.'"³³ Once again, Osteen misquotes the Bible to make his point. Hebrews 12:1-2 actually reads, "Therefore, since we also have such a large cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us lay aside every weight and the sin that so easily ensnares us, and run with endurance the race that lies before us, keeping our eyes on Jesus, the source and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that lay before him endured the cross, despising its shame, and sat down at the right hand of God's throne." In other words, the counsel is to look away from ourselves-both our sins and our good works-and not let anything distract us from Christ. Yet Osteen's entire message represents a distraction from Christ. Who needs Christ if this is the gospel: "You're not perfect, but you are trying to live better, and God looks at your heart. He sees the inside, and He is changing you little by little"?³⁴

Once again, Osteen's message-though perhaps a bit more explicitly oriented toward the prosperity gospel than most-is not all that different from the general drift of a lot of popular religion and spirituality that pervades even our own evangelical circles today. The focus is on us rather than on God, on our happiness apart from God's holiness, on our "ascending higher" by moral effort rather than on our being receivers of God's saving work in Jesus Christ. "I know, too, even when my plans don't work out, even when things don't go my way, because I am honoring God and striving to keep the right attitude, God will make it up to me."³⁵

The Good News? God's Keeping Score!

Having exchanged the gospel of Christ's doing, dying and rising, for a pep talk for our doing, declaring, and rising, Osteen can say, "The world does not need to hear another sermon nearly as much as it needs to see one." ³⁶ Now we are the "good news." And here is the gospel according to Joel Osteen:

God is keeping the records. He sees every act of kindness you show. He sees every time you are good to somebody. He hears every encouraging word you speak. God has seen all the times you went out of your way to help somebody who never said thank you. Your good deeds do not go unnoticed by Almighty God.³⁷

But once we are placed back under the law for righteousness, on what basis can Osteen claim that God only counts the good works? Is there a single passage in the Bible that separates God's record-keeping in this way, so that our good works can bring God's favor and blessing but our sins do not count at all? If we are going to inherit God's promises by the "righteousness that is by the law," then Osteen's pleasant outlook hardly seems justified.

Make no mistake about it, behind all of the smiles, there is a thorough-going religion of works-righteousness: "God's plan for each of our lives is that we continually rise to new levels. But how high we go in life, and how much of God's favor and blessings we experience, will be directly related to how well we follow His directions."³⁸ God "is waiting for your obedience so He can release more of His favor and blessings in your life...My question to you is: How high do you want to rise

? Do you want to continue to increase? Do you want to see more of God's blessings and favor? If so, the higher we go, the more disciplined we must be; the quicker we must obey."³⁹ "You don't get the grace unless you step out. You have to make the first move. God will see that step of faith and He'll give you supernatural strength to help you overcome any obstacles standing in the way of doing the right thing...Remember: How high you go in life will be directly related to how obedient you are."⁴⁰

And if anyone has any questions about whether this plan is workable, Osteen offers himself as an example:

I know I'm not perfect, but I also know this: My conscience is clear before God. I know that I'm doing my best to please Him. That's why I can sleep well at night. That's why I can lie down in peace. That's why I have a smile on my face. Friend, keep your conscience tender, and you will discover that life keeps getting better and better.⁴¹

By contrast, Jesus and his apostles taught that the searching judgment of God through his law brings conviction, pricking my conscience that I have fallen short of God's glory. My conscience does not render a positive verdict in God's courtroom. The only reason I can sleep well at night is that even though my heart is still filled with corruption and even though I am not doing my best to please him, I have in heaven at the Father's right hand the beloved Son who has not only done his best for himself, but has fulfilled all righteousness for me in my place.

Just as Joel Osteen has decided for himself the message that he will preach, he has also tailored his own vocation. In interviews, he has said that he is not called to explain the Scriptures or expound doctrine. In this book he adds, "I'm not called to explain every minute facet of Scripture or to expound on deep theological doctrines or disputes that don't touch where real people live. My gifting is to encourage, to challenge, and to inspire."⁴² Ambassadors do not get to choose what they say. As ministers of the gospel, our "gifting" is to "preach the whole counsel of God" (Ac 20:27).

Have we actually come to a place in Evangelicalism where we will listen to people who clearly tell us that they are not called to explain and expound the Scriptures? A number of responses I have received after being interviewed regarding Osteen's message criticized me for failing to show a united front against the real enemies: the liberals. However, it is unclear to me how Osteen's message displays any higher regard for the authority and basic teaching of the Scriptures. Once upon a time, conservative Protestants imagined that theological liberalism was the greatest threat to authentic Christianity in our time. With liberalism almost completely irrelevant as an active school or movement, Osteen's success confirms my suspicions that evangelicalism itself is becoming a more serious obstacle to evangelical faith and practice today.

Re: Become a Better You: Reflections on Joel Osteen's Latest Book -horton - posted by notmyown, on: 2007/11/17 4:03

Quote:

- 1. Keep pressing forward.
2. Be positive toward yourself.
3. Develop better relationships.
4. Form better habits.
5. Embrace the place where you are.
6. Develop your inner life.
7. Stay passionate about life.

1. Keep pressing upwards (ascend the hill of the Lord)
2. Be critical of yourself (Examine yourself)
3. Develop a better relationship with Christ
4. Kill the old habits
5. Be discontent with where you are (press on to full surrender/sanctification)
6. Allow Christ to replace your inner life
7. Stay passionate about dying daily.

Re: - posted by hisremnant, on: 2007/11/17 8:56

Praise Jesus!! Lion of Judah!!!!

Mt 24:4 And Jesus answered and said to them: "Take heed that no one deceives you.

2ti 4:3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers;

2ti 4:4 and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.

2ti 3:4 traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God,

2ti 3:5 having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!

Jude 1:3 Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.

It is time for those of us who know the true Christ and HIS Gospel to take a stand against such deceit.

It is not about our best life now it is about Jesus. For HE is WORTHY!!! Worthy is HE of all we might suffer. Of all the rejection and hatred that may be directed towards us.

Let us see clearly the deep division that is growing between those such as Osteen and his ilk and those few who still reach the full counsel of Scripture such as Conlon and Washer.

It is time to contend earnestly, with our treasure, with our time, and (i believe it will soon come to this) our blood!

Hisservant rich

Matthew 4:17

Re:, on: 2007/11/17 9:45

The title of this book alone tells you it's not of God. How can I become a "better me" if I'm dead??? Do I want to bring back my old sinful man?

Galatians 2:20

I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.

Re:, on: 2007/11/17 15:05

I have specialty tracts that we slip into these books at the store on the life enhancement gospel vrs the true Gospel. We plan on hitting up all the major books store in the metro area next weekend. An excellent way to reach and warn people with truth who are caught up in error (if your conscience allows such a thing). If anyone is interested PM me and I can send you a word document that you cant print out and cut at home.

In Christ - Jim

Re: - posted by FireinmyBones1 (), on: 2007/11/17 15:19

Although I am far from a member of the "Joel Osteen Fan Club", let us not likewise fall into error in our desire to be removed from it. While I do believe that searching the heart and examining oneself is important, the morbid navel gazing that I see so many in "holiness movements" participating in is far from New Testament Christianity. I'm reminded of Isaiah's encounter in Isaiah 6 -

1. He saw the Lord
2. He saw his own heart (woe is me...)
3. He saw the harvest (Here am I, send me)

Jesus instructed his disciples in John 4:35 to "LIFT UP YOUR EYES...AND SEE THE FIELDS...". Sometimes we have our eyes so on our own hearts that we are not seeing the harvest. There is a proper time and place for heart searching. Certainly Paul instructed the Corinthians to examine themselves...

1 Cor 13:5

5 Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you - unless, of course, you fail the test?

(The chapter and book then goes on with little or no teaching on this subject...)

1 Cor 11:31-32

31 For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. 32 But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world.

(Given in the context of taking communion while not truly being in right relationship with the Lord...)

Both of these statements are true, but were situational and not intended to become a lifestyle.

1 Cor 4:3-5

3 But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by a human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. 4 For I know nothing against myself, yet I am not justified by this; but He who judges me is the Lord. 5 Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one's praise will come from God.

This is the same man who wrote the previous two verses. Here he says that his conscience is clear before God but that doesn't make him innocent . . . yet still he doesn't spend his time judging Himself. Confident in his relationship with Jesus, he awaits the day of judgment in which the Lord will judge and reveal the secrets of men's hearts. Certainly when we become aware of issues of sin, compromise, pride etc... within our hearts we need to judge ourselves and cleanse ourselves. Some believers I know, however, (I was one of them) spend their entire lives searching inward for more and more areas of impurity. Much of this comes from a false, Old Testament view of the heart based on scriptures like Jeremiah 17:9 -

"9 "The heart is deceitful above all things,
And desperately wicked;
Who can know it?"

We therefore view our hearts as a nearly unsearchable chamber filled with evil desires. Unconsciously, our life's mission then becomes to search out and destroy all hidden wickedness in our hearts. We neglect the fact that this is an Old Testament truth and must be filtered through the Cross, Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus. The plain fact of the matter is that Ezekiel 36:26 teaches that a New Covenant believer receives a new heart. Jeremiah 31:31-33 teaches that the New Covenant heart has the laws of God inscribed upon it and God moves us to follow Him. Therefore the truly born again saint is not a sinner saved by grace with a propensity towards sin. Rather they are supernatural new creations with a bend towards righteousness.

A faulty view of the heart causes the believer to be stricken with a perpetually guilty conscience and they inevitably find themselves (in the name of humility, dependence, poverty in spirit, etc...) feeling weak and disqualified for the work of God. Therefore they see the Lord, and see their hearts, but never go on to see the harvest. (as in the case of Isaiah 6) Many in the holiness movement (of which I am the guiltiest of all) spend the entire bulk of their preaching calling men to repent and search their hearts in the name of taking people deeper. In truth, the writer of Hebrews tells us that teaching on repentance is the most elementary of elementary teachings and we should eventually move beyond it into maturity.

Certainly there are large sectors of the church who desperately need to hear this. Oftentimes, however, the people who need it most aren't getting it, while the people who should be moving beyond it, feast continually on nothing more than el

elementary teachings. When we choose to live under the power of a guilty conscience, living perpetually inward, not only do we become lazy, selfish and rob ourselves of intimate knowledge of God - we also rob others of the benefit of experiencing God through our intervention. For instance, the writer of Hebrews left out an entire section on the Melchizedek priesthood because his audience was still stuck on elementary things. There is a whole revelation missing from scripture (perhaps it was not intended to be there, or further taught on in another portion-I'm just trying to make a point...) due to the hearers inability to receive it. When we as the church live perpetually inward, it affects generations to come as well.

HEBREWS 10:19-22

19 Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.

Verse 22 teaches us that Jesus blood cleanses us not only from sin, but from the power of a guilty conscience. It is this inward guilt, which first entered humanity when Adam hid from the Lord in Eden, which drives us from intimacy with God and consequently from useful service in the Kingdom of God. Not only so, it is also a hindrance in prayer-

1 John 3:19-22

19 This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence 20 whenever our hearts condemn us. For God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. 21 Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God 22 and receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him.

There's enough meat in that passage to feast on for years. Notice though, in verses 21-22 that the heart under condemnation (which most in the holiness movement are, albeit unconsciously) is hindered in receiving from God in prayer.

LUKE 11:8-10

8 I tell you, though he will not get up and give him the bread because he is his friend, yet because of the man's boldness he will get up and give him as much as he needs.

9 "So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. 10 For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.

Jesus teaches us here that powerful prayer comes from not just asking, but asking with boldness. The word boldness in greek literally means to ask with your eyes lifted up - literally SHAMELESSNESS! Because he asked with confidence, no shame, he received. Many of us, because of faulty understandings concerning the new birth, the heart of the believer, and a morbid over emphasis on heart searching, do not approach God with confidence. This is not prideful or presumptuous, but a true honoring of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ!

I don't mean to go on a rant here, these are just somethings that I feel the Lord has been reiterating to me as of late. Although this certainly is not the message that the lukewarm, Ladoecian church needs to hear, it is what many true, desperate seekers of God, trapped in life of navel gazing Christianity need to hear.

What does this have to do with Joel Osteen you ask? :) This is more of a response to the comments made by the man doing the critique of his book. Take this for what it's worth - if I'm in error, please (and I truly mean that) let me know...
God Bless!

Jeff

Re: - posted by Compton (), on: 2007/11/17 18:36

Quote:
-----I have specialty tracts that we slip into these books at the store on the life enhancement gospel vrs the true Gospel. We plan on hitting up all the major books store in the metro area next weekend. An excellent way to reach and warn people with truth who are caught up in error (if your conscience allows such a thing).

Hmmm...is this an excellent way to reach and warn? It might just communicate that you don't respect the law concerning the property rights of the bookstore. Paul was accused of hurting the local idol trade with his preaching, but I don't think he was accused of leaving flyers in their books. ;-)

While no federal offense, perhaps it is something to consider.

MC

Re:, on: 2007/11/17 20:38

Quote:
-----Hmmm...is this an excellent way to reach and warn? It might just communicate that you don't respect the law concerning the property rights of the bookstore.

I remember a group of men who cut a hole in another mans roof to lower their friend to Jesus... Jesus did not rebuke them for the property rights of the home owner.

There is no damage to anyones property, thanks for your concern though. We must never do anything to sin against our conscience.

In Christ - Jim

Re: - posted by awakenwithin (), on: 2007/11/18 0:19

I have always thought about that story and how nothing was said about the roof.

How big of a deal is it, to have this book? I mean some Christians have Harry Potter, to read and some to use. So I have heard it said that Christians have this book to use and get the good points out. I am asking should we read what is a known false teacher's.

And what would you say to a Church that had this book in their Church library?
One Church I went to had it there, Me and my friend went there on a Sunday for Church. I have seen it other places too. I have been wondering if it is harmless, he is a good encourager right?
I am not pointing fingers, just been wondering what people think on these things and this book in a Church.

Thanks
Charlene

On the other hand - posted by ZekeO (), on: 2007/11/18 2:33

Quote:

jimdied2sin wrote:
I remember a group of men who cut a hole in another mans roof to lower their friend to Jesus... Jesus did not rebuke them for the property rights of the home owner.

There is no damage to anyones property, thanks for your concern though. We must never do anything to sin against our conscience.

Well, to take your analogy further, Jesus wouldn't even be in the bookstore. :-?

You are going onto someone else's property and inserting material into property that is not yours. I suppose if you wanted really be safe ;-), you could ask the store owner if you can do what you do. I think that you may find them being a little averse to your efforts. Let's have faith that they will say it's okay.

What you are doing is the same as open-air preaching except you are not actually saying anything.

I while back a question came up on a business forum that I belong to. It was a provocative question: 'Adult website - would

Id you?' This is not a christian forum but a business one so the responses varied from why not its just a business, to othe rs saying that its morally repugnant.

The question then arose of ethics/morals and the role they play in what business decisions and business ventures to be involved in.

I am reminded of that discussion now, as getting the message out is what we're born again to do. But, what is wise beha vior in witnessing and what is not? And what will get you into unnecessary trouble and what is the best way of doing it?

Some would say, win the lost at all cost, and all means justify the end. Its like that guy you have in the states who is quit e militant in his anti-homosexual proclamation. Puts allot of people off and brands Christians as bigots.

So, I write more to give you some brain food, to chew on, if indeed you find it worthwhile at all.

Re: On the other hand, on: 2007/11/18 7:05

Hey Jim,

Could you guys be *outside* the bookstore, offering *everyone* who leaves, a free bookmark?

Re: - posted by Tears_of_joy, on: 2007/11/18 8:06

North Korean Pastor Kim Sung-Wei (named changed for security reasons) told TBNN, "North Korean Christians face great difficulty each day. If the authorities find out that we serve Jesus, they will take away our homes and jobs. If they find us meeting together for worship, they will throw us in jail. As a pastor, I have been beaten three times already this year. This man, Osteen, writes about things that we do not understand."

(<http://tominthebox.blogspot.com/2007/10/osteen-books-flop-in-1040-window.html>) source

Re: - posted by hmmhmm (), on: 2007/11/18 8:10

Jesus also broke many "rules" , not saying what is right or wrong, but very soon if we stick by the rules we cant preach t he gospel as it should be preached. those times are coming to our comfortable Christianity soon. Seek the Lord and he will show you the best way of showing people the truth

Re:, on: 2007/11/18 13:07

Voice of the Martyrs sends baloons carrying bible literature into north Korea every year... this is against the governmen ts rules. Again, I do thank everyones input and will be sending out the file to those who requested it at lunch on monday . Again, let us never condemn our conscience.

Dorcas, we will also be standing outside of local area mega and prosperity "churches" to hand out similar tracts. I have t hought about doing this instead at the "christian" book store also. I'll just wait on the Lord and see where He would have us go and do.

in Christ - Jim

Re:, on: 2007/11/18 16:09

I have a great idea. How about a mannequin covered with a sheet at the foot of a cross and you could have a sign that says "how to become a better you," then pass tracks out by that. That would be a great way to draw people.

Re: - posted by PaulWest (), on: 2007/11/18 18:27

Quote:
-----I remember a group of men who cut a hole in another mans roof to lower their friend to Jesus... Jesus did not rebuke them for the property rights of the home owner.

This is an interesting observation. I heard a Zac Poonen message stating that this house actually belonged to Jesus. For this reason the men could break through the roof without fear of reprisal. Any one else would sue them for property damage. But they knew that with Jesus they had nothing to fear, as he was a man who regarded the things of God over the things of this world. It makes sense, because in Mark 2 and Luke 4 there is no specific reference that some one other than Jesus owned the house, and we know that Jesus, after being rejected at Nazareth, chose Capernaum as the headquarters for His Galilean ministry. (see Matt 4:13 and Mark 2:1). It was called "His own city" in Matthew 9:1. It was here where Jesus was "dwelling" when He called Simon and Andrew and James and John on the shores of Galilee and they "straightway left all and followed Him into Capernaum" (see Mark 1:16-21).

Just some interesting thoughts.

Brother Paul