

CBS News describes Joel Osteen following their 60 Minutes interview:

“Osteen preaches his own version of what is known as the ‘prosperity gospel’ – that God is a loving, forgiving God who will reward believers with health, wealth and happiness. It’s the centerpiece of every sermon.” (CBS News web site, Interview by Byron Pitts, October 14, 2007)

The copyright pages to both of Joel’s books categorize them as “Self-actualization (Psychology)”. This motivational advice coupled with the help of a generous God is clearly presented in *Your Best Life Now* and *Become a Better You*:

“To live your best life now, you must start looking at life through eyes of faith, seeing yourself rising to new levels. See your business taking off. See your marriage restored. See your family prospering. See your dreams coming to pass. You must conceive it and believe it is possible if you ever hope to experience it.” (Your Best Life Now, p. 4)

“He’s a progressive God, and He wants every generation to be increasing in happiness, success, and significance. No matter where we are in life, God has more in store.” (Become a Better You, p. 3)

“But if you develop an image of victory, success, health, abundance, joy, peace, and happiness, nothing on earth will be able to hold those things from you.” (Your Best Life Now, p. 5)

“You were never created to reach a certain level and then plateau. You were created to excel. There’s no limit to how high you can go in life.” (Become a Better You, p. 5)

What seems to give Joel Osteen’s message of success and happiness the greatest credibility is that he appears to be experiencing the dramatic results of following the motivational advice he gives.

Joel’s first national best-seller book, *“Your Best Life Now”* sold over 4 million copies. His second book *“Become a Better You”* gained Joel an unprecedented \$13 million dollar advance.

The church he pastors, Lakewood Church in Houston, Texas, has had incredible growth success. When Joel took the church over after the death of his father in 1999, the attendance was an impressive 7,000. Under Joel’s leadership the weekly attendance skyrocketed to an estimated 42,000 by late 2007! Joel’s church spent nearly 100 million dollars renovating the Houston Rockets’ 16,000 seat Sports Arena which now grosses \$73 million dollars a year. Joel told CBN.com (The 700 Club) that “I believe one day they’ll be 100,000 people coming between four to five different services.”

Joel does give “some” good advice in his books and sermons, such as be forgiving and don’t be bitter. Be kind to your wife and be a person of integrity and generous to everyone.

But the theme of his books and sermons is clearly man centered rather than God centered. Positive, feel-good messages of assurance that God always rewards human effort and virtue with happiness,

success, health and wealth. His essential message is, “You can have this NOW!”

Sadly, Joel won’t preach the heart of the Christian Gospel that Jesus Christ and His shed blood on the cross is the solution to man’s moral bankruptcy. Nor will you hear about a Holy God who must punish sin or about a life of submission to Jesus Christ. The gospel that Joel preaches can be summed up in one word, “prosperity”.

The Apostle Paul warned of the seriousness of preaching another gospel:

“But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.” (Galatians 1:8)

Much of Joel’s teaching comes from a misunderstanding and misuse of scripture. This is complemented with declarations that something is true without any biblical support whatsoever.

To obtain God’s best Joel says that you must get rid of any bitterness or resentment. “You may even need to forgive God”:

“Forgive the people who did you wrong. Forgive yourself for the mistakes you have made. You may even need to forgive God. Perhaps you’ve been blaming Him for taking one of your loved ones. Maybe you are angry at God because He didn’t answer your prayers, or some situation didn’t work out the way you had hoped.” (Your Best Life Now, p. 144)

It is unthinkable to even suggest that there is some wayward way in God that He would require my forgiveness. God is not required to give us an explanation for anything. Who can accuse God?

Joel ends his book, *“Your Best Life Now”* with a reminder that our faith is what activates God’s power for bigger and better things:

“It’s our faith that activates the power of God. Let’s quit limiting Him with our small-minded thinking and start believing Him for bigger and better things.” (Your Best Life Now, p. 306)

Rather than man’s faith activating God’s power or our small-minded thinking limiting God, the Holy Bible reveals that God does according to His will without restraint from anyone:

“All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; He does according to His will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth. No one can restrain His hand or say to Him, ‘What have you done?’” (Daniel 4:35)

The Power of Words

Joel teaches not only that we can limit God and activate God’s power by our faith, but that our “words” likewise energize God to produce the future we desire. This “Word-Faith” distortion was taught by Joel’s father and handed down to Joel. He spends a whole chapter (Speaking Life-Changing Words) on this principle in his first book:

“Your words have enormous creative power. The moment you speak something out, you give birth to it. This is

a spiritual principle, and it works whether what you are saying is good or bad, positive or negative.” (Your Best Life Now, p. 129)

Joel wrote another full chapter dedicated to “Making Your Words Work for You” in his second book, *“Become a Better You”*:

“With our words, we can prophesy our own future. ... Declare health, joy, financial blessing, happy and whole relationships. ... It’s not enough to merely think positively: You need to speak positively about yourself. ... Something supernatural happens when we speak it out. That’s how we give life to our faith.” (Become a Better You, pp. 114, 115)

According to Joel, our words can thwart God’s plan and curse our future:

“God knew that if Jeremiah went around saying, ‘I can’t do this. I don’t have what it takes. I’m too young,’ those negative words would thwart the plan and prevent the promise from coming to pass. God simply said, ‘Jeremiah, do not say that anymore. Don’t use those words to curse your future.’” (Become a Better You, p. 118)

Our words will never limit the God of the Holy Bible and His purposes in any way:

“For the LORD of hosts has planned, and who can frustrate it? And as for His stretched-out hand, who can turn it back?” (Isaiah 14:27)

Joel teaches that just as we have to rid ourselves of negative influences so Jesus had to rid Himself of a negative environment, which would have ended up holding Him back:

“Isn’t it interesting that even Jesus had to leave His hometown of Nazareth because the people there were so filled with unbelief? Jesus knew that if he stayed in that negative environment, it would hold Him back.” (Become a Better You, p. 30)

In one example of Joel’s glaring misuse of the Scriptures, he turns “the fall of man” into a message of “success”:

“I love the way God answered them. 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?’” (Become a Better You, p. 9)

Scripture is not meant to be used in this way. The meaning here is clear that a radical change had taken place because of sin. Great fear came over Adam as he recognized his nakedness and hid from God. Joel’s message of “success in the fall” demonstrates that his guidance is not to be trusted.

Here’s a list of some of God’s favor that Joel presents:

New home. Move up to first class. Promotions. Incredible gifts. Happiness. Health.

Joel tells you that you can live in the home of your dreams as he did if you “conceive it on the inside”. (*Your Best Life Now*, p. 5)

Joel says you will get “preferential treatment” as he did when he was moved to first class. (*Your Best Life Now*, pp. 45, 46)

He says you will receive promotions and live prosperously in every area of live. (*Your Best Life Now*, p. 87)

Joel claims that if you haven’t been treated fairly at work for a long time, God will pay you back for all those wrongs and will give you incredible gifts, such as a complete mechanic’s shop free and clear. (*Your Best Life Now*, p. 167)

Joel insists that God “wants every generation to increase in happiness, success, and significance.” (*Become a Better You*, p. 3)

Joel’s key to prosperity is Pray, believe, and declare health and you can be happy, healthy, and whole. (*Become a Better You*, pp. 45, 46)

If this message is from God, why is it not proclaimed to the starving and poor? Would you take this message to the ghettos or the prison camps where Christians die in confinement? What of the martyrs burned at the stake for refusing to compromise the gospel of the cross? Why weren’t the apostles prosperous in the things of this world?

Joel’s prosperity teachings are often presented as simple authoritative proclamations – and even his references to the Bible lack responsible analysis and application. The hearer is not convinced by the strength and worth of scripture, but is seduced by the appeal of the prosperity message and confidence in the messenger.

This is man-centered materialism, spawned in the richest country in world. It is appealing to the flesh, but it is not the message of the Bible. Our treasure and delight is in God and His worth; it is not our worldly abundance. Our best life is NOT now but it is yet to come – in glory with our Lord.

“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, ...” (Matthew 6:19-20)

“Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.” (1 John 2:15)

God does want us to be happy, but happy in Him:

“ ... happy is that people, whose God is the LORD.”
Psalm 144:15

True Christians are not called to a life of worldly prosperity, success, and health. We are called to lose our lives for the sake of Christ and the reward that is yet to come:

“And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.” (Luke 9:23)

“He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal.” (John 12:25)

The scriptures do not promise a life of leisure and success but of difficulty:

“For to you has been granted, for the sake of Christ, not only to believe in him but also to suffer for him.” (Philippians 1:29)

“Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name’s sake.” (Matthew 24:9)

A pastor’s greatest responsibility is to earnestly present the only gospel that can save morally bankrupt sinners. This is the message of inconceivable worth in the shed blood of the Son of God on the cross. Tragically, you won’t hear Joel present this message.

The Apostle Paul expressed the sum and substance of the Christian message which is the gospel:

“For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.” (1 Corinthians 2:2)

As true Christians, we MUST carefully examine the scriptures and align our thinking with what we find.

The Apostle Paul warned Timothy to faithfully preach the word of God, for a time would come when they would not be happy with sound doctrine:

“Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.

For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears;

And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, ...”(2 Timothy 4:2-4)

This tract was written by Jerry Benson. If it has been a blessing to you, please write:

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