

# THE PLEASANT VIEW PLUMB LINE

"...then said the Lord, Behold, I will set a plumb line in the midst of my people Israel..." (Amos 7:8)

## THE "PROSPERITY GOSPEL"

If it were to be judged merely by popularity, Joel Osteen's "ministry" would be a success. The television broadcast of Lakewood Church's services reaches 100 million homes, and Osteen's book Your Best Life now was a New York Times Best Seller. However, an interview on *Larry King Live* a couple of years ago provided a glimpse into the heart of Joel Osteen's message. While there is no doubt that Mr. Osteen earnestly desires to provide some type of guidance to those who hear him, there is just as little doubt that his message—and that of many others like him—falls short of Biblical demands in several key ways.

First, one cannot help but be taken aback by Osteen's aversion—not just *avoidance* but *aversion*—to anything remotely related to doctrine. Notice Osteen's noncommittal attitude after being asked, "But don't you think if people don't believe as you believe, they're somehow condemned?"

"You know, I think that happens in our society. But I try not to do that. I tell people all the time, - preached a couple of Sundays about it. I'm for everybody. You may not agree with me, *but to me it's not my job to try to straighten everybody out.* The Gospel is called the good news. My message is a message of hope, that's God for you. You can live a good life no matter what's happened to you. And so I don't know. *I know there is condemnation but I don't feel that's my place.*" (emphasis mine throughout this article, CP).

It seems that Joel Osteen is not even willing to stand up for the fundamental ideals of the denominational world, let alone true Biblical doctrine. Larry King followed a question regarding belief with the following:

**KING:** "What if you're Jewish or Muslim, you don't accept Christ at all?"

**OSTEEN:** "You know, I'm very careful about saying who would and wouldn't go to heaven. I don't know..."

**KING:** "If you believe you have to believe in Christ, they're wrong, aren't they?"

**OSTEEN:** "Well, I don't know if I believe they're wrong. I believe here's what the Bible teaches and from the Christian faith this is what I believe. But I just think that only God will judge a person's heart. I spent a lot of time in India with my father. I don't know all about their religion. But I know they love God. And I don't know. I've seen their sincerity. So I don't know. I know for me, and what the Bible teaches, I want to have a relationship with Jesus."

Osteen gives no solid Biblical answer. His answer to the all-important problem of human suffering is "I don't know Larry. I don't know it all" (while true to an extent, his knowledge seems horribly limited). Osteen's favorite filler statement in this interview is "I don't know..." and truly he doesn't appear to know much of anything concerning the word of truth. However, Jesus taught, "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32). Paul commanded Timothy to "preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine" (II Timothy 4:2).

Just as disturbing as Osteen's lack of knowledge and concern for the basic truths of the Gospel is his focus on material success. Consider this exchange between King and Osteen:

**KING:** "What is the prosperity gospel?"

**OSTEEN:** "I think the prosperity gospel in general is—well I don't know. I hear it too. I don't know. I think what sometimes you see is it's just all about money. That's

**PRAYER: A HEAVENLY AVENUE**

Text: \_\_\_\_\_

- I. The \_\_\_\_\_ of Prayer
  - A. Who is \_\_\_\_\_?
  - B. What is \_\_\_\_\_?
  - C. Who is it \_\_\_\_\_?
- II. The \_\_\_\_\_ of Prayer
  - A. To \_\_\_\_\_
  - B. To \_\_\_\_\_
  - C. To \_\_\_\_\_
- III. The \_\_\_\_\_ of Prayer
  - A. It is \_\_\_\_\_
  - B. It is \_\_\_\_\_
  - C. It is \_\_\_\_\_

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**“BE” BEFORE THEM**

Statistics show that entire families who begin the day with hot food, encouraging words, and affection do their respective tasks more efficiently during the time they are apart.

The unfortunate ones who leave each other after a quarrel do not fare as well. Unhappy or stressed students make poorer grades in school and do not get along with others as well as children who leave home with a positive attitude. It is the responsibility of parents to instill in their children positive attitudes, as well as a depth of love and forgiveness that make for peace in families. This is best done by example. Be before them what you want them to become. “*And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works*” (Hebrews 10:24).

*not what I believe. It’s the attitude of your heart, and so you know, we believe—but I do believe this, that God wants us to be blessed. He wants us to be able to send our kids to college, excel in our careers. But prosperity to me, Larry, is not just money, it’s having health. What good is money if you don’t have health?”*

**KING:** “*Also many in the Christian belief are wary of too much material aren’t they?”*

**OSTEEN:** “*Yeah, I think some of them are. But to me, you know. I hope people get blessed if they can handle it right. Because it takes money to do good. You know to do things for people. To spread the good news. So I think it’s all a matter of your heart.*

Those who listen in ignorance to Osteen’s messages cannot help but get the impression that righteousness equals wealth, which is merely an echo of Job’s friends: “*Remember, I pray thee, who ever perished, being innocent? Or where were the righteous cut off?*” (Job 4:7). However, such a materialistic view of God’s blessings is full of serious holes in light of the nature of the world. How many who have bought into such philosophies end up echoing the sentiments of the Psalmist: “*For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked*” (Psalm 73:3)? Joel Osteen might have trouble gaining support for his prosperity gospel from the literally millions of New Testament Christians here and in foreign lands who labor to get by from day to day *yet remain faithful to God*. To be sure, God has promised the faithful Christian the necessities of life (Matthew 6:25-33), and those who abide by godly principles will fare better than those in similar circumstances who do not, but the focus of the Gospel message is not salvation of the bank account (Matthew 6:19-21).

Joel Osteen and others of his mold provide what the masses want to hear. With “*itching ears*” (II Timothy 4:3) people in general want someone “preaching” to them who will do no more than stroke their fragile egos and reinforce their beliefs that if they work hard and are more or less good people, they will be blessed materially. However, may those of us who wear the name Gospel preacher “*not shun to declare all the counsel of God*” (Acts 20:27).

-Chris Perry

*Note: Chris, the author of the above article, has already been invited to preach our gospel meeting in 2009. Knowing Chris as I do, I assure you that his preaching will be equal to what he has written and that we are all in for a treat when he gets here.—Andy*

**THE VALUE OF THE GOOD BOOK**

What do you think about the Bible? The question might quickly be answered with a positive remark, but understand that our usage of the Bible dictates what we think of it. In principle one might consider the verse “*For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he*” (Proverbs 23:7). Similarly, as a man considers the Bible in his heart, so does that reflect upon his treatment of it. In such, there is noticed a stark contrast between the Christian and the world.

Many times the Bible is taken for granted and not treated with the respect that it deserves and demands. To many it is merely a trophy to display in order to impress those who see it. To others its mere presence radiates an invisible force of righteousness to protect a home from evil. Many use it as a photo album to display pictured memories of days gone by. Others perhaps view it as a family heirloom which has been passed down from generations as a keepsake.

To the Christian, though, it should be a constant companion, a daily guide, a means of governing one’s life, and a map to heaven. It may not always be kept in the best of shape because of its constant use. In fact, the cover may be dull, the pages may be yellowed and even torn, and the binding might be coming loose or falling apart all together. Its physical appearance may never impress a stranger who does not really understand what it is all about, but to the faithful child of God its appearance may represent a lifetime of diligent study, research, and desire to “*grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*” (II Peter 3:18). It is their prized possession, what they start and end every day with in order to better prepare themselves for the next. This book is their opportunity, though, not only to find redemption and live righteously themselves, but to teach others how to do the same. The message they treasure is one they assume everyone should, and are disappointed when they do not.

There are many common verses in the Bible that relate what a person’s attitude and treatment of the word of God should be such as Acts 17:11; II Timothy 2:15; and II Timothy 3:16-17. However, an account from the Old Testament brings to light the awe, wonder, and thanks that one should have for that revealed will and how it should forever be treated by those who love God.

*“And all the people gathered themselves together as one man into the street that was before the water gate; and they spake unto Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded to Israel. And Ezra the priest brought the law before the congregation both of men and women, and all that could hear with understanding, upon the first day of the seventh month. And he read therein before the street that was before the water gate from the morning until midday, before the men and the women, and those that could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive unto the book of the law. And Ezra the scribe stood upon a pulpit of wood, which they had made for the purpose; and beside him stood Matthiah, and Shema, and Anaiah, and Urijah, and Hilkiyah, and Maazeiah, on his right hand; and on his left hand, Pedaiah, and Mishael, and Malchiah, and Hashum, and Hashbadana, Zecharaiah, and Meshullam. And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people; (for he was above all the people;) and when he opened it, all the people stood up: and Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God. And all the people answered, Amen, Amen, with lifting up their hands: and they bowed their heads and worshipped the Lord with their faces to the ground”* (Nehemiah 8:1-6).

Understand some key qualities about the people’s new found respect for and treatment of the written word of God:

- They loved it enough to assemble to hear it read.
- They loved it enough to demand it and it alone be read.
- They loved it enough to not notice the amount of time it took to read it.
- They loved it enough to actually listen and attempt to comprehend the words Ezra read rather than just stand their like a knot on a log.
- They loved it enough to provide a proper place from which it could be read.
- They loved it enough to stand out of respect when it was opened.
- They loved it enough to accept what it said, reacting with a resounding chorus of “Amen, Amen.”
- They loved it enough to fall prostrate and worship the God who had given it to them.

The people’s love and respect of the book of the Lord is an inspiring account that should be resembled today by all of God’s children. May these points mentioned be a means of encouragement to use our Bibles as tools by reading them, studying them, searching them, and obeying them. Remember, that our treatment of the Bible dictates our feelings for it.

-Andy Brewer