

The False Promise of the Prosperity Gospel: Why I Called Out Joel Osteen and Joyce Meyer

-Rev. Rick Henderson

I have been preaching for 20 years. Yesterday I did something that I have never done before in a sermon. I publicly called out false teachers and named them by name. I said:

If you listen to Joel Osteen and Joyce Meyer, if you take what they teach seriously, it will not be good for you. It will be detrimental to your long-term growth as a follower of Jesus.

I used to think that their error was so blatantly obvious that they could just be ignored. I was wrong. They are massively growing in popularity in the evangelical world and are seen as credible and helpful. Before I'm inundated with questioning emails I want to share why I distrust these two and think you should as well. So, don't shoot me -- at least not yet.

When I was a kid I could tell the difference between neighborhood kids who wanted to be my friend from the neighborhood kids who were my friends so that they could play with my toys. Joel and Joyce are the latter. They both teach a twisted form of Christianity that teaches obedience, giving and faith as a way to get things from God. They are both products of what is known as the Prosperity Gospel and The Word of Faith Movement, or the Seed Faith Movement.

Dangers of the Prosperity Gospel

John Piper does a great job of defining what the Prosperity Gospel is and why it is so sinister. Please take a few minutes to watch this before moving on the critiques of Joyce Meyer and Joel Osteen:

Joyce Meyer

When I first heard her tell her story I was deeply moved and impressed. She is an amazing example of overcoming hurts and abuse. She will forever have my admiration and respect in that regard. Furthermore, she gives spectacular advice. If my wife or if one of my daughters went to her in a moment of crisis, I believe they would return with magnificently helpful advice. If they went to her for teaching, they would return with deadly heresy.

False Doctrine

1. She teaches that Jesus literally stopped being the Son of God on the Cross.

"He could have helped himself up until the point where he said I commend my spirit into your hands, at that point he couldn't do nothing for himself anymore. He had become sin, he was no longer the Son of God. He was sin."

2. She teaches that Jesus went to Hell and became the first-born again man.

"Do you know something? The minute that blood sacrifice was accepted Jesus was the first human being that was ever born again. Now that was real it happened when he was in hell."

3. She teaches that Jesus paid for our sins in Hell:

"There is no hope of anyone going to heaven unless they believe this truth I am presenting. You cannot go to heaven unless you believe with all your heart that Jesus took your place in hell" -From *The Most Important Decision You Will Ever Make*

4. She teaches that words have power and you can release the power of Heaven through your words.

5. She teaches that you need special revelation from God to understand what she teaches because it is NOT contained in the Bible:

"The Bible can't even find any way to explain this. Not really. That's why you've got to get it by revelation. There are no words to explain what I'm telling you. I've got to just trust God that He's putting it into your spirit like He put it into mine." From "What Happened From the Cross to The Throne": "Now spirits don't have bodies, so we can't see them. Okay? There probably is, I believe there is, and I certainly hope there is several angels up

here this morning that are preaching with me. I believe that right before I speak some anointed statement to you, that one of them bends over and says in my ear what I'm supposed to say to you." From "Witchcraft & Related Spirits" (Part 1) - 2 A-27 Audiotape)

6. She teaches that she is no longer a sinner.

Unfortunately I could continue with examples of her utter misuse of scripture, false teaching and blatant heresy. In America, Christians have an embarrassment of riches. We can buy more books, download more podcasts and tune into more helpful teachers than anyone else on the planet. The lies that she teaches are easily lost in the hum of all the great teachers we hear. But this is not the case in the third world.

In many other countries their resources are far fewer. Uneducated pastors, who are doing their very best and uninformed Christians have this garbage pumped into their countries through radio waves and TV broadcasts. Because Joyce Meyer is endorsed here, she is trusted there. And, she can afford to spread her message with the money she makes from American Christians who buy her books, CDs and who attend her conferences. Her influence is severely disrupting the church in the third world. Her teachings are the unfortunate starting point for Christians in the third world and it is birthing even greater heresies.

The devastating reality that we have to come to grips with is that when we support her here, we support the churches she is undoing there.

Financial Concerns

There is nothing wrong with being wealthy. I love it when Christians are rich. That should mean more money to fund the mission. But there is a line to how much money we as leaders should spend on ourselves. I don't know where the line is, but it is somewhere before the ministry purchasing million dollar homes for us and our kids. That line is somewhere before purchasing us a \$10 million private jet. The line is somewhere before the ministry spending \$261,498 for 68 pieces of furniture. That equates to \$3,845.56 per item. That line is somewhere before spending so egregiously that the U.S. Senate investigates us. Joyce Meyer lands on the other side of that line.

The following link includes audio from Joyce Meyer. Around 5:30 she is asked if people will get more money back to them if they give financially to her ministry.

Not only does she teach giving as a way to leverage more money from God, she is reckless with desperate people. She is not at all concerned if people give to her instead of paying bills. This is intolerable!

Questionable Example and Lack of Accountability

I challenge you to watch a typical message by Joyce Meyer. Here are a few of things you will notice:

She pauses about every five minutes for applause. And if people don't applaud she is likely to say something like, "I'm preaching better than you're acting."

She talks about herself constantly. She is the main character in every story she tells. Even when she talks about herself in a self-deprecating way, somehow it comes across in a way that causes people to admire her more.

God talks to her and reveals new information to her... a lot!

Her ministry lacks real accountability. Her family and her close friends are the governing board. This is an organization that receives almost \$100 million dollars annually, and with no substantive accountability.

Conclusion for Joyce Meyer

What I wrote and linked in the first section should have been enough to completely remove her from our sphere of trust. Her doctrine is horrific. Her hermeneutics are horrible. She is a woman who seems to have an unrestrained love for money and applause. Her finances are questionable at best. Her example is questionable at best. Her impact on desperate people here, as well as churches and pastors around the globe is wildly destructive.

I lament with you a sense of loss if she was a teacher you trusted. I lament that someone who is so wrong has so much influence with so many. I do not regret, however, pointing to her as a false teacher and as one who should be rejected.

Joel Osteen

Like Joyce Meyer, Joel Osteen has some really great things to say. He is encouraging and the man is certainly happy. This should not be held against him.

The man is confused on theology. He has much of the same doctrinal misunderstandings as does Joyce Meyer. They come from the same tradition. His doctrine is difficult to discern for many because he won't talk about doctrine. He won't talk about theology. He quickly back pedals when asked hard questions, as seen here in an interview with Larry King.

In fairness, Joel published a letter of apology after this interview.

While I commend him for his humility and courage to publicly declare that he was wrong, this is just one of too many instances. He frequently misunderstands important matters of faith and doctrine when being interviewed. He repeatedly gets the Gospel wrong. And he does so when talking to millions.

If we take Joel at his word, our only conclusion is that he is either incapable or unwilling to understand and explain how the Gospel intersects with all of life.

We recently hosted Hank Hanegraaff (The Bible Answerman) at SMCC. He has some very helpful insights into Joel Osteen's confused views of faith, doctrine and Scripture:

Joel Osteen and Prosperity Gospel

The Prosperity Gospel is much like all other religions in that it uses faith, it uses doing good things to leverage material blessings from God. Essentially, use God to get things from God.

"God has already done everything He's going to do. The ball is now in your court. If you want success, if you want wisdom, if you want to be prosperous and healthy, you're going to have to do more than meditate and believe; you must boldly declare words of faith and victory over yourself and your family" (From *Your Best Life Now*, p.132.)

"If you are believing for your child to find God, go help somebody else's child to develop a relationship with God. If you're struggling financially, go out and help somebody who has less than you have ... If you want to reap financial blessings, you must sow financial seeds in the lives of others ... If you want to see healing and restoration come to your life, go out and help somebody else get well" (From *Your Best Life Now*, pp. 224, 250-51.)

This is not the Gospel. This is a false Gospel. Joel teaches that we open ourselves to God to get more from God. He teaches that we use our words to speak into existence a better reality. This straight from the Word of Faith Movement. This is not what is taught throughout the New Testament. Consider what the Apostle Paul wrote. And remember that he wrote this while in prison.

Philippians 4:10-13 I rejoiced greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you were concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength.

Conclusion

When I was in seminary, Heather and I were poor. There were seasons in which I worked 70+ hours a week while taking a full-time Master's load. There were times that I had to sleep every other day so that I could get all my work done. This was an extended period of exhausting financial stress.

During this time, I remember reading something from Joel Osteen. He and his wife claimed by faith a new house that they wanted. Joel was unsure, but his wife Victoria was confident. And she lovingly chastised him for his lack of faith. Sometime later, they purchased that house. Still in seminary, my wife and I were walking through our dream neighborhood and that was playing through my mind. As I walked through the neighborhood, looking at all the homes, I wanted so badly for what Joel is teaching to be true. I don't know if you can understand how desperately I wanted it to be true.

I wanted relief and I wanted more. But I knew that it wasn't true. I knew that my exhaustion and desperation made me emotionally vulnerable to this false Gospel. I'm educated and well read. I've haven't just read the Bible, I've translated large chunks of it from the original Hebrew and Greek. I think I understand it. I think I have a relatively significant level of discernment. But for a moment, I was emotionally vulnerable to this false doctrine.

What about the millions of others who are desperate, searching, hoping and vulnerable without the discernment? We owe it to them to not tolerate a false gospel any longer.

If you made it to the end of this blog post, congratulations. This is a thick and heavy subject. Even though I've written much, this only begins to scratch the surface of the repugnant nature of the Prosperity Gospel.

(By Rick Henderson is a pastor who blogs at churchismessy.com. This post [first appeared](#) on his blog.)