

“The Nice, Friendly Message of Joel Osteen Doesn’t Save”
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Greetings in the Name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!

Joel Osteen, the pastor of the largest congregation in America, Lakewood Church in Houston, Texas, has been making the rounds lately, promoting his new book, “Become a Better You.” He has appeared on such popular shows as 60 Minutes, Good Morning America, and Larry King Live.

“Become a Better You” is the much anticipated sequel to Joel’s first book, “Your Best Life Now,” which was released in 2004 and has sold nearly 5 million copies. Many believe that Joel’s second book will be even more successful than his first. In fact, Joel received an unprecedented 13 million dollar advance from the publisher before he even began writing his second book. Now, that’s confidence! What would make the publisher so confident? Joel’s message, that’s what. He presents a version of Christianity that is extremely popular with the masses – especially the American masses.

Joel’s message is simply this: God loves you and wants to shower you with blessings in this life. He wants you to live your best life now. He wants you to become a better you. God has great plans in store for you, but it is up to you to bring those great plans to fruition. You must rise above your current circumstances, surround yourself with positive people, feel good about who you are, and believe that God will reward your efforts with health, wealth, and prosperity in all things. In short, if you will do your part, God will do His.

Joel tells people what they want to hear, which is very appealing to many. What is even more appealing is the way in which Joel delivers his message. If you have ever seen Joel deliver his message on his weekly television program or if you have ever seen him interviewed, you know what I mean. He has a soothing, friendly voice and always wears a smile. He is a very talented public speaker and always seems very sincere. He just seems like an all around nice guy. Some of Joel’s critics have said that it is all a façade, but I personally do not believe it is. I think Joel is legitimately sincere. I think he really is a nice guy, and I think he really, sincerely believes that he is preaching what God has called him to preach.

But, my friends, that is what makes Joel all the more dangerous, for people are drawn to him because of his sincerity and friendliness and fail to realize that the message he preaches wholly contradicts the message God has revealed to us in Holy Scripture.

St. Paul says to the Christians in Corinth, “For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2). Compare this to Joel who never mentions the cross of Jesus Christ, neither in his weekly messages, nor in his books.

St. John says in his first epistle, “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. But, if we confess our sins, God, who is faithful and just, will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:8-9). Compare this to Joel who never mentions sin, neither in his weekly messages, nor in his books.

You see, the message proclaimed by Joel Osteen, as popular and appealing as it may be to the masses, cannot save. The nearly 40,000 people who attend Joel’s Lakewood Church weekly, and

the millions of others who watch him on television weekly, are not being exhorted to repent of their sins and trust in Jesus Christ who lived the perfect, sinless life they cannot live and died on the cross to pay the full price for their sins. Instead, they are being exhorted to believe in themselves and to strive to live a life worthy of receiving God's blessings. That message can never save, for it points us away from the only source of salvation which exists – Jesus Christ.

My friends, the only message that can save is the truth revealed by God to us in Holy Scripture. That message is simply this: We are sinners. We cannot save ourselves. We cannot live lives worthy of receiving God's blessings. But, God knows that. That is why He sent His Only-begotten Son into the world to live and die for us. He alone saves us by His perfect life and sacrificial death. Those who repent of their sins and trust in Christ have forgiveness, life, and salvation. Those who refuse to repent and trust not in Christ, but in themselves, remain in their sins and outside of the salvation God accomplished for them through Christ.

That is the message which must be delivered in Church every Sunday, for that is the only message which saves. I know it is not popular, but, then again, it never has been very popular. As St. Paul says, "For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God" (1 Cor. 1:18).

May God grant you eyes to see and ears to hear His truth amidst the plethora of false teachings which surround us today, especially when they are delivered in the nicest, friendliest way by the nicest, friendliest guys, like Joel Osteen. Confess your sins, trust in Christ. That is the Christian message. It is Christ-centered and cross-focused. It is the message we sinners need to hear, for it is the power of God unto our salvation. You are more than welcome to come hear that message at our congregation, for it is delivered every week. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

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