

PSALM 24 MINISTRIES

Your Best Lie Now

The Gospel according
to Joel Osteen

By
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A note on translation:

In 1604, King James I of England authorized that a new translation of the Bible into English be started. It was finished in 1611, just 85 years after the first translation of the New Testament into English appeared (Tyndale, 1526). The Authorized Version, or King James Version, quickly became the standard for English-speaking Protestants. Its flowing language and prose rhythm has had a profound influence on the literature of the past 300 years. The KJV is public domain in the United States.

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Opening

In case you haven't figured it out yet, I'm not Joel Osteen. I don't smile nearly as much, I don't get broadcast into millions and millions of homes each week, and I don't mind offending people. If you picked up this book expecting me to fill your head with visions of gumdrops and sugarplums dancing, you're definitely in for a shock. So who am I? You can call me Adam, I'll be your guide through the wonderful world of Joel Osteen.

Now that you know who I am, I've got a question for you. It's the same question asked to seven Jews a couple millennia ago. You see, these weren't your normal run-of-the-mill Jews. They were exorcists and sons of a Jewish high priest named Sceva. You can read about them in Acts 19. So, being exorcists, they went around casting demons out of people. Believe it or not, there was actually competition in this area from a guy named Paul. You might have heard his name before, he did write a good portion of the New Testament. Anyway, Paul, being an Apostle, was much more effective in casting out demons than Sceva's kids because he was using the name and authority of Jesus. So, in an effort to improve their business, the sons of Sceva watched Paul and decided to say the exact same thing he did. Confident that their exorcism careers were secure, they approached one particular man and said, "We adjure you by the name of Jesus, whom Paul preacheth." Not only did that not work, the demon spoke through the man and said, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know, but who are ye?" The surprised look on their faces must have been priceless, but it didn't last too long. The demon-possessed man began to pound on Sceva's sons, keep in mind there was one of him and seven of them, and beat them so severely that they ran from the house naked and bleeding.

So what's the Bible lesson here? Besides the importance of

knowing Christ and not just knowing about Him, someone should point out that this story shows that just because your dad is a highly respected religious leader, it doesn't mean that you're automatically one too. You can look the part, you can have one of the largest congregations on the planet, you can even mention the name Jesus now and then, but it doesn't make you called by God.

Now, I promised you a question and here it is: Who are you? Are you a son of Sceva or are you an Apostle Paul? As you can see, there is a huge difference between the two. There is a big difference between being a soulwinner and pew filler, being Spirit-Led and Living Your Best Life Now, being saved and unsaved. How do you know the difference between the two? It can be hard sometimes, but keep reading and I'll show you.

So, you might be asking, why did I write this book? What makes me qualified to take on a spiritual giant like Joel Osteen? Who am I to judge him or his ministry? I'm a Christian who believes that the Bible is just as true now as it was when it was written. I believe Malachai 3:6 when it says "For I am the Lord, I change not." I believe the Apostle Paul when he writes in Hebrews 13:8 that Christ is "the same yesterday, and today, and forever." The answers to your questions will be answered throughout the rest of this book, but before I begin, there is something I'd like to take exception to. When I first told the idea for this book to my friends and parents, I got the same consistent objection. Since Joel Osteen is a pastor, I was told that by writing this book I would be defying God by questioning those He has placed in authority.

The infallibility of those who preach the Word of God has been a point of contention throughout the history of the Church. Far from being a side issue, objections to the blind acceptance of papal infallibility led to both the Great Schism and the Protestant Reformation. One might assume, then, after two great splits in the history of the Church, the issue of infallibility would be put to rest.

Sadly, I doubt it.

Far from the office of the Pope, the Protestants have found the enemy of 'papal infallibility' in a place much closer to home: their own pastors. If you are one of those people who have a pastor willing to admit his fallibility and open himself up to correction, consider yourself among the fortunate few. It seems more and more, pastors are using their call from God as a 'get out of jail free card' that allows their teaching to be unquestionable. Those who might have a problem with something the pastor believes are said to be disrespecting the divine authority put in place by God and therefore committing a sin.

Oddly enough, the Bible says something entirely different. We, as believers, are told to never blindly submit to the authority of any man. On the distinct contrary, the Bible tells us to be wary of false teachers and prophets, to be able to spot wolves no matter how refined their sheep's clothing may be. Rather than sinful dissenters, the Bible applauds those willing to examine the teachings of any person against the Bible. It goes so far as to say in Acts 17 that the Bereans were of more noble character because they examined each and every thing said by the Apostle Paul to see if it lined up with Scripture. Jesus was infamous among the Jews for examining and debunking the teachings of the Pharisees. Of course, some pastors try to get around this but claiming that they're doing the things they interpret the Scriptures to say. This sounds very close to the culture of sin described in the book of Judges where every man did what was right in his own sight. For those who might need more convincing, please note that the Bible itself says that it is not open to any private interpretation in 1st Peter 1:20.

Saints, it is time that we recognize what is going on within our own churches. It is time that people of God stood up against pastors that would lead congregations down the wide road that leads to destruction, paved with their own personal interpretations of Scripture. God, the source of all authority, is the author of the

Bible, not the pastors. The author is the only one with the authority to interpret and change their writing, anyone else who does so sins against God. The Bible warns against believing anyone, even an Angel of the Lord, who preaches another Gospel. More than that, the last verses of the Bible warn against adding to and removing from the Word of God. We must not blindly follow simply because someone has the title of pastor. No, let them prove themselves of God the same way the Apostle Paul did: by having their teaching weighed against the Word of God.

Yes, God will hold them accountable on the Day of Judgment for how they handled their flock, but we will also be held accountable for obeying false teachers. Our Lord gave us His Word to defend against these things, so let us use it and become of more noble character as the Bereans were. In the pages that follow, I attempt to do just that. This book is part rebuke, part correction, and part cry for revival. It is a love letter to Jesus Christ and His True Gospel.

Chapter One

Pimp My Church

I once heard a story about a man vacationing in Florida with his wife and young children. He was a very good man who had achieved a reasonable degree of success, but he was cruising along, believing he'd already reached the limits of what he could gain in his life. One day, a friend had been driving them around the tropical area, showing them the sights. They stopped to appreciate the beauty of a magnificent mansion sitting atop a cliff overlooking white sand beaches. The property was abounding with marvelous palm trees and beautifully green gardens filled to the brim with the most gorgeous flowers the man had ever seen. This house was truly picturesque, as if it had been plucked from a famous painting.

As the man gazed upon this stupendous home, he commented to his wife, friend, and small children, "I can't ever imagine us living in a place like that."

Right there, something inside him said, *Don't worry. You're not going to. You won't ever live in a place as great as this one.*

Surprised and a bit taken aback by the thoughts in his head, he asked himself, *What do you mean?*

As long as you can't imagine it, as long as you can't see it, this is not going to happen for you.

You're right, thought the man. The man realized his own thoughts and attitudes were condemning him to his mediocre life and his mediocre house. He determined right then and there to start believing better of himself and better of God. He would have that house for his very own. He had to; after all, God had a wonderful plan for his life and wanted to bless him.

From that day on, the man became consumed with getting a mansion like the one he saw in Florida. Every night, he got on his knees and thanked God for wanting him to have the house. Every morning, he woke early and went to his job. He knew in order to have this house, he would have to work and work he did. His hours began to stretch longer and longer, but he always made sure to keep asking God for the house. Soon, he woke and left before his wife and children got up and came home long after they had gone to sleep. Sure enough, his wealth began to grow.

After a few years like this, his wife filed for divorce and took the children to live with her mother. Realizing that getting what God wanted for him would involve sacrifices, the man carried on with his work. Finally, after nearly a decade of hard work the man finally had enough money to buy the mansion he had dreamed of. Sure that God has finally blessed his efforts, he moved into the mansion.

Several weeks later, the man, sad and alone, died suddenly of a heart attack. He was remembered by almost no one. His beautiful mansion was sold along with the rest of his possessions and his company quickly hired a replacement who took over his office and long hours. However, we can be sure that he died knowing that he had truly gotten what God wanted for him. He had lived his best life now.

Does anyone see a problem with this? Does anyone believe that this man truly lived his best life and got what God had in store for him? Sadly, this is the true and logical result of the materialistic dribble pouring from the lips of Joel Osteen.

No longer do the churches of America teach their congregations to rely on God, to “be content” in “whatsoever state” you are in. (Phil 4:11). Instead, Osteen speaks to the excessive wants of his parishioners’ worldly lusts and tells them that the only things separating them from massive riches are their own negative thoughts. If you can eliminate these thoughts, you

will be blessed with “more of the goodness of God.” This statement seems pretty innocent at first, until you realize that when he says “the goodness of God” he is almost always referring to money. For those in the supposed curse of poverty, Osteen encourages them to break the cycle and rise into a higher financial class. When you do that, Osteen says, you will “do more, have more, be more.” That is, the more you have, the more you are.

The central theme of Osteen’s book, *Your Best Life Now*, seems to be “What can God do for me?” From the very first paragraph of the first chapter, the emphasis of the book is put on God blessing you financially. The Almighty Creator of the Universe has been reduced in Osteen’s text to an overly rich uncle who wants nothing more than to take the struggle and hardship away from his nieces and nephews by drowning them in a river of cold, hard cash.

To justify the image of rich Uncle Jehovah, Osteen begins his incredible series of quoting Scripture out of context in different translations to suit his purposes. (I will more closely address this dangerous practice in a later chapter.) Osteen says that “God wants to pour out ‘His far and beyond favor.’” This is a quote of Ephesians 2:7 which accurately translated reads, “That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.” While grace does, in essence, mean to show someone favor when they don’t deserve it, it is far from the favor Osteen describes. The very next verse brings the true meaning into context when it says, “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.” (Eph 2:8) If we are to use Osteen’s definition of grace as “far and beyond favor,” then are we saved by the blessings of God’s riches? Are we saved by the favor of God, as Osteen says, in the form of “promotions, fresh ideas, and creativity?” Are we saved by great jobs, new cars, and the respect of our coworkers? Or are

we, as the Bible says, saved by the great grace and mercy of Christ? Choose your answer carefully, you can only pick one.

Just like the man in the story, many who hear Osteen speak or read his book will decide that God wants them to be wealthy and will dedicate their life to doing that. After all, according to Osteen, you're not doing God a favor by remaining poor. There are times when we have prayers for things like houses or cars and God will say no, no matter how long we continue to pray. Reading Osteen's book, you get the feeling that the people God loves the most are the ones he blesses with the most wealth. He speaks passionately of his father's rise from the slums and that he admires his father's commitment to "rise above that mentality of defeat and mediocrity." He comments that previous to his father, "nobody in our family line had ever amounted to much." This all sounds well and good until you realize that, yet again, Joel is referring to money. According to Joel, God doesn't want you to stay in your current economic class, "He doesn't want you to stay where you are." Osteen tells readers not to ever "let anybody convince you that God wants you to barely get by in life." It is almost as if he sees poverty as a sin or a result of a lack of faith. He ends the paragraph encouraging people to "never be satisfied with where you are."

So, by now you're probably asking, what's wrong with what he's saying? Is it wrong to have a lot of money? Doesn't God want me to have the very best? Yes, God wants you to have the best He has to offer. However, he wants you to have His best, not your best.

Now, don't get me wrong, being wealthy is not a sin. Abraham was a very rich man and he was most definitely a friend of God. The same can be said of David after he became King. David's son Solomon is the richest man in the history of the world, and he too was blessed and honored by God. If money itself were

evil, then why would God give it to those he loves? Riches are not the problem, the desire for riches is.

In discussing this, I will be drawing largely from the 6th chapter of the book of 1st Timothy. I encourage you to read the chapter in whole either before or after you read this segment of the book. The 5th verse of this chapter is particularly relevant to dealing with Joel's preaching. Along with the preceding verses, it serves as a warning against men who would speak against the Godly wisdom of the chapter. The verse reads, "Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself." Quite a change from "Don't let anybody convince you that God wants you to barely get by in life." Therefore, based on this, I ask that you withdraw yourselves from teachings about how God wants you to be rich and listen to the Scripture.

The very next verse spells out a Biblical principle that Osteen's book truly seems to miss when it says "godliness with contentment is great gain." As with all Biblical truth, the next several verses bring this truth into context: "For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content. But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition." (1 Tim 6:7-9)

Notice that the verse speaks against "they that will be rich," not those that are. Those that have the will to be rich are those who embrace money in their thoughts and their affections, those that consider having money to be more important than other things. We are warned against doing these things. Or, to put it more succinctly, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." (Ex 20:3)

Whether you have a few cents to your name or you own nearly all the skyscrapers in a major city, you can have the will to be rich. Having the will to be rich is still a sin, even if you don't

achieve it. This desire for riches is the motivation for many who enter casinos hoping that it will be their lucky night and they will strike it rich. I'm not saying that gambling is a sin, I'll leave that for the Southern Baptist Convention. No, you can play blackjack and poker and pull the arm of the slot machine without sinning. The point where it becomes sin is when you are gambling in an attempt to strike it rich and have an overabundance of wealth.

The will to be rich violates the First Commandment because it puts your need to be wealthy before God. Think of the rich young ruler described in the 10th chapter of the book of Mark. This man had everything his heart desired, except eternal life. He is a perfect example of a person with the will to be rich. When Christ instructed him to sell all his possessions, he left saddened because he couldn't do what the Master asked. He had such a will to be rich, to have money and possessions, that he could not let go of them to save his own soul. He's like a rich man who drowns after a shipwreck because he is weighed down by the gold in his pockets. Christ then comments, in his divine wisdom, about how difficult it is for those who "trust in riches to enter the Kingdom of God."

Those with riches using their wealth to celebrate themselves while neglecting the poor is not just a problem for ancient parables. This infirmity is very much alive, well, and kicking today. The house I grew up in is just down the street from a famous mansion. It's truly a magnificent structure with amazing amounts of fine art and expensive landscaping, all surrounded by a red brick barrier. It has become something of a tourist attraction for the Houston area. The thing that struck me most about the mansion was not the exquisite art, but the pamphlet you're handed when you tour the facility. In it, the owners describe that in their travels collecting artwork and other expensive wares for their mansion, they felt that God was leading them to purchase certain pieces. Far be it for me to question what someone thinks God is

telling them to do (right, David Koresh?), but that doesn't sound like the God described in the Bible to me.

Of course, religion is not an infallible shield to the will to be rich. Look at the Pharisees, they were among the most religious of their brethren, yet they were almost entirely consumed with desire for riches.

As was evident in the Pharisees, a will to be rich can easily replace a true devotion to the things of God. Desiring to be rich so consumes a person that they forget the needs of their fellow man. In the 16th chapter of the book of Luke, Christ tells the story of the rich man and a beggar named Lazarus. The rich man was fed scrumptious meals every day, while Lazarus begged outside the walls of the rich man's estate. The Bible tells us he chose this spot because he wanted to have even the "crumbs which fell from the rich man's table." Time passed and both men died; Lazarus was taken to Abraham's bosom, while the rich man fell into the curses of hell. The truest danger of this materialism is that people, like the rich man, will choose silver instead of salvation, gold instead of God, and riches instead of redemption.

Joel Osteen and his watered-down gospel preaching are not alone in their obsession with wealth. We are finding the same greed and lust for wealth in Protestant churches that was previously reserved for Vegas wedding chapels. This isn't a recent problem either. I can remember many times being told by my parents to "put on my Sunday best" before we went to church on Sunday morning. What that meant was to go and put on the absolute best set of dress clothes that I had and wear them to worship. Even as a small child, I found it odd that God, the Almighty Creator of the universe, would care which clothes I wore. Do we think we can somehow impress God if we show up to his house in nice clothes? Is God some teenage mallrat who's obsessed with designer labels? If that's true, then Billy Graham should really think about revising the words to "Just As I Am."

Comedian George Carlin also comments on materialism in churches. While I'm sure some of you will have stopped reading as soon as I mentioned Mr. Carlin's name, I will remind you that it's important to evaluate even our worst criticisms, because those are usually the truest. In a particular bit on religion, Carlin comments that he prefers worshipping the sun to God because "no one asks for money... and we don't have a special building where we all gather once a week to compare clothing." Rapper Marshall Mathers, more popularly known as Eminem, is despised by many churches and Christian organizations. He, too, offers criticism in his song "Criminal" when he sings, "Please Lord, this boy needs Jesus. Heal this child, help us destroy these demons. Uh, please send me a brand new car." This is how the world sees the church. Can we really blame them when Joel is preaching the same thing?

Materialism is the preoccupation of people with material things rather than intellectual ideas or, more importantly, spiritual principles. A materialistic person is one that lives as if God doesn't really exist and therefore the things of this world are all that truly matter. Their praise and worship go entirely into their jobs, their mortgages, their cars, and their bank accounts. In essence, the materialistic "Christian" is a practical atheist. When a Christian becomes materialistic, they love the gift more than the Giver.

I know a family with a situation quite like this. Their son, ever since he reached his teenage years, believes that the world revolves around him. It's as if he never moved on from the phase toddlers go through when their favorite word is "mine!" Whether it is the newest clothes or the shiniest sportscar, this kid is absolutely obsessed with the things his parents have given him. The thing is, as much as he loves his things, it's never enough. More than a few times, I've seen this young man get into bitter arguments with his parents about wanting the newest fad. Despite that his parents have given him all the nice things that he has, he shows little or no respect for them. This teenager loves the gifts he

gets from his parents much more than he loves his parents themselves. There's something wrong with this situation.

Despite the fact that so many people claim to believe in God, materialism is rapidly spreading throughout the United States. With the materialism epidemic comes its main symptom: discontentment. When you make wealth your main goal, you can never have enough of it. There are always bigger beds, better computers, newer cars: seemingly everything can be continually improved. Is it any wonder we have over a fifty percent divorce rate in this country? Everything else is being improved, why shouldn't we upgrade our spouses to the newest model?

Not only do you always want more, but you become obsessed with the things you do have. Again, this is true regardless of which economic class a person finds himself in. You can have as much love for a pickup as you can for a Lamborghini, as much worship for a cardboard box shanty as you can for the biggest house on the block. The love you have for something is truly equal to the amount of faith you put into it. This faith/love is described in Scripture when it says "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." (Matt 6:21) If your heart is in what you have, then that is what you put your faith in. If this is you, then I would remind you that you never see a hearse towing a U-Haul. The things you have will rot away, only God is permanent. Christ warns to "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal." (Matt 6:19-20)

Speaking of love for money and for God, the Bible says "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other." (Matt 6:24a) Therefore, by being a materialistic Christian, a person is actually living in rebellion against God. Essentially, by

choosing materialism, a person is extending a middle finger towards Heaven and shouting “God, you can’t tell me how to live my life!” This rebellion is serious stuff. There are just about 2,350 verses dealing with money in the Bible. Additionally, roughly 15% of what Christ said dealt with money, more than Christ even specifically warns about hell. Basically, the materialistic Christian is choosing the temporary things he has over eternal salvation. Christ again warns against this kind of behavior when he says “For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Mark8:36-37) I ask you to honestly ponder that question: what would you trade your soul for?

To put it into context, if I offered you one billion dollars for one of your five senses, would you take it? If it were something like smell, you just might. But what if I told you the only sense of yours I wanted was your sight? How much would you sell me both of your eyes for? I’m betting you wouldn’t sell your sight for any amount. It’s been said by many men wiser than I that the eyes are the windows of your soul. If your sight is so valuable to you, then why would you risk your soul for worldly gain?

Have you fallen prey to the unbiblical gospel of materialism? Are you no longer counting on God to provide for you, but rather relying solely on what you, yourself, can do? Are you hoping to have enough money that you can eventually buy happiness? The truth of the matter is this: the rich are, in large part, much unhappier than the poor. Go to the richest parts of Beverly Hills, California and look for the spoiled brats who have a toy store’s supply in their closets. See how happy they really are. Then, take a drive to Compton. Find the poorest kids you can. They’re probably hungry with dirty torn clothes. Watch how they appreciate everything given to them, how the joys of playing a game of baseball and basketball overwhelm them. Who is truly happier, the rich or the poor?

Now that you see why materialism is such a great sin, you should wonder as I have why Joel Osteen seems so intent on pushing it. I will address this in a later chapter, but I believe that Joel and those like him are catering their message to a worldly audience. Materialism certainly wasn't invented by Lakewood, but it certainly seems like it has become one of their new sacraments.

Let us not forget the lesson of Judas Iscariot. The not-so-beloved disciple of Jesus, the betrayer, the man who sold Jesus to his captors for a few measly silver coins... or so we're taught. With the recent stir about *The Da Vinci Code*, a lot of attention has been brought to the painting portraying the Last Supper. Next time you see it, or any depiction of the Last Supper, I challenge you to look for Judas. The other disciples are seemingly nondescript, but you can always find Judas. He has a devilish grin, a dark and scraggly beard, and is typically counting money while Christ is blessing the meal. And he is ugly, man is he ever. That's how we "modern" people like to depict those we think of as evil. They can't look like us, no, they must be just as hideous on the outside as they are on the inside. By no means could they look normal or God forbid attractive. We would never suspect a smiling preacher with a wife and kids to be anything but Christ-like.

Unfortunately, history tells us that is just what Judas was like. A mentor of mine always likes to say that "perception is truth, regardless of the facts," and there is no greater example than Judas. The disciples around him thought he was a man of God. According to some sources, when Judas left to betray Christ the other Apostles thought he had left to give money to the poor. He was also the one who complained when the prostitute broke the expensive bottle of perfume to wash Jesus' feet because the perfume could have been sold and the money given to the poor.

So what made Judas Iscariot different from the other eleven men hand chosen by Christ? Was he possessed by Satan? Was he jealous of Christ's popularity? I don't think so. I believe that he lost

sight of Christ when he set his sights on riches. And what is wrong with that? Wasn't he expanding his vision to include those thirty pieces of silver? Didn't God want him to be rich? Wasn't Judas just trying to live his best life now?

Just like Judas Iscariot, Joel Osteen has sold out Jesus Christ.

Chapter Two

Why Can't We Be Friends?

I know of a place in Alabama that I'd really like to visit. This enormous structure, which has just recently finished construction, contains no less than 5 gigantic domes. One is a children's play area with a 50 foot long platform and six massive groupings of soft toys. The next is a bistro for adults with a stage setup capable of satisfying most touring rock bands. The third is set up the same way, but designed for a teen audience. The last two domes, both 164 feet in diameter, house two NBA regulation size basketball courts, fitness rooms, a commercial kitchen, a food court, a 1200 seat banquet hall, and a 12-lane bowling alley. All five of these domes are connected by a central lobby which also features a climbing tower. You would think a theme park this size would really put Birmingham on the map. After all, the only resorts in the area that could rival this behemoth are Disneyworld and Universal Studios.

The thing is, it's not a theme park or a resort. What I've just described is the brand-new Faith Chapel. It seems we've come a long way from the Sermon on the Mount.

In other news, Christians in China are still being hunted down, jailed, tortured, and killed for their faith. Pastors of so-called "unregistered churches" are being jailed as terrorists, since Christianity poses a threat to the atheistic Chinese regime. Unfortunately, China isn't unique in this policy. Today, all around the world, Christians are literally being martyred for their faith.

So what makes the American megachurch so different from Christians around the world? Do the huddled masses in secret

homechurches dream of the day when they'll have a church with a bowling alley? Do those tortured and executed for their faith pray that God would raise up a food court? Or have we become so comfortable in our freedoms in this nation that we've let the world creep into control of our churches?

So many times in this pluralistic society, we are told to do what works for us. What is good for one person isn't what's best for another. One man's trash is another man's treasure. That's what we're taught growing up. People have different ways of worship and no one way is any better than another -- if only that were actually true. Christianity is not the same as any other religion or philosophy. Christians are decidedly different from the rest of the world, not only because we choose to be, but because we are called to be. Christianity is a faith of absolute truth, there can be no gray area. So, when two radically different types of Christianity exist, there must be one that is shown to be true and the other false. The persecuted church rejects the ways of this world, and the megachurch embraces it. They cannot both be right. This isn't an issue of culture or geographic location, because Jesus cannot be two different people. Either we reject the ways of the world or we don't.

I strongly affirm that the persecuted church is the true Church. My reason behind this is simple: the way they believe works anywhere, whether they're being hunted down or not. The beliefs of the megachurch only work in places of prosperity. The way to test any belief is trial by fire. When the flames of persecution are lit beneath a church, you will begin to see people cling to truth and abandon falsehood. In 1st Corinthians 3:11-15, it says "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what

sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire." This tells us, again, that there is only one foundation for the Church: Jesus Christ Himself. When we all begin to build, trial by fire will show whether what we have built belongs to God to belongs or to the world. The Word of God is spoken of in many contexts as a consuming fire, so in keeping with this Biblical truth, I will try to shed light on the message taught by Joel Osteen in order that the true things of God may be revealed.

The Bible says in James 4:4-5, that "Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God. Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy?" Look very closely at how those who have friendship with the world are addressed. Not only are they called enemies of God, but they are revealed to be adulterers and adulteresses. This may seem strange when you first read it, but given the proper context, it makes sense.

The relationship between a husband and his wife is used as a metaphor for the relationship between Christ and His Church in Ephesians 5:22-25 when it says, "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it." The Church is at many points described as being the bride of Christ.

Seeing the Church as Christ's bride, it becomes clear why those Christians who share friendship with the world are called to account for adultery. In the same way that a wife is called to be one flesh with her husband, the Church must be one with Christ and

Christ alone. A wife cannot be one flesh with her husband and someone else. If she is sleeping with other men, then she is committing adultery. In the same way, when we as Christians share friendship with the world, which stands in direct opposition of God, we are committing spiritual adultery in a very real sense. When we are friends with the world, we are cheating on God.

This spiritually adulterous relationship with the world is further elaborated upon and forbidden in many other parts of the Bible, including the same chapter of Ephesians where marriage is described. In verses 5-11, it says, “For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience. Be not ye therefore partakers with them. For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light: (For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth;) Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.” Here again we are told not to be joined together with the world, because that will invite the wrath of God upon our lives. In the same way parents will punish a child for hanging around the wrong crowd after they’ve been warned not to, God will not hesitate to punish us in order to bring us back into obedience.

Now, this is of course not to say that we shouldn’t have friends who aren’t Christians. That’s not what the verses mean, because after all, how would we evangelize if we avoided the unsaved like they carried leprosy? We’re told not to partake in their sin with them, but we’re also told not to abandon them. Friendship with the world is different than friendship with the unsaved. We are told that we struggle against the world, the flesh and the devil. We are also told that our struggle is “not against

flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places” in Ephesians 6:12. Our fight isn’t with people that aren’t saved, but with the sinful world itself. However, as the Bible shows, we are not to partake in their sin with them nor be spiritually joined.

This principle of avoiding spiritual entanglement with the world and unbelievers is illustrated in 2nd Corinthians 6:14-17 when it says, “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you.” In my college years, I experienced a perfect example of this.

Walking across campus one afternoon, I happened upon a bulletin board where different campus groups posted flyers about their upcoming events. As I was glancing across the sea of fraternity and sorority parties, I came across a rather simple flyer that had a pentagram, the symbol of Satan, and a cross, the symbol of Christ, right next to each other. Sure that I must have seen something wrong, I looked more closely at the flyer. It was advertising an interfaith picnic between a certain Christian denomination’s group and the campus pagan alliance. Not sure what to make of this, I showed up to the picnic. There I heard them discuss their different faiths and heard the denomination’s clergy (I’m speaking in decidedly nondescript terms about the denomination) say that their faith and the pagan faith were very similar paths. This is a perfect example of fellowship between

righteousness and unrighteousness. The verses from 2nd Corinthians talk about there being no common ground between Christ and Belial. Belial is identified by the Bible as a demon and by the Occult as one of the crown princes of hell. Christ will not, nor can He, have association with a demon, and neither can His bride the Church.

The differences between righteous and unrighteous are not always so apparent. Satan was chief among the angels, given the task of guarding the throne of God Himself. Being created for this position, he possessed extreme beauty. His angelic name Lucifer even means 'light.' When he was cast down from Heaven, he didn't lose his beauty. The comic idea of the devil being a little red angry man with horns, a goatee, a pitchfork, and a tail is a vast misconception. Instead, we are told in 2nd Corinthians 11:14-15 that "And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works." Satan won't look like what we think the devil will be and neither will his deceptive followers.

Friendship isn't a one way street. Not only should we refuse to be joined with the things of this world, but we should act in such a way that the world will want absolutely no association nor union with us. Again, this isn't to say we should act in ways that make nonChristians not want to talk to us, but that the sinful nature of the unsaved of this world should repulse them from the holiness of Christ they see in us. The Bible has much to say about this subject and brings it to light at several points.

In John 15:18-25, Jesus tells his disciples, "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will

also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also. But all these things will they do unto you for my name's sake, because they know not him that sent me. If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloak for their sin. He that hateth me hateth my Father also. If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin: but now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father. But this cometh to pass, that the word might be fulfilled that is written in their law, They hated me without a cause. “

Look very closely at the words of the Messiah. If we were still members of the world, then it would love us. The truth of this statement is still echoing today as the secular world clings to its own members, no matter what they're doing. The President is cheating on his wife, but he's still a good man. He's still a great leader, because after all, what you do in your own bedroom or (Oval) office doesn't affect your professional performance at all. This way of the world runs in direct contrast to Scripture.

In the parable of the talents recorded in the 25th chapter of the book of Matthew and the 19th chapter of the book of Luke, Christ shows us that what we do with what little we have is evidence of how we will handle great things. The servant who wasted his personal talent had it taken from him, but the servant who expanded his talents was told in Matthew 25:23 that, “His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.” The world has its teachings and clings to them, whether they agree with the Word of God or not.

Moving on, look directly at the next few truths revealed in the passage. We are no longer members of the world. Christ chose us to separate from the world and be separate, so the world is going to hate us. If we are truly living out the Christian lifestyle as

God commanded us to, then the world is going to hate us. The word used for hate in this verse is 'miseo' which means literally to hate, to despise, to persecute. Let me say this again, if you are truly a Christian and living as Christ wanted us to, the world will hate you, the world will despise you, and the world will persecute you. Christians who are not hated by the world are not actually Christians and there is no way of getting around that.

Why does the world hate us? The simple answer is Jesus. They do not hate us because of who we are, they hate us for Who we serve. The very presence of Christians shows unbelievers, even on some subconscious spiritual level, that there is something radically wrong with their life. Before Christ, men walked in darkness and enjoyed it. When no one could see themselves in their true state, everyone looked pretty good. When Christ came, His holy nature was a condemnation to them. He was the perfect standard that they could not live up to. Suddenly, their sins came to light for what they are. Little white lies and exaggerations on their taxes became perjury. Youthful lust became adultery, hate became murder. "Boys will be boys" became "all that sin are condemned." The Bible says in John 3:19-20, "And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved." The verses originally quoted say "If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloak for their sin." The latter portion of John 7:7 brings perfect clarity to why the world hates Christ, and by association Christians, when it says, "but me it hateth, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil."

One of the truest tests of a Christian is love and hate. If they are hated by the world and love Christ, they are a believer. However, if the world loves them and they love the things of this world, the Bible tells us they are false brethren. 1st John 2:15-16

bring this to light when it reads, "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. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world." Demas, a fellow labourer of the Apostle Paul, abandoned Paul and the faith. When Paul writes of Demas in 2nd Timothy 4:10, he makes clear the reason why Demas left when he writes, "For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world."

Now I'm sure some of you are still stuck on my earlier statement. I'll say it again, if you cannot name any person or part of the world that hates you, you should examine yourself to see if you're really a Christian. Jesus said that the world will hate us, so if the world loves you, then something is wrong. You cannot be a Christian and not be hated. You say to me, "But I love Jesus." I'm glad for you. In fact, I can't tell you how happy that makes me. It's great to love Jesus, I do too. But loving Jesus is more than just lip service. It's more than prayer, it's more than tithing, and it's more than going to church and singing in the choir. Jesus Himself gives the test of whether or not we love Him. In the John 14:15, Jesus tells us the test when He says, "If ye love me, keep my commandments." Jesus has clearly said that if you are keeping his commandments the world will hate you. So, if the world loves you, do you really love Jesus?

Of course, this doesn't make one lick of sense to you. You're all about loving your neighbor and your neighbors love you back. You make giving more than a habit, in fact, you literally live to give. You pick people up when they're down and give help to the hurting. You are loved by your community and hailed as a humanitarian. There is not a single person that hates you. You're not brash and you don't hurt anyone's feelings. If anyone ever feels hurt by something you've said, you feel horrible and apologize. You are a waterfall of God's unconditional love and

kindness and believe that if Christians could all just be a little nicer, then we could all just get along. You have it all figured out.

Oh, really? If you just agreed with the above paragraph, if I'm describing you, then you are saying that you are greater than Jesus Christ. "Remember the word that I said unto you, **The servant is not greater than his lord.** If they have persecuted me, **they will also persecute you;** if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also. But all these things will they do unto you for my name's sake, **because they know not him that sent me.**" The servant is not greater than his Master, the Christian is not greater than Christ. If you think being loving and kind will keep the world from hating you because you're a Christian, think again. There is not one person who can even come close to the love and kindness demonstrated by Christ and look at how the world hated him. Part of the reason we are commanded many times in Scripture to love each other is that we certainly shouldn't be loved by the world. Christians aren't "Born to Be Wild (At Heart)," they are "Born Again to be Hated."

If I seem to have buried you in Scripture in this chapter, I make no apologies. First, it's always good to be wrapped in Scripture. Second, because of the reasons I've just listed about Satan appearing as an angel of light and his ministers as righteous, it is important that Scripture be used to discern the true from the false. Those who are Christians are called to recognize sin for what it is, and this is especially true of pastors who God has entrusted with the important task of guiding flocks. As the pastor of the largest church in the nation, who by the way gets more television coverage than the Pope, the standard is raised.

Chapter Three

Does this church come with fries and a drink?

“You don’t even know anything about Christianity, Cartman!”

“I know enough to exploit it”

While this conversation comes from an episode of South Park, it could have just as easily come from the transcript of a Lakewood board meeting. More and more, Osteen’s church has begun to look so much like the world that you get the feeling that the person pulling the strings is just using a church as a front for something much different than the service of God.

Stepping into Lakewood, you’ll see suited volunteers greeting everyone with that same “Welcome to Wal-Mart” smile. There are no crosses that might offend folks, but there are plenty of signs, name-tags, a gift shop, a book store, and even some sort of a costume-clad squirrel that welcomes children to the play area, complete with person inside. It’s a Disney-esque atmosphere in there as well. This looks so much like the world that if you didn’t know you were at Lakewood Church, you might just think that you were at the Magic Kingdom.

In the last chapter, we discussed the reasons why there can be no double allegiances for Christians. Either we belong to Christ or we belong to Satan, there is no middle ground. As believers, we are called not only to separate ourselves from the world, but to be separate. Now, I know most of you are probably thinking I just repeated myself, but there is a definite distinction between the act of separation and the state of being separate.

Separating from the world is the action of breaking free from the ways of sin. It's something that you do. When you make the decision not to make provision for sin, that's the act of separating. Choosing to stop getting drunk because you know it's a sin is separating. Being separate from the world deals with much more than our actions, it concerns the things we believe. Being separate deals with the qualities that we, as believers in Christ, possess that distinguish us from the rest of the planet's population. Romans 12:2 brings this clearly to light when it says, "And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God." As Christians, our beliefs and our churches are not to conform to what the world thinks. God has set the standard we should follow, not the unbelievers.

When we conform to the ways of the world, we demonstrate a lack of fear for God and thus a lack of wisdom. In Proverbs 9:10 the Bible says, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding." When we fail to exercise true and proper fear of God, we become like the wicked. A good friend and mentor of mine is a director at my church. He told me recently of a woman who came to speak to him while her children attended our church's Vacation Bible School. Her family was apparently shopping around for a new church and while she liked ours, she had two objections. First, when she dropped her children off for the first day of Vacation Bible School, no one seemed available to help her. Secondly, she 'needed' a 9:30am church service (our services are at 8, 10:50, and 11 with Bible classes and Sunday school at 9:30). My friend learned from talking to her that she had a checklist about the church her family would attend which included things like times and hospitality, but had nothing about what the church actually taught. He commented to me later that he wondered if the Apostle Paul dealt with people like this when he

was planting churches. Can't you just see it? Do you offer orgies after the service? No? Hmmmm. How about a blessing from the Roman Government? No? Well, what about a free toga for all new members? You don't offer that either? Well, I don't know how you plan to get along in these modern times without those things. Good luck, I am taking my business over to the church of Zeus instead!

This woman, in her church-shopping, was demonstrating a lack of fear for God. She wanted God on her schedule, rather than allowing her life to be conformed. While this is a seemingly small quandary, it is evident of the root problem facing megachurches and small churches alike. We are conforming to the will of the popular majority rather than the standards of God. We are called to be standard-bearers, not conformers. When our services, from their times to their content, are bent around pleasing people, then we have strayed from the ways of our Master. The Apostle Paul makes this incredibly clear when he says in Galatians 1:10-12, "For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ. But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ." Read very carefully what Paul has said here: you should not be a servant of Christ if you're out to please men. We're not out to please the world, but to please Christ by telling the world His truth. Paul begins the chapter just referenced by identifying himself as an Apostle, which means messenger, "not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead." Paul knew who he was and what he was doing because he knew Who it was that he served.

Corporations like Wal-Mart have people pleasing down to an art. They're there to help you buy goods from them, and to make you feel comfortable. Every aspect of their business is about

money. Whether it's the greeters at the door who help you feel comfortable; or the fact that the stores are encouraged to follow the same basic floor-plan nation-wide so that no matter which Wal-Mart you walk into, you'll at least have a basic familiarity with where things are located; or that everyone wears the same uniform so that you'll know who to talk to. It's about making the customer feel welcomed and comfortable spending their money at Wal-Mart. But here's the thing. If every aspect of Wal-Mart is to help make the customer feel good and want to spend money... is every aspect of Lakewood to direct people towards a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ?

If the word of an Apostle Paul were not enough, the Prophet Ezekiel spoke the Word of God upon this issue as well. In Ezekiel 22:26-31 it reads, "Her priests have violated my law, and have profaned mine holy things: they have put no difference between the holy and profane, neither have they shewed difference between the unclean and the clean, and have hid their eyes from my sabbaths, and I am profaned among them. Her princes in the midst thereof are like wolves ravening the prey, to shed blood, and to destroy souls, to get dishonest gain. And her prophets have daubed them with untempered mortar, seeing vanity, and divining lies unto them, saying, Thus saith the Lord GOD, when the LORD hath not spoken. The people of the land have used oppression, and exercised robbery, and have vexed the poor and needy: yea, they have oppressed the stranger wrongfully. And I sought for a man among them, that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I should not destroy it: but I found none. Therefore have I poured out mine indignation upon them; I have consumed them with the fire of my wrath: their own way have I recompensed upon their heads, saith the Lord GOD."

Read carefully the Words of the Lord as given through the Prophet Ezekiel. The priests of Israel had brought spiritual

violence to the things of God. How'd they do this? Did they turn their backs on God and join the Occult? No, this was a more subtle change. God had called Israel to be a people separated from the world, in the same manner He has called his believers today. The distinctions made are different, but God's people whether Christian or Jew have always been called to be different than the rest of the world. The priests of Israel profaned the holy things of God by failing to make a distinction between the holy and unholy, the clean and unclean, the sacred and the secular. When they did this, when they failed to remain separate, they profaned God. When we, as the Church, look so much like the world that people really can't tell the difference, then we have profaned God. Profaning something doesn't mean to spit on it, but to make it normal. God cannot be made normal, because He is not on the same level with us. In fact, trying to make God on the same level with us is essentially Satan's sin that resulted in him being cast down from heaven.

Joel Osteen's church is very hospitable and welcoming, something the previous church-shopping woman was looking for. Hospitality is a good thing, and all Christians should demonstrate it. The thing is, there are a great many groups in this world that are great at hospitality, but they're secular. Hospitality is a good thing for churches to have, but it's not one of the defining things that make us different from the world. The centurion mentioned in the eighth chapter of the book of Matthew didn't approach Jesus Christ because he heard of the Lord's great hospitality. He wasn't interested in the great musical performances of the Apostles. He didn't notice what people were wearing or the color of the coffee. No, the centurion had a different agenda than being pleased by the hospitality of Christ. He came looking for the power of God, the distinction Christ and his followers had that the world did not. If we can't make the distinction between the sacred and the secular, how are we going to help people? You're not going to raise the

dead looking like the world.

Ezekiel, speaking the Words of the Lord, said “And I sought for a man among them, that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I should not destroy it: but I found none.” The Lord sought a man among the corrupt. Heaven was looking for someone to do what God had commanded. He was looking for a hedge builder, someone who would stand up for the things of God and show the difference between the sacred and the secular. He was looking for someone to stand in the gap before Him “for the land.” The person he was looking for was one with a passion for both God and his nation. Who should stand for America? Who will build the hedge and make the distinction between the holy and unholy? How about the pastor of the largest church in America?

Chapter Four

No Savior Necessary

(In the interest of objectivity, I have copied the transcript directly from CNN's website and have not altered it in any way, including grammatical corrections)

On June 20, 2005, Joel Osteen was interviewed by Larry King on Larry King Live. As an audience of millions, a large part presumably nonChristians, tuned in, Osteen was seen as representing the faith and more importantly Christ Himself. Let's see how he did:

KING: But you're not fire and brimstone, right? You're not pound the decks and hell and damnation?

*OSTEEN: No. That's not me. It's never been me. I've always been an encourager at heart. And when I took over from my father he came from the Southern Baptist background and back 40, 50 years ago there was a lot more of that. But, you know, I just -- **I don't believe in that. I don't believe -- maybe it was for a time. But I don't have it in my heart to condemn people. I'm there to encourage them. I see myself more as a coach, as a motivator to help them experience the life God has for us.***

Roughly 13 percent of every recorded word we have of Jesus was a warning about hell. As far as Joel not believing in preaching about hell and damnation, and that it was possibly only useful for a time, we can look to the words of Jesus to see what he thought. In Matthew 23:35, Jesus says, "Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, **how can ye escape the damnation of hell?** Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: and some of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye

scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city: That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar." That sounds as close to "pound the decks and hell and damnation" as you can get. And since we know from Hebrews 13:8 that "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and forever," we can be confident that what Jesus preached was not good only for a short time.

KING: But don't you think if people don't believe as you believe, they're somehow condemned?

*OSTEEN: 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 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 called the good news. My message is a message of hope, that's God's 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.***

KING: You've been criticized for that, haven't you?

OSTEEN: I have. I have. Because I don't know.

KING: Good news guy, right?

*OSTEEN: Yeah. But you know what? It's just in me. **I search my heart and I think, God, is this what I'm supposed to do?** I made a decision when my father died, you know what? **I'm going to be who I feel like I'm supposed to be. And if it doesn't work, it doesn't work. Not the end of the world if I'm not the pastor...***

Ah, where to begin. Larry King asks Joel point blank in front of the secular world whether he believes that if people aren't Christians, that they are condemned. Joel says he knows there is condemnation in the world, but he doesn't feel it's his place to tell people about it and tries not to. Newsflash, according to John 3:18, "He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." People are condemned by their sin whether Joel wants to tell them about it or not. In fact, by not telling them about their condemnation and the coming judgment, Joel is extremely hurting them, not helping. If he tells them about God and His love, but never tells them of their need for repentance, then they will remain lost, but think they are saved. It is amazing to me that Joel's parishioners can think they're saved, but never wonder what they are saved from.

Osteen says "I search my heart" and "I'm going to be who I feel like I'm supposed to be." Both these statements, but the last one especially, are the kinds of things I hear from unbelievers as reasons why they're not going to change their ways and follow Christ. I plan on addressing this focus on self in a later chapter, but the fact remains that a person should not trust their own hearts to lead them in the ways of God. Jeremiah 17:9 reads, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" We are further told in Proverbs 5:3 to "Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding." Twice in the book of Judges, when speaking about the corruption, we are told in the very last verse as well as the sixth verse of the 17th chapter that "In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes." If you're going to be who you feel like you're supposed to be, rather than do what the word of God says, then you aren't really a Christian. That statement basically says "God, you can't tell me how to live my life!"

Finally, the book of Proverbs again sheds light on the fallacy of Osteen's words about following his heart and doing what he thinks is right. Proverbs 12:15 reads, "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes: but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise." It says twice, including in Proverbs 16:25 that "There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death." Finally, Proverbs 28:26 reads "He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool: but whoso walketh wisely, he shall be delivered."

Joel says that it's not his job to try to straighten people out. The word used for pastor is the same one for shepherd. It is not the same word used for Motivational Speaker. The roles of pastor and shepherd are one in the same. By calling himself a pastor, Joel Osteen has accepted the role of shepherding the flock. Therefore, far from not being his job, straightening out the flock is precisely the duty of his calling. In the same way a teacher who never instructs anyone isn't a teacher, a pastor who doesn't shepherd is not a pastor. Joel says it's not the end of the world if he's not the pastor, but if he fails to lead as a pastor, at the end of the world, the flock entrusted to him will likely end up in hell.

KING: Is it hard to lead a Christian life?

OSTEEN: I don't think it's that hard. To me it's fun. We have joy and happiness. Our family -- I don't feel like that at all. I'm not trying to follow a set of rules and stuff. I'm just living my life.

KING: But you have rules, don't you?

OSTEEN: We do have rules. But the main rule to me is to honor God with your life. To live a life of integrity. Not be selfish. You know, help others. But that's really the essence of the Christian faith.

If living the Christian life isn't hard, then someone better

tell those persecuted for their faith around the world that they're doing something wrong. Better yet, we've got to tell people that the Apostles, who were all brutally murdered except John, should have just been having more fun. And Jesus must have been wrong in Matthew 5:10-11: "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake."

As long as we're not trying to follow a set of rules like say the 10 Commandments, shouldn't we go ahead and do the things it forbids? Are lying and adultery okay now? If we look at Bill Clinton's approval rating, the world apparently thinks so. How about murder and theft? Should we go out from church and kill people and rob their corpses? After all, we're not trying to follow a set of rules.

This whole lack of rules thing not only contradicts Scripture, but logically it wouldn't work. Another good friend and mentor of mine teaches sociology on the college level. Every semester, when talking about rules, he encourages his students to visit Outback Steakhouse and do something rather strange. He tells them not to use the parking spaces, but instead to pull up and park on the shrubbery in front of the entrance. When the hostess gives them the blinking pager because there are no free tables, the students should throw it down on the ground and kick it until it breaks. Then, he instructs them to go to any table they want and push the people eating onto the ground and claim the table for themselves. Instead of having a waiter take their order, they should go back into the kitchen and take whatever food they want. Finally, when the police are called and they're being led in handcuffs, they're supposed to turn around right before the exit and exclaim "Outback Steakhouse. No rules, just right."

*KING: Because we've had ministers on who said, your record don't count. You either believe in Christ or you don't. **If you believe in Christ, you are, you are going to heaven. And if you don't no matter what you've done in your life, you ain't.***

*OSTEEN: **Yeah, I don't know. There's probably a balance between.** I believe you have to know Christ. But I think that if you know Christ, if you're a believer in God, you're going to have some good works. I think it's a cop-out to say I'm a Christian but I don't ever do anything ...*

You know, there might actually be some hope for Joel yet. To be fair, he does correctly identify that faith will produce works. And saying that it's a cop-out to claim to be a Christian and never do anything sounds as close to condemnation as anything I've ever heard come out of Osteen's smiling mouth. However, the problem we should pick up on here is that Larry King point blank asked Joel whether or not a person's salvation depended on their faith or their works and he said he didn't know. I realize Joel never went to seminary, and I actually believe there's nothing wrong with that. None of the Apostles went to seminary, save perhaps Paul (and they taught him to kill Christians). However, even Joel's lack of formal seminary training should not excuse this blatant ignorance of what the Bible says. Protestant churches, including Lakewood, would not have existed if Martin Luther hadn't read Ephesians 2:8-9, which reads "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast." This verse showed Luther that the Catholic church wasn't teaching what the Bible said and led to his posting of the 95 Theses which began the Protestant Reformation. Larry King didn't ask Joel if you could be saved and not do good works, he asked him if you could be saved through Christ alone or by doing good works without Christ. Joel said he didn't know for sure, but there must be a balance in between. The verses from Ephesians show

that we are incapable of earning our salvation. Grace, being unmerited favor, cannot be earned, otherwise it isn't grace.

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.

So what Joel's basically saying is this: Christianity works for me, but if it doesn't work for you, that's okay too. As long as you believe in and love God, no matter which god you think He is, I'm not going to say you're wrong. It's Satan's best lie now, Joel! Can you imagine Jesus or any of the Apostles saying that? What is the point of evangelism if anyone who loves their image of who God is goes to Heaven?

Jesus paints a vastly different picture than the "everyone who loves God goes to Heaven" message of Joel Osteen. In Matthew 7:21-23, Jesus says, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many

wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity." Personally, I'm going to believe Jesus over Joel.

Joel's statements about believing what the Bible teaches and not knowing if he believes other religions are wrong is a blatant contradiction. In John 14:6, Jesus says "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." Notice Christ did not say that he was one of the many possible ways, one truth that was only true if it worked for you, and just one of many ways to truly have life. He is the only way, the only truth, and the only life. No one comes to the Father whether they are Christian, Atheist, Hindu, or Greek, except through Christ and Christ alone.

KING: I want to get to the seven steps. But when the people call you cotton candy theology. Someone said you're very good but there's no spiritual nourishment. I don't know what that means ...

OSTEEN: I think, I hear it meaning a lot of different things. One I think a lot of it is that I'm not condemning people. And I don't know, but Larry I talk, I mean every week in our church we're dealing with people that are fighting cancer, that have their lost loved ones. That are going through a divorce. I mean, I talk about those issues, and to me I don't see how it can get any more, you know, real than that. So I don't know what the criticism is.

Obviously Joel doesn't understand the criticism people are making for his lack of preaching about the condemnation sin brings, he says it himself. Therefore, let me explain the problem I'm having. Talking about horrible diseases like cancer and showing support for people dealing with them is awesome, Joel should be commended for doing it. He should also receive a pat on the back for comforting those who have lost loved ones and helping people out that are going through the tragedy of a divorce.

However, doing these things are not all there is to being a minister of God. Doing these things is good, but just as with hospitality, there are many groups that show support for those with cancer, that comfort grieving widows, and that help people deal with divorce. In fact, Oprah and Dr. Phil make a living doing these things. The thing is, a lot of the groups and people doing these things are, you guessed it, secular. There must be a difference between the church and the world. The world cares about these things and talks about them. If you don't believe me, just listen to George Clooney give an awards speech. The church must do these things, but do more.

Joel says that nothing can get more real than dealing with cancer, divorce, and the death of a loved one. While all these atrocities are indeed horrible, there is a catastrophe much "more real" than any of these things, and it's something Joel doesn't like to talk about at all. It's a very real place called hell. If Joel is concerned with 'keeping it real,' then he might think about preaching about a real thing called sin, a real day where God will judge us all, and a real person called Satan who's doing his best to get people to hell.

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 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.*

Let me get this straight. Joel thinks prosperity involves having lots of money and good health. No mention of prayer, fasting, a close walk with God, or even salvation. You can have Joel's prosperity whether you know Christ or not. However, since it involves having lots of money and being healthy, if you're sick or poor, you can have no part of Joel Osteen's prosperity. If health and wealth are all prosperity is and that's the gospel, then I have to ask, as Christ did Mark 8:36, "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"

I think Joel may be right on his last point, though. It does take money to do good, lots of it. The more money you have, the more good you can do, the more the gospel can spread. That's what we need in the church, forget prayer and fasting, let's just play music, tell people what they want to hear, and pass the plate. There's one man I know that would have just a tiny problem with that plan and so would his followers. He was a very common man and I believe he lived in a small town with his mother and worked in construction for most of his life until he finally became a pastor. He certainly didn't benefit from the high class education Joel received and you would never see him driving a Porsche. As I understand it, the religious elite, who were very focused on prosperity, didn't like him too much either. But hey, it's just one person, right?

In case you haven't figured it out, the person I'm referring to is none other than Jesus Christ Himself. When Jesus started his ministry, he was by no means wealthy; nor was He financially flourishing when He died. As far as I know, not one of the original

twelve were rich men, and when He sent out His disciples, He didn't send them with expensive luggage.

In Matthew 10:7-10, Jesus tells the Apostles, "And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand. Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give. Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses, Nor scrip for your journey, neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves: for the workman is worthy of his meat." How could the disciples do good without money? How could Jesus send them out to help people without wealth? How could anyone spread the Good News without wads and wads of cash, a television show, a best-selling book, and a pretty blonde wife? Jesus and his followers did the most good for the most people in the history of the world, and it didn't take money. All it took was God.

*KING: How about issues that the church has feelings about? **Abortion? Same-sex marriages?***

*OSTEEN: Yeah. You know what, Larry? **I don't go there.** I just ...*

KING: You have thoughts, though.

*OSTEEN: I have thoughts. I just, you know, **I don't think that a same-sex marriage is the way God intended it to be. I don't think abortion is the best. I think there are other, you know, a better way to live your life. But I'm not going to condemn those people. I tell them all the time our church is open for everybody.***

I realize I'm about to step on some toes here, not that I don't think I've done so already. I'm not out to offend you, I'm really not, but I hate the devil and I hate what he does. I heard an estimate that sometime in 2004, we experienced abortion number 47 million. 47 million children killed in the womb. This isn't a political issue like flat taxes, this is something the Church should

be and is vocal on. The world may say it's a fetus, not a baby, but the Church is called to defend the defenseless and there is no greater example than this. Abortion is murder, and that's much more severe than not being "the best." If Joel was a judge and a mass murderer came before him, would he dismiss him because all the man did were things that weren't "the best?" Homosexuality is condemned many times in both the Old and New Testament. The world says whatever sexual choices you make are just as okay as any other; the Church is called to be different. We are called to set the standard, not follow the world.

KING: You don't call them sinners?

OSTEEN: I don't.

KING: Is that a word you don't use?

OSTEEN: I don't use it. I never thought about it. But I probably don't. But most people already know what they're doing wrong. When I get them to church I want to tell them that you can change. There can be a difference in your life. So I don't go down the road of condemning.

This is a classic struggle between law and grace. The Bible has two parts, the Old Testament and the New Testament and both are equally important. I won't go into this much now as it will be discussed at great length in a later chapter, but Joel's statement that people get to church knowing what they're doing wrong must be addressed.

In Romans 7:7, the Apostle Paul says, "What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet." Look very closely at that statement: "I had not known sin, but by the law." Paul, the Apostle who wrote most of the books in the New Testament, the man hand chosen by God to

bring the Gospel to the Gentiles, didn't know what sin was until the holy and just Law of God showed him what it was. The Law of God acts as a mirror and reveals to us our true sinful state.

Previous to our knowledge of God's Law, we think we're doing pretty well. We're not nearly as bad as our neighbor that beats his wife and we're certainly no Adolph Hitler. God's Law gives us the standard God has for us, the standard that only Christ can live up to. When comparing ourselves to our own standard, we usually end up coming out pretty good. When we do the same thing with God's standard, we see sin for what it really is. The Law brings knowledge of sin, and previous to that we are ignorant.

So, if even the Apostle Paul, who could heal and cast out demons with the best of them, needed the Law to show him what sin was, why does Osteen think the average Joel will know all on his own? It is the job of the church to show people what sin is through the Word of God, they're not going to know on their own. People need to come to a place of repentance; they don't just become Christians all on their own. Oh wait, here's Joel again.

KING: Is -- have you always believed?

*OSTEEN: I have always believed. I grew up, you know, my parents were a good Christian people. They showed us love in the home. My parents were the same in the pulpit as they were at home. I think that's where a lot of preachers' kids get off base sometimes. Because they don't see the same things at both places. **But I've always believed. I saw it through my parents. And I just grew up believing.***

This is a very dangerous teaching indeed. No person but Christ Himself always believed. No person but Christ, not one, is born a Christian. We are all born into sin and sin is second nature to us. You don't have to teach a child to lie, to get angry, to throw a tantrum. The sin in us demonstrates itself, even at a young age. No, a person is not always saved. They must come to a point of

repentance. They must make a decision themselves to believe, not just follow what their parents teach them.

There is a growing epidemic in America. Formerly reserved almost exclusively for the children of pastors, we are seeing a huge mass of children raised in evangelical Christian homes leaving the faith at the age of 18, never again to return. I've heard statistics that cite up to 88% of church home raised children doing this. Why is this happening? These children grew up "always believing" because of their parents. They never came to a point of repentance and never received Christ themselves.

*KING: The book describes seven steps to living at full potential. I want to ask you about -- **Choose to be happy**. Now, how the heck do you do that?*

OSTEEN: Well, I think, Larry. It's just an attitude we've got to get up and make a decision every single day. I mean, what so many people today do, they focus on what they don't have instead of what they do have. They focus on what's wrong instead of what's right. And I believe that all of us, if we want to, can be happy right where we are. We may not be laughing our heads off but we can get up and say, you know what, I'm in a tough situation, but this is where God has me and I'm going to make the most of it. And I think that that's where so many of us miss it today. We're waiting to be happy one day.

KING: How about the Eastern philosophy that says you're not entitled to today. Today is a gift. So -- it doesn't matter if it's raining. It's a beautiful gift today.

OSTEEN: I've not heard it. But I'd agree with it.

KING: You aren't entitled to today.

OSTEEN: *Well, that's right. It's a gift God gave us. What if we weren't here? To me, I say it all the time, every day we live negative and discouraged and unhappy, that's a day we've wasted. And I'm not going to waste you know, just because I don't get my way or something happens.*

KING: *Another seven steps -- one of the seven steps is live to give, charity is, in the Talmud, the greatest thing of all.*

OSTEEN: *Yeah. I believe it is. I believe that's the whole spirit of Christianity is, you know, having a lifestyle of giving. Not giving at Christmas, not giving every once in awhile but having an attitude to give. I've always said this, if you'll get up and make it your business to make somebody else's day, God will make your own day.*

“Her priests have violated my law, and have profaned mine holy things: they have put no difference between the holy and profane, neither have they shewed difference between the unclean and the clean, and have hid their eyes from my sabbaths, and I am profaned among them.”

Osteen demonstrates here that he has profaned the Holy things of the Lord. He has put no difference between the holy and the profane, Christian faith and Eastern philosophy, the unclean and the clean, the Talmud and the Bible. There is a difference between Christianity and every other religion, whether Osteen wants to admit it or not. It's not just about loving any god, it's about loving our God above any other and submitting ourselves to His perfect Will. God didn't just speak through Ezekiel, but through the other prophets including Isaiah. In Isaiah 5:20, it reads “Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!”

There is a consequence for making no difference between the things of God and the things of the world. The church must be

different, the Church must be distinct. Our leaders must not be as their leaders, just as our Rock is not as their rock. Remember the warning of the prophet Ezekiel about those who mix the secular and the sacred.

“Therefore have I poured out mine indignation upon them; I have consumed them with the fire of my wrath: their own way have I recompensed upon their heads, saith the Lord GOD.”

This warning was spoken to Israel, the chosen people of God from the beginning of time. If the Lord would not spare them for their transgression of mixing the sacred and secular, of not being separate, then will He spare us?

Chapter Five

Jesus and Moses

The great Reformer Martin Luther once said, "Satan, the god of all dissension stirs up daily new sects. And last of all which of all others I should never have foreseen or once suspected, he has raised up a sect such as teach that men should not be terrified by the law, but gently exhorted by the preaching of the grace of Christ". These words are centuries old but still have great relevance for today. Over the last several years, American churches have been continually falling victim to what has been called the Church Growth Movement. This movement led in large part by Joel Osteen, while drastically increasing the size and mainstream popularity of the American Church, has some side effects that make it a difficult pill to swallow for those familiar with the teachings of the Bible. More and more, we are propagated with an image of Christ as a God of love, peace, and prosperity. Emphasis on living well has replaced teaching on repentance. No longer is the Church shaping American society, but instead society is shaping the American church.

The church of the modern age is but a shadow of the Church described in the book of Acts. Somewhere, somehow, the Church has lost sight of the principles upon which it was established.

In order to see how far modern Christianity has fallen, it is imperative that a relationship be examined. A far cry from the typical examination of the relationship between man and God and the modern relationship of Christians and worldly wealth, the relationship who's explanation will best explain the true essence of Christianity is that of Jesus and Moses.

The question has been posed to conservative Christians - who do you like better, Jesus or Moses? That is, when looking at the central teachings of both figures, the question is asked which teaching conservative Christians prefer. The church of the modern day preaches a Jesus solely of the Beatitudes, while more traditional churches cling to the moral Law of Moses. In reviewing these two teachings, especially as it applies to evangelism, the situation presents a radical dichotomy. Therefore, in order to understand this difference between modern and traditional churches, it is important that the history of the Church be reviewed and put into context against methods used by the megachurch.

It is the belief of this author that then, and only then, will the secularization of the modern American Church be brought to light. In writing this book, it is recognized that not all churches act in this way, but the information is cited as an alarm that any church acts in this manner. This book seeks to illuminate the relationship between the teachings of Moses and Jesus, the historical methods by which the Church influenced society, balance them against the trends of the Church Growth Movement, and review the implications for the Church as well as the society within which it exists.

So, the question must be answered: Does Biblical Christianity prefer the teachings of Jesus or Moses? Despite the predetermined conclusions of some skeptics, the answer is most definitely both. To justify forcing conservative Christians to choose between one and the other, the epistles of St. Paul in which he writes that Jesus freed us from the Law are often cited. Paul is absolutely right. We, as Christians, are no longer under the Law. The suffering and death of Christ has fulfilled the requirements of the Law and we are therefore covered by grace. However, there exists a group of staggering size that this grace does not yet apply to: non-Christians. The Bible tells us the Law was made for them. In fact, it even lists those the Law was made for in the book of 1st

Timothy. The same Ten Commandments that the ACLU delights in taking down from the walls of courtrooms and public schools are the same ones they will be judged by when Christ returns. The Bible tells us in Malachai 3:6 that God's principles and very nature are just as eternal as He is when it says "For I am the LORD, I change not." The same God who hated lying, pride, murder, zeal for sin, conspiring to do evil, and wicked thoughts in the Old Testament still hates them today. Scripture promises us in Revelation 21:8, that "the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death." In 1st Corinthians 6:9-10, a similar promise and warning is given: "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God." Over ten percent of all the Biblically recorded words of Jesus are a warning about hell. When you look at these in comparison to sections of sermons like the Beatitudes, you begin to see what the teachings of Jesus were really and truly about.

Contrary to popular Christian opinion, there are actually two ways to get into heaven. The first is to perfectly keep the Law of God. However, the Bible tells us there is only one person who has done that: Jesus. The second is to repent and believe that Christ died to save you from the fate your sins justly sentence you to. So, what then is the purpose of the Law of God? Is it a guide to living, a set of principles by which to live your life? Hardly. The Bible says in Romans 3:20 that, "Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin."

The Law of God tells us what sin is. In 1st John 3:4, the Bible reads in it's latter portion that "sin is transgression of the Law." In the 7th chapter of the book of Romans, St. Paul boldly declares that he had not what sin was except that the Law showed him. In Galatians 3:24, we're shown one of the main underlying functions of the law when it says, "Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith." Finally, in Psalm 19:7, it is written that "The Law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul."

The purpose of the Law is to show us that we are incapable of living up to the moral standard of God and therefore need to repent and trust Christ to be saved. Surely, the Beatitudes are of great value to those who are already saved, but are unimportant to those still spiritually lost. I am sure the courts of this nation would have no problem promoting the blessing of the meek and peaceful, largely because these verses speak only the positive seeker-sensitive message that makes Joel Osteen so popular.

The world likes to take things like the Beatitudes and use them to paint the full picture of Christ. In fact, the world seems to only praise Christ after they misinterpret Him. The more the world understands about Christ's true message, the more they begin to hate Him. This is why he warned his followers that the world would hate them because it hated Him first.

The question is asked as to why Christians preach the Law of Moses when Jesus preached peace and mercy. This, again, paints a false picture of the character of Jesus. Those who prefer to solely use the Beatitudes to define Jesus have shaped a god to suit their own needs. They have reversed the order of authority, making themselves the potters shaping God out of clay. This sin, called idolatry and forbidden throughout Scripture including the 2nd Commandment, is one of the oldest and most common in human history. Yes, Jesus did preach about peace and mercy. He also preached about sin, Law, righteousness, repentance

from sin, sanctification and holy conduct, judgment, and hell. Jesus never intended for the people of God to stop promoting the Law. In fact, He used it Himself on many occasions. In the 18th chapter of the book of Luke, when the proud rich man came seeking eternal life, Christ did not tell him how blessed the meek were. He gave him the Law of God, showed the man his sin, and did not change his stance even though the man left in sadness. You did not see Jesus running after the man shouting, 'But you're blessed if you're poor in spirit.' Jesus is the same God who was merciful and forgiving so many times throughout the Old Testament. Just look at the 9th chapter of Nehemiah for repeated examples of this. He is also the same God that killed Annaias and Sapphira for lying to the Church. He is the same God who will judge the world in righteousness, who will tell those who think they are his followers but are not to depart into the lake of fire. He is not solely the God of the Beatitudes, but also of Judgment Day. Jesus did not supercede the Law He gave to Moses on Mt. Sinai, but instead came to fulfill it. In fact, He said as much in Matthew 5:17-18 when He said "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled."

Repentance from sin, not human dignity, was at the core of the teachings of Jesus. God takes sin extremely seriously. If you ever want an example of how much God hates sin, take a look at Christ on the cross. That is the price of sin, that was His reason for coming, that was the core of His message. Jesus was not a motivational speaker. While He wants us to love one another, He also wants us to love people enough to show them their sin through the Law of God.

The point is proposed that Christians prefer the Law of God because it gives them an easy answer to the question of who is good and who is bad. The latter is true, but Christians don't tend to

like it. The reason for this is simple: there are no good people. Addressing this concept, we must recognize that people are basically self-seeking, self-interested, dishonest, and untrustworthy. When judged by the law, we are all found to be sinful. From Hitler to Mother Teresa, all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

This Law is not manmade, but comes from God Himself. Therefore, punishing those who violate the Law of God makes sense, not only from a self-centered point of view, but also from one of universal morality. In all cultures, lying is wrong. Stealing is wrong. Murder is wrong. All cultures know these things because God has written his Law upon the hearts of every man. This is proven in Romans 2:15, when it reads, "Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another." Having the Ten Commandments up in courtrooms and public schools serves as a reminder of that.

Jesus does tell us to forgive and to act with grace and mercy, but those things cannot exist without the Law. Mercy cannot be mercy if it is unjust. Imagine the following situation. Your daughter has been brutally raped and murdered. The man who did it has been on trial and the jury has just returned a guilty verdict on all counts. Before he passes sentence, the judge asks the man if he has anything to say. The criminal says, 'Judge, I believe that you are a good and forgiving man, a Christian full of the grace and mercy Jesus Christ talked about. I am truly sorry for what I did, please overlook my crimes.' Imagine how you would feel if the judge then let your daughter's rapist and murderer go free. Would you think he was a good judge? Of course not. If he was, then the judge would say, 'You're right, I am a good person and a good judge. Therefore, because I am good, because of my goodness, I must see that justice is done.'

Now, let's look at what true grace and mercy are. There is another trial, except this time you are the defendant. The jury has found you guilty of murder, kidnapping, extortion, terrorism, and other serious crimes. You are sentenced to death. The law is about to run its course when someone you have never even met stands up in the back of the courtroom. He says, 'Judge, I know I'm not on trial because I haven't committed any crime. I know he's guilty as charged, but if you're willing, I will take his place and take his punishment for him.' The judge agrees, the man is hauled off to death row and you are set free. That is true grace and it cannot exist apart from the perfect Law of God.

If we separate Jesus from the 10 Commandments, then we create a false idol in the place of who God truly is. By using the Beatitudes to nullify the Law of God, you are preaching the benefits of the grace of God without first convincing people of the disease of sin. If I came to your house, knocked on your front door, and said "I've got some good news for you, there is a cure for McClure syndrome. I've spent my entire life raising money to get this cure and now I'm out telling people about it. I'm giving it away, all you have to do is take it," how would you react? You would probably think I was a nut and shrug it off. After all, I was telling you about the benefits of a drug that cures a disease you've never heard of. Instead, if you came to me and said, "Adam, I can see you're suffering from McClure syndrome. I know it doesn't seem obvious to you, but I can show you 10 ways to know if you've got this horrible disease. If you don't treat this, you're going to be dead in two weeks."

If you took me through the 10 steps, I would become convinced I had the disease. Then, if you told me about a cure that you had spent your life researching and now were giving away, I would react much differently. You wouldn't be a nut, you'd be my very best friend. The reason for this change is simple: I've seen that I have a disease, so I am thankful for the cure.

Now that the relationship between the Law of Moses and the Grace of Christ has been firmly established, it becomes evident why those who spread the message of Christianity throughout the past few millennia used the moral Law of God. On this journey, we will examine the methods of John the Baptist, the Apostle Peter, Stephen the Martyr, Biblical writers James, Jude, and Paul. Additionally, we will examine wisdom from people like John Wesley, Charles Spurgeon, D.L. Moody, and many others. These men, used by God to spread His Word, provide an adequate basis for the Biblical model of Christianity.

We begin with the examination of the methods of John the Baptist. A cousin of Jesus, John was given the commission to prepare the people of Israel for the coming of the Messiah. His tongue was sharp as a surgeon's scalpel and his words penetrating, cutting deep into the hearts of his haughty and self-justified listeners. He was loathed, cursed, and eventually put to death by beheading because of the method in which he preached. While people today might be against a preacher who spoke just like John the Baptist, it is important to remember that John bore a special distinction in the eyes of Heaven. In Matthew 11:11, Jesus said "Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he." John didn't mince words and, on a regular basis, severely angered and offended those within earshot his message. Like Jesus eventually would, John, Luke 3:7, called men a 'brood of vipers' and warned them of wrath to come. It was his call to repentance that eventually cost him his life. Rather than being a respecter of persons and titles, John the Baptist used the moral Law of God to show King Herod his sin of adultery in the fifth chapter of Matthew. Had he been more 'seeker-sensitive,' as the Church Growth Movement teaches, he surely would have survived and perhaps even "thrived". Instead, John became a

martyr not only for the cause of Christ, but also for his use of the moral Law of God.

The Apostle Peter was equally adept with the use of the Law and its God-given ability to convert the soul. While the casual Bible scholar might remember that Peter made no mention of the Law during his Pentecost sermon that saw three thousand Jews come to Christ (it seems that the modern Church follows the same method), this situation must be put into context. The people he preached to were Godly Jews, so much so that, according to some sources, the reason they were gathered as they were on the day of Pentecost was to celebrate God giving the 10 Commandments to Moses on Mt. Sinai. Therefore, Peter had no need to give them the Law since they already knew it and were, therefore, convicted by it. Instead, Peter preached Christ crucified, which made a huge amount of sense to them because of their knowledge of the Law. However, when dealing with those who had no knowledge of the Law, we see that Peter acted quite differently. Peter confronted both Ananias and Sapphira as well as Simon the Sorcerer about their self-righteous sin. While Peter dealt mostly with the Jews, it should be recognized that he did not hesitate to use the Law when the situation required it. Stephen, like many who preached the Gospel, was killed for his faith. He actually bears the distinction of being the first Christian martyr. In the 7th chapter of the book of Acts, Stephen is addressing a large group of Jews. He, like John the Baptist, uses cutting words to get to the heart of their problem. Specifically, he speaks to the fact that they have been given the Law of God, but do not and will not follow it. He talks about the Jewish history of killing Prophets, leading up to their slaying of the Messiah. His words should not fall under our worldly critique because they were given directly by the Holy Spirit as Jesus promised they would be in the Luke 12:11-12, which states “And when they bring you unto the synagogues, and unto magistrates, and powers, take ye no thought how or what thing ye shall

answer, or what ye shall say: For the Holy Ghost shall teach you in the same hour what ye ought to say." So, to criticize Stephen's word would be to criticize God's Word. Like so many others would be after him, Stephen was killed for preaching the truth and the Law.

James, the half brother of Jesus and pastor of Jerusalem, makes several points about the Law that reveal his practice of using it. He speaks of the Law as a mirror, that it shows us ourselves in our true state, in James 1:23-25, which reads "For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed." He speaks of being judged and convicted by the Law in James 2:9-12 which read, "But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors. For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law. So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty." Beyond that, he writes that friendship with the world makes one an enemy of God. Finally, in his 4th chapter, James talks about the sorrow and contrition that accompany true repentance in verses 8-9 which read, Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded. Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness." None of these elements speak to a seeker-sensitive message. James was, after all, the pastor of the Church of Jerusalem and thus bore great responsibility for promoting the true and correct message of Christ.

Jude's epistle, while relatively short by comparison, speaks deeply about sin and judgment under the Law of God. Jude makes mention of sinners suffering under eternal fire and of Christ coming to judge the world in righteousness. More than that, Jude exhorts Christians to rescue their fellow man from the fire, lest they should suffer for eternity. It is clear from these teachings that Jude promoted the use of the Law and the knowledge of sin in order to win many to Christ.

Next, we examine the Apostle Paul. Paul, like his fellow Apostle Peter, was given a commission by God to bring the Gospel to a specific group of people. Where Peter was given the Jews who knew the Law, Paul was given the Gentiles who, according to the second chapter of Romans, only had the knowledge of God that was written upon their hearts. This makes Paul's actions a chief example of the methods the early Church used to evangelize and influence society. In Acts 24, Paul, like John the Baptist before him, used the Law to bring moral conviction to a ruler of his day. Paul reasons with Felix about righteousness and judgment and leaves him trembling. To the Athenians, Paul spoke against idolatry, telling them that they would be judged in righteousness by a holy God. While not every example specifically mentions the direct use of the Law, it is clear that Paul's message was not seeker sensitive in the least. This can be logically shown through the reaction of the people to him.

The method of using the Law didn't stop there. Evangelists continued to use the powerful message down through the centuries. Rather than go into great detail into each of their lives, I have selected quotes from these men that sum up what they believed about the use of the Law. A. B. Earl, an evangelist reputed to have over 150,000 converts, said "I have found by long experience [that's the true test] that the severest threatenings of the Law of God have a prominent place in leading men to Christ. They must see themselves lost before they will cry for mercy; they'll not

escape danger until they see it." Charles Spurgeon, the Prince of Preachers, said "They will never accept grace until they tremble before a just and holy law." John Wesley, founder of the Methodist church, said "Preach ninety percent law, ten percent grace." D.L. Moody would walk up to strangers and assault their consciences with the Law. It is clear through the study of these men that they, like the Apostles before them, used the Law as a means to convert the soul.

Out of curiosity, I wanted to know how many modern denominations taught this. As a method of research, I chose to seek out members of different Christian denominations and ask them about their evangelistic methods. Originally, I had planned on grouping them as Catholic and Protestant, but I was also given the opportunity to interview two Mormons when they came to my door. While not a Christian denomination, they are an imitation of one so I was interested to see how they answered. My research plan was a structured interview by which I would ask them what the difference between being saved and unsaved was, how they knew they were saved, and how they would attempt to witness to a non-Christian. Additionally, while not being able to physically interview Joel Osteen, I rely on sermons and published interviews to provide his information.

My research findings revealed surprising trends. Not a single one of those I interviewed of any denomination responded with answers that fully met the standards set forth in the Bible. Each and every one did not mention the exceedingly sinful nature of humanity and the position that sin put us in before God. As far as what it takes to be saved, the Catholics and Protestants both said you had to believe in Jesus, but made no real mention of repentance. The Mormons didn't even mention Jesus; just that Joseph Smith wanted all people to be reconciled to God. Joel Osteen, in an interview with Larry King, said that Jesus was right for him, but that he wasn't going to say that people of other

religions were wrong. This was discussed in much detail in a previous chapter. Surprisingly, one Catholic I interviewed couldn't even tell me why she was saved.

To show the devastating impact of these research findings, it is important to directly compare them to what the Bible teaches. We have thus far reviewed a great many of the qualities of the true Church and its members. They are as follows: We are separated and separate from the world with no fear of man nor respect of persons. We must be the light that shows men and women everywhere of their need for repentance before a holy and just God, else they face eternal punishment in the lake of fire. We must not be materialistic, but instead focus on the things God has given us to accomplish His tasks. We must love Christ, so much so that everything else seems irrelevant in comparison.

I challenge you, review a Joel Osteen sermon; Any sermon that Joel has preached in Lakewood. See if these predictions are anything like what you observe, Joel will tell the congregation that:

- They are very special to God
- God approves of them and how they are
- God supports the choices they make
- God isn't mad or angry at them
- God had a wonderful plan for them
- God wanted to bless them, usually monetarily
- God made them as a masterpiece
- God didn't care about their faults or mistakes
- God only made one of them
- God wanted them to live more productively

There is an obvious difference between the preaching of John the Baptist and Joel the Motivator.

So, seeing the difference in methods between the early Church and the Church Growth Movement, it becomes clear why the former had a much greater effect on society than the latter. When the American Church, near the turn of the last century,

abandoned the Law and, with it, the ability to convert the soul, it lost the power to influence society. Ever since that point, churches across the nation have been plagued with more and more false converts. In every single church, there are people who attend every Sunday but will be the ones turned away by Christ on Judgment Day. They might be pew fillers, they might be elders, they might be pastors, but there are many unsaved people in American churches under the false impression that they are Christians. This is a great deception and one that demands a remedy. On Judgment Day, this large number that has been deceived will find that the Jesus they thought was their "Wonderful Life Coach, Mighty Blessor of Lifestyles, Prince of People Pleasing, Great Guide to Life and Everlasting Rich Uncle" is truly a holy God who will judge them in righteousness. These are the people who go to bed every night praying, but will end up with a permanent place in the lake of fire. These people look like Christians, they sound like Christians, they sing like Christians, but they are not because they have never come under the conviction of the moral Law of God.

Megachurches are incredibly successful in terms of numbers and of acceptance by the world, but these are not the standards by which God measures success. Modern preachers like Joel Osteen talk about life, marriage, and health... basically everything but the Gospel. They truly fulfill the prophecy in 2nd Timothy 4:3-4 which reads "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, and shall be turned unto fables."

We Christians have given glory, by our inaction, to the radicals. They spread their views despite starvation and death, while we who are supposed to be followers of Christ reject any preaching that does not center on our personal fulfillment and happiness. Just as the Israelites did when Moses was receiving the

10 Commandments, the modern American Church has made themselves a god to suit their own desires. Like Moses, those who have received the Law must thrust it at them that they might be awakened. If we fail at this task and let our witness be silent, there will be no witness and Christianity will die, at least in this nation.

In summation, it is impossible to Biblically separate the teachings of Jesus and Moses. The two are perfectly intertwined in the wonders of the nature of God and Christians should not promote one over the other. Each has its place in doing the will of God. One thing is clear: the struggle of modern Christianity is not Jesus v. Moses, but Jesus and Moses v. the world.

Chapter Six

Did God really say...?

KING: But it doesn't quote a lot of biblical passages until the back of the book, right?

OSTEEN: It doesn't do a whole lot of it. My message, I wanted to reach the mainstream. We've reached the church audience. So I just try to, what I do is just try to teach practical principles. I may not bring the scripture in until the end of my sermon and I might feel bad about that. Here's the thought. I talked yesterday about living to give. That's what a life should be about. I brought in at the end about some of the scriptures that talk about that. But same principal in the book.

300 A.D. - Diocletian, the emperor of Rome, orders the destruction of every Bible. Anyone caught possessing the forbidden Scriptures would be immediately executed. The Emperor believed that if he was able to destroy the Bible, he would be able to end Christianity once and for all.

1728 A.D. - French philosopher Voltaire dies, having declared that the Bible will cease to exist within a century of his death. 50 years later, the Geneva Bible Society purchases his former home and uses it and his printing presses to print Bibles.

Modern day - Possession of a Bible in nations like North Korea, Iran, and Egypt will result in persecution, torture, and even death.

And Joel Osteen doesn't use it a lot in his sermons or book.

Every sermon, Joel Osteen leads the Lakewood faithful in the same seemingly mindless chant. *This is my Bible. I am what it says I am, I have what it says I have, I can do what it says I can do. Today I'll be taught the Word of God. I boldly confess my mind is alert, my heart is receptive, I am about to receive the incorruptible, indestructible ever-living seed of the Word of God. I will never be the same. Never. Never. Never. I'll never be the same, in Jesus name.* Every time I hear this, I want to tag on the end, "And this is the last you'll hear about my Bible. Now here's Joel Osteen."

The Bible is the Word of God. Despite what anyone else may think or say, there is no greater authority on this Earth than the Bible. Practical principles are all well and good, but in the end they are manmade. The things man can do are adequate, but the wisdom of God Himself is perfect. Given that, it's surprising that Joel wouldn't use it more often. I take that back, it's not surprising that Joel doesn't use the Bible more often than he does because the truth contained in the Bible is offensive to our sinful nature. However, that doesn't negate the Bible's importance and use.

More than that, through a thorough examination of Joel's preaching and writing, it is clear that he is using the Word of God to suit his own needs as a people-pleaser rather than preaching what it actually says. I've been told many times before by men much wiser than I that, if you abandon all notions of context and translation, you can prove and legitimize just about anything using the Bible. If you take a verse here and half a verse there and present them together as being coherent, many things could be justified. We don't need tiny pieces, we need the whole context.

For instance, I could tell you about my brother. I could tell you that he used to work for a casino. I could tell you that he regularly leaves his wife and young child to fend for themselves for long periods of time during the day. I could tell you that when he leaves, he spends most of his time with young children and teenagers without their parents around. At this point, my brother

sounds like a pretty bad person, doesn't he? If I went to a police station and only told them that, they'd probably put him under investigation. The problem is that while each of those statements about my brother is true, they aren't the whole story.

My brother did work for a casino right after he and my sister-in-law had their first child. The job involved cleaning tables and making sure the high rollers had plenty of complimentary pretzels. It wasn't a job he wanted to take, but he took it because he needed the paycheck to provide for his family. He never dreamed he'd work in a casino, but he did whatever it took to be responsible for his wife and infant son.

It is also true that he leaves his wife and child alone for long periods of time every day. The reason he's leaving is to go to work, so he can provide for his family. If he stayed home, his wife would have to work, they would have to borrow from other family members, or he and his family would starve.

Finally, it's true that my brother spends most of his time away from home with young children and teenagers away from their mothers and fathers. It's actually his job. He teaches 5th grade at a public school during the day and is also a youth minister for his church. His wife actually does children's ministry there as well.

Do you see how having truth out of context can alter the way you perceive someone? When I gave you the original facts, you wouldn't have let your children near my brother. Now that you see the whole picture, you'd be fine with him teaching your children or being their youth minister.

It is the exact same way with the Bible. When we take bits and pieces and put them together, our lives and actions look pretty good. A friend of mine who's also a minister told me of one such situation. A woman, who had been married for just a shade under a decade, came to him overjoyed to tell him about what she was doing with her life. Her husband's quirks that she once found fascinating were now as enjoyable as an infant's screams. He

seemed to have lost the ambition that attracted her to him in the first place and had fallen into a predictable rut at work and at home. It seems that she had met someone else. A recently hired coworker of hers had been flirting with her and she was excited about the kind of man he was. She kept going on and on about the “great new guy God brought into my life.” My minister friend paused and asked if she was considering leaving her husband. She replied that she thought she might, because after all, the Bible tells us to put on the new man.

The verse she was quoting, or at least attempting to, is Ephesians 4:24. Put into context, verses 21-27 of the chapter read, “If so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus: That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness. Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another. Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath: Neither give place to the devil.” The Scripture does indeed tell us to “put on the new man,” but it’s not talking about trading in your husband for a newer model. Instead, the Scriptures say that if we belong to Christ, then we are a different person. We are no longer the “old man,” but instead are a new creation in Christ. The sinful nature we’ve had in the past is gone and we are to be new people. Being the new man involves not lying, speaking truth, being angry without sinning, and not going to bed angry to name a few. However, given only the phrase “put on the new man,” it’s reasonable to see how this woman interpreted the Scripture to mean “go after this new guy.”

So what did my friend do? Was he permissive of her desires? Did he reward her for her personal interpretation of Scripture? Did he jump for joy at her chance for another man? No,

he did the right thing and showed her what the Scriptures said. He showed her the words of Jesus in Matthew 5:31-32, that “It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement: But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery.

He then reasoned with her. If God hates divorce, so much that he forbids it except in cases of adultery and then calls any post-divorce relationship adultery, would he really bring this new man into her life? She of course had to admit that no, that didn't seem like something God would do. My friend then asked her if it wasn't God who brought this man into her life, who was it? Her eyes got wide as she exclaimed, “The devil!” Looking at the Scripture in context brought to light the truth of the situation. God didn't want her to divorce her husband and commit adultery with another man. We know this when we look at the whole of his Word for what it really says, not just what we wish it would say.

2nd Peter 1:20-21 gives us a strong warning where it says, “Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.” This Scripture gives us two important points. First, no one who is an author of the Bible wrote their personal opinion about any subject. The Bible is not a collection of the ways in which they saw the world. In fact, the 66 books of the Bible were written over a span of thousands of years by 40 men with a tremendous variety in backgrounds. David was a shepherd who became king, Moses was the son of a slave, Luke was a doctor, and Matthew was a tax collector. If you took a king, a son of a slave, a doctor, and a tax collector from any place on Earth today and asked them to all write about one subject, they would no doubt have large differences of opinion because of their unique

perspectives. The Bible contains no contradictions because there were no differences of opinion. The only opinion written down in the Bible is God's. 2nd Timothy 3:14-16 brings this concept truly to light when it reads, "But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:" Every word in the Bible is as true as if you had heard it spoken from God Himself.

As was demonstrated in the earlier example, knowledge of the Scriptures gives us the ability to know all truth and to separate truth from lies. This is demonstrated by Jesus Himself in Matthew 4:1-11 which read, "Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungred. And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone. Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God. Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve. Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold,

angels came and ministered unto him.”

Notice that each of the three times that Jesus was tempted, He quoted Scripture in response to Satan. Think of the importance of this. Jesus Christ is and was God in the flesh. His inspiration wrote the Scriptures, yet he quoted them saying “It is written.” Why would Jesus, being God Himself, need to quote the Scriptures? Our Lord quoted them because He knew that they were true and were the defense against Satan’s lies. The Scriptures were that important to Christ that he used them to shield off temptation in his weakened state after a 40 day fast. Here, the Son of God equates the Word of God to be more important than even food. How different our attitude is toward the Scriptures. We seem to want to take care of absolutely everything else that we need to accomplish in our day before we go to God in His Word.

This story also demonstrates again the need for the whole truth to determine what the Bible really says. Satan, when he tempted Christ to jump off the temple top, he said, “If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.” This is an intentional misquotation of the 11th and 12th verse of the 91st Psalm which actually read, “For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone.” Satan intentionally left out the phrase “to keep thee in all thy ways” and “in their hands,” while adding the phrase “at any time.” Given Satan’s version, it’s possible to see why some Christians might want to jump off buildings.

With these principles in mind, let’s examine how Joel uses Scripture in his book. He wasn’t lying when he said that he didn’t use a lot of Scripture. By my count, Osteen uses a total of 137 direct or indirect references to Scripture in *Your Best Life Now*. 45 times he uses a direct verse quotation, of several varying versions, and

the other 92 uses bits and pieces of the verse to get the point he's trying to make across. Given that the book goes on for 306 pages of text before the references and invitation to salvation page, Osteen only makes some kind of reference to the Bible every 2.2 pages and provides an actual Scripture just once every 3 pages. Many chapters have only 2 verses referenced, while the most he uses is 12. He tells stories of his childhood and gives a good amount of his life experiences, but provides only a tiny bit of the Word of God. Does anyone else see a problem with this? The way Osteen's book is written, you would have expected Jesus to say "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of Joel."

My problem with Joel's use of Scripture isn't just the fact that there is a definite lack of it. The deeper problem is that when Joel uses Scripture, he typically uses it entirely out of context in order to back whatever seeker-sensitive point that he's making.

In an earlier chapter, there was intense discussion about his misuse of the word 'grace' in Ephesians 2:7 to mean "far and beyond favor," usually of the monetary variety. This very misused part of Scripture is actually the very first verse referenced in Osteen's book and the misuse goes on from there. I could honestly write an entirely different book just focusing on Osteen's misuse and misinterpretation of Scripture in *Your Best Life Now*, and one day I might, but for the sake of space and time, I will review a few selected portions.

"Interestingly, when Jesus wanted to encourage His followers to enlarge their visions, He reminded them, 'You can't put new wine into old wineskins.' Jesus was saying that you cannot have a larger life with restricted attitudes. The lesson is relevant today. We are set in our ways, bound by our perspectives, and stuck in our thinking. God is trying to do something new, but unless we're willing to change, unless we're willing to expand and enlarge our vision, we'll miss His opportunities for us."

This piece of work is actually the very second time Joel uses a Scripture reference. His batting average remains the same as with the first reference as he strikes out again. Joel's Scripture index says to "See Matthew 9:17," so let's do that. In context, Matthew 19:14-17, reads, "Then came to him the disciples of John, saying, Why do we and the Pharisees fast oft, but thy disciples fast not? And Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bridechamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them? but the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast. No man putteth a piece of new cloth unto an old garment, for that which is put in to fill it up taketh from the garment, and the rent is made worse. Neither do men put new wine into old bottles: else the bottles break, and the wine runneth out, and the bottles perish: but they put new wine into new bottles, and both are preserved."

Does it sound like he's telling the disciples that their visions aren't big enough? Is he telling them that they need a different attitude, a better way of thinking, a changed perspective? He says that they won't fast and mourn while He is still with them, but will do so when He leaves them. He compares the coming situation to clothes and wine. The reference to new and old wineskins is a reference to the saving power of Christ and His Gospel. The "old man" is gone, the "new man" has arrived. This, not finding a new husband, is what it means to put on the new man. It does not mean we need to adjust our way of seeing God so that He will pour out more opportunities to us. Instead, it shows us that there is no union between the old man and the new man.

"God says, 'Behold, I am doing a new thing. Do you not perceive it?' Notice, God is always ready to do new things in our lives. He's trying to promote us, to increase us, to give us more. Yet, it's interesting that God

asked the question 'Do you not perceive it?' In other words, are you making room for it in your own thinking?"

Again, let us examine the context of this verse. Isaiah 43:18-22 reads "Remember ye not the former things, neither consider the things of old. Behold, I will do a new thing; now it shall spring forth; shall ye not know it? I will even make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert. The beast of the field shall honour me, the dragons and the owls: because I give waters in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert, to give drink to my people, my chosen. This people have I formed for myself; they shall shew forth my praise. But thou hast not called upon me, O Jacob; but thou hast been weary of me, O Israel."

Wait, who is God referring to here? I think our Lord makes it very clear. He's doing a new thing, all right, but the new thing he's doing is for Israel. Israel is the chosen nation of God, the "people have I formed for myself." Here he is clearly addressing Israel as a nation and makes references as to how he will re-gather it from the north, the south, the east, and the west in an earlier passage in this same chapter. In fact, in verse 9, God clearly makes a distinction between the nation of Israel and the rest when He says, "Let all the nations be gathered together, and let the people be assembled: who among them can declare this, and shew us former things? let them bring forth their witnesses, that they may be justified: or let them hear, and say, It is truth." If that were not enough to show that God was addressing Israel and not all nations, He makes mention in verse 3 that "For I am the LORD thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour: I gave Egypt for thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee." He makes final distinction in verses 14-15 that, "Thus saith the LORD, your redeemer, the Holy One of Israel; For your sake I have sent to Babylon, and have brought down all their nobles, and the Chaldeans, whose cry is in the ships. I am the LORD, your Holy One, the creator of Israel,

your King.”

Now, even if we forget that these verses of prophecy are not even directed toward us, Joel again misinterprets when he says that God is saying that His people aren't making room in their thinking for the new thing that He is doing. In fact, God lays out for Israel what the problems are in verses 23-26 when he says, “Thou hast not brought me the small cattle of thy burnt offerings; neither hast thou honoured me with thy sacrifices. I have not caused thee to serve with an offering, nor wearied thee with incense. Thou hast bought me no sweet cane with money, neither hast thou filled me with the fat of thy sacrifices: but thou hast made me to serve with thy sins, thou hast wearied me with thine iniquities. I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins. Put me in remembrance: let us plead together: declare thou, that thou mayest be justified.” Does this sound like small thinking to you?

Finally, God lays out one final problem with Israel and the consequence that is particularly relevant to Joel's misuse of Scripture. In verses 27-28, it reads, “Thy first father hath sinned, and thy teachers have transgressed against me. Therefore I have profaned the princes of the sanctuary, and have given Jacob to the curse, and Israel to reproaches.” God punished Israel because of their original sin, but also because Israel's teachers had sinned against God in their teaching. Might they have done that by putting their own spin on God's Word to get it to sound like it backs up their point?

Finally, we see one of Joel's most dangerous misinterpretations.

*“If you don't think your dreams will ever come to pass, they never will. If you don't think you have what it takes to rise up to that new standard, it's not going to happen. The barrier is in your mind.”
That's what Scripture calls a 'stronghold.' It's a wrong thinking pattern*

that keeps us imprisoned in defeat. And that's why it's so important that we think positive thoughts of hope, faith, and victory."

As much as I find Joel's Peter Pan like notion that we can fly to our dreams if we'll just think enough happy thoughts (he left out the pixie dust), what's he's talking about here is something much more vile than a defeatist attitude. Let's look at the verse he referenced.

2nd Corinthians 10:2-4 read, "But I beseech you, that I may not be bold when I am present with that confidence, wherewith I think to be bold against some, which think of us as if we walked according to the flesh. For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;)" These verses are further brought to light by Ephesians 6:12 which says, "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." Both sets of verses here are written by the Apostle Paul and say precisely the same thing. Our struggle isn't against people, but against demons and Satan himself.

The word used for strongholds is *ochuroma*, which literally means castle. In a spiritual sense, a stronghold is a legal ground that a demon, on orders from Satan, uses to oppress humans. Having cast more than a few demons out in my time, I can tell you that these are not ways of incorrect thinking, but areas of unconfessed sin and generational curses. When dealing with spiritual warfare, it is important that we recognize a stronghold for what it is, ground demons are using to attack us, rather than what Joel says it is, a defeatist way of thinking. Happy thoughts may get you to fly in Neverland, but they will never break down a stronghold nor evict and expel a demon. It is my belief that demons affect a large amount of people, but these problems never

go away because people think they can rid themselves by changing their way of thinking. Again, this is a subject for another book at another time. The point is this interpretation, like many of Osteen's, is both incorrect and dangerous. Just like Satan's misquotation to Christ, given the right context a person might believe the Bible wants them to jump off a building.

Joel says in his book that we should all "Get rid of that small-minded thinking and start thinking as God thinks." I can sincerely hope you take your own advice, Joel.

Chapter Seven

The “Really Good” News

“Have you ever heard him preach about the need for feeling sorry and repenting for sin?”

“Actually, it’s more like he talks about how we should accept what we do because no one can be as perfect as God or Jesus Christ... It’s not about repenting, it’s about accepting God into your life and realizing that in every situation you encounter, you need Him there for you. He is the only one who can help you.”

This is a portion of an actual conversation I had with a young woman I consider to be the closest thing I have to a little sister. At the point where she said that, I was taken aback. I hold a degree in Speech Communication, but I was literally speechless. Up until that point I figured that Joel’s smiling message sold books and looked good on TV, but it hadn’t set in that people I knew would actually be persuaded into believing it. It wasn’t until I had this conversation with her that I truly realized how far reaching and effective the watered down Gospel preached to the thousands in attendance and the millions watching at home really was. Let’s get ready to rumble.

It’s true, the Gospel is called the Good News and with good reason. It is the story of how God saw us as an imperfect and sin-laden creation with absolutely no hope of redemption within our own means. With salvation out of our grasp, Christ took it upon Himself to save us even though our sinful nature made us His natural enemies. He came down to this planet that He Himself created, but not as a giant or a warrior. Instead, he came as a small infant, born to a teenage mother in a stable where animals fed. This

was no entrance fit for a king, but for a pauper. He grew and became a Jewish carpenter, an ancient blue collar worker. He worked at it for most of his human life until he reached the age of 30 and began his ministry. He preached a message of law and grace, of sin and redemption, of wrath and love. He was the Messiah that the people of Israel were promised many millennia before. And they killed him.

Of course, the story doesn't end there. On the third day, Jesus Christ rose from the grave, proving once and for all that he had defeated death. His lasting gift to us, one that He shed His Blood for, is eternal life that is freely offered to any man who will repent and put their faith in Christ.

It sounds like good news to me.

It seems, though, that the good news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is not quite good enough for him. To Joel, God is about saving us, but He's about more than that. He's about financial blessing, He's about prosperity, and He's about teaching us to enjoy life. The Almighty Creator of the Universe wants us to be as happy as we can be. At least, that's the word you hear from Joel.

Joel's book tells us nothing of sin, but instead passes the offenses against God as "some poor decisions." Joel relays a story of a pastor who "got off track" and made "poor decisions" that eventually resulted in his resignation. How much can we make sin, which is taken ever so seriously by God, sound like he made a wrong turn without being blasphemous? Would Joel describe King David's affair with Bathsheba and murder of her husband Uriah as David "getting off track" and making "poor decisions" that ended with the death of his son and continual chaos within his household. Does God punish us for our poor choices or does He punish us for our sins against Him?

If sins are really just "poor choices" made when we get off track, then why did Christ have to die to pay for them? More than that, why is it necessary to forgive others for their "poor choices?"

If someone murders your family, are you honestly going to think it was just a “poor choice?” It’s natural to forgive choices we don’t agree with, it’s not natural to forgive sins. Forgiving sins takes Christ living in us, but anyone can overlook some wrong turns.

Joel continues to expand on the Gospel in his book in a vain attempt to make salvations sound better than it did before. “God wants us to have healthy, positive self-images, to see ourselves as priceless treasures. He wants us to feel good about ourselves.” We’re further told that “God sees you as a champion. He believes in you even more than you believe in yourself!” We’re also told to “Be the best you can be, then you can feel good about yourself.” Finally, we’re told, “As long as you are pressing forward, you can hold your head up high, knowing that you are a “work in progress,” and God is in the process of changing you. He’s looking at your last two good moves.”

Not only is this self-glorifying nonsense, but it seems to develop a sense of pride in yourself. More importantly, none of this is backed up in any way, shape, or form by Scripture. God isn’t always looking at our “last two good moves,” in fact, we are told in Isaiah 64:6-7, “But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away. And there is none that calleth upon thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee: for thou hast hid thy face from us, and hast consumed us, because of our iniquities.” Yes, God wants us to do good things, but our righteous works are nothing compared to the righteousness of our holy and just God.

When speaking of forgiving others, we are told to forgive for our own benefit, not because God commanded us to or because Christ forgave us. Joel tells us, “Don’t hold on to feelings of bitterness and resentment and let them poison your future. Let go of the hurts of the past. Forgive the people who did you wrong.

Forgive yourself for the mistakes you have made. You may even need to forgive God.”

That’s right, you read correctly. Osteen tells us we might need to forgive God. God, who is perfect and has done no wrong, who sent His only Son to be a sacrifice for our sins, needs our forgiveness. Talk about making the potter the clay. Joel is calling for a complete role reversal. While it is true that a person should not be angry at God, they should repent of that anger and ask God’s forgiveness, not the other way around.

Sadly, preachers like Joel are not a new phenomenon. They’ve actually been around since the days of the Old Testament. Around 600 BC, the Prophet Jeremiah had been proclaiming God’s anger and wrath at the people of Israel for as long as anyone could remember. The nation created and chosen by God had abandoned the principles, the truth, and the laws given to them by God. No matter how long or hard Jeremiah prophesied, they would not heed his warning. Instead, the people flocked to listen to Hananiah.

This experience is recorded in Jeremiah 28:1-11:

”And it came to pass the same year, in the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah king of Judah, in the fourth year, and in the fifth month, that Hananiah the son of Azur the prophet, which was of Gibeon, spake unto me in the house of the LORD, in the presence of the priests and of all the people, saying, Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, saying, **I have broken the yoke of the king of Babylon. Within two full years will I bring again into this place all the vessels of the LORD's house, that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon took away from this place, and carried them to Babylon: And I will bring again to this place Jeconiah the son of Jehoiakim king of Judah, with all the captives of Judah, that went into Babylon, saith the LORD: for I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon.** Then the prophet Jeremiah said unto the prophet Hananiah in the presence of the

priests, and in the presence of all the people that stood in the house of the LORD, Even the prophet Jeremiah said, Amen: the LORD do so: the LORD perform thy words which thou hast prophesied, to bring again the vessels of the LORD's house, and all that is carried away captive, from Babylon into this place. evertheless hear thou now this word that I speak in thine ears, and in the ears of all the people; The prophets that have been before me and before thee of old prophesied both against many countries, and against great kingdoms, of war, and of evil, and of pestilence. The prophet which prophesieth of peace, when the word of the prophet shall come to pass, then shall the prophet be known, that the LORD hath truly sent him. **Then Hananiah the prophet took the yoke from off the prophet Jeremiah's neck, and brake it. And Hananiah spake in the presence of all the people, saying, Thus saith the LORD; Even so will I break the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon from the neck of all nations within the space of two full years. And the prophet Jeremiah went his way."**

Hananiah was a prosperity preacher. He was a good news only prophet that claimed the Lord had spoken great things over the lives of the people of Israel. If they would just believe, expand their vision if you will, then these things would come to pass and the Lord would set them free from their slavery, oppression, and captivity. Sound familiar? Even Jeremiah, who heard directly from God, wished that Hananiah's prophecy was true. However, the test of a true prophet is to see if they speak the truth, because then we can know that they speak for God. Let's see what happens in verses 12-14:

"Then the word of the LORD came unto Jeremiah the prophet, after that Hananiah the prophet had broken the yoke from off the neck of the prophet Jeremiah, saying, **Go and tell Hananiah, saying, Thus saith the LORD; Thou hast broken the yokes of wood; but thou shalt make for them yokes of iron. For thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; I have put a**

yoke of iron upon the neck of all these nations, that they may serve Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon; and they shall serve him: and I have given him the beasts of the field also. "

You see, Jeremiah sought after the Lord and heard directly from Him. The problem is that he was hearing a radically different message than the one spoken of by Hananiah. As was mentioned, the test of a prophet to see if they spoke for God was to examine the truth of their prophetic words. If the words were true, then the Spirit of God was on the Prophet. If the words were false, the wannabe prophet was put to death, usually by stoning. There needed to be a test and God instructed Jeremiah into one.

"Then said the prophet Jeremiah unto Hananiah the prophet, Hear now, Hananiah; The LORD hath not sent thee; but thou makest this people to trust in a lie. Therefore thus saith the LORD; Behold, I will cast thee from off the face of the earth: this year thou shalt die, because thou hast taught rebellion against the LORD. So Hananiah the prophet died the same year in the seventh month." (verses 15-18)

Joel says in his book, "If you foster an image of defeat and failure, then you're going to live that kind of life. 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." Hananiah had such a vision, but as we can clearly see, it was denied to him because it wasn't of God. Nothing on earth may be able to withhold those things, but the Creator of the planet definitely can.

The point this illustrates is that regardless of what we think or feel, God is still God and He doesn't always have good news for us. The people applauded the false prophet Hananiah, and why wouldn't they? He told them what they wanted to hear. That God loved them, that God had a wonderful plan for them, that their struggle would soon be ended because they were special to God. The Prophet Jeremiah, however, spoke an entirely different

message. He called for men everywhere to repent, just as Jesus later would do. He didn't tell them they were living in defeat because of their wrong thinking, he told them the truth: that God was punishing them for their rebellion.

As we can plainly see here, God takes false teaching by those claiming to speak for him very seriously. As a pastor of the largest church in the nation, Joel Osteen is seen by many as speaking for God, almost in the same way Catholics see the Pope. When you turn on your TV and see a preacher, it's probably Joel. American society likes Joel, in fact, they love Him. He never makes them feel bad about themselves or their sin. In fact, he doesn't even call it sin. Evil nature is sloughed off as being poor choices that can be improved. There's no need for repentance with Joel, because God is going to forgive your sins anyway. The only one your sins, I mean wrong choices, are hurting is yourself because they're keeping you from being all that you could possibly be. They're keeping you from vaults full of money. They're keeping you from a trophy wife and picturesque children. They're keeping you from living your best life now.

The fact that a man who calls himself a pastor is preaching what people want to hear, rather than what they need to hear is disturbing at its core. Joel said in his Larry King interview that the reason he didn't use much Scripture in the book is he was trying to reach the mainstream audience. He was trying to reach the unsaved world, but he didn't use Scripture? Who could have predicted this? Oh yeah, in 2nd Timothy 4:3-4, the Bible says, "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, and shall be turned unto fables." People who won't endure sound doctrine, are these perhaps those who could be won over by a Christian self help book that barely uses Scripture and when it does so it does incorrectly? Could Joel be a teacher that heap to

themselves after their own lusts, to preach what they want to hear to their itching ears? Isn't it possible that the fact that the pastor of the largest church in the nation not giving the Bible its proper importance could be a reason why people think the Bible is a bunch of fairy tales that teach life lessons, or more succinctly "turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables?"

2nd Peter 2:1-3 bring further light onto this fact when they say, "But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not." False teachers bring destruction upon the church, just like the false prophets of days long since passed. They are spoken of to have the characteristic action of speaking evil of the way of truth. Just like refusing to call sin what it is and refusing to tell people about the condemnation their sins have brought on them?

But you say to me, what's the problem? Joel Osteen is just being seeker sensitive. His way of preaching gets many people to come to church that would never go into a more traditional church. First, being seeker-sensitive is a giant waste. This may seem insensitive but it's true. Romans 3:11 says very plainly that, "There is none that understandeth, there is **none that seeketh after God.**" There are none who seek after God who are not saved, not a single one. Therefore, if Osteen's Lakewood Church is seeker-sensitive, who are they being sensitive to? More importantly, what are the seekers looking for? It's not God, the Scriptures say that. Listening to Joel's sermon, it seems like they are, in fact, looking for a pick me up.

In order to prove this point, examine how seeker-sensitive the Apostle Paul was. In order to do this, we will examine the book of Acts which records in detail the actions of the early Church. In Acts 13:45, the Jews spoke in anger and blasphemy after hearing Paul preach. Five verses later, Paul and Barnabas are forced from the area. In the 5th verse of chapter 14, the Jews plotted to stone Paul. In the 19th verse of chapter 14, Paul is stoned and left for dead by an entirely different group of Jews. In verse 23 of the 16th chapter, Paul and Silas are jailed, but not before being severely whipped. In verse 28 of the 19th chapter, Paul was attacked by angry listeners. In verse 23 of the 20th chapter, the Holy Spirit reveals to Paul that he will face this persecution anywhere he preaches, but he continues steadfast. The listeners of the 22nd chapter, verse 22, called for his death. In the beginning verses of chapter 23, Paul is struck in the mouth as soon as he began speaking. In the later verses of the same chapter, more than forty Jews conspire to kill him. These are but a few of the examples of the welcome received by Paul's truthful message.

So what should we do in this situation? I hope you've learned by now that the most important question to ask is: What does the Bible say about this? I believe the following verses will give us our true and correct course of action.

2nd John 1:9-11 reads "Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. **If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.**"

2nd Corinthians 11:2-4 tells us, "For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in

Christ. For if he that cometh preacheth another Jesus, whom we have not preached, or if ye receive another spirit, which ye have not received, or another gospel, which ye have not accepted, ye might well bear with him."

Galatians 1:6-9 says, "I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. **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.** As we said before, so say I now again, **if any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed."**

I believe the answer is clear. Joel Osteen must either repent, or we as the Church must abandon him and his false teachings. All I'm asking for is just one sermon on sin, repentance, judgment, hell, and the real reason Jesus died. Come on Joel, you can do it.

We are called to worship God. As was previously mentioned, when Satan took Jesus to the exceedingly high mountain and offered Him dominion over all the kingdoms of the world, there was just one condition. Jesus would have had to worship Satan, something he could not do. I have to wonder, when Satan wanted Jesus to worship him, what did he specifically want Jesus to do? Did he want him to sing him a song? Did he want Jesus to dance? Or maybe preach a sermon? Or did he want Christ's total devotion, so much so that he would be served by Jesus in every aspect of Christ's being? The word used by the devil that we translate worship is 'proskuneo.' It means to literally fall down on your face in reverence. If a person was to do this, they would bow as physically low as they could to the ground. Satan didn't want half-hearted worship from Christ; after all, he was offering dominion over the entire world to pay for it. Christ gave us dominion over death and paid for it with His Blood, how much greater should our proskuneo be to Him?

Closing

As I stood up in front of a bar to open air preach for the first time, I suddenly knew why Joel Osteen preaches the way that he does. Spreading the Gospel the way Jesus and the Apostles did it is just about the most terrifying experience in the world. You have no idea how people will react, what they will do to you, or what will happen. There is a deep-rooted need in all of us to be liked and respected by our fellow man, which is the exact opposite result that fervent Gospel preaching typically yields. In the name of discretion, unity, and tolerance, the megachurch has become the world, that it may attempt to preach without offending.

America's churches have become secularized, not by an attack from the world but by an attempt to imitate it. The cause for this is clear: sick of persecution, the American church diluted the medicine of its message to make it easier for the world to swallow. The consequences of such actions are grave indeed. When you water down medicine, it loses its curative properties. In fact, a person is worse off taking watered down medicine than no medicine at all. If they were to not take medicine, they might eventually become sick enough that they would seek a cure. Those who take watered down medicine will become just as sick, but will either stop taking the medicine altogether or continue steadfast in taking it. Either way, the disease eventually does them in.

In the same way, those who hear a watered down Gospel are worse off than those who haven't heard. I find many times when preaching and evangelizing that the hardest people to win over to the faith are those who falsely believe themselves to be Christians. These false converts are the stony ground hearers described in Christ's parable of the sower. However, unlike normal false converts, these would-be Christians don't fall away after a while. While their roots might not be deep, every Sunday

megachurch preachers load up more fertilizer. That is, when they tune in to Lakewood's TV program every week, Joel Osteen piles more spiritual manure onto their already shallow belief system.

The commitment to Christ is made without the knowledge of sin. Without such knowledge, there can be no repentance. After all, why would you repent when you didn't know you had done anything wrong? Without repentance, there can be no salvation, because those who do not repent will perish according to Jesus. These are the people that Jesus will turn away as workers of iniquity on the Day of Judgment because He never knew them. The religious leaders who preach a man-centered message have absolutely desecrated that which God entrusted them to do. They have perverted the Gospel into a self-help book, but never help the person escape hell. These churches that meet felt needs must realize that a person never has a felt need to be saved. That is, they never feel the need to be saved until the Day of Judgment when it is much too late.

The moral Law of God is absolute and it is the standard by which each and every person will be judged. Despite what megachurch leaders seem to think, they have no power to amend the holy Law of God. Jesus said it was easier for heaven and earth to be destroyed than for such a change to occur. Rather than the fiery sermons of yesteryear, secular American churches seem to go to great lengths not to do anything that might awaken their sinner-filled audience to the truth of the Gospel. Words are crafted not to alarm or scare anyone, but gently lift them up with a fake Jesus who has no wrath. If I saw your house was on fire, would I knock on your door and politely invite you to my house for coffee? If you saw a blind man headed towards an open manhole, would you invite him to a nonconfrontational church get together, but not tell him that he's headed for danger? The truth is, when people are headed for dangerous situations, it is inhumane not to alarm them.

No one in their right mind would ask people in a burning house for coffee, they would bang on the door and scream that the house was on fire. They would even break a window and pull someone to safety.

People are afraid that they'll be judging other people, as if that were some kind of unforgivable sin. The Bible does not say "Thou shalt not judge," it says "Judge not, lest you be judged. For whatever standard you use to judge, you will also be judged by." No matter what we do, we are all going to be judged by the moral Law of God. Therefore, that verse doesn't really apply to judgment by the Law. Christ tells us to make righteous judgments, but not to be judgmental. It is the same difference between doing that which is legal, and doing that which is legalistic.

In closing, I will give you one final decision to make. In 1st Kings 18:21-24, it reads, "And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? if the LORD be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word. Then said Elijah unto the people, I, even I only, remain a prophet of the LORD; but Baal's prophets are four hundred and fifty men. Let them therefore give us two bullocks; and let them choose one bullock for themselves, and cut it in pieces, and lay it on wood, and put no fire under: and I will dress the other bullock, and lay it on wood, and put no fire under: And call ye on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the LORD: and the God that answereth by fire, let him be God. And all the people answered and said, It is well spoken." Here Elijah and the prophets of Baal were worshipping two different deities, but only one of them was the true God. The God of prosperity and financial blessing Osteen talks about and the God I have written of are different, and only one of them can be the true God. I offer you the same challenge. Use the Bible and the Bible alone without any manmade doctrine. Look at the teaching of Joel Osteen and the teachings of this book, and decide which one is right. Read the

Word and pray and listen for God's answer, "and the God that answereth by fire, let him be God."

I realize that Osteen published a letter apologizing for what he said on Larry King Live. I am aware that he said that he didn't realize until seeing the transcript that he failed to relay the message that Christ was the only way to Heaven. I am aware he appeared contrite. However, the truth remains. Joel was reminded by a caller of the true message of salvation through Christ alone, yet that did not change his answer. The word "repentance" means "to turn away from." If Joel has truly repented of his actions on Larry King, why does he continue to publish his book of falsehoods that is apparently aimed at the mainstream and teaches nothing about salvation? If he truly wishes to relay the message, why does he fail to preach on it?

Do I believe there is hope for Joel Osteen and his Lakewood Church? Sure. At the time of the writing of this conclusion, I have had opportunity to briefly meet Joel as a visitor to his church. During our short conversation, I asked him where he believed those who weren't Christians went when they died. He told me that the Bible said there was a heaven and a hell. Until this point, I had believed he may have been ignorant about hell or simply not believed in its existence. However, it is much easier to say he believes in hell to a lone person than to a congregation. It is easier to tell his congregation he believes Christ is the only way than to a secular television audience. Knowing that he believes that the unsaved are headed for hell, I am left with one simple question:

Why doesn't he use his pulpit to warn others about it?