

The Brown Street Beacon

"...Shine out among them like beacon lights,

holding out to them the Word of Life" (Phil 2:15-16)



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Non-Judgmental Preaching

In July of 2005, the Lakewood Church in Houston Texas moved into the former Compaq Center, old home of the NBA's Houston Rockets, remodeled to be their new place of worship. The Lakewood Church was at that time the largest church in America, averaging around 40,000 people a week in attendance. The leader of the church is Joel Osteen, author of the best selling book, "Your Best Life Now: 7 Steps to Living at Your Full Potential." In denominational circles, many refer to Osteen's message as "Christianity Lite" because he purposely avoids any negativity, emphasizing positive thinking, success and wealth. I once heard Mr. Osteen preaching on his weekly television program. In fact, as I recall, it was a replay of the first worship services of the Lakewood Church in their new facility. His guarantee was that those who come to the Lakewood Church would never hear him speak against anyone or say any thing negative or judgmental. Instead, they would hear something that would allow them to leave feeling better about themselves than when they came.

Should it be the goal of gospel preachers to avoid negativity, preaching only things that are going to make people feel better about themselves? The answer is simply no. Joel Osteen has developed a strategy that is becoming altogether too popular in religious circles today, even among the true people of God. It is a plan to grow numerically by appealing to the outward man while ignoring the inner man. In other words, to preach that which makes people feel better, while, at least to a large degree, ignoring the problem of sin. The strategy is working, evidenced by Osteen's mega-church. The problem is it is not really the strategy of man, it is the devil's strategy. Satan knows that true faith comes by hearing the Word of God (Romans 10:17). People need, not just portions of the Word that are positive, but all of God's Word. Paul said that the responsibility of the evangelist is to reprove, rebuke and exhort (2 Timothy 4:2). Joel Osteen is okay with the exhorting part of preaching, but he is determined to avoid the rebuking and reproving aspect of it. In fact, Mr. Osteen's philosophy is to accommodate the very people that Paul warned Timothy about in 2 Timothy 4. Paul warned Timothy of those who *"will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they help to themselves teachers, having itching ears."*

In contrast to this approach, Paul, led by the Holy Spirit, was determined to keep back nothing that was profitable (Acts 20:20), and to declare all the counsel of God (Acts 20:26). In doing this there were times when Paul had to tell people that they were carnal (1 Corinthians 3:3). There were times when it was necessary for Paul to tell brethren that they had been bewitched (Galatians 3:1). Paul was once even forced to confront a fellow apostle and rebuke him publicly for his inappropriate behavior (Galatians 2:11-17). I know all of this sounds a little preachy, and even condemning, but unlike Mr. Osteen, Paul wasn't in a popularity contest; he was in the business of saving souls. So was Peter. This is why on the day of Pentecost he wasn't interested in people leaving feeling better than when they came. Peter was interested in sinners leaving saved. Thus, he told the Jews in the first gospel sermon that they were guilty of crucifying the one whom God has made both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36). Peter wasn't trying to make them feel good, he was trying to make them feel guilty. It worked! They were pricked in their hearts (Acts 2:37), and about 3,000 of them accepted Christ

(Acts 2:41).

What people need today is to hear the Word. They need to hear all of the Word and nothing but the Word. We should be leery of those who preach a message that is only positive because, the truth is, the gospel of Christ is a message that is both positive and negative. The gospel both saves and condemns, and the only way a person who is in condemnation can be saved is to hear the entire message. And by the way, when a man begins to take an “only positive approach” in preaching, it is usually only a matter of time before he abandons even the core message of the gospel. In an interview by Larry King in June of 2005, a month before Joel Osteen’s church moved into the Compaq Center, Mr. King asked Joel if the Jews, Muslims and others were wrong because they did not believe in Jesus. Osteen said, “I don’t believe that they are wrong. I believe that only God can judge a persons heart.” You see, Joel Osteen, in order to grow the largest church in American, has compromised in his own heart the essence of the gospel. If those who do not believe in Jesus are not wrong, the gospel of Christ is a vain message, and Jesus was wrong when He said, “I am THE way, the truth and the life; no man comes to the Father but by me” (John 14:6).

You can’t preach the gospel without seeming judgmental to someone. The gospel offends all who don’t believe in Jesus, and most who have determined to live in sin. The fact is, however, the gospel is their only hope. And we do them no service at all by itching their ears with a watered-down version of the gospel that makes them feel better but doesn’t help fix the problem of sin in their lives.

Don

What do you think are the three most important words anyone can say? Some people would immediately think “*I love you*”. Indeed those are important words that should be said often, but there are three other words that may be even more important: “*Please forgive me*”.

“*Please forgive me*” are three words many people have a hard time saying. They know that those three words mean they did something wrong. Those words mean they hurt another. By uttering, “*Please forgive me*” they are made vulnerable. These feelings of insecurity have caused many to harden their hearts

Three Important Words

By Simon Harris

against God and fall victim to the sin of pride.

“*Please forgive me*” is an expression of reconciliation and liberation. We are liberated from the bondage of sin (1 John 1:9). We are freed from the guilt and pain of sin (Hebrews 9:14). Forgiveness reconciles us to God (Colossians 1:20-22) and to others whom we have sinned against (Matthew 5:23-4).

“*Please forgive me*” expresses humility that is so important to a Christian. Too often even when we know that we have done wrong we refuse to seek forgiveness because of pride. We expect others to make concessions to us, even though we are wrong! Such an attitude is contrary to the Scriptures (Philippians 2:3-4; 1 Peter 5:6) and contrary to love. “*Please forgive me*” is the very essence of humility. It is a recognition that we subjecting ourselves to the will of another. We are not demanding anything, we are pleading for it. We are utterly dependant on another to give that which we need and that which only they have the power to bestow. In Psalm 51, David recognized that his forgiveness was totally dependant upon God and he humbled himself before Him. Joseph’s brothers ultimately realized that their only hope was to humble themselves before the brother they treated so shamefully.

You could make an argument that “*Please forgive me*” are not the most important words a person

could say, but certainly you will agree that they are among the most important words. That being said, use them! You will be greatly reward for uttering these three simple words both here and now and in the world to come.