

Is Joel Osteen Using Double-Talk to Appeal to the Masses?

A number of years ago, I was privileged to have a breakfast conversation with the late **John Osteen**, father of **Joel Osteen**. I appreciated his forthright style of communicating **God's Word** in his weekly television sermons. He always spoke clearly and yet compassionately in conveying the truth of the Scripture. I thanked him for his impact upon my life as a young minister.

John used to say, "Slow growth is good growth." That certainly changed when the baton was passed to Joel as we witness the explosive growth of his church and ministry in America today. Joel's national television broadcast, his million-seller books and his stadium events have caused him to be recognized as maybe the most influential voice to **American Christians** today.

Something else has changed, in my humble opinion, besides the exponential growth. I'm speaking here of a shift from John's candor in communicating truths to his son's approach of majoring on the positive and inspirational while usually avoiding the controversial. Seeing his success, scores of ministers follow in his footsteps.

While I, like multitudes of fellow believers, admire Joel and Victoria Osteen for their authenticity, sincerity, integrity and love for God and His people, how many of us secretly wish that he would come forth with more directness—especially when he is asked about important doctrinal, moral and cultural issues of our day?

Come on. Be honest.

I lived in Atlanta, Ga., for 11 years. While I was there, I served alongside pastor Michael Youseff. Recently he wrote a piece for Charisma News entitled "When Catholic and Protestant Popes Use Double-Talk."

He said the following: "Double-talk. It's confusing to the faithful. But more than that, it can be a jumping point for the weak and uninformed.

"In my book *The Leadership Style of Jesus*, I explain the critical role leaders play, especially in the way they communicate. Depending on the situation, communication can literally bring life or death.

"So why, then, do many Christian leaders—such as the **Catholic pope**, the **Anglican archbishop of Canterbury** or many evangelical popes—not measure their words? Why do they often invoke double-talk in dealing with clear-cut issues?

"Is it so **atheists** and **agnostics** will love them?

"Is it so an increasingly secular society will accept them?

"Is it so unbelievers will feel good about their unbelief?

"Only God can judge their motives."

Now, I know that Joel Osteen has stated his primary gifting is that of an encourager. There's probably nobody better!

Interviewing people leaving one of his stadium events, a young woman exclaimed that she feels so good whenever she hears him speak. Another couple was beaming, saying every time they hear him, they just feel so encouraged.

These thoughts crossed my mind as I listened: *What if she was a lesbian? What if that couple was cohabitating [euphemism for a lifestyle of fornication]?*

As they listened to an uplifting sermon and were given hope, were they also challenged to truly live 100 percent for God, or were they simply made comfortable in their sin to stay as they are because there was little **Holy Spirit** conviction?

While we all love to be told how good we are and how great we

can be and how much God loves us, do we also hear a balanced presentation of Scripture, wherein we understand our sinfulness before a holy God and our need to repent and align with God's **righteous** standards? If we fail to do this out of fear of man or a man-pleasing spirit, we really are defrauding people and possibly keeping them from their eternal salvation.

Albert Einstein stated, "Make everything as simple as possible, but no simpler." OK. As it relates to this topic, let me have a go at it.

It is my personal conviction that the urgency of the hour requires that pastors across America rise up and proclaim the whole counsel of God. The deplorable standards of our culture today are merely a reflection of the deplorable standards in much of the church.

William Wilberforce told us, "There is no shortcut to holiness; it must be the business of our whole lives." Isn't it time for everyone, from Joel Osteen to the youngest church planter and storefront church pastor, to return to the proclamation of God's Word, calling people to righteousness so that we might see an awakening in America before it's too late?

Granted, this is costly—remember it cost **John the Baptist** his head when he confronted Herod in his immorality. **Jesus** commended him when he said, "Among men born among women there is no one greater." But if we are to be faithful to the way Jesus and the **New Testament** leaders preached, we don't have another alternative.

In whatever city God places us, we are called to seek the peace and prosperity of that city (Jer. 29:7). While that certainly entails fervent prayer, it also means faithful proclamation of all of God's Word.

Joel is planted in the great city of Houston. The fourth-largest city in America has the first lesbian mayor of a major

metropolis. It is the No. 1 human trafficking corridor in the nation, with 300 locations for sex trafficking. Not only is teenage sex slavery rampant, but child sex trafficking is out of control. Nightly, more than 6,000 runaway children are on the streets.

The great city of Houston, like the rest of our nation, needs a genuine Holy Spirit revival that will only come when we have anointed proclamation of God's Word, conviction of sin, turning back to God and an outpouring of God's Spirit transforming lives for eternity!

Recently Joel was interviewed by the Huffington Post to talk about his new book, *Break Out! 5 Keys to Go Beyond Your Barriers and Live an Extraordinary Life*. The interviewers took advantage of the opportunity to ask him about homosexuality. The response he gave was as follows:

- God absolutely likes and accepts gays.
- It is not his place to tell anyone what they are doing is wrong.
- God's disciples should love one another.
- Nobody is perfect.
- He is not preaching hate or pushing people down.

This week in our city, the *Nashville Scene* publication put the Rev. Emilie Townes on the cover with the headline "Divine Inspiration." She is the new dean of Vanderbilt Divinity School. She is also an open lesbian who is ordained by the American Baptist Church and was selected by the provost of the university because "her sexuality is not relevant" and the university "actively seeks to populate itself with diverse believers professing a wide spectrum of beliefs."

Here's the deal: When faced with the above, let me attempt to model how to respond, doing so with utmost charity and clarity yet consistent with the sacred Scripture:

1. All of us are broken and born with a fallen nature that

gives us a tendency to sin.

2. Homosexuality is not simply an “alternative lifestyle.”
3. Some people are definitely more susceptible to homosexuality than others, but predisposition is not predestination.
4. God loves all people and gave His Son to die to redeem mankind so that our sins could be forgiven and we would be free from sin’s power.
5. Practicing homosexuality is most definitely sinful and contradicting biblical teaching on God’s order for human relationships and family.
6. To call oneself an authentic Christian and remain a practicing homosexual is a direct contradiction of biblical teaching and contrary to the abundant life promised by Jesus Christ.
7. Homosexual behavior can be changed, as evidenced by multitudes throughout the world and in the Bible.

If you say, “I was born this way,” I say, “You can be born again!”

The Bible tells us, “If the bugle blow an indistinct sound, how can we prepare for battle?”

As our nation is rapidly approaching judgment unless there is a genuine turnaround, isn’t it time for all of us to be courageous and speak with charitable candor? If we demonstrate this kind of bravery, we can see the awakening that we are longing for in all of our hearts.

Joel, will you rise up, lead the way and encourage all of us to follow? I can almost hear your father in that “cloud of witnesses” cheering all of us on!

Larry Tomczak is a best-selling author and cultural commentator with over 40 years of trusted ministry experience. His passion is to bring perspective, analysis and insight from a biblical worldview. He loves people and loves awakening them to today’s cultural realities and the responses needed for the

bride of Christ—His church—to become influential in all spheres of life once again.