

Joel Osteen Did Not Renounce Bible or Resign as Pastor

In the age of Twitter, Facebook and mobile devices, news can spread quicker than it can be substantiated. In most cases, news outlets are quick to substantiate or discredit rumors and random tweets, but sometimes things slip through the cracks. Such was the case with Monday's Joel Osteen hoax.

As the West coast headed to work and teenagers sat in their first-period classrooms, a piece of news circulated Facebook and Twitter that saddened many conservative Christians across America. According to initial reports, Joel Osteen had apparently stepped down from his position as pastor of one of America's largest churches and denounced Christianity as being "untrue." But, what at first seemed credible, soon crumbled into an elaborate hoax.

According to MSNnow, a WordPress blog named "Joel Osteen Ministries" posted two images of fake CNN articles titled 'Pastor of mega church resigns, rejects Christ,' as well as a fake "letter from Joel Osteen."

The information circled Facebook and Twitter with many people expressing emotions from sadness and incredulity to downright disbelief, before a few smaller news organizations picked up the story and tracked down the website. , MSNnow, and the Christian Post all quickly looked into the facts and soon labeled the entire thing a "hoax," and many breathed a sigh of relief.

Putting aside any opinions of Joel Osteen's often-criticized and sometimes questionable theories and teachings, this situation is very important for families to consider. How does this tie into media wisdom?

You may have seen this State Farm Insurance commercial

featuring a conversation between a man and a woman, in which the woman seems to believe everything because she “read it on the Internet.” (Click below to watch.)

We may be amused by the absurdity of this insurance commercial, but many of us don’t realize that we too can be suckered into this same mentality. Sure, we might not believe that her fanny-pack-wearing online date is a French model, but we can be seduced by less obvious things—like this Joel Osteen hoax.

It’s important to remember for ourselves, and to teach our children, never to believe anything we see on the Internet at first glance. Information is very quick in this day and age, and it’s always important to check multiple reliable sources—such as large news agencies or the home website of an organization or person—before believing anything. Also giving things time—a few hours or days—for the whole story to come to the surface before acting on any information you see (the Trayvon Martin case is a perfect example).

Media wisdom extends to the Internet each and every day, and without thinking critically about everything seen or read, huge mistakes can be made. Instruct your children. Take some time this week and talk to them about the Internet, and how to discern the real truth from all the dubious chaff.

Our children and grandchildren spend 40 times more hours watching movies and television, listening to popular music, and playing video games than they do at church—and that’s if they attend every week. Yet the amount of money we spend on teaching our children to be media wise and influencing the entertainment industry with the gospel of Jesus Christ accounts for less than 50 cents per person in the United States!

How do movies, television and other media affect children? What is appropriate viewing at different age levels? How do

children learn?