

Joel Osteen Misuses Scripture in 'The Power of I Am,' Dennison Says

It sounds like the beginning of a bad joke: "A televangelist and a Catholic Sunday school teacher were talking one day ..."

But Tuesday night it really happened: Pastor Joel Osteen appeared on Stephen Colbert's *The Late Show* to discuss Osteen's latest book, *The Power of I Am*.

Colbert, one of the most biblically literate Hollywood celebrities, noted God's description of Himself as the "I Am" (Exodus 3:14). It turned out, the book is about something else entirely.

Osteen explained to Colbert that he wrote about what follows the words "I am" in a person's mind. He illustrated: Sometimes we say "I am slow" or "I am unlucky" or "I am not attractive." Instead, he wants us to say "I am blessed" or "I am strong" or "I am talented." According to Osteen, "We don't realize how many times we speak negative things about ourselves." To which Colbert responded with his typical wit: "I do that all the time. I'm so stupid."

I read *The Power of I Am* recently and appreciate Joel Osteen's desire to help us see ourselves as loved by God. However, I need to remind you of an important theological maxim: *The Bible can never mean what it never meant*. To understand Scripture, discover its original meaning and apply that meaning to your life today. Only then can you experience the full wisdom and power of God's word.

For example, in Deuteronomy 15 we read that Hebrew slaves were to be released every seventh year. Osteen applies this fact to your challenges today: "I believe you are coming into one of your seventh years. The seventh year is when you break free of

any limitation that is holding you back.” But the biblical text has nothing to do with such problems today.

Osteen cites Philippians 1:28, where Paul encourages his readers to be “not frightened in anything by your opponents.” Osteen applies the apostle’s statement to say, “Don’t be intimidated by that cancer. ... Sickness cannot keep you from your destiny.” But the “opponents” in Paul’s text were people who opposed the gospel, not physical or personal problems.

I could cite more examples. Here’s the bottom line: Joel Osteen wants us to experience God’s gracious provision, but misusing Scripture to advance a worthy goal is still a misuse of Scripture. Leonard Ravenhill was right: “The Bible is either absolute, or it’s obsolete.”

So “do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15).