

# John Piper: Oprah Leans Away From Biblical Reality

What happens when celebrities exchange theology in a public forum? Pastors are at the ready to examine their words.

Take Pastor John Piper for example, who recently gave four reasons why Oprah Winfrey was inaccurate in her interpretation of Psalm 37:4.

Initially, Winfrey made her comments on *The Late Show With Stephen Colbert*, when he asked her for her favorite passage. Colbert, a practicing Catholic, said his favorite verse was Matthew 6:35.

Winfrey's is Psalm 37:4: "Delight thyself in the Lord. He will give you the desires of your heart."

It says to me, if you focus on being a force for good, then goodness will come, which is also the Third Law of Motion, which is also karma" and the Golden Rule, Winfrey said.

In a recent blog post, Piper critiqued Winfrey's interpretation:

*1. The first thing she did was to move from the specific person of Yahweh. You know whenever you see the all-caps LORD in the English version that means it is a reference to the particular personal name of the God of Israel, not to a generic name of God. And that is what is here. Delight yourself in Yahweh, the God of Israel, the God and Father of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, who descended to the world to die for sinners and rise again and establish an eternal kingdom. That is the God that is being known and delighted in here.*

*... So she is moving from specificity in a person to generic character traits that everybody can be happy about. Now my*

approach is to move in exactly the opposite direction when I read that verse or anywhere else in the Bible. I think the emphasis here falls not on aspects of virtue or character, but on the person of the Lord Himself.

2. The second difference, and it is the reason why the first one really matters, is because of what she does with her direction in this text. She says that the point of the text is the principle: "If you focus on being a force for good, then good will come." Then she generalizes by saying this. This is her real agenda. She says, "That is the same as 1) the third law of motion, 2) karma, 3) the Golden Rule."

3. The third difference is that Oprah does not connect this verse with Jesus Christ at all except as Jesus lines up with the principles of physics and the eastern religions. And I would relate this to Jesus in another way. I think delighting yourself in the Lord is another way of saying: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart," Jesus' words in Matthew 22:37. And then I would point out that Jesus taught that no one can truly love the Lord God, no one can truly delight in the Lord God of Israel, who does not receive Jesus Himself as the Son of God and the Redeemer of the world, sent into the world by Yahweh.

4. And here is the last difference between her way of going at this text and my way of going at this text. Her way of handling the relationship between the two halves of the verse is to simply say it is cause-effect. If you delight, then you get your desires. Or if you devote yourself to good, then you get good.

Now I think the relationship is, yes, cause-effect, but more than cause-effect. I think delighting yourself in the Lord is what shapes the desires of your heart so that it will be good for you for God to grant them. In other words, there are a lot of desires in our hearts that are impure and unwise, and this is not a promise that, if you delight in God, then you get all

*those evil desires in your heart. And the best way to bring the desires of our hearts into conformity with God is to put all of our energy and all of our effort into enjoying God Himself. When we enjoy God, not just His gifts, but God Himself, then the desires of our heart are shaped, are defined and created, in accord with our delight in Him.*

Agree? Disagree? Let us know!