

Pastor Lentz, Can You Clarify Your Comments to Oprah?

Pastor Lentz, as you know, I've tried on several occasions to reach out to you privately (most recently this week), but without a response, so I'm asking you publicly if you would please clarify your recent comments made to Oprah Winfrey.

Specifically, do you believe people can have a relationship with God outside of Jesus or even while rejecting Jesus? Do you believe that people are lost if they do not know Jesus as Lord?

Of course, there were other issues that came up during the interview, and I was troubled by your (hesitant) affirmation of the Holy Spirit as impersonal "divine energy" (Oprah's words), which leads to further confusion and unbiblical error. But that is minor compared to the confusion that has arisen through your answers to Oprah's direct questions, questions which she asked for obvious reasons.

I'm aware that many of your critics only heard snippets of the interview, and they might not have heard you say (beginning at about 30:55 of the interview) that "once you've began this relationship with God, you've repented of your sin, you have bowed your knee, you have surrendered to what, you know, the reality of the gospel is."

And perhaps they didn't hear you say (beginning at about 16:55) that the No. 1 question people need to answer is, "Who is Jesus?"

I appreciated that you proclaimed Jesus as everything, as God, as the answer, as the sacrifice, as the atonement, as the way in. And you stated clearly that you don't see Jesus as an option or as a good guy or as moralist. Well said!

You also stated that you see Jesus as salvation, and that when you read the Bible, it demands a verdict. And yes, you said that “Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life,” quoting John 14:6, but you somehow left out the rest of the verse (twice in the interview, in fact).

In other words, you never quoted His words that “no one comes to the Father except through Me.”

I trust that’s what you believe, but does Oprah know that? Does her audience know that?

It appears that you are a sincere soul winner, and I’ve read stories about how you share the gospel with non-believing journalists who interview you, even following up with them months later with personal texts, encouraging them to turn to the Lord.

And I think it’s incredible that you have such an open door with so many celebrities and athletes and people in “high places.” Wonderful!

I also want you to know that I’m not one of those shouting from the rooftops that you are a false teacher and heretic. After your interview with Oprah, many more are saying that very thing.

To be sure, I’ve had serious concerns about some public comments you’ve made in the past, and, as you know, I’ve reached out to you in private (without success) and then shared my constructive criticism publicly for the good of the body—and hopefully, for your good as well.

But I do this only to serve you as a brother rather than to hurt you as an enemy.

The fact is, God has given you a great platform to reach millions of people—not just in New York City, where I was born, but around the world, through Oprah and others—and

therefore your words could bring life or death, truth or deception. What will it be?

As you know, Oprah is anything but a born-again follower of Jesus, and many of her followers adhere to her New Age beliefs, so in a setting like her TV show, with her massive audience, the clarity of your words is even more important. Do you agree?

And this is where I have my serious questions for you.

Oprah asked you, "Do you have to be a Christian to believe in God?"

You answered immediately, "No," before explaining, "Our thing is to point people to say, 'Hey, if you allow God, if you will bow your knee and admit your need of God,' and if you do that, and you say, 'Lord ... there's a moment where my repentance matters, and it's right now, and I'm handing over the keys,' if you do that, God can drive this better than you can. ... In that moment, there's a rescue, a salvation, that you can't counterfeit any other way."

Of course, there's ambiguity in Oprah's question, since many people believe in God but do not believe in Jesus, but given Oprah's audience and given her presuppositions, did you mislead them with your answer?

Again, I appreciate you speaking of people's need for God, of repentance and surrender, of rescue and salvation, but do you believe people are lost without Jesus? What are the people rescued from?

Could you kindly clarify if you believe that all people who do not put their trust in Jesus as Lord are "dead in [their] trespasses and sins ... following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience ... by nature children of wrath"? (Eph. 2:1-3).

Do you believe that Oprah, in her present estate, is bound to divine judgment and eternal destruction? If so, does she know that you believe that? Do her viewers know? Or have you misled them (even unintentionally) with empty and deceptive words?

In Acts 24, Paul spoke with Felix and his wife Drusilla “about faith in Christ Jesus” (Acts 24:24).

What exactly did he share with them? Let’s remember that Drusilla was a trophy wife to Felix, who violated the laws of God and man to marry her.

Luke records, “As he lectured about righteousness, self-control, and the coming judgment, Felix was afraid and answered, ‘For now, leave! When time permits, I will send for you’” (Acts 24:25).

My brother, do you think that Paul knew something about reaching the lost that you and I could learn from?

Did you give Oprah and her audience any reason to be alarmed?

Did you clearly speak to her and to them about “righteousness and self-control and the coming judgment”?

Is this part of your message on faith in Christ Jesus?

And to ask again, does her audience know that they are lost and under judgment without the Savior?

Please understand that I’m not trying to nitpick and take your words out of context, but during a 45-minute interview, was there a reason that you never clearly spoke of judgment, of salvation only through Jesus, of the life-and-death nature of the gospel?

When Oprah asked you, “Do you believe that only Christians can be in a relationship with God,” you replied, “No, I believe that when Jesus said that ‘I am the way, the truth and the life’—the way I read that, Jesus said that He is the road

marker, He is the map.”

My dear brother, please read your own words again. When one of the most influential women on the planet asked you if only Christians can be in a relationship with God you answered no.

Is that what you really believe? If not, would you publicly and clearly correct this, being sure that Oprah is the first to know?

You spoke of Jesus as the road marker and the map, but what happens if we miss the road marker and don't follow the map? What are the consequences of rejecting the one who is “the way, the truth and the life”?

You also said “So, I think that God loves people so much that whether they accept or reject Him, He's still gracious and He's still moving, and He's still giving you massive red blinking lights, for chances to take a right turn where maybe you'd take a left. I believe God loves people.”

Of course, I agree with you that God still loves people even if they reject Him and that He puts “massive red blinking lights” in their path to call them to stop and get right with Him. But you told Oprah plainly (along with her massive audience) that people other than Christians can have a relationship with God.

Honestly, I don't think you believe that, but since you said it, I understand why your critics are calling you a heretic, and I trust you can understand their concerns.

But I'm not asking you to respond for the sake of your critics, whom you'll never totally satisfy, but rather for the sake of the body of Christ and the world.

So here are the most pressing questions:

1. Are people lost without Jesus?
2. Can people have a true relationship with God outside of

Jesus?

If you can't answer these simply and clearly (obviously, yes to No. 1 and no to No. 2), then I do have grave concerns about your message, and my optimism is misplaced.

But if you affirm the basic New Testament gospel, then I urge you to use your platform to shout that message to the world and to ask Oprah for the opportunity to clarify your beliefs to her and her audience. Otherwise, if you have given lost sinners a false sense of security, their blood is on your hands.

It is possible, of course, that if you speak the truth clearly and unambiguously, you will lose your platform with Oprah and your friendship with some celebrities. But I'm sure you'll agree that it's better to have the favor of God than the favor of man.

Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, "Enter at the narrow gate, for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who are going through it, because small is the gate and narrow is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it" (Matt. 7:13-14).

Oprah preaches the wide-gate "gospel," which leads to destruction. Which gospel do you preach?

I, along with perhaps millions of others, are looking forward to your response.

And I'll say it again: I'm here to help, not to hurt.

Good news! Pastor Lentz reached out to me today and is eager to answer my questions and make his positions clear. I hope to follow up with his answers within the next week.