

What Joel Osteen Has in Common With the Pope and the President

What do the pope, the president and the megachurch preacher have in common? It almost sounds like a joke and it might even be funny—if the punch line wasn't so disturbing. What the pope, the president and at least one megachurch preacher seemingly have in common is a refusal to judge homosexuality.

Joel Osteen is making headlines this week for his comments on accepting gays just the way they are. But before we get into that, let's look at the megachurch preacher's forerunners: the pope and the president. What you'll discover is a disturbing trend among world and church leaders that I believe clearly marks a sign of the end times (2 Tim. 3).

"If a person is gay and seeks God and has good will, who am I to judge him?" the pope said in an 80-minute conversation with journalists in July. That comment set off a firestorm of debate among Christian leaders. Ron Cantor said the pope's comments are not biblical, while Larry Tomczak insisted we should not judge **Pope Francis** for not judging gays.

But the popular pontiff didn't stop with one controversial statement. In September, he shocked the church and thrilled much of the world when he declared that we must shake off an obsession with teachings on abortion, contraception and homosexuality or risk the collapse of its entire moral edifice, "like a house of cards."

Then there's **President Obama**. This week the liberal chief commander celebrated the pope's comments on shaking off the obsession with abortion, contraception and homosexuality teachings. He told CNBC, "I tell you, I have been hugely impressed with the pope's announcements."

But what struck me most was Joel Osteen's comments to *HuffPost Live* host Josh Zepps about the pope and gays this week. The megachurch preacher, whom HuffPo describes as a "spiritual star," was on the show to talk about his new book *Break Out! 5 Keys to Go Beyond Your Barriers and Live an Extraordinary Life*.

Zepps read a line out of Osteen's book: "It doesn't matter who likes you or doesn't like you, all that matters is that God likes you. He accepts you. He approves of you." Zepps then asked Osteen if that was true of homosexuals.

"Absolutely," Osteen said. "I believe that God breathed life into every person and that every person is made in the image of God, and you have accept them as they are on their journey. I'm not here to preach hate or push people down."

Osteen also said, "We're not trying to make this a little bitty narrow thing. Anybody's welcome. We may not agree 100 percent on doctrine and theology, but the Catholic Church, our church, it's open for everybody. ... I believe God is big and His mercy is very wide."

Amen to the truth that God is big and His mercy is very wide. But isn't there a difference between welcoming all into the church and tolerating unrepentant sin, whether it's adultery, homosexuality or some other behavior? Isn't helping someone overcome sinful patterns different than accepting them as they are in the name of love or inclusiveness or even tolerance?

And wasn't it Jesus who said the way is narrow? Indeed, His exact words were: "Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it" (Matt. 7:13-14).

Of course, there's a huge difference between the pope and the president. Francis is not lobbying for **gay marriage** while

Obama is doing everything in his presidential power—and perhaps beyond his presidential power—to make gay rights the new civil rights. So far as Osteen, I think his heart is full of love for everyone, but his statements trouble me.

We have to love the sinner but not accept the sin. God is love, but He hates sin. We are called to everybody, but that doesn't mean we accept their lifestyles. We don't have to agree 100 percent on doctrine and theology, but we do need to agree on the fundamental doctrines of Christ. When Joel Osteen, as influential as he is, makes these sorts of statements about accepting gays as they are, I fear it sends the wrong message to a lost and dying world he's trying so hard to lead to Christ.

Jennifer LeClaire is news editor at Charisma. She is also the author of several books, including *The Spiritual Warrior's Guide to Defeating Jezebel*. You can email Jennifer at @ or visit her website [here](#). You can also join Jennifer on Facebook or follow her on Twitter.