

Why You Should Stop Hating on Celebrity Pastors Like Joel Osteen

Over the past few years I have noticed a disturbing trend with so-called “celebrity pastors” – the trend actually isn’t related to them, but rather the hatred that is thrown towards them on a regular basis.

Whether it’s Billy Graham, Joel Osteen, Carl Lentz, or Rich Wilkerson Jr., there always seem to be certain pastors that garner more attention and notoriety than others. While I don’t agree whole heartedly with each of these pastors’ doctrine, preaching style or opinions, I do think that they each of them have the capability to bring people to Christ.

Additionally, I do not believe that they deserve to be demonized simply because they have been labeled as popular, cool, modern, hip or famous. Instead, I believe they deserve our support, because they are reaching people that no one else can.

People like to condemn these pastors and others like them for their celebrity status when in reality being a celebrity isn’t exactly something you can control. It isn’t like they all woke up one day and said, “I think I’ll become a famous celebrity pastor.” Becoming famous should never be the goal of a pastor, but if it occurs while trying to reach people that generally means you will reach even more people.

I believe that many people who are against these kinds of pastors fail to realize that Jesus also dealt with an unwanted celebrity status as he traveled to preach the Good News (Mark 1:28).

While Jesus didn’t desire fame or notoriety, He didn’t reject

the crowds. Instead, He used it as an opportunity to reach more people. He often preached where crowds of thousands would gather (Luke 12:1, John 6:2).

Watering Down the Gospel

One accusation that is commonly made about celebrity pastors is that they are “watering down the Gospel” and handing out licenses to sin. It is wrongly assumed that just because you have a growing, thriving church then you obviously are just telling people what they want to hear.

What if it wasn't that, but rather it is because someone is preaching what people need to hear – **about the love and grace of Jesus Christ.**

If the apostles drew crowds in the thousands and saw their numbers increasing daily (Acts 16:5), why would we not expect to see the church grow in similar fashion today?

Discrediting a church and a pastor for its popularity and large attendance is equally wrong as discrediting another for its unpopularity and small attendance. What truly matters is the heart of the church and whose name is being glorified.

Guilty by Association

I have also seen people condemn celebrity pastors for simply spending time with pop icons and celebrities with a not-so-perfect public image. Pastor Rich Wilkerson Jr. officiated Kim Kardashian and Kanye West's wedding and recently Justin Bieber was baptized by Pastor Carl Lentz.

What seems to happen is that people find these pastors “guilty by association.” I think this is a rash sense of judgment. And beyond that I feel that those who are condemning celebrity pastors for hanging out with a rough crowd are forgetting that Jesus spent the most time with those that the religious crowd had deemed as “sinners” during His ministry.

In Luke 15:2 there is a group of Pharisees complaining about the crowd Jesus is spending time with by proclaiming “This man receives sinners and eats with them.”

There are two incredible meanings to this:

1. We know that we are all sinners in one sense, but the term “sinners” to the Pharisees meant something different. To them, a “sinner” was anyone who lived a **publicly immoral lifestyle**.
2. When the verse says Jesus receives sinners **and eats with them**, this means much more than just tolerating them so that He can tell them how horrible they are. Eating with someone in this time era had serious social connotations. Jesus dined with them, because He wanted to reach the unreachable. Jesus was more concerned with their hearts than the opinions and judgment of the religious crowd.

Just as Jesus made it His mission to reach the unreachable, I believe we should thank God for these pastors who are reaching the unreachable in our culture. If someone like Wilkerson wasn't pastoring Kim Kardashian and Kanye West, then who would? If Lentz and Judah Smith weren't putting efforts towards mentoring Justin Bieber, then who would? With fans numbering in the millions think about the impact that these celebrities could make should they start pointing people towards Christ.

And you might be thinking that these celebrities and pastors just do it for the publicity or that they never talk about Jesus, but I beg to differ. The *Los Angeles Times* wouldn't title an article “How Justin Bieber turned Staples Center into a megachurch” if there wasn't some kind of fruit being produced.

I also am not claiming that these pastors or the A-List celebrities they are pastoring are perfect. I realize that

there are those who intentionally use Jesus to selfishly elevate their own platform. I also don't agree with everything that celebrity pastors do or say (which is not unusual, because I've never met anyone that I agree with on everything).

We're all imperfect in our attempt to be who we are called to be by God and these so-called "celebrity pastors" are no different. Rather than receiving our judgment, these pastors should be receiving our prayers and support. Regardless of where you are at on this topic, I think we would all be better off to just agree with how Paul says it in Philippians 1:16-17, "whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice." {eo}

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