

Joel Osteen Defends Stance on Hot Button Issues: 'This Is Just Who I Am'

Pastor Joel Osteen—whose “A Night of Hope” event on Saturday drew 50,000 people to Yankee Stadium in New York City—recently spoke about how he deals with controversial issues, meeting Pope Francis, and his views on Christian unity.

The pastor of Lakewood Church in Houston recently said **gay marriage** is “against the rules,” but that he doesn’t want his ministry defined by how he views the issue.

“I think the challenge for me that you have to overcome is they want to go to the hot button issues and for some people, that’s not what my ministry’s about or what I’m about,” Osteen told The Blaze. “It’s just not my focus, so for me it’s easy for me to walk away from an interview and for people to think, ‘That’s just the guy who’s against gays or against some other hot button issue.’

“I try to express myself in a way—‘Here’s what I believe the Scripture says, but it also says love God, love every person, love your neighbor,’ ” he added. “So I just try to find that balance.”

Osteen recognizes that there are people on both sides of the gay marriage issue who may not like his response, but he defended his stance.

“I’d rather get criticized for who I am ... this is just who I am,” he explained. “This is the path I’m supposed to take.”

The megachurch pastor has the challenging job of preaching to more than 40,000 people every week, and he says keeping his sermons fresh is one of the most difficult issues he faces in

ministry.

Osteen takes about three days to prepare, using Wednesday, Thursday and Friday to put his sermon together and reviewing it on Saturday.

He said another challenge is maintaining his personal health.

"You've got to take time to be spiritually healthy, mentally and spiritually as well," he said.

However, he insisted that the benefits of a national ministry far outweigh the downsides.

"There's different approaches," Osteen said. "I just know that my gift is encouragement, hopefully to uplift people."

The preacher also spoke about his meeting with **Pope Francis** at the Vatican on June 5, where he attended an unofficial meeting with Sen. Mike Lee and former U.S. Interior Secretary Dirk Kempthorne. Osteen said it was an "amazing" experience and called the pontiff a "warm, kind man full of joy."

"I went there to expressly feeling for unity and to let [the pope] know that the American pastors support what he's doing," he explained. "I felt honored to be invited."

Osteen said he is on board with the pope's message for unity, explaining that he does not have a problem with theological differences among Christians, but they need to be handled carefully and respectfully.

"There's nothing wrong with denominations, but just don't let it separate us," he said, encouraging people to respect each other regardless of their differences.