

When Twitter Trolls, Fake News, Liberals and Even Evangelicals All Piled on Joel Osteen

Can we talk about this week, the moment when Twitter trolls, fake news, Liberals and even evangelicals all piled on Joel Osteen?

The *New York Post* claimed Lakewood Church and Joel Osteen were turning away flood victims, refusing to lend a helping hand to those in need. The story had everything. Famous preacher, global church, vast resources not being very Christlike by turning away the down and out. It wasn't true.

The story apparently began when a Twitter user started to troll Lakewood and began posting pictures and posts to make it look like the megachurch was turning a blind eye to the mega-suffering in the surrounding streets. That story was then picked up by the *New York Post* as well as other liberal media outlets that were all too happy to throw added fuel on the fire.

The saddest part came when many Christians, ignoring the clear counsel of Scripture to refrain from gossip, began to share it as well. My newsfeed, like yours, was lit up with friends and peers sharing this "fake news". My friends, what were you thinking? This article was poorly sourced and ignored Lakewood's incredible history of caring for their city in times of need. Church, this was not our finest hour! I hope and pray we are all embarrassed by what we've just witnessed within our own ranks.

It is hypocrisy to scream, "fake news, fake news, fake news" when newspapers write an article you disagree with, only to

turn around and post an article from the same outlet that now attacks someone you disagree with. You can't have it both ways.

Honestly, I am convinced the things we share and post say more about us than the person the post is actually about. Facebook certainly believes this. They spend a lot of money to collect this kind of data on each of us. That is something you ought to truly think about. I wonder, what do the secret files of Facebook say about us and the church? I imagine it wouldn't be pretty.

The tragic reality is that while Lakewood was coordinating with their city and working towards relief efforts, they also had to deal with the distraction of trying to manage an out of control story. Sadly, many of us within the church contributed to that mess. We must apologize.

Yes, I realize that I am not writing about all believers. Most, like me, saw the story and chose to ignore it. Most will contend that those who did share it do not represent the church. Here's the problem: They do. How often have we judged other groups by the actions of a few members of that group?

Should we not hold ourselves to the same standard? If we call for those groups to admonish or even condemn the actions of wayward members, shall we not do the same when it falls within our own congregations? We must. And we must show the world how to do so in love with truth and grace.

The real story is the deluge of positive testimonies coming out of the Houston area. They are remarkable, especially coming off the heels of what we witnessed a few weeks ago in Charlottesville. I am not surprised. This is who we Texans are and who I believe most of humanity is. Good-natured people who care deeply for others in times of need. It has been encouraging to watch neighbor help neighbor, even risking their own well-being to save the life of another. Last week they didn't even know each others' names. They may be on

opposite sides of the political isle or hold different religious beliefs. But today, none of that matters. The only thing that was important was saving a life. God bless Texas!

America can learn from this example. Allow me the opportunity to share a good word of advice: When the floodwaters are rising, it's not time to throw jabs at anyone who is currently holding a pail. It's time to grab one of your own.

Perhaps there are two things we can learn from this.

First, assume most of what pops up in your Facebook feed or Twitter feed is likely false or at least misleading. Consider clicking that share button to be the equivalent of you saying, "I wholeheartedly agree with this post, and it fully represents me." That alone may cut down on a ton of social traffic. Good riddance!

Second and more importantly, if you really want to click a button online, how about finding a few donate buttons and sending some funds to the people who have boots on the ground helping and serving those in need. If you shared the false Lakewood story yesterday, perhaps this is a great way to show repentance. In fact, I noticed that Lakewood is receiving donations at this very moment. Imagine that, a fake news story turning out to be a blessing for a church striving to be a blessing to its city. Now that is a story I wouldn't mind sharing!