

Fulton County Gospel News

Good News About Christ And His Church For All Of The World

“. . . Christ is the head of the church: and He is the Savior of the body.” - Ephesians 5:23

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FAILURE TO CORRECT

by Lee Moses

“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for . . . correction”(2 Timothy 3:16).

Every Christian should be thankful for the corrective instruction of God’s word. Were it not for the correction provided by His word, a Christian would be doomed to apostasy and eternal destruction upon his first sin following baptism. Correction is one of the great functions of God’s word. And as Christians are entrusted with the ministry of proclaiming God’s word (2 Timothy 4:2; 2:2), they are Christians who are entrusted with the duty of correction. This is not the duty of “correcting” every person with whom one has a personal disagreement, but of correcting those who err outside of the way of Christ. Yet Christians often fail in this regard: They will sit quietly by as denominationalists stand condemned, they will hold their tongues while false teachers shout forth error, and they will blind themselves to the problem when loved ones have “eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin.” Following are some of the reasons why so many fail with regard to correction.

COMPLEX ABOUT CONFLICT

A necessary prerequisite to correction is *rebuke*. How else is one to be motivated to do right if he does not know that he is doing wrong? However, rebuke is associated with conflict, and many Christians have a complex about conflict. This is not unnatural—Most people do not desire to make enemies. This should especially be so of the Christian, as the Gospel commands, “*If it be*

possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men” (Romans 12:28). Conflict should be neither sought nor desired. But notice that this instruction had to be qualified with “*if it be possible.*”

The same Gospel which commands Christians to live peaceably when possible also commands Christians not to shy away from necessary conflict: “*Ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints*” (Jude 3, emphasis LM). Many other times does the New Testament stress the importance of not shying away from necessary conflict (see Matthew 10:34-35; Ephesians 6:10-17; Titus 1:9-11). Conflict is uncomfortable, but comfort was never to be the first priority for the Christian. Comfort certainly never held priority for Christ. Do we simply tell people what they want to hear so that our happiness of life is not disturbed? Do we allow the lost to stay lost just so that we can avoid the headache? As the old covenant instructed Israel, “*Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him*” (Leviticus 19:17). One who refuses to help correct a brother or sister in need of correction demonstrates hatred for that person. Words of praise can be uplifting, but they are not always what is appropriate.

He that saith unto the wicked, Thou are righteous; him shall the people curse, nations shall abhor him: But to them that rebuke him shall be delight, and a good blessing shall come upon them (Proverbs 24:24-25).

Correction is a two-way blessing—a blessing is pronounced by God upon the giver of correction as well as upon the willing recipient (James 5:19-20). A Christian should not let a complex about conflict prohibit him from helping another soul either to see or to reclaim the light of salvation.

APATHY TO ERROR

The majority of the world has always followed error. The twenty-first century world is a world marked by so many differences and shades of error that it can be easy to become tolerant of the “lesser error.” When a Christian is surrounded by those who are members of denominations, and then comes in contact with a member of a liberal church of Christ, there tends to be a bond formed. When a Christian is surrounded by those who deny the Deity of Christ, and then comes in contact with a denominationalist who believes in the Deity of Christ, there tends to be a bond formed. When a Christian is surrounded by those who have no regard for moral living, and then comes in contact with a Muslim who lives morally, there tends to be a bond formed. There is nothing wrong with forming such bonds of friendship, but if a Christian is led to believe that the importance of this friendship prohibits him from helping to correct his friend’s error, he is bound by an “unequal yoke” (2 Corinthians 6:14). As well, he is really not being much of a friend at all: “*Open rebuke is better than secret love. Faithful are the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful*” (Prov. 27:5-6).

Some have a fervent desire to combat what they consider serious error, but they are willing to spiritually team with those who are in lesser error in order to defeat serious error. Those who are in error are in darkness, and

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Christians are to *“have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them”* (Ephesians 5:11). Can one be apathetic about error when fellowshipping it and refusing to correct it violates the commandments of God? Can one be apathetic about error when the one following error stands condemned? There is certainly a wise, kind, and judicious way of correcting error; but it must be done.

INDIFFERENCE TO INIQUITY

There is nothing in the world more serious than sin. By sin man's perfect fellowship with God was destroyed (Genesis 3:23-24); by sin death has become the lot of every man and woman since (Romans 5:12; Heb. 9:27); and by one's own sin will one condemn himself to eternal torment (Matthew 25:41-46). Sin is most certainly not to be taken lightly.

Oftentimes people who are in sin are at least tentatively conscious of their situation. This puts others in a position where one who cares about that person's situation can truly help

him; but those who are indifferent to iniquity can greatly harm him. Once a formerly ignorant person's conscience is better instructed, it can motivate that person to remove himself from sin. However, if a person's conscience is instructed that his sin is acceptable, it is much more difficult to correct later. What do we tell people when they ask us about the sin in which they are involved? Do we help them—or harm them? As brethren J.W. McGarvey and Philip Pendleton wrote, “Conscience is one of God's greatest gifts, and he that destroys it [for example, by telling someone he is O.K. when he is not, LM] must answer for it” (*The Fourfold Gospel*, p. 76).

We spend time in God's word so that we will not be indifferent to iniquity in ourselves (Psalm 119:11)—neither let us be indifferent to iniquity in others.

SHORTCOMINGS OF SELF

Oftentimes, we have so many problems of sin within ourselves that we feel we are unable and unqualified to correct such problems in others. We feel hypocritical trying to correct others when we ourselves are in need of correction. On one hand, this is proper reasoning. One who is guilty of a sin has no business condemning others guilty of the same sin (Romans 2:1). One who has serious sin in his life, or a “beam” in his eye, is not qualified to help another with a small “mote” in his eye (Matthew 7:1ff). Only those who are “spiritual” are entrusted with restoring one who is overtaken in a fault (Galatians 6:1).

While one's sinful shortcomings of self may indeed disable and disqualify one from helping another correct his sins, this does not excuse him from his Christian duty to *“consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works”* (Hebrews 10:24). Similarly, one who is blemished by sin may be unable to worship God acceptably (1 Corinthians 11:29; 1 Peter 3:12), but this still does not excuse him from his Christian duty to worship God *“in spirit and in truth”* (John 4:24). If in any way our shortcomings of self

hinder us from performing our Christian duty, it also becomes doubly our Christian duty to eliminate those shortcomings, through the grace of God.

CONCLUSION

Jesus came to earth *“to seek and to save that which was lost”* (Luke 19:10). The apostle Paul preached the Gospel of Jesus Christ in order that he might *“present every man perfect in Christ Jesus”* (Colossians 1:28). He was deeply grieved while there were souls dwelling outside of Christ, removed from the salvation found only in Him (see Romans 10:1; 2 Timothy 2:10). Each of us should have similar motivation to help souls make the corrections necessary to be found in Christ when the final trumpet sounds. Correction begins with ourselves and with our families, carrying over to all those whom we might have the opportunity to help. This may be through stern rebuke, mild chastening, or simply presenting a statement of truth; but it is always to be done with grace and love for God, for the truth, and for the soul in need of correction (Colossians 4:6; Ephesians 4:15).

What causes our failure to correct? Does a complex about conflict hinder us from correcting those in need? Correction may require conflict, but remember,

Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins (James 5:19-20).

Are other hindrances keeping us from correcting? A Christian cannot have apathy to error or indifference to iniquity when such is what separates souls from God. Shortcomings of self, while they obviously do hinder one from correcting others, do not provide an *excuse* for a failure to correct. Correction is a Christian's duty, and if we are failing in this regard, we need to correct ourselves.

THE “PROSPERITY GOSPEL”

by Chris Perry

Every so often, as I am surfing through the channels on my television, I will run across Joel Osteen. His big-toothed smile always beams across the cable lines, and his message always seems to be the same. But it must be a popular message—the television broadcast of Lakewood Church’s services reaches 100 million homes, and Osteen’s book *Your Best Life Now* was a New York Times Best Seller.

An interview on *Larry King Live* a couple of years ago provided a glimpse into the heart of Joel Osteen’s message. There is no doubt that Mr. Osteen is genuine in what he says, just as there is no doubt that he earnestly desires to provide some type of guidance to those who hear him. However, after reading the transcript of that interview several times, I could not help but notice several areas in which the teachings of Joel Osteen—and many others like him—fall short of Biblical demands.

First, one cannot help but be taken aback by Osteen’s aversion—not just *avoidance* but *aversion*—to anything remotely related to doctrine. Time and again, Larry King attempts to provoke a position statement from the “smiling preacher,” only to be met with a watered-down response or a direct dismissal. Notice Osteen’s noncommittal attitude after being asked, “But don’t you think if people don’t believe as you believe, they’re somehow condemned?”:

You know, I think that happens in our society. But I try not to do that. I tell people all the time, preached a couple Sundays about it. I’m for everybody. You may not agree with me, *but to me it’s not my job to try to straighten everybody out.* The Gospel called the good news. My message is a message of hope, that’s God’s for you. You can live a good

life no matter what’s happened to you. And so I don’t know. *I know there is condemnation but I don’t feel that’s my place* (emphasis mine throughout this article, CP)¹

Admittedly, Joel Osteen, even if he were to voice his beliefs, would not come down on the Biblical side of such teachings as salvation, worship, etc. But he’s not even willing to stand up for the denominational version of these ideals! Larry King followed a question regarding belief with the following:

KING: What if you’re Jewish or Muslim, you don’t accept Christ at all?

OSTEEN: You know, *I’m very careful about saying who would and wouldn’t go to heaven. I don’t know...*

KING: If you believe you have to believe in Christ? They’re wrong, aren’t they?

OSTEEN: *Well, I don’t know if I believe they’re wrong.* I believe here’s what the Bible teaches and from the Christian faith this is what I believe. But I just think that only God will judge a person’s heart. *I spent a lot of time in India with my father. I don’t know all about their religion. But I know they love God. And I don’t know. I’ve seen their sincerity. So I don’t know.* I know for me, and what the Bible teaches, I want to have a relationship with Jesus.

Every time King confronts him with a question that hits the Biblical bedrock, Osteen stammers and shimmies his way out of the question. His answer to the all-important problem of human suffering is “I don’t know Larry. I don’t know it all” (which is true to an extent, but his knowledge seems horribly limited). Osteen’s favorite filler statement in this interview is “I don’t know...,” and truly he doesn’t appear to know much of anything. But God’s Word provides a different picture. Jesus

taught, “*And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free*” (John 8:32), and He commanded His followers to “*Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit*” (Matthew 28:19). Paul commanded Timothy to “*preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine*” (2 Timothy 4:2). To be sure, Paul’s picture of preaching as 2/3 negative is vastly different from Osteen’s smiling motivational lectures.

Just as disturbing as Osteen’s lack of knowledge and concern for the core truths of the Gospel is his focus on material success. Consider this exchange between King and Osteen:

OSTEEN: I think, I hear it meaning a lot of different things. One I think a lot of it is that I’m not condemning people. And I don’t know, but Larry I talk, I mean every week in our church we’re dealing with people that are fighting cancer, that have their lost loved ones. That are going through a divorce. I mean, I talk about those issues, and to me I don’t see how it can get any more, you know, real than that. So I don’t know what the criticism is.

KING: What is the prosperity gospel?

OSTEEN: I think the prosperity gospel in general is – well I don’t know. I hear it too. I don’t know. I think what sometimes you see is it’s just all about money. That’s not what I believe. It’s the attitude of your heart, and so you know, we believe – *but I do believe this, that God wants us to be blessed. He wants us to be able to send our kids to college, excel in our careers. But prosperity to me, Larry, is not just money, it’s having health. What good is money if you don’t have health?*

KING: Also many in the Christian belief are wary of too much material, aren't they?

OSTEEN: Yeah, I think some of them are. But to me, you know, I hope people get blessed if they can handle it right. *Because it takes money to do good. You know to do things for people. To spread the good news. So I think it's all a matter of your heart.*

Though Mr. Osteen attempts to do the old Texas two-step around the issue, it's clear to see his focus is on the material rather than the physical. Those who listen in ignorance to Osteen's messages cannot help but get the impression that righteousness equals wealth. Preachers of his breed are merely reproducing the philosophy of Job's friends: *"Remember, I pray thee, who ever perished, being innocent? Or where were the righteous cut off?"* (Job 4:7). However, such a materialistic view of God's blessings is full of serious holes in light of the nature of the world. How many who have bought into such philosophies end up echoing the sentiments of the Psalmist: *"For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked"* (Psalm 73:3)? Joel Osteen might have trouble gaining support for his prosperity gospel from the literally millions of New Testament Christians here and in foreign lands who labor to get by from day to day *yet remain faithful to God*. To be sure, God has promised the faithful Christian the necessities of life (Matthew 6:25-33), and those who abide by godly principles will fare better than those in similar circumstances who do not, but the focus of the Gospel message is salvation of the soul, not of the bank account (Matthew 6:19-21).

The crux of this issue is simple: Joel Osteen and others of his mold provide what the masses want to hear. With "itching ears" (2 Timothy 4:3) people in general want someone "preaching" to them who will not challenge them to improve or rebuke them for their sin, but who will stroke

their fragile egos and reinforce their beliefs that if they work hard and are more or less good people, they will be blessed materially. Sadly, there is so much lacking in that message that mankind desperately needs.

Friend, are you spending your Sundays listening to someone who pats your head but whose best answer to the serious questions is, "I don't know"? Are you longing for the breath of fresh air that only the pure Gospel represents? Find a faithful congregation of the Lord's church and submit to God's authority in your life. Become a Christian, or dear Christian, thirst for truth. Long for the only prosperity that will last—spiritual prosperity.

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¹ See full transcript at <http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0506/20/lkl.01.html>

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GOD'S AUTHORIZED WORSHIP

- COLOSSIANS 3:17

1. **LORD'S SUPPER** - The New Testament and early church history record that Christians met on the first day of every week (Sunday) to worship God and remember Christ (Acts 20:7; I Corinthians 11:23-34; 16: 1-2).
2. **PRAYERS** - (Acts 2:42; Philippians 4:6-7; I Thessalonians 5:17-18).
3. **SINGING** - God's word authorizes only vocal music and specifically singing (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16; Hebrews 2:12). The New Testament shows no use of mechanical instruments of music in worship to God by the church Christ established. Church history notes no such use for nearly 700 years after the New Testament was completed. It is an innovation of men, not of God.
4. **GIVING** - Free-willed, cheerful, generous, and every week (Acts 20:35; I Corinthians 16:1-2; 2 Corinthians 8 & 9).
5. **PREACHING OF THE WORD** - The gospel of Christ, not men's doctrines nor entertainment, saves and strengthens us (Acts 2:42; 20:7; Romans 10:17; I Corinthians 1:18-23).

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