

Just Be Happy

Victoria Osteen is the wife of Joel Osteen and is listed as the co-pastor with her husband of the Lakewood Church in Houston. A video clip went viral (August, 2014) in which she said, “I just want to encourage every one of us to realize when we obey God, we’re not doing it for God—I mean, that’s one way to look at it—we’re doing it for ourselves, because God takes pleasure when we’re happy. That’s the thing that gives Him the greatest joy. So, I want you to know this morning: Just do good for your own self. Do good because God wants you to be happy. When you come to church, when you worship Him, you’re not doing it for God really. You’re doing it for yourself, because that’s what makes God happy. Amen?”

The response to this in Evangelical circles has been tempestuous. Many more have risen up to denounce her remarks than those who have defended them. It is easy to focus on the “being happy” aspect and miss all else that she had to say.

What Victoria Osteen had to say is the real element of the message from the Lakewood pulpit. “It’s all about you. If you are happy, then God is happy. Worship is all about you. Just be happy” is the bottom line. Many Evangelicals are labeling her statement as “heretical” and the “hedonist gospel” among other things.

Let me say that certainly God wants us to be happy. However, that would be a secondary result of His wishes. The primary desire that God has for us is **salvation from our sins**. The Osteen’s will not say this because pointing out that some are lost in sin might not be a happy thing.

Jesus came and died for sinners in that they be saved from sin, not just to be happy (Rom. 3:23; Jn. 3:16; Lk. 19:10; 1 Tim. 1:15; Rom. 5:6-10; Rom. 6:23). Being freed from sin will surely produce appreciation and bring happiness to the free. But this is not part of the Osteen message.

Is this not similar to the Positive Mental Attitude approach that was so popular a few years ago? We have been told that the focus should all be on the positive and let not the negative be heard and the Osteen’s practice this. We have probably witnessed where the object of worship has shifted from God to the audience. Victoria Osteen’s words are just one proof of that. Is the old gospel message of sin and salvation ringing out from pulpits? It may be, but can it be heard above the circus/rock concert atmosphere today?

Is the Lord's church immune from this? I wish it were so. Yet, it has happened in the past and is probably happening now. I wonder how many members of the church can read or hear Victoria Osteen's words and then agree with her that the most important thing is just be happy with yourself and do not pay any attention to that pesky obedience stuff.

May I be so bold as to suggest that our aim ought to be to please—not ourselves, but God. “Finally then, brethren, we request and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us instruction as to how you ought to walk and please God (just as you actually do walk), that you excel still more” (1 Thess. 4:1). The knowledge that our walk (which necessarily includes obedience) pleases God is what should please us (Heb. 13:20-21).