

16. False piety

November 16, 2014

This August, Victoria Osteen, wife of megachurch pastor Joel Osteen, said this: "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," she said this with her husband smiling at her side in approval. "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," she continued. "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?" Their congregation cheered.

I'd have loved to have an opportunity to ask Victoria Osteen where in the Bible she found this blasphemous phony theology. Her feel-good and all-about-me heresy was echoed by the false prophets of the time of Jeremiah. Throughout the Book of Jeremiah, the true godly prophet Jeremiah had warned the Israel people to take heed what he told them through the power of the Holy Spirit that they were about to be exiled to Babylon due to their disobedience to the Lord and idol worship. But the false prophets chanted "Peace," in their false prophecies:

Jeremiah 23:16-18 Thus says the Lord of hosts: "Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you. They make you worthless; They speak a vision of their own heart, Not from the mouth of the Lord. 17 They continually say to those who despise Me, 'The Lord has said, "You shall have peace"; And to everyone who walks according to the dictates of his own heart, they say, 'No evil shall come upon you.'"

A few verses below from there, the Lord spoke about these false prophets:

Jeremiah 23:32 Behold, I am against those who prophesy false dreams," says the Lord, "and tell them, and cause My people to err by their lies and by their recklessness. Yet I did not send them or command them; therefore they shall not profit this people at all," says the Lord.

As many of you already know, this once-great country USA is heading for a fatal tragic ending like all the other nations around the world with the exception of Israel. This is not a twisted-minded preacher's cynical comment, rather it is from the Lord's Word, the Bible.

America is following the exact same self destructive pattern of the ancient Israel that was blessed by the Lord beyond anyone's imagination as long as they obeyed Him and followed His commands. But when they disobeyed Him and worshiped the pagan idols, He allowed them to have their ways and suffered the consequences of their carnal choices.

America was more blessed than any other countries around the world because our founding fathers honored the Lord and put Him in their first priority in every aspect of their lives including the politics. But now America is only a few steps away from becoming a completely Godless nation. Don't think that the midterm election brought a favor to the Lord because He had to be a member of the Tea Party or at least a Republican. He is neither.

Instead of speaking the truth of God, there are many pastors and Bible teachers who would teach their "Everything-Is-Hunky-Dory" heresies, like Joel and Victoria Osteen, the Emergent Movement teachers, the Prosperity Gospel teachers, etc. What they are really concerned about is not their congregation's spiritual condition, rather their own pocket books. As long as they teach those heresies, naive and biblically ignorant people would flock around their churches and support them.

The ancient Israel people whom we are going to study went through their religious rituals to make themselves feel more spiritual and secure, but the Lord did not listen to them. In many churches in America the same thing is happening. They would have fancy worship team and band coupled with laser beams and digital lights like concerts; they might feed the hungry people and cloth them in the name of God; they even fast and pray. But the Lord will reject them because of their heresies and disobedience and tell them something they don't expect:

Matthew 7:21-23 "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. 22 Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' 23 And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'

A. FASTING IN GOD'S WAY

Isaiah 58:1-7 "Cry aloud, spare not; Lift up your voice like a trumpet; Tell My people their transgression, And the house of Jacob their sins. 2 Yet they seek Me daily, And delight to know My ways, As a nation that did righteousness, And did not forsake the ordinance of their God. They ask of Me the ordinances of justice; They take delight in approaching God. 3 'Why have we fasted,' they say, 'and You have not seen? Why have we afflicted our souls, and You take no notice?' "In fact, in the day of your fast you find pleasure, And exploit all your laborers. 4 Indeed you fast for strife and debate, And to strike with the fist of wickedness. You will not fast as you do this day, To make your voice heard on high. 5 Is it a fast that I have chosen, A day for a man to afflict his soul? Is it to bow down his head like a bulrush, And to spread out sackcloth and ashes? Would you call this a fast, And an acceptable day to the Lord? 6 "Is this not the fast that I have chosen: To loose the bonds of wickedness, To undo the heavy burdens, To let the oppressed go free, And that you break every yoke? 7 Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, And that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; When you see the naked, that you cover him, And not hide yourself from your own flesh?"

The Jews were commanded to observe only one fast on the annual Day of Atonement according to the Book of Leviticus 16, but they were permitted to fast personally if they wished. But these Jewish people at the time of Isaiah complained that nobody seemed to notice that they were fasting. Perhaps they were trying to "buy God's blessing" with their fasting. Worshiping God involves more than observing an outward ritual; there must be an inward obedience and submission to the Lord.

Matthew 6:16-18 "Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. 17 But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, 18 so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.

What is the definition of fasting? Fasting is voluntary abstinence from food to spend the meal time in prayer with mourning of repentance or intercession.

Listen, fasting and prayer are frequently found together in Scripture, because fasting is a preparation for concentrated and humble prayer. Of itself, fasting is no guarantee that God will bless, because fasting must be accompanied by sincere humility and brokenness before the Lord. If fasting is only a formal religious ritual, it accomplishes no spiritual purpose other than empty stomachs and prideful hearts.

True fasting will lead to humility before God and ministry to others. We deprive food from ourselves so that we might share with others and do so to the glory of God. If we fast in order to get something for ourselves from God, instead of becoming better people for the sake of others, then we have missed the meaning of the true worship through fasting. In other words, it is not about us, rather it is about the Lord and serving others contrary to the heresy by Victoria Osteen.

She and her husband Joel Osteen will have to answer to the Lord for what they said and taught and how they misled millions of people.

B. SEPARATED FROM THE LORD

Isaiah 59:1-2 Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, That it cannot save; Nor His ear heavy, That it cannot hear. 2 But your iniquities have separated you from your God; And your sins have hidden His face from you, So that He will not hear.

There was a great deal of injustice in the land of Israel at that time. With the rich exploiting the poor and the rulers using their authority only to make themselves rich. It sounds like what's happening in America today, don't you think? When these rich and powerful people go to the temple, they lifted their hands to worship God in their pretense, but their hands were stained with blood. God could not answer their prayers because their sins hid His face from them.

I shared this with the people at the Midweek service. For those who were there, bear with me. Over the last weekend with several guys from our church, I went to the Men's Conference. It was great. The theme of the conference was "Be Imitators of God" from Ephesians 5. You had to be a total deaf not to hear from the Lord how we are supposed to live because speaker after speaker expounded the Scriptures.

At the breakfast table on Sunday, there was a young man from another Calvary Chapel who told us that he'd like to have fun and dance and go out with girls. So I asked him, "Are you telling me that you'd like to hop in the sack with these unbelieving girls?" He answered, "Yes." I couldn't believe what I was hearing. So I asked him again, "What were you listening to at this conference?" There was absolutely no shame in his part. One of our elders Bob Lehman was sitting next to me and he probably was thinking, "Pastor, calm down. He is not worth killing for."

I saw this young man raising his hands during the worship. But what was the purpose of worshiping the Lord since he had no intention to do what the Lord was telling him to do throughout the conference? Obviously he doesn't realize that his sins separated himself from the Lord and the Lord is not listening to his prayers.

If you are in sin, repent from it. Turn away from your sin. Until then, God will not hear your prayers, not because He chooses not to hear you, rather your sin pushes Him away from you.

Then, some of you who want to be forgiven by the Lord may wonder if your sins can be really forgiven, because your sins are too much.

Isaiah 43:25 "I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake; And I will not remember your sins."

When God forgives and restores His people, He wants you to forget the failures of the past, witness for Him in the present, and claim His promises for the future. Why should we remember that which God has forgotten? He forgives our sins just as He promised and doesn't remember them any more. Yes, our God has a serious Green Valley Moment when it comes to our confessed sins. He FORGETS .

C. THE SALVATION AND JUDGMENT OF GOD

Isaiah 59:16-21 He saw that there was no man, And wondered that there was no intercessor; Therefore His own arm brought salvation for Him; And His own righteousness, it sustained Him. 17 For He put on righteousness as a breastplate, And a helmet of salvation on His head; He put on the garments of vengeance for clothing, And was clad with zeal as a cloak . 18 According to their deeds, accordingly He will repay, Fury to His adversaries, Recompense to His enemies; The coastlands He will fully repay. 19 So shall they fear The name of the Lord from the west, And His glory from the rising of the sun; When the enemy comes in like a flood, The Spirit of the Lord will lift up a standard against him. 20 "The Redeemer will come to Zion, And to those who turn from transgression in Jacob," Says the Lord. 21 "As for Me," says the Lord, "this is My covenant with them: My Spirit who is upon you, and My words which I have put in your mouth, shall not depart from your mouth, nor from the mouth of your descendants, nor from the mouth of your descendants' descendants," says the Lord, "from this time and forevermore."

The Lord patiently waited for the Israel people to turn from their sins and wickedness, but the people ignored Him because they thought they were right with Him since they were religious by sacrificing the animals, lifting their hands at the temple, fasting , etc. But the Lord didn't approve of their empty religious rituals. Because the Lord loved them, He had to discipline them.

While you read v17, you might be thinking the Whole Armor of God from the Book of Ephesians 6. If we don't put on the whole armor of God and fight for His glory in our spiritual battle, the Lord will do it for Himself. But it is His preference to work in and through us, with the whole armor of God.

Recently a US Air Force colonel's column was removed from an Air National Guard newsletter because the writer violated military policy by including references to Jesus Christ and God. Col. Florencio Marquez, the medical group commander of the 180th Fighter Wing, wrote an essay in the September edition of the "Stinger." It was titled, "A Spiritual Journey as a Commander." He wrote about how his mother's faith in Jesus Christ influenced his life and he referenced a Bible verse from the New Testament, "With God all things are possible." To US Air Force, it is against their policy. But USAF expects God to bless them and protect them.

The unbelieving people in the US and around the world think that they are winning over Christianity which reveals their wicked sins. They probably think that Christianity is a dying religion and nothing can stop them from removing it from the history and people's minds. They left a very important person out of their equation – God. They may come after us like flood, but the Lord will protect us from them and Christianity will prevail.

D. APPLICATIONS

- 1) If you feel that the Lord is leading you to fast and pray , do it quietly without any fanfare. It is between you and the Lord.
- 2) We might impress others with our outward religious remark or display , but the Lord sees right through our hypocrisy. Our worship to the Lord must be done in spirit and truth, not as a facade.
- 3) If you are in sin, stop and repent. While you are in sin, the Lord doesn't hear your prayers.