**Is Joel Osteen a “Success”?**

*by Harry Osborne*

What makes one a “success” in life? How one answers that question speaks volumes to that person’s values, priorities, actions and aspirations. Many answer it by the amount of money in their bank account, the size of their stock portfolio, the kind of car they drive, the value of the house they own or some other material measure. Others might measure it by their popularity or fame. Still others might gauge it by the level of entertainment they have enjoyed, the fun activities they have experienced or the number of items crossed off of their “bucket list.” But are any of those measures enduring answers to the question?

God’s answer to what makes one successful is given in Scripture. The book of Ecclesiastes was written by King Solomon who pondered the purpose of life. He sought the answer to success in material wealth, in romantic relations, in seeking both wisdom and folly, in the pursuit of knowledge, in finding honor and acclaim, in enjoying wine and vice – he tried to find fulfillment in every facet of life “under the sun.” Yet, he could not find a lasting answer in this physical realm alone. When the purpose and fulfillment of man were sought only by “life under the sun,” Solomon found it was “vanity of vanities” and “grasping for the wind” (Eccl. 1:2, 14, 17; 2:1, 11; 4:4; 5:10, 16; 12:8; etc.). Life is often fickle and the best of plans and actions sometimes lead to very undesirable ends. So where is success found. After seeking it the wrong way throughout his life, the lasting answer is given by an old king who looks back on his misspent life:

*“Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man’s all. For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil”* (Eccl. 12:13-14).

Jesus gave us the best measure for success in life that has ever been given. What did He give as the measure of whether one is a success or a failure? Our Lord said that one is successful if in Judgement is heard His commendation: *“Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your Lord”* (Matt. 25:21, 23). Failure will be measured by the tragic words of rejection: *“I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!”* (Matt. 7:23). No one is a real success unless so acclaimed by Christ. Humble submission and obedience to Him is the only way to lasting glory (James 4:10). We are successful only if we go to heaven at life’s end and a failure if we do not!

*Success Magazine* describes itself as “a business magazine that puts the focus on personal and professional development.” It asks, “Looking for ways to succeed? This publications offers advice to put you on the right path.” The following article by Adelle Banks for Religious News Service noted the magazine’s acclaim of Joel Osteen, popular mega-church televangelist. I found the criteria interesting:

(RNS) Featured on the February cover of Success magazine, Houston megachurch pastor and best-selling author Joel Osteen says he doesn’t hear the critics of his “prosperity gospel” who say he causes people to focus on themselves instead of God.

 “It seems like I’m naive, but everybody I talk to, they’re saying, ‘You helped me, I like listening to you,’” he [told](http://www.success.com/article/why-joel-osteen-is-the-most-popular-preacher-on-the-planet) Success. “And the stadiums full of people? They’re not coming because they’re critics. They’re coming because you touched their life.”

Osteen tells writer Michael Mooney, in the article that calls him “the most popular minister on the planet,” that precision is one of the keys to his success.

“It’s got to look good, and you’ve got to be precise,” he said of productions such as “A Night of Hope” that he held in San Francisco’s AT&T Park last year with the help of a team of almost 200 people. “There’s so much competing for the viewer’s attention these days.”

Osteen is promoting his latest book, “The Power of I Am,” and recently had a theological discussion on “The Late Show with Stephen Colbert.” Colbert asked how he was going to top God telling Moses “I am that I am.”

Osteen said he was shifting to how people describe themselves after the words “I am.”

“I think there’s power in our words,” he told Colbert. “I think people don’t realize how many times we speak negative things about ourselves.”

It seems that Mr. Osteen’s criteria for self-assessment differ rather radically from our Lord’s basis of judgement. Please notice a few of the differences:

**Mr. Osteen preaches the “prosperity gospel” that promises his followers material riches.** As his followers grow, Mr. Osteen says God will give them greater wealth. Strange, because Jesus Himself was the greatest example we have, yet He was impoverished from start to finish in His life (Luke 9:58). The apostle Paul contrasted his physical poverty with the spiritual purpose, summarizing his circumstances *“as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things”* (2 Cor. 6:10). It is obvious that Jeremiah, the beggar Lazarus and the poor widow commended by Jesus did not follow the “prosperity gospel” of Mr. Osteen.

**Mr. Osteen glories in his popularity noting that everybody He talks to is complimentary of him and his teaching.** But our Lord warned, *“Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for so did their fathers to the false prophets”* (Luke 6:26). Jesus noted that when He came preaching to those in His time, they “hated” Him because their lives differed from the demands of His truth (Jn. 15:18-25; 3:19-20; 19:6).

**Mr. Osteen’s new book proclaims “The Power of I Am,” the human “I Am” that is and not the Great “I Am”** (Exod. 3:14; Jn. 8:58). No, the power does not come from our self-esteem. The fact is that each of us, at our very best, on the basis of our own merit are merely unprofitable servants (Luke 17:10) and sinners (Rom. 3:23) worthy of death (Rom. 6:23). The **power** to change our lives is not is us, but in His gospel (Rom. 1:16-17). The high evaluation of self is a warning sign of destruction, but humility produces true wisdom (Prov. 16:18; 11:2). God promised, "I dwell in the high and holy place, with him who has a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones" (Isa. 57:15). Thus, we are instructed, “Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others” (Phil. 2:3-4).

In short, Mr. Osteen shows a philosophy that differs drastically from the doctrine of Christ. Mr. Osteen urges attitudes and actions that will not lead us to true success, but to eternal failure. Faithfulness to the Lord and His truth, regardless of the cost, is what will bring us to true success (Rev. 2:10; 2 Tim. 4:7-8; 1:12).