

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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A TRANSFORMED MIND IS A STEADFAST MIND

This past Tuesday saw the release of “Christian” celebrity Joel Osteen’s new book *I Declare: 31 Promises to Speak Over Your Life*. The book is broken into 31 segments, as Osteen uses the structure to convince readers to focus upon one theme each day over the course of a month. Throughout the book, Osteen, who has become the most prominent advocate of the prosperity Gospel puts the latest spin on the Word of Faith heresy (note the title of the book). Individuals are encouraged to make specific declarations surrounding their personal lives and faiths. Osteen nowhere suggests that one has to have saving faith in Christ to secure these blessings from God. In fact, Osteen has openly said, “I don’t want to just preach to Christians. I feel I have a broader message. I’d like to think that I can help people who don’t even go to church.” Not surprising, given Osteen’s emphasis on happiness and success strictly in terms of such things as a better job, better house, better car, better career. His latest book simply repeats what he said in his earlier books. Osteen, over and over again, points to himself as *the* example to follow. He, in my opinion, has what has been dubbed in the mental health field a narcissistic personality disorder! “I declare it is not too late to accomplish everything God has placed in my heart. I have not missed my window of opportunity. God has moments of favor in my future. “He is preparing me right now because He is about to release a special grace to help me accomplish that dream. This is my time. This is my moment. I receive it today! This is my declaration.” Note how *grace* is seen as something *we* secure to achieve personal goals. Osteen’s crass theology of personal success is the constant theme in all of his books. In fact, every sermon he preaches has this message at its core. Osteen declares, “many times we put off what we know God wants us to do. Maybe down deep God has been dealing with you about forgiving a wrong, getting back in shape, having a better attitude, spending more time with your family. Or maybe it’s a dream or goal that you know you should be pursuing, such as starting a business, writing a book, joining the choir, learning a new hobby. You know God put it on the inside but so often we make excuses that hold us back. Things like, “I’m too busy. I tried and failed. I’m not that talented. They hurt me too badly.” As in all his other books, sin is never mentioned. In fact, Osteen avoids ever addressing Biblical themes like sin, repentance, judgment and the Holiness of God. Of course this goes hand in hand with his silence on the cross as well. The good news, according to Osteen, is *not* the gospel, but that God never aborts a dream! He proudly proclaims, “We may give up on them. We may quit pursuing new opportunities, quit believing to overcome an obstacle. But God still has every intention of bringing to pass every dream, every promise, He put in your heart.” In other words, *any* thought we entertain about ourselves, our goals or desires *must* have been put there by God! Here’s more from the *Day Four* chapter: Now you should rise up in faith and say, “This is my time. This is my moment. I’m not settling where I am. I’ve let excuses hold me back long enough. But today, I will take steps of faith to pursue new opportunities, to explore new hobbies, to break bad habits, to get rid of wrong mind-

sets. I know it's not too late to accomplish everything God has placed in my heart." If you have this kind of attitude, the rest of your life can be the best of your life. In the Bible when Paul told Timothy, "Stir up the gift. Fan the flame" (2 Timothy 1:6 (NIV), he was saying, "Timothy, life is flying by. Get busy pursuing your destiny." You have to stay passionate about what God put in your heart. Don't let one disappointment or even a series of disappointments convince you to give up. In the conclusion to "I Declare," Osteen details his final thoughts about individuals working diligently to triumph over their life challenges. Throughout the book's closing chapter, he resorts to scripture twisting and attempts to connect to readers' struggles. Rather than thinking good thoughts, Osteen says people need to "speak to" their "mountains" (i.e. life challenges). In doing so and in relying upon God, Osteen contends that negative thoughts and forces won't derail believers: Jesus said in Mark 11:23 (KJV): "Whoever will say to this mountain, be removed, and does not doubt in his heart, he will have whatever he says." You may be praying about things you should be speaking to. You don't need to pray about that fear anymore. You need to say, "Fear, I command you to leave. I will not allow you in my life." If you have health problems, instead of begging God to heal you, you need to declare to that sickness, "Sickness, you have no right in my body. I'm a child of the Most High God. You are not welcome here. And I'm not asking you to leave. I'm not saying, 'Pretty please, do me a favor.' No, I'm commanding you to leave my body." I've learned if you don't talk to your mountains, your mountains will talk to you. All through the day, those negative thoughts will come. They are your mountains talking to you. You can sit back and believe those lies, or you can rise up and declare: "I'm in control here. I will not allow my mountains to talk to me. Mountain, I'm saying to you, 'Be removed. You will not defeat me.'" Osteen urges readers to *declare* in "the authority of the Son of the Living God." When individuals make such a proclamation over their lives, he claims that results will be seen. "No power can stand against God," he continues, highlighting sickness, addiction, fear and legal problems as possible "mountains" that aren't big enough to supersede the Lord's power. "Now, the mountain may not move overnight. It may look just the same month after month. Don't worry about it," he writes. "In the unseen realm, things are changing in your favor."¹ The gospel according to Osteen centers around *be saved* from not living up to our full potential, of not achieving our personal goals. Let me say in no uncertain terms, this is *NOT* a "Christian" book – it is pure undiluted Pelagianism of the worst sort. The blatantly naïve assumption that just because we *believe* something to be true because we would like it to be so, is contrary to what the Bible means by *faith*. Warfield astutely wrote, "It, of course, does not follow that all our 'beliefs,' 'faiths' correspond with reality. Our convictions are not infallible. When we say that 'belief,' 'faith' is the product of evidence and is in that sense a compelled consent, this is not the same as saying that consent is produced only by compelling evidence, that is, evidence which is objectively adequate. Objective adequacy and subjective effect are not exactly correlated. The amount, degree, and quality of evidence which will secure consent varies from mind to mind and in the same mind from state to state. Some minds, or all minds in some states, will respond to very weak evidence with full consent; some minds or all minds in some states, will resist very strong evidence. There is no 'faith,' 'belief' possible without evidence or what the mind takes for evidence; 'faith,' 'belief' is a state of mind grounded in evidence and impossible without it. But the fullest 'faith,' 'belief' may ground itself in very weak evidence—if the mind mistakes it for strong evidence. 'Faith,' 'belief' does not follow the evidence itself, in other words, but the judgment of the intellect on the evidence. And the judgment of the intellect naturally will vary endlessly, as intellect differs from intellect or as the states of the same intellect differ from one another."² Over the last few decades, Christianity has suffered badly from the advent of the charismatic group known as the 'health and wealth,' or 'prosperity gospel' promoted by the likes of Kenneth Hagin, Kenneth and Gloria Copeland, Oral Roberts and more recently Joel Osteen. They have turned faith itself into something that has absolute sovereignty. Faith *in* Faith is the

central thing in this teaching. Faith, as they define it, has magical powers and as such can be used to get God Himself to respond like the genie in Aladdin's lamp. This turns faith into a talismanic potion. A positive utterance that is like a magic spell. Rightly did Machen once remark, "Faith is not a force that does something, but it is a channel by which something is received."³ One of the biggest concerns that the Apostle Paul displayed in his epistles was that of keeping his young churches firmly committed to his gospel (cf. his amazement at the Galatians in Gal. 1:6). A cursory reading of Colossians shows the heresy that plagued the church of Colossae was very much like that preached by the Word of Faith crowd. As Moulton pointed out, "They were so young and inexperienced, and were so easily led astray by people who came to them preaching perversions of Christian truth with every possible type of persuasiveness. We cannot altogether blame the new Christians for listening to them. Their teaching sounded good, and there was no long tradition to hold the converts steadily to it. Paul has therefore to keep on exhorting them to be constant to what he had taught them. One verse in which he tries to drive home his message with a remarkable variety of expression is Col. 1:23."⁴ "The call here," observes Martin, "is to steadfastness in the face of a seduction which would draw the Colossians away from the Pauline gospel. 'Stable and steadfast' suggest metaphors of strength and security drawn from the picture of a house. It is settled on firm foundations (the Greek word for 'stable' indicates this clearly)."⁵ Let's look at this in some detail.

I. Continue. The word (*epimenete*) is the ordinary word for making a stay of some length in a place, as contrasted with a quick passing through. It stresses endurance or longevity. A similar expression is found in Col. 4:2, where we read "continue steadfastly in prayer." Perseverance cultivates patience and patience in turn displays itself on the way we respond to not only various situations, but toward others (Col. 3:12). In Acts 10:48, Cornelius asks Peter to remain with him for some time in order to consolidate the wonderful Pentecost that had come to him and his household. The word is often used also of Paul's stays in different places on his journeys (21:4, 10; 28:12, 14; I Cor. 16:7, 8; Gal. 1:18). Paul also uses it when he speaks of continuing alive (Phil. 1:24), and of continuing in God's goodness (Romans 11:22). I Tim. 4:16 is an appeal to Timothy to continue without fail in the commissions that have been entrusted to him. And of course it is equally possible to continue in sin (Romans 11:22). I Tim. 4:16 is an appeal to Timothy to continue without fail in the commissions that have been entrusted to him. And of course, it is equally possible to continue in sin (Romans 6:1), and in unbelief (11:23). 'Persist' would often be a good translation: the Pharisees *persist* in questioning Jesus (John 8:7), Peter *persists* in knocking until he is admitted (Acts 12:16). All of this is background to the verse in Colossians. The readers are to continue in their faith as a man makes a long stay in a place, and does not just halt for an hour or two. They are to continue as a man continues in life itself, letting their faith be as much a part of them as their very life. They are to persist and persevere in it, as Peter *persisted* until he attained the entrance he desperately needed.

II. Grounded. The word (*tethemeliomenoi*) is the normal Greek word for the foundations of a building, firmly built into the ground. Our Lord used it of the man who bases his action on the firm rock of His teaching (Matt. 7:25; Luke 6:48). Hebrews 1:10 quotes Psalm 102:25 where the Psalmist speaks of God's having laid the foundation of the earth, firm and sure. Eph. 3:17 has the beautiful phrase 'founded on love,' the firmest of all foundations. I Peter 5:10 (A.V.) has the promise that God will 'settle' those new Christian readers. It is the same word: He will give them fixed foundations for their faith. The noun 'foundation' is even more frequent than the verb. Luke 6:49 speaks of the man who does not do what Jesus says as being like a house built on earth without a foundation. Paul talks of his work in Corinth as that of laying a foundation (I Cor. 3:10), the only possible foundation, Jesus Christ (3:11). It is left to each man to build wisely or unwisely

on the foundation that has been laid for him, and God Himself will test which it is (3:12f.). In Eph. 2:20 the foundation is the apostles and prophets (the order of words implies Christian prophets rather than Old Testament ones), but this is simply a change of metaphor. Christ Jesus is here the chief corner stone, and the apostles and prophets are thought of as the beginning of the Church on its human side. II Tim. 2:19 speaks of the 'firm foundation of God' in contrast with the profane babblings of false teachers. It is a double foundation, based firstly on the fact that God knows His own, and secondly on the need for righteousness in ourselves. (A great text to preach from!) And of course this foundation is concerned not only with the present but with the future. We need to lay a good foundation for the life eternal which is life indeed (I Tim. 6:19). The foundations of the heavenly city are themselves firm and permanent, as Abraham knew (Hebrew 11:10), and precious in every way, as Revelation shows in its beautiful symbolism (21:14, 19). In Eph. 3:17, along with the word 'founded' goes the word *Rooted*, which is also used in Col. 2:7: '*Rooted and builded up in Him.*' But to what does this steadfast Faith refer? The theological Latin terms are helpful here. Does this refer to **fides qua creditor**: *the faith by which (it) is believed*; i.e., the faith of the believer that receives and holds the revelation of God, *fides* subjectively considered? Or does it refer to **fides quae creditor**: *the faith which is believed*; i.e., the content of faith as revealed by God, *fides* objectively considered? The context makes clear that it is the latter, *The Faith which is believed*. Thus, it points to the Gospel. In essence, this constitutes what Warfield refers to as *doctrina fidei* and becomes a synonym for 'the Christian Religion.'⁶ As the Old English divine John Davenant declared, "Upon what foundation this faith rests; even upon the free promises of God which are offered in the Gospel. This the Apostle shews in saying, *and be ye not moved from the hope of the Gospel: for the hope of the Gospel denotes the expectation of those rewards which the Gospel promises to believers. For there is this difference between the Law and the Gospel: the Law puts the hope of eternal life under the condition of works and of perfect obedience; He that doeth these things shall live in them, Levit. xviii. 5: but the Gospel inspires the hope of salvation in us, through the mercy of God alone, on the condition of faith; He that believeth hath eternal life.*"⁷

III. Steadfast and Firm. The expression 'steadfast' (*hedraioi*) and 'Not shifting from' (*mē metakinoumenoi*) refer to being firmly seated in a fixed position, not wandering about from place to place. It is used of a firm, unshakable resolve in I Cor. 7:37. The picture is of the Church as something that gives support and steadiness to *the truth*, so that it may not be rocked about by those who try to upset it. Thus Paul is calling upon the Colossians not to shift from the fixed ground of the Christian hope – i.e., the content and substance of the Gospel. This was Paul's major concern: that the Colossians like the Galatians would be *bewitched* by false teachers (Gal. 3:1) and embrace *another* Gospel and thus fall from grace (Gal. 5:4) by accepting a Gospel that mixes Law and Gospel.⁸

CONCLUSION: Look at the immediate context of Col. 1:23 and Paul's emphasis on the hope of the Gospel as it is centered on the Person and Work of Christ. The Gospel bearing fruit all over the world (1:6). God has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light (1:12). God has rescued us from darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves (1:13). Christ is the image of the invisible God (1:15). Christ is the firstborn over all creation. (1:15). By him, for him, through him all things were created (1:16). He is prior to and the preservation of all things (1:17). He is the beginning and firstborn from among the dead to have supremacy over all things (1:18). He is the head of the church (1:18). God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him (1:19). God reconciled all things to himself, making peace by the blood of Christ (1:20). We have been reconciled through death in order to be free from accusation (1:22). "These things," wrote Machen, "have been despised as idle speculation, but in reality they are the very breath of our Christian lives.

They are, indeed, the battle ground of theologians; the church hurled anathemas at those who held that Christ, though great, was less than God. But those anathemas were beneficent and right. That difference of opinion was no trifle; there is no such thing as “almost god.” The next thing less than the infinite is infinitely less. If Christ be the greatest of infinite creatures, then still our hearts are restless, still we are mere seekers. But now is Christ, our Savior (the One who says, ‘Thy sins are forgiven thee’), revealed as God. There is now for us no awful Beyond of mystery and fear. We cannot, indeed, explain the world; to us it is all unknown, but it contains no mysteries for our Savior; He is on the throne; He is at the center; He is ground and explanation of all things; He pervades the remotest bounds; by Him all things consist. The world is full of dread, mysterious powers; they touch us already in a thousand woes. But from all of them we are safe. ‘Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.’”⁹

ENDNOTES

¹ Joel Osteen, *I Declare: 31 Promises to Speak Over Your Life* (Hachette, 2012)

² B. B. Warfield, *Biblical and Theological Studies* (rpt. P & R, 19680 P. 380.

³ J. Gresham Machen, *What is Faith?* (rpt. Eerdmans 1962) p. 250.

⁴ H. K. Moulton, *The Challenge of The Concordance: Some New Testament Words Studied In Depth* (Bagster, 1977) p. 187. I have used Moulton’s analysis with modification.

⁵ Ralph Martin, *Colossians: The Church’s Lord and The Christian’s Liberty* (Zondervan, 1972) p. 59.

⁶ Warfield, op. cit. p. 444.

⁷ John Davenant, *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Colossians I* (rpt. James Family, 1970) p. 262.

⁸ I cannot underscore the importance of not mixing Law with Gospel, something that the Colossians were in danger of doing (cf. Col. 2:16-20). Joel Osteen’s faith formula is likewise nothing but a legal bargaining with God. There is no need for repentance or even for God’s grace to sinners in Osteen’s scheme. It’s all very Pelagian. Listen to the wisdom of Calvin on this. “The law...as it simply prescribes the rule of a good life, does not renew men’s hearts to the obedience of righteousness, and denounces everlasting death upon transgressors, can do nothing but *condemn*. ...The office of the law is to show us the disease, in such away as to show us, at the same time, no hope of cure. ...The law leaves man to himself, it condemns him, of necessity, to death. The gospel, on the other hand, by which men are regenerated, and are reconciled to God, through the free remission of their sins, is the ministry of righteousness, and consequently, of life also. ...[The gospel is] reckoned the doctrine of life, because it is the instrument of regeneration, and offers to us a free reconciliation with God. ...The office of the gospel is to bring a remedy to those who were past hope. ...The gospel brings [a man killed by the law] to Christ [and] opens the gate of life” (all emphasis in original). *Calvin’s New Testament Commentaries* 10 (Eerdmans, 1973) pp. 43-45.

⁹ Machen, op. cit. p. 116.