



*"I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reproved." Hab. 2:1*

October 7, 2011

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Feature Article – Why Reproof Is So Important - Part 3

At present in the feature article each week we are addressing the Myths of Reproving Others. Myth #1 - (Reproving others is unspiritual, unloving and unkind) and Myth #2 - (It is wrong to reprove anyone outside your local church.) were examined in the last two issues of Heads Up! If the reader did not receive these and wishes to read them, please write and ask for them and I will email you the articles.

Myth #3 - Words of reproof must never be spoken to or about "God's Anointed Ones."

In this myth it is implied that Christians in leadership are the "Anointed", especially those who seem to be very successful, and must never be reproved by us lesser mortals.

**The verses generally quoted to support this myth are 1Chron. 16:22 and Psa. 105:15** "Saying, *Touch not mine anointed*, and do my prophets no harm." and 1Sam. 24:6 "And he said unto his men, The LORD forbid that I should do this thing unto my master, the LORD'S anointed, to stretch forth mine hand against him, seeing he is *the anointed* of the LORD."

Bro. Dennis Costella, Director of the Fundamental Evangelistic Association, made the following comments about these verses, ""TOUCH NOT THE LORD'S ANOINTED!" Time and again we hear this cry parroted as a counter to those who attempt to alert the unsuspecting of the dangerous, unbiblical teachings of a particular ministry. As a result, key religious figures fall into a category that is apparently safe from scriptural examination; since their ministries influence millions, they MUST be God's anointed--don't you dare "touch" them!

If you give a warning about doctrinal inconsistencies within the programs headed by men such as Billy Graham, Bill Bright, Jimmy Swaggart or even the pope, you can be sure that in the estimation of many, the moment the word of caution was uttered, you became guilty of "touching the Lord's anointed"! This indictment sounds ominous to say the least, but the question still remains, "What does God's Word have to say about this?" That's what really matters.

A look at the actual context from which this phrase is lifted provides clear-cut proof that scriptural reproof and rebuke does NOT constitute "touching God's anointed" at all. In fact, God made sure that Saul was forced to face up to his compromise. The ministry of the King of Israel was judged according to the Lord's commandments, and no man today is exempt from this same kind of biblical scrutiny.

David refused to slay King Saul with the sword, even though in doing so, he would rid himself of his arch enemy, and also clear the way for his own ascent to the throne of Israel (1 Sam. 24:1-15). God, not David, would remove Saul in His time and in His way (26:8-10). But some say there is a "secondary application" found in this text which would also bar ANY negative comment about another's far-reaching ministry, for this, too, would constitute "speaking against" one of God's servants and is, in essence, "touching God's anointed." Is this a viable, secondary application? Absolutely not!

Samuel certainly "touched God's anointed," if by that you mean speaking out against his disobedience (1 Sam. 15:20). God told Saul to "Smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not..." (1 Sam. 15:3). But under a pretext of pious intention, he "... spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen, to sacrifice unto the Lord..." (v. 15). Partial obedience--Samuel said it was tantamount to witchcraft and idolatry! TO OBEY is better than sacrifice!!! (If reproving the disobedience of Saul is "touching God's anointed" then Samuel sinned in doing so, and since God told Samuel to reprove Saul, those who criticise Samuel make God the author of sin. - Ed)

Saul had a very visible testimony that affected all of God's people. When he failed to minister according to the absolute standard, God's faithful prophet was commanded to cry out against the error. Take his life--no, rebuke his sins--yes! Let's get straight what the

Bible forbids in this account, and what it demands. Scriptural reproof and rebuke of a disobedient brother is not "touching God's anointed." It is compliance with God's order. (from [http://www.christian-parents.net/Church/YC102\\_Touch\\_Not\\_Anointed.htm](http://www.christian-parents.net/Church/YC102_Touch_Not_Anointed.htm))

This myth is very popular among charismatics. Kevin Reeves was a pastor in Latter Rain circles and encountered this myth there. He said, "Perhaps the single biggest factor hindering acknowledgment and genuine repentance of false doctrine is the unwillingness for believers to relinquish THE SUPERSTAR STATUS OF THEIR SPIRITUAL HEROES. And how many times had our [church] leadership supported this by telling us not to name names? It was the one thing above all others that tied my hands and put a gag in my mouth. Although I was told to go ahead and speak to whomever I wanted to within our group, such presentations were always followed up with appropriate damage control by the leadership. And I was forbidden to breach the unwritten hyper-charismatic code and expose people like Kenneth Copeland during the times I filled the pulpit. ... This fear of exposing God's anointed, even if they are guilty of repeated heresies, bordered on (may I use the term?) paranoia. ... The false shepherds among us have too long used I Chronicles 16:22 and Psalm 105:15 as a blank check to do as they please. 'Touch not mine anointed' and 'do my prophets no harm' was God's warning to the nations through which the Israelites passed during their sojourn through the wilderness. It implied swift judgment for any pagans who would come against the chosen people of the Lord. To wield this like a saber at a sincere brother alarmed at false doctrine smacks of spiritual tyranny, cowardice, and dishonesty. Hammered also with the Acts 5 account of the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira, a concerned believer in Jesus is usually bullied into silence or into leaving the congregation" (excerpted from The Other Side of the River by Kevin Reeves). <http://www.wayoflife.org/files/5e7e6a9121d577a562b763c60bec30a1-870.html>

The level of "success" a pastor/evangelist/missionary/Bible college president must achieve before he can be considered to be one of the "Anointed" ones varies from group to group. Years ago John R. Rice honoured pastors who had baptised more than 200 converts a year. In my youth, I saw pastors elevated to the "Anointed" status whose churches donated large sums of money to Baptist Bible College in Springfield, Mo. Billy Graham achieved that exalted position when the Hearst chain of newspapers widely publicised his 1949 meetings in Los Angeles. Notoriety, charisma, accent, numbers, and educational achievements all contribute to the status of being "Anointed," but there is probably nothing that elevates an Independent Baptist preacher more than having a large church. If he can add to that a Bible college and lots of YouTube videoclips, well, he's made. You can always tell if he has attained the "anointing." He will be an honoured guest on every conference platform. His photo will be everywhere, at least in all the approved denominational literature. He will be awarded an honorary doctorate, he will become the criterion for every other pastor, and his church the measure for every other church. Once his "anointing" is recognised by his peers he will gather a following that will grow and grow.

Oh, there is one other quality that pertains to the "anointed ones." They never need reproofs. They have become infallible, inerrant, impeccable, even perfectly irreproachable.

I know of a preacher who said about himself that he was less than the least of the apostles, that he was the chief of sinners, that his past life was filled with hubris (there's a good word to define). He said God gave him many revelations, and a thorn in the flesh to go with them, lest he should be exalted above measure. Of course, his name was Paul,

but I somehow doubt if he would fit in our crowd, as he doesn't seem to see himself as one of the "anointed."

There is in this dark hour a great need for all the Lord's servants to humble ourselves to the point where we welcome reproof. We will find in the long run that a meek and lowly heart will anoint a man more than the size of his church or the number of his admirers.

*Buddy Smith*

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## Links in the Media Chain -

- Dead Sea Scrolls online –  
<http://www.smh.com.au/technology/technology-news/dead-sea-scrolls-go-online-20110927-1ku9a.html>
- Medical Tattoos? –  
[http://www.breitbart.com/article.php?id=CNG.6e1e2ad90e2d94b12b6258b7e9c5b33d.611&show\\_article=1](http://www.breitbart.com/article.php?id=CNG.6e1e2ad90e2d94b12b6258b7e9c5b33d.611&show_article=1)
- A new video on the New Age influences in the modern churches –  
[http://www.carylmatrisciana.com/site/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=86:wide-is-the-gate-the-emerging-new-christianity&catid=51&Itemid=80](http://www.carylmatrisciana.com/site/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=86:wide-is-the-gate-the-emerging-new-christianity&catid=51&Itemid=80)
- \*Want to go fishing for salmon? –  
<http://www.wimp.com/slownature/>

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## Notable Quotes and Quotable Notes -

- **U**ncle Bud Robinson's prayer after a friend showed him the sights of New York City - "Well, Lord, I've seen the big city today. I'm sure glad I didn't see anything I wanted."
- **G**od loves broken things and broken people. As Vance Havner wrote, "It takes broken soil to produce a crop, broken clouds to give rain, broken grain to give strength. It is the broken alabaster box that sheds forth perfume. It is Jacob limping from Jabbok who has power with God and men. It is Peter weeping bitterly who returns to greater power than ever." *William MacDonald*

- **K**eeep about your work. Do not flinch because the lion roars; do not stop to stone the devil's dogs; do not fool away your time chasing the devil's rabbits. Do your work. Let liars lie...let the devil do his worst; but see to it that nothing hinders you from fulfilling the work that God has given you....He has never bidden you to defend your character. He has not set you at work to contradict falsehood [about you] which Satan and his servants may start to peddle. If you do those things, you will do nothing else; you will be at work for yourself and not for the Lord. - *Anonymous*
- **I**f we were entirely honest, wouldn't some of the favorite hymns we sing sound rather like this: "I Surrender Some"... "He's Quite a Bit to Me"... "Where He Leads Me, I Don't Always Follow"... "Jesus is Some of What I Need"... "I Sort of Love You, Lord"... "Just as I Pretend to Be"...etc.! - *Anonymous*

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## Deacon True Sez -

"Some folks what call themselves Christians ain't learned yet that the Lord's church is a sheepfold, not a zoo."

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## Cartoons to Make One Wise -

(Our federal government is Australia is riddled with corruption that is tied to the labour unions which provide so much of its support. When the media recently reported on it, the government began threatening to control the media, and even to require journalists to have a licence. - Ed.)

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## Therapy For The Funny Bone -

- **T**he circus that came to our little town had an act with a strong man who lifted weights and bent a horseshoe, and pulled a circus wagon with his teeth. The best trick he did was squeezing an orange so hard that he got a big glass of juice out of it. Then he offered to pay \$50 to anybody that could squeeze one more drop out of the orange. We all laughed when a weedy little fellow stepped down out of the grandstand and asked the strong man if he would pay him \$50 for every single drop he could squeeze out. The strong man roared with laughter and agreed, sure that his money was safe. Well, would you believe it? That

little man picked up that dry orange skin and proceeded to squeeze six drops out of it, right there in front of everybody! We jumped up and down and cheered and clapped till we were hoarse. That strong man was embarrassed, and puzzled, and wanted to know how he did it, so he quieted us all down, and asked the little fellow, "What do you do for a job, that you could put the squeeze on that orange like you did?" The little man smiled and replied, "I work for the tax department."

- **T**he local barber was a bit of a drunk, but he was the only barber in town. One day the Catholic priest dropped in for a trim, and when he reached for his wallet, the barber said, "There's no charge, Father. I'm doing community service for that shop window I broke last Saturday night." And would you believe, the next morning there were three bottles of wine on the barber shop doorstep? When the Lutheran pastor came in for a haircut, he was told the same thing, "No charge, I'm doing community service." And the barber found three blocks of Gouda cheese on the doorstep the next morning. Well, the Baptist pastor needed a haircut and was told the same thing, "No charge for the haircut, Pastor. I'm doing community service." And the next morning, what do you think he found on the doorstep? Three Baptist pastors.
- **I**t was bitterly cold when a businessman in Chicago was sent to a conference in Florida one weekend. Since he was due to fly down to Miami on Thursday night, he suggested to his wife that she fly down after work on Friday and they could get in a bit of sunshine before they had to fly home on Sunday night. When he checked in to the hotel in Miami, he plugged in his laptop and logged on to the internet to send his wife an email to tell her he'd arrived safely. But he got one letter wrong in the address, and the email went astray, very badly astray. You see, an elderly pastor in Nebraska had died earlier that week, and his funeral was held on Thursday afternoon. All the children and grandchildren were there staying with the old pastor's wife. Sometime after breakfast on Friday morning she checked her emails to see who had sent letters of sympathy. She went into the study and logged on to their email account. Then the family heard Grandma scream and when they rushed into the study, they found her on the floor in a dead faint. Her daughters propped her up and tried to resuscitate her, and one of the sons, suspecting that she fainted because of an email, sat down in the desk chair and read the following note from the businessman to his wife, "Hello, dear. I just wanted to let you know I arrived safely and am all settled in. Am missing you already and am looking forward to you joining me tomorrow. Your loving husband. PS It sure is hot down here."

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## Can You Stand Your Own Company? -

### Saints Often Walk Alone

In the morning of the world (or should we say, in that strange darkness that came soon after the dawn of man's creation) that pious soul, Enoch, walked with God and was not, for God took him; and while it is not stated in so many words, a fair inference is that Enoch walked a path quite apart from his contemporaries.

Another lonely man was Noah who, of all the antediluvians, found grace in the sight of God; and every shred of evidence points to the aloneness of his life even while surrounded by his people.

Again, Abraham had Sarah and Lot, as well as many servants and herdsmen, but who can read his story and the apostolic comment upon it without sensing instantly that he was a man "whose soul was alike a star and dwelt apart"? As far as we know not one word did God ever speak to him in the company of men. Face down he communed with his God, and the innate dignity of the man forbade that he assume this posture in the presence of others. How sweet and solemn was the scene that night of the sacrifice when he saw the lamps of fire moving between the pieces of offering. There alone, with a horror of great darkness upon him, he heard the voice of God and knew that he was a man marked for divine favor.

Moses also was a man apart. While yet attached to the court of Pharaoh he took long walks alone, and during one of these walks while far removed from the crowds he saw an Egyptian and a Hebrew fighting and came to the rescue of his countryman. After the resultant break with Egypt he dwelt in almost complete seclusion in the desert. There, while he watched his sheep alone, the wonder of the burning bush appeared to him, and later on the peak of Sinai he crouched alone to gaze in fascinated awe at the Presence, partly hidden, partly disclosed, within the cloud and fire.

The prophets of pre-Christian times differed widely from each other, but one mark they bore in common was their enforced loneliness. They loved their people and gloried in the religion of the fathers, but their loyalty to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and their zeal for the welfare of the nation of Israel drove them away from the crowd and into long periods of heaviness. "I am become a stranger unto my brethren, and an alien unto my mother's children," cried one and unwittingly spoke for all the rest....

There are some things too sacred for any eye but God's to look upon. The curiosity, the clamor, the well-meant but blundering effort to help can only hinder the waiting soul and make unlikely if not impossible the communication of the secret message of God to the worshiping heart.

Sometimes we react by a kind of religious reflex and repeat dutifully the proper words and phrases even though they fail to express our real feelings and lack the authenticity of personal experience. Right now is such a time. A certain conventional loyalty may lead some who hear this unfamiliar truth expressed for the first time to say brightly, "Oh, I am never lonely. Christ said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you,' and, 'Lo, I am with you alway.' How can I be lonely when Jesus is with me?"

Now I do not want to reflect on the sincerity of any Christian soul, but this stock testimony is too neat to be real. It is obviously what the speaker thinks should be true rather than what he has proved to be true by the test of experience. This cheerful denial of loneliness proves only that the speaker has never walked with God without the support and encouragement afforded him by society. The sense of companionship which he mistakenly attributes to the presence of Christ may, and probably does, arise from the presence of friendly people. Always remember: you cannot carry a cross in company. Though a man were surrounded by a vast crowd, his cross is his alone and his carrying of it marks him as

a man apart. Society has turned against him; otherwise he would have no cross. No one is a friend to the man with a cross. "They all forsook him, and fled."

The pain of loneliness arises from the constitution of our nature. God made us for each other. The desire for human companionship is completely natural and right. The loneliness of the Christian results from his walk with God in an ungodly world, a walk that must often take him away from the fellowship of good Christians as well as from that of the unregenerate world. His God-given instincts cry out for companionship with others of his kind, others who can understand his longings, his aspirations, his absorption in the love of Christ; and because within his circle of friends there are so few who share his inner experiences he is forced to walk alone. The unsatisfied longings of the prophets for human understanding caused them to cry out in their complaint, and even our Lord Himself suffered in the same way. The truly spiritual man is indeed something of an oddity. He lives not for himself but to promote the interests of Another. He seeks to persuade people to give all to his Lord and asks no portion or share for himself. He delights not to be honored but to see his Saviour glorified in the eyes of men. His joy is to see his Lord promoted and himself neglected. He finds few who care to talk about that which is the supreme object of his interest, so he is often silent and preoccupied in the midst of noisy religious shoptalk. For this he earns the reputation of being dull and over-serious, so he is avoided and the gulf between him and society widens. He searches for friends upon whose garments he can detect the smell of myrrh and aloes and cassia out of the ivory palaces, and finding few or none he, like Mary of old, keeps these things in his heart.

It is this very loneliness that throws him back upon God. "When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up." His inability to find human companionship drives him to seek in God what he can find nowhere else. He learns in inner solitude what he could not have learned in the crowd that Christ is All in All, that He is made unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption, that in Him we have and possess life's summum bonum.

Two things remain to be said. One, that the lonely man of whom we speak is not a haughty man, nor is he the holier-than-thou, austere saint so bitterly satirized in popular literature. He is likely to feel that he is the least of all men and is sure to blame himself for his very loneliness. He wants to share his feelings with others and to open his heart to some like-minded soul who will understand him, but the spiritual climate around him does not encourage it, so he remains silent and tells his griefs to God alone.

The second thing is that the lonely saint is not the withdrawn man who hardens himself against human suffering and spends his days contemplating the heavens. Just the opposite is true. His loneliness makes him sympathetic to the approach of the broken-hearted and the fallen and the sin-bruised. Because he is detached from the world he is all the more able to help it....

The weakness of so many modern Christians is that they feel too much at home in the world. In their effort to achieve restful "adjustment" to unregenerate society they have lost their pilgrim character and become an essential part of the very moral order against which they are sent to protest. The world recognizes them and accepts them for what they are. And this is the saddest thing that can be said about them. They are not lonely, but neither are they saints.

Excerpted from *Man, the Dwelling Place of God* by *A. W. Tozer*

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## Moishe and the Pope -

About four centuries ago, the Pope decided that all the Jews had to leave Rome. Naturally there was a big uproar from the Jewish community. So the Pope made a deal. He would have a religious debate with a member of the Jewish community. If the Jew won, the Jews could stay. If the Pope won, the Jews would leave.

The Jews realized that they had no choice. So they picked a middle-aged man named Moishe to represent them. Moishe asked for one addition to the debate. To make it more interesting, neither side would be allowed to talk. The Pope agreed. The day of the great debate came.

Moishe and the Pope sat opposite each other for a full minute before the Pope raised his hand and showed three fingers. Moishe looked back at him, shook his head, and raised one finger. The Pope waved his fingers in a circle around his head. Moishe shook his head and pointed to the ground where he sat. The Pope pulled out a wafer and a glass of wine. Moishe shook his head and pulled out an apple.

The Pope stood up and said, "I give up. This man is too good. The Jews can stay."

An hour later, the cardinals were all around the Pope asking him what had happened. The Pope said, "First I held up three fingers to represent the Trinity. He responded by holding up one finger to remind me that there was still one God common to both our religions. Then I waved my finger around me to show him that God was all around us. He responded by pointing to the ground and showing that God was also right here with us. I pulled out the wine and wafer to show him how God absolves us from our sins. He pulled out an apple to remind me of original sin. He had an answer for everything. What could I do?"

Meanwhile, the Jewish community had crowded around Moishe. "What happened?" they asked. "Well," said Moishe, "First he said to me that the Jews had three days to get out of here. I told him that not one of us was leaving. Then he told me that this whole city would be cleared of Jews. I let him know that we were staying right here."

"Yes, yes,.. and then???" asked the crowd.

"I don't know," said Moishe, "He took out his lunch, and I took out mine, and he said we could stay."

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## Bill Bray –

## An Excerpt From His Biography

"One of the most blessed results of his deep piety was his unfeigned humility, and his continual sense of dependence upon God. The Lord's servants without the Lord's presence are weak like other men, like Samson, when he lost his locks. Here is one experience of Billy's: 'When I was in the St. Neot's Circuit, I was on the plan; and I remember that one Sunday I was planned at Redgate, and there was a chapel full of people, and the Lord gave me great power and liberty in speaking; but all at once the Lord took away his Spirit from me, so that I could not speak a word: and this might have been the best sermon that some of them ever heard. What! you say, and you looking like a fool and not able to speak? Yes, for it was not long before I said, I am glad I am stopped, and that for three reasons. And the first is, To humble my soul, and make me feel more dependent on my Lord, to think more fully of the Lord and less of myself. The next reason is, To convince you that are ungodly, for you say we can speak what we have a mind to, without the Lord as well as with him; but you cannot say so now, for you hear how I was speaking, but when the Lord took away his Spirit I could not say another word; without my Lord I could do nothing. And the third reason is, That some of you young men who are standing here may be called to stand in the pulpit some day as I am, and the Lord may take his Spirit from you as he has from me, and then you might say, it is no good for me to try to preach or exhort, for I was stopped the last time I tried to preach, and I shall preach no more. But now you can say, I saw poor old Billy Bray stopped once like me, and he did not mind it, and told the people that he was glad his Lord had stopped him: Billy Bray's Lord is my Lord, and I am glad he stopped me too, for if I can benefit the people and glorify God, that is what I want. I then spoke a great while, and told the people what the Lord gave me to say.'"

Preaching in such a spirit Bray was sure to have a blessing, and a blessing he had. Many orators and doctors in divinity look very small by the side of Billy Bray, if we estimate ministries by their results in soul-winning, and they will look smaller still when the souls saved by poor humble speakers shall shine forth like stars, and their own rhetorical fame and boasted learning shall be as darkness.

(This is excerpted from Charles Spurgeon's book, *Eccentric Preachers*, a book you can download from: <http://www.spurgeon.org/misc/ep.htm> - Ed)

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## Blinded Minds –

### Joel Osteen And His "Feel Good" Gospel

(One of the best known Prosperity preachers is Joel Osteen. I recently received two articles that ought to be read together. The first is Osteen's defence of his false gospel. the second is a critique of prosperity preaching. - Ed)

<http://www.christianpost.com/news/joel-osteen-feel-good-gospel-is-part-of-gods-calling-55617/>

## Joel Osteen: 'Feel-Good' Gospel Is Part of God's Calling

Wed, Sep. 14, 2011 Posted: 03:13 PM EDT

Televangelist and author Joel Osteen, pastor of Lakewood Church in Texas, has reacted to critics who claim he downplays sin and waters down the Gospel, saying he has been following God's calling on his life, a calling that involves teaching about prosperity.

In an interview with ABC News, Osteen said, "I believe God, Jesus, died that we not just go to heaven but that we excel in this life. I never think you make money your goal. ... God wants you to excel. Just keep him in first place and God will open up doors you never dreamed of."

As for critics who claim he spends too much time preaching about well-being and personal fulfillment and not enough time addressing sin or Scripture, Osteen says he is simply doing what Jesus did.

He explained, "I think it goes back to tradition, how we were raised. Jesus talked about everyday life, not just doctrine but how do we live? How do we forgive? How do we keep a good attitude when the economy is down?"

Osteen added that people need to hear that about the goodness of God and not that God is mad at them.

When they hear the good news he preaches, Osteen says, "People come alive when they realize 'God is for me. He's got a plan for my life, and I can do something great. I can be who he wants me to be.'"

The Lakewood pastor also explained why he has been reluctant to wade into political or cultural debates.

"I think it starts to narrow you. I mean, for a while ... to be an evangelical meant you were a white Republican, and you were against this and against that. I don't want to be put into that mold, because then people judge you before they even listen. ... I don't want to divide the very people I am trying to reach," Osteen said.

The Houston preacher also commented on his new book, *Every Day a Friday: How to Be Happier 7 Days a Week*.

"I read some studies that said that people are happier on Friday," Osteen explained. "I thought, You know what? We should be happy every day. That's a choice that we can make."

The whole aim of his new book, Osteen said, is to remind people that there is always something to be grateful for and that readers can choose to be happy by focusing on those things.

The ABC News article noted that Lakewood church has a financial ministry, which Osteen agreed is unusual.

"We take in about \$80 million [per year]. It's not all from the church. Some of it's from the TV audience as well. It goes all over the world. If we take in 80, we spend 80. Victoria and I don't take a salary from the ministry. We've been blessed with our books and things," Osteen explained.

The ABC network will air an interview with Osteen Wednesday night at 11:35 p.m.

Osteen's Lakewood Church in Houston remains America's largest church with an attendance of 43,500 people in a weekend, according to a report by Outreach magazine.

*Nicola Menzie*

Christian Post Reporter

Q&A: The prosperity gospel – 'pagan teaching with a Christian face,' prof says

*by Michael Foust*

<http://www.bpnews.net/BPnews.asp?ID=36173>

Posted on Sep 22, 2011

**WAKE FOREST, N.C. (BP)** -- A dangerous "egocentric gospel" that omits Jesus, neglects the cross, and instead promises health and wealth is being promoted by some of America's most well-known preachers today, and their teachings are readily available on cable TV and in local bookstores.

That's the conclusion of two seminary professors whose new book, "Health, Wealth & Happiness" (Kregel), critiques what is often called the prosperity or "health & wealth" gospel -- the claim by some of America's most well-known preachers that God desires all Christians to be materially wealthy and physically healthy.

The prosperity gospel is dangerous, the professors say, because it contains just enough truth to make it appear biblical but more than enough distortions to make it heretical. That, they say, has led Christians to become discouraged in their faith or angry at God, or worse, to walk away from the church for good. After all, if a preacher says that enough faith can make a sick person well, and no healing ensues, then -- according to the preachers -- that person's faith is weak.

One study quoted in the book found that 50 of the 260 largest churches in America promote the prosperity gospel.

"If Christianity is supposed to be about God and His glory and is supposed to be about Christ, and we're making it about us -- that's the worst thing we could do," one of the authors, David W. Jones, told Baptist Press. Jones is associate professor of Christian ethics at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C. "It is so catering to the flesh and it so exalts man that it gets to the point where you obscure Christ."

The prosperity gospel, Jones says, is a "pagan teaching with a Christian face."

The book, co-authored with Russell W Woodbridge, a missionary in Eastern Europe who is an adjunct professor at Southeastern, gives the history of the prosperity gospel movement, interacts with quotes from some of the most well-known prosperity gospel preachers, and ends by giving a "corrective" -- that is, an explanation of the historical, biblical teaching on suffering, wealth, poverty and giving. Jones and Woodbridge distinguish between what they consider soft advocates of the prosperity gospel (Joel Osteen, Joyce Meyer) and more staunch advocates (Benny Hinn, Kenneth Copeland).

Baptist Press recently spoke with Jones. Following is a partial transcript:

**BAPTIST PRESS:** Why has the prosperity gospel grown when, as you argue in the book, its teachings are overtly unbiblical and contrary to historical Christianity?

**JONES:** It caters to the fallen human flesh. All of us want Christianity to be about us, and we want to focus upon our own wants and desires and needs. And since our heart is already bent that way, when the prosperity gospel comes along and says, "Christianity is about you, and if you just believe in Jesus you'll be healthy, wealthy and wise," that just resonates with our fallen flesh. People are already primed to hear that message -- especially those in our churches that don't know much of their Bibles.

**BP:** One question people might have is: Are you saying that God no longer heals and that God does not want to bless His people?

**JONES:** That's a very common question. We don't want people to over-learn the lesson that we're trying to teach in the book. Of course, God still does bless His people, but what it boils down to is this: What is being rich? Is it wealth, having a lot of money, a sports car and a trophy wife? Or is wealth being content with whatever it is that we have? I have five kids and I have a teacher's salary, and so I don't have much but I feel like I am an incredibly wealthy man. So God does want to bless us, but we need to define blessing on God's terms and not on materialistic man-centered terms.

**BP:** And healing?

**JONES:** There are several different kinds of healing in Scripture. There is miraculous healing, there is healing that we could say comes through medicine. There is healing of emotions. And there is also ultimate healing -- which comes through the death of the believer. When we die, we're in God's presence, and we await a redeemed, resurrected, glorified body; we'll no longer have aching backs, broken legs. It's also a matter of timing: Is it now that we can expect these things or is it later; is it in the resurrection that we can expect these things? We need to first of all properly define health, wealth and happiness, and then we need to say what Scripture has to say about the chronology of it as to when we'll get it. We would say it's later, not now.

**BP:** What are some of the basic biblical or theological errors of the prosperity gospel?

**JONES:** First of all, there's a distorted view of God -- God is sort of like a cosmic bellhop that we can call upon and He's there to serve us as opposed to us being here to serve Him. No. 2, there's an exalted view of man -- [it teaches that] Christianity is ultimately about us and not about Jesus and God's glory. No. 3, there's this idea of mind over matter -- if you just believe it, it will come true. No. 4, there is an overall fixation upon health and wealth and the idea that if you're just a good person and you love Jesus and tithe, you can expect to have a full wallet and perfect health. No. 5, there is a false idea of salvation itself. [According to the prosperity gospel,] it's not so much that we're saved from eternal damnation, saved from God's wrath, but rather we're saved from the unfulfilling, unprosperous life.

**BP:** In terms of how the prosperity gospel has spread, what role has TBN played?

**JONES:** You can just flip on cable television and see preachers saying a message that might be a little bit different than what your pastor is preaching at your church, but it's a message that resonates with your desires. And they seem to have packed churches full of people, and they seem to have lots of money -- which seemingly endorses their message. Of course, there's a lot of good preaching on TBN. There are some solid guys on there. But let's say you have Charles Stanley or Adrian Rogers and then the very next hour [TBN shows] Kenneth Hagin or Joel Osteen. How do you know when to turn the TV off?

**BP:** Would the prosperity gospel be as popular without TBN?

**JONES:** When TBN took off and cable and satellite television took off, that seems to have really been a milestone in the prosperity gospel movement. If you go back to the 1970s to the early days of Hagin or [Kenneth] Copeland, it was almost easier to spot the prosperity guys; they're the guys driving the Rolls Royce who have the big hair and the white suits. Whereas today, if I tell people in my church that Joel Osteen is a prosperity gospel preacher, folks are like, "Really? I had no idea."

**BP:** In the book, you differentiate between what you call "soft advocates" of the prosperity gospel such as Joel Osteen and more well-known advocates such as Kenneth Copeland and Kenneth Hagin. Explain the difference between the two types of advocacy.

**JONES:** Soft advocates are those who come from more of an orthodox background. At one point, if you go back far enough, you might find less prosperity preaching in their ministries. And even today in their preaching, they still try to get the Gospel in there and they give the Gospel lip service. Whereas, some of the more hardcore advocates -- Kenneth Hagin, Kenneth Copeland, even Creflo Dollar, these are guys that you very rarely hear them try to preach what looks like the traditional Gospel. It's almost all about avoiding suffering, avoiding losing your job, avoiding being poor. And you find the more egregious statements coming from them, as well, where they say poverty is a sin and Jesus had designer clothes.

**BP:** Would you say the prosperity gospel has harmed the name of Christ?

**JONES:** I think it really has -- not only in the effect that it's had upon believers, but when the lost world hears about the prosperity gospel, they lump Jerry Vines and Adrian Rogers in there with Kenneth Copeland and Joel Osteen, because to a lost world, these are all

people who claim to be Christians. Many people in a lost world can see the hypocrisy of people who go on TV with their Rolexes saying, "Send me some money and I'll pray for you." They can see it's just a big scheme. But, unfortunately, that undermines the true Gospel. It's happened to both of us [David Jones and Russell Woodbridge] numerous times in the pastorate. You're out there talking to lost folks coming to your church, and an objection is raised, "I've seen you guys on TBN, and I know what you're all about, and all you want is my money."

**BP:** You devoted an entire chapter showing how the prosperity gospel has its foundation in New Thought philosophy [a late 18th- and early 19th -century quasi-Christian heresy that promoted the belief that the mind has power over movement]. Why did you think it was important for Christians to understand the foundation of the prosperity gospel?

**JONES:** We thought people need to realize that the prosperity gospel is not just another variety of Christianity. It's a baptized form of a secular heresy. It's not just Christianity that's a little bit off. It's pagan teaching with a Christian face. We thought that if folks can start with that and grasp that, then some of the objections we'll raise later in the book will be easier to process. We're not trying to say that every advocate of the prosperity gospel knows the roots of their own belief system. But the movement as a whole and its core teachings, that's where it comes from.

Michael Foust is associate editor of Baptist Press.

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## Teens Sleeping Less Than 8 Hours a Night More Likely to Drink, Take Drugs, Contemplate Suicide

According to a new study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, teens that get less than eight hours of sleep on school nights are more likely to smoke, drink and fight and engage in other risky behavior.

"Lack of adequate sleep can be a warning sign for parents that their teens have other problems," the study's lead author told Reuters on Monday.

Published online by the Preventive Medicine Journal from CDC, the study is believed to be the first large national survey of its kind.

In a survey of more than 12,000 teens, 68.9 percent reported that they sleep less than eight hours on an average school night.

According to the study, in 10 of 11 categories, the students that slept less were more likely to engage in risky behavior than other students who slept more than eight hours on school nights.

These behaviors include smoking cigarettes and marijuana, and drinking alcohol.

According to the survey findings, sleep-deprived teens are not only more likely to engage in risky behavior but also more likely to not engage in healthy behavior. For example, students who slept fewer hours were less likely to exercise.

*Gina E. Ryder*

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## The Imminence of the Lord's Return -

### Is Christ's Second Advent Imminent? - *by John R Ecob*

**W**hat do we mean by the Lord's return being imminent? Is the return of Christ imminent? Could it happen at any time?

Scoffers have noted that those who preached the imminence of Christ's return 50 years ago have died. They therefore conclude that it is wrong to say Christ is coming soon or even that it could occur at any moment. Yet Jesus gave very specific instruction to His disciples to watch for His coming. "*Therefore **be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh***" (Matt.24:44).

If the coming of the Lord was not imminent (possible at any moment) then what did the Lord mean? Not only did Jesus warn the disciples to be ready but He also warned of solemn consequences for those who say, "*my Lord delayeth his coming*" (Matt.24:48).

If words mean anything then Christians of all ages should live their lives in the constant expectancy that Jesus could come at any moment whether it be the first century or the twenty-first century. And if God would have us do so then it must be possible for Christ to come at any moment.

To suggest any specific time for Christ to return would be wrong for Jesus said:

*"But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father. Take ye heed, watch and pray: **for ye know not when the time is**"* (Mark 13:32-33).

Several things are obvious from this passage:

- 1) The Lord will come at a specific hour.
- 2) No man knows, or can know, when Jesus will come
- 3) The time of Christ's return is unknown to the angels and even to Jesus.
- 4) The time of Christ's return is known only to the Father. It would seem that the Father has not yet made that decision which may be contingent upon other events unfolding.

The Bible teaches that it is the Father who determines WHEN future events will occur. This is plainly stated by the Lord in Acts 1:7: "*And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power.*"

It will always be a mystery to mortal men how there is one God yet three persons. Within this Godhead the Father sent **the Son** to become flesh like us (John 17:18) and the Holy Spirit was **sent by the Father** to indwell those who believe (John 14:26). The Father has "*committed all judgment unto the Son*" (John 5:22) yet Jesus could say, "*I and my Father are one*" (John 10:30).

This means more than just "one in purpose" for Jesus said to Thomas, "*He that hath seen me hath seen the Father*" (John 14:9).

Old Testament saints belonged to the Father but when the New Covenant was enacted, based on the sacrifice of the Lamb of God, the Father gave those saints who were still living on earth to the Son (John 17:6), and they are secure in the hand of the Son and the Father (John 10:27-30). This does not mean in any way that the Son is inferior to the Father for Jesus said that "*all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father*" (John 5:23).

Within the Godhead there is perfect unity yet **it is the Father who determines "the times or the seasons"** and thus we can understand that **the Son does not know when He will be sent a second time into the world.**

## The Time of Christ's First Advent

Similar warnings to watch were NOT given to Old Testament saints about Christ's FIRST advent because about 538BC the Father revealed the precisely-determined time when Messiah would appear as the King of Israel. Any Jew who knew the Scriptures would have been able to calculate 483 prophetic years from the date of the "*command to restore and build Jerusalem*" (Dan. 9:25) in the month Nisan, the twentieth year of Artaxerxes, 445BC, to Palm Sunday when Jesus fulfilled Zech. 9:9 and was presented to the nation as the son of David, their King.

Many other prophecies of Christ's first advent **had no time attached**. Prophecies of His virgin birth are merged with His second advent in Isa. 9:6-7 and descriptions of His sufferings on the cross give no clue as to **when** this would take place. Bethlehem, is identified as the location of Jesus' birth but Micah does not indicate **when** He would be born. The flight to Egypt and the location of Nazareth as the hometown of the Lord are mentioned in prophecy but only Daniel is given a **specific time** when Messiah the Prince would be presented to the nation after which He would be cut off.

The time of Christ's birth could not be precisely foreknown for no prophecy told **Messiah's age** when He would ride into Jerusalem as the King of Israel. There were prophecies which indicated the time of Christ's appearing was **near** for God would send His messenger, John the Baptist, to "*prepare the way*" before the Lord (Mal. 3:1).

As the time for Christ to be born drew near, Zacharias received the message that John would be born to "*make ready a people prepared for the Lord*" and Simeon was told that Messiah would appear **in his lifetime**. Anna and a remnant in Jerusalem lived in

anticipation of His imminent coming and it would seem they were aware of the prophecies. The preaching of John told the message; "*the kingdom of heaven is at hand*" (near) (Matt.3:2;4:17;10:7).

At Jesus' birth the shepherd's "*made known abroad the saying that was told them concerning this child*" (Luke 2:20) but this was after the event.

## Christ's Second Advent is always Imminent

There was no excuse for Israel's failure to recognize the time of Messiah's first Advent but His second advent has no **such explicit time** and Jesus' final message in the Olivet Discourse warned Israel to **be ready at any time**. In other words, His coming would always be imminent! It could occur at any time. The final generation however, would know that His coming was "*near, even at the doors*" (Matt.24:33).

In the parable of the rich man (Luke 12:16-40) Jesus told the Jews that the Father would give them the kingdom (Luke12:31) and that He would return "*after the wedding*" (Luke12:36) for the marriage supper. He urged Israel : "*Be ye therefore ready also: for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not*" (Luke12:40).

*"And if he shall come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants"* (Luke12:38).

There were four 3-hour watches in the night and Jesus was saying that whatever hour He should come they should be expecting Him!

The Disciples, however, were not given the exact time of Christ's second advent and it is not indicated anywhere in Bible prophecy. When the Disciples asked the Lord for the signs of His coming and of the end of the age He made it very clear that there would be a short period of Great Tribulation **immediately before He appeared in glory**. The whole purpose of the Olivet Discourse was to provide information about events during the seven years prior to His Second Advent so that the readers would THEN know WHEN the coming of the Lord was near, "*even at the doors*" (Matt.24:33).

Not only does the Olivet Discourse give signs to indicate the nearness of the Lord's return but it urges the reader to be in a constant state of watchfulness because the Lord **could come at any time**. Those who are watching will be blessed:

*"Blessed is that servant, whom his Lord when he cometh shall find so doing"* (Matt.24:46).

These warnings in the Olivet Discourse, it must be remembered, were given to Jewish disciples in the age of law **before the Church was established**. Once the Church was established, Israel was put aside and, as the "*natural branch*" of the olive tree, was plucked off until the end times.

The reader will recall that we quoted Daniel 9:25-26 as evidence that an explicit time was give for Christ's presentation to the nation as her king. However, that was only part of the prophecy. Verse 27 indicates that there are seven more years determined on Jerusalem and the nation of Israel **before the Lord returns to reign**. This period is divided into two

equal parts of three and a half years. Other Scriptures describe these periods as 1,260 days, 42 months and "a time, times, and an half" or 3 1/2 years.

These prophecies, located in Daniel 7:25; 12:7; Revelation 11:3; 12:6,14; and 13:5, clearly refer to the first and second halves of the last seven years which God has **determined upon Israel** before they are blessed in Christ's millennial kingdom. Furthermore, the events of that last seven years are described in great detail in Revelation chapters 6 through to 18 so that once the seven year period begins, all on earth who know their Bible will know **precisely when Christ will return!** In fact Jesus said that those who see the events of the Tribulation would know His coming was near, "*even at the doors*". How then do we explain the words of the Lord that no man knows the day or hour of His return? **And how can we believe in imminence if the last seven years is given in great detail?**

The coming of the Lord is in two stages. Jesus is coming FOR His Church BEFORE Israel's last 7 years of prophetic history and will come WITH His saints at the end of Israel's last 7 years.

Once this is understood the answer is very simple. When Jesus spoke to Israel about watching for His return there was **an unknown period of time** which was to precede the last seven years. That was the Church age in which God would take out of the Gentiles "*a people for His name*" (Acts 15:14). The Church is referred to as "*the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God*" but is "**now** revealed unto his holy apostles" (Eph. 3:5,9).

God has determined a definite period of 490 years upon the Jews and Jerusalem but nowhere has he indicated the length of the Church age or the "*dispensation* (administration) *of the grace of God*" to the Gentiles (Eph. 3:2). Only the Father knows how long the Church age will continue. He will decide when "*the fulness of the Gentiles*" has come in and the Bride of Christ is complete. Only then will the Father say to the Son, Go and get your Bride! Then the Rapture will take place.

Many Bible prophecies may indicate that the Church age is drawing a close but there is no definite time specified. Thus, nearly 2,000 years ago, Jesus could say, "*ye know not what hour your Lord doth come*".

What are the prophesied events which must occur in the gap between Israel's 69th "seven" of years and her last "seven" of years (the 70th) when Israel's prophetic history begins again? They are:

- 1) Messiah must be "*cut off*". This happened **four days after** Jesus rode into Jerusalem to the cry, "*Blessed is the King that cometh in the name of the Lord!*"
- 2) The city of Jerusalem must be destroyed by the Romans in fulfillment of Daniel 9:27: "*The people of the prince that shall come (Antichrist) shall destroy the city and the sanctuary.*" This was fulfilled in A.D. 70 by the Roman armies led by Titus, 38 years after the presentation of Messiah the Prince to the nation on Palm Sunday.
- 3) After Israel rejected Messiah God turned to the Gentiles to take out of them "*a people for His name*" and this Church of Jesus Christ would issue a genuine call to Israel to repent. Jesus told the Disciples just 10 days before Pentecost that they would be baptized with the Holy Spirit and that they were to witness, first at "**Jerusalem, then in all Judaea, and in Samaria and unto the uttermost part of the earth**" (Acts 1:8). The Gentile Church was the

"other sheep", which were not of the fold of Israel, whom Jesus said He must bring (John 10:16).

The Church was formed on the day of Pentecost but **her first message** was to Israel and so Peter preached to the Jews:

**"Repent ye (of killing the Prince of life) therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord. And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: Whom the heaven must receive UNTIL the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began"** (Acts 3:19-21).

The last chapter of Acts describes Israel's rejection of the Gospel presented by the Church and so Paul says:

**"The heart of this people is waxed gross (calloused), and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it"** (Acts 28:27-28).

To the Church at Rome Paul wrote that the Gospel was the power of God unto salvation **"to the Jews first, and also to the Greek"** (Rom.1:16). The Church fulfilled its testimony to Israel in the lifetime of Paul.

In the parable of the marriage supper for the king's son (Matt.22:1-14) the guests were invited **three times**. The parable teaches **three calls** for Israel to come to the marriage supper of the Lamb which takes place **after** Christ returns to the earth.

The **first invitation** was given by the Lord during His earthly ministry but **"they would not come"**. Jesus said:

**"How oft would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not"** (Matt.23:37).

The **second invitation** was issued by the early Church but they **"spitefully entreated"** the Christians and **"slew them."** Had Israel accepted the invitation to the marriage supper of the Lamb at the second call then Christ would have come to establish His kingdom but they rejected the testimony of the Church (Acts 3:19-21).

The **third invitation** will be given by 144,000 Jewish witnesses who will preach **"the Gospel of the kingdom in all the world for a witness"** during the first half of the 7-year Tribulation. At this time, **"All Israel shall be saved"** (Ezek.39:22; Rom.11:26).

**The unknown factor in God's program is the commencement of the last 7 years before Christ returns to reign so we need to ask, What event brings the Church age to a close and introduces Israel's final 7 years of prophetic history?**

In Paul's epistle to the Romans chapters 9 to 11 we have described the relationship of Israel to the Church in this age. In this age there is a remnant of Israel being saved but the Church is **"neither Jew nor Greek (Gentile)...for ye are all one in Christ Jesus"** (Gal.3:28).

Israel is described as a "*natural olive branch*" which has been broken off and the Gentile believers are described as a "*wild olive branch*" grafted into the olive tree in her place. But this will only continue "*UNTIL the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved*" (Rom.11:25-26).

Acts 15 explains what the term, "*the fulness of the Gentiles*" means. This is the Church of Jesus Christ which God is taking out of the Gentiles "*for the name*" of the Lord Jesus (Acts15:14). "*The fulness of the Gentiles*" therefore means the completion of that number which make up the predominantly Gentile Church. That number is either not yet determined by the Father or the time when it will occur awaits the response to the Gospel. Jesus was perfectly right to say that no man knows the day or the hour when He would return.

Once the Rapture of the Church has occurred, then Israel's prophetic clock will begin to tick and the last 7 years of history before Christ returns to reign will run its course.

## Can we Say Christ's Return is Near?

The coming of the Lord to reign will always be at least 7 years away because there must be 7 years of Great Tribulation called, the Day of the Lord, immediately preceding it. Jesus said His coming would be "**immediately after the tribulation of those days**" (Matt.24:29). The Rapture of the Church however, precedes the Tribulation and it is this event which triggers the final 7 years of Israel's history as determined in Daniel 9:27.

Paul wrote of the Day of the Lord and told the Christians, "*Ye are not in darkness, that **that day** should overtake you as a thief...for God hath not appointed us to wrath*" (1Thess.5:4,9).

During Israel's last 7 years of history and **before the kingdom is established**, there are certain political, economic and environmental events described and these will occur quickly. Preparation for these events will no doubt **begin prior to the 7 year period**. Some of these are as follows:

- i) **Israel must already be re-established** in the land before the last 7 years begins because a Roman prince will make a 7-year treaty with Israel at its commencement. Israel became a nation on 14 May 1948.
- ii) The last 7 years of Israel's history begins with **a treaty signed by a Roman prince** whose people destroyed the city of Jerusalem and other Scriptures (Dan.2 and 7) indicate that the Roman Empire, the fourth kingdom on earth, is to be revived just before Jesus returns.

The union of European states under the banner of the EU is undoubtedly a revival of the Roman Empire. In 2011 the EU has 27 member countries and a population approaching 500 million. After the Lisbon Treaty in December 2009 a President and a Foreign Minister were appointed. The President will ultimately have power like that of the US President. Foreign policy will be administered by the EU Foreign Minister. The Bible teaches that the Revived Roman Empire will be led by the Beast (Antichrist) and his False Prophet.

- iii) Halfway through the 7 years the Roman prince will cause **the Jewish Temple sacrifices to cease**. This requires the Jewish Temple to be rebuilt. There has been no Temple for nearly 2,000 years and any move by the Jews to rebuild or to refurnish the Temple must therefore be an indication that Israel's last 7 years before the return of Christ must be approaching.  
  
The Temple mount was captured from the Jordanians in 1967 and there are a number of Jewish organizations actively preparing for and promoting the reconstruction of the 3rd Temple. Since 1998 Jews have been minting and selling the "holy half-shekel" and accumulating funds for the maintenance of the 3rd Temple.
- iv) During the first half of the 7 years **Israel will be invaded by a "northern army" led by Russia**. At this time Israel will turn to the Lord (Ezek.29:22). This army will be drawn from Iran, Turkey, Libya and Sudan (Ezek.38:1-7). In 2011 these Islamic countries are forging economic and military ties with Russia, and Iran is threatening to destroy Israel.
- v) Daniel foretold that at the time of the end **"many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased"** (Dan.12:4). In the 20th Century millions of people began traversing the globe daily and there has been an explosion of scientific knowledge. This prophecy is being fulfilled.
- vi) The Great Tribulation will be a time of unprecedented **global warfare** and we see many nations in possession of nuclear weapons or in the process of acquiring them. Vast sums of money are expended on armaments and preparations are being made for warfare on a scale described in the Bible for the last seven years before Christ returns.
- vii) During the Tribulation, apostasy will reach its zenith with **one global religion set up by the Antichrist** and centred in Jerusalem. The world's religions will be overthrown and **"all the world"** will wonder after the Beast (Rev.13:3). The ecumenical movement made massive strides during the 20th Century and dialogue is continually being encouraged between all religions. Within Christendom many have departed from the Truth and deny the Word of God. The Charismatic movement is practicing signs and wonders, the very thing that will characterize Antichrist's religion (Rev.13:13-15; 2Thess.2:9; Matt.7:22-23). The present theological climate is preparing for the apostasy of the last 7 years of Great Tribulation.

With all of these events enacted before us it would be foolish of us to deny that we are in the last days and that the Rapture must be drawing near. How long? We do not know. But if ever the Church needed to be watching in holiness and giving a strong Gospel testimony it is in this 21st Century. It certainly is not an exaggeration to say that the Lord's coming is imminent and that His coming for His Church could be at any time!

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## Eddy-torial - When I Join the Church, Can I Bring My Kinfolks With Me?

Last week two men asked me if they could join the church. They each made the same request. They asked if they could bring their kinfolks with them when they came into the church. At first I thought that it would be wonderful and that it would result in our attendances and offerings increasing and the church growing. But something inside made

me hesitate about agreeing too quickly with their request. So I sat down with each one and asked about his deepest beliefs, and his motives, and who his kinfolks were that he wanted to bring into the church with him.

The first man I talked to was a trendy young chap named Bro. Carnal. He said he likes to be called "bro." He said he went to church when he was real young, but backslid for some years, and just recently decided he needed to get back into church. When I asked if he had been baptised, he said no, but was thinking about it, and might actually do it someday. When I told him that we require new members to do a discipleship course before they join, he yawned and changed the subject. So I asked him who the kinfolks are he wants to bring with him into the church. He told me their names. His little brother is called CC (their last name is Muso.) He likes rap music, and has a drum kit he'd loan to the church, as long as he gets to play. There is "bro's" girlfriend, Flirty, and her sister Immodest. Their mother would like to come, too. Her name is TABby and she likes to have a bet on the horses once in a while. He also said he has an uncle who works with the youth and has led lots of youth ministries in other churches. His name is Mambo and he is very charismatic, according to "bro." I asked him if there were others in his family he hoped would come with him to our church. He thought about it a bit, and then said, "Well, there are my two grandpa's, but they might not come to start with. They like to just work their way into a church gradually, unnoticed at first." "And what are their names?" I asked. "Grandpa Westcott and Grandpa Hort," he replied. "They are very intellectual, but they just love to go to church. They always bring their Bibles with them." "Anybody else?" I asked. "bro" thought for a while and then he said, "Yep. I've got two uncles named Calvin and Piper that want to move into the area, and they might be interested. Actually, they are both very theological and could really sort of deepen the church for you." Since he hadn't mentioned his father at all, I inquired whether he was still alive. He said yes, but that he keeps a low profile. He told me his name is Mr. Worldly Wise, and that he is very highly educated, and loves to reason things out with pastors. And then he told me about his aunty, Jezedel Longtongue, who loves to share "prayer requests about other people's problems" with everyone in the church. I asked him if he thought all of his kinfolks would really want to come to our church. He said he was sure they would as they get on really well, and really stick together. I told him I would think it over and get back to him next week.

The second applicant for membership was middle aged and fairly quiet. His name was Bro. Faithful. He brought his wife, Charity, with him, Their salvation testimonies are clear and it appears that the Lord really did a work in their hearts when they professed faith in Christ. He told me how they wrestled with their need to be saved for a long time and then finally repented of sin and believed in Christ. When I asked him what kind of church he was looking for, he told me they really want to go where the Bible is preached and practiced. I agreed, and then asked him about the kinfolks they wanted to bring with them. He smiled and said, "Our kinfolks are not real flashy. Not showy or impressive, at least to most folks. They don't fit in every church, and so they take a while to check out the church before they move their membership. If they see they don't fit in, they just go elsewhere. The sad thing is, I guess, it is getting harder and harder for them to find a church where they can feel at home and serve the Lord. They've even been asked to leave some churches." So I asked him who they were. And he began to list them, Bro. Stalwart is his dad, his Mom's name is Sister Joyful, his wife's folks are Bro. and Mrs. Grace, and his uncle is Bro. Generosity. He has a cousin named Bro. Evangelist, whose kids are named Love, Joy, and Peace. He has a nephew named Diligence that is engaged to Miss Virtue. The old grandpa is still alive and his name is Mr. Stedfast. He said there are others, but these are the ones that are looking for a church in this area right now. He told me again

that these folks probably wouldn't all run down the aisle to join the church the first Sunday they visit. I told him we want to see the church grow and he nodded his agreement, and then commented, "Preacher, our family isn't much into helping churches grow quickly. We like to see if we are going to fit in, and then join one by one, and then get to know everybody else in the church and build real fellowship in the Lord with them, and be good, godly influences among the members. We notice that wherever we've been welcomed, it's not very long before the church starts growing. That's the kind of kinfolks we have." I told him I would think about it and get back to him next week.

So there you have it. Two applicants for membership and each of them will bring their kinfolks with them.

I've been watching folks join churches for over sixty years now, and I've noticed they always bring their kinfolks with them. Some pastors welcome young "bro's" CCM music family and never stop to think about all the terrible kinfolks they bring with them, the Immodesty clan, and the Flirty tribe. Have you noticed how the Immorality family is never far behind? Or that the Divorce and Remarriage cousins soon join, too? Sikster Longtongue is never far behind.

Other pastors welcome old Bro. Faithful and his kin, only a few members of his family at first, but over the years they join and then they become so prolific that the church far outgrows and outlasts the other, the one with "bro" Carnal's kinfolks.

I think I will encourage young "bro Carnal" to look elsewhere, and Bro. Faithful to join.

We need him and all his kinfolks in our church.

*Bro. Buddy*

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