

Feature Article: JAF5372

## JOYCE MEYER IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

by Bob Hunter

This article first appeared in the CHRISTIAN RESEARCH JOURNAL, volume 37, number 02 (2014). For further information or to subscribe to the CHRISTIAN RESEARCH JOURNAL go to: <http://www.equip.org/christian-research-journal/>

---

Popular televangelist Joyce Meyer has been involved in Christian ministry for more than thirty years. The victim of sexual abuse as a child, she has spoken and written extensively on such subjects as forgiveness, relationships, prayer, overcoming sins, and breaking bad habits. Meyer is a graduate of Life Christian University (LCU) in Tampa, Florida. Other LCU graduates include popular Word of Faith teachers Kenneth and Gloria Copeland, Benny Hinn, and laughing revivalist Rodney Howard-Browne.<sup>1</sup> She also received an honorary doctorate of divinity from Oral Roberts University.<sup>2</sup> Both Life Christian University and Oral Roberts University are bastions of Word of Faith theology.

### MEYER'S THEOLOGY

Over the years, Christian apologists have been critical of her many Word of Faith teachings. One such teaching can be found in her 1991 booklet, *The Most Important Decision You Will Ever Make*. She wrote that "Jesus paid on the cross and in hell...God rose up from His throne and said to demon powers tormenting the sinless Son of God, 'Let Him go.' Then the resurrection power of Almighty God went through hell and filled Jesus...He was resurrected from the dead—the first born-again man."<sup>3</sup>

Meyer also holds to the popular Word of Faith belief that faith is a force: "Unto every man is given the measure of faith, and faith is a powerful force....And the two greatest ways that we release our faith...is through sincere, heartfelt prayer and through the words of your mouth."<sup>4</sup>

She even has stated that she is not a sinner. "I didn't stop sinning until I finally got it through my thick head I wasn't a sinner anymore. And the religious world thinks that's heresy and they want to hang you for it. But the Bible says that I'm righteous, and I can't be righteous and a sinner at the same time." She explained on a St. Louis radio station that although she sins, identifying herself as a sinner would give her the mentality that she was nothing but a sinner.<sup>5</sup>

Holding to such a position is like someone who regularly robs banks but denies being a bank robber! Contrary to Meyer's belief, we are at the same time both sinner and saint—sinners because we were born in sin and continue to sin, and saints because of our righteous position in Christ.

## WORD OF FAITH

Despite the fact that Joyce Meyer has never publicly retracted any of her Word of Faith teachings, some Christians are of the opinion that she shouldn't be criticized for things she taught years ago. Therefore, we shall have a look at her more recent teachings to see if she has changed her views over the past thirty years.

To begin with, Meyer still associates with teachers who espouse Word of Faith theology. Listed among her board of directors is Paul Osteen—the brother of Word of Faith teacher Joel Osteen—and Tommy Barnett, another influenced by Word of Faith teachings.<sup>6</sup> She also continues to accept speaking engagements at Osteen's Lakewood Church, the most recent being February 1–2, 2014.<sup>7</sup>

As a prolific author, Joyce Meyer has published more than eighty books on a variety of subjects. In her 2012 book *Change Your Words, Change Your Life*, we can see what can only be described as blatant Word of Faith theology: "We should be confessing God's promises as if they already existed in our lives. We are called to walk by faith and not by sight. In other words, we believe what God says in His Word, even more than we believe what we see....What do you want in the future? Are you cooperating with what you say you want by speaking as if it is already yours? I know this may seem a bit unusual, but if God can do it, then we can do it, too. We are His children, and He wants us to follow His example."<sup>8</sup>

Meyer does tell us in the same book that "we cannot merely get anything we think and say, but we can have anything that God says we can have in His Word."<sup>9</sup> However, Word of Faith teachers often will claim that God says you can have things that He didn't, in fact, promise you could have. A good example can be found a few pages later. Meyer talks about how, as a young Christian, she created a confession list of things that "were in God's Word that I would like to see happen in my life and begin to confess that out loud two times a day."<sup>10</sup> Included in that list was "Pain cannot successfully come against my body because Jesus bore all my pain" (Isa. 53:4–5).<sup>11</sup>

In another book, she wrote, "When our bodies prosper, we are strong and physically healthy. Even if we currently have a physical ailment we can pray for and expect healing, but we need to sow good seed by taking care of ourselves and not abusing our bodies."<sup>12</sup>

Isaiah 53:4 refers to physical healing, but it finds its fulfillment in Matthew 8:16–17. "When evening came, many who were demon possessed were brought to him, and he drove out the spirits with a word and healed all the sick. This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: 'He took up our infirmities and carried our diseases.'"

Peter elaborates on Isaiah 53:5 when he writes, "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed" (1 Pet. 2:24). It is clear that both Peter and Isaiah were talking about being healed of our sins, not our physical ailments.

In her 2013 book *Making Good Habits: Breaking Bad Habits*, Meyer continues to emphasize the idea that if you can speak it, you can have it: "Our words can help us or

harm us in any area of life. Words are spiritual, for they cannot be seen, and they reach into the spiritual realm and begin to create our future. According to Genesis, God created everything that we see with words! We are created in His image and told to follow His example in all things, so why would our words not work the same way?"<sup>13</sup>

It is careless and irresponsible to teach that because God can do something, we should be able to do the same thing. We are not God, and we do not have God's ability to create reality in the way He can. As sinners, we are flawed beings. One can only imagine the chaos that would ensue if we could create our future just by the words we speak.

During one of her TV shows, Meyer espoused the classic "words are containers for power" doctrine. "Words are containers for power. Just like this glass is containing my water tonight [holds up glass of water]. Words that we speak have power in them, and I want you to understand that. Every word that comes out of your mouth has power in it. Either creative or destructive power. Positive or negative power."<sup>14</sup>

In *Change Your Words, Change Your Life*, Meyer enters into the world of superstition when she gives us another illustration of the power of words: "What 'pet phrases' do you use when you are frustrated? I know one person who uses the word *death* a lot. She *loves people to death*, things *tickle her to death*, and she says, *My troubles are going to be the death of me*....She is a wonderful Christian woman who loves God, but she has a bad habit of using language that is unwise and could even do her harm....You may have thought previously that it was just something to say, but now that you know that words have power, you will want to make all of yours count for good."<sup>15</sup>

Such is the power of words in Meyer's worldview that on her television show she told people to speak to their checkbooks. Using the dry bones illustration in Ezekiel, she says, "Oh you dry bones, hear the Word of the Lord. Maybe you need to get your checkbook out and say, 'Oh you checkbook, hear the Word of the Lord,' you are not going to stay empty all of your life. Ah, somebody says this is just too weird for me. Well then, just stay broke. What you're doing's not working! You listen to me, checkbook, the first 10 percent of everything that goes into you is going to God's work, and you are going to be full to overflowing! And I am going to be blessed, and I am going to be a blessing."<sup>16</sup>

If she believes that we can do what God can do, then she should at least be consistent and teach that just as the dry bones instantly came together, we too will get instantaneous results, with money materializing in our bank accounts as soon as we utter the words. While it is true that negative or positive words can have a *psychological* effect on other people by discouraging them or giving them hope, we can see from the context that Meyer is using this idea in the *metaphysical* sense of speaking what we say into existence.

### STILL THE SAME

Those who say that the Joyce Meyer of the present differs significantly from the Joyce Meyer of the past have not done their research. She still promotes classic Word of Faith teachings and teachers. Indeed, she typifies what Hank Hanegraaff calls the

Osteenification of American Christianity.<sup>17</sup> She not only speaks in Joel Osteen’s church, she speaks with his voice (or maybe it is he who speaks with hers!). When Osteen pontificates, “The Scripture tells us that we are to ‘call the things that are not as if they already were,’”<sup>18</sup> Meyer promulgates, “I’m talking about doing what the Bible says, calling those things that be not as though they are.”<sup>19</sup> What the Scriptures actually teach, however, is that it is “the God who gives life to the dead” who “calls things that are not as though they were” (Rom. 4:17). Nowhere in Scripture are we taught to attempt creation *ex nihilo* (out of nothing)!

Not all that goes under the guise of Christianity is beneficial. In the case of Joyce Meyer, she undoubtedly wants the best for her followers. However, her practice of combining good teachings with false teachings can only serve to confuse and frustrate Christians when what she teaches fails to materialize in their lives. Rather than listen to Joyce Meyer, Christians would do much better turning to more biblically sound Christians such as Joni Eareckson Tada, Nancy Guthrie, or Ellen Dykas.

**Bob Hunter** is a former researcher with the Christian Research Institute. He and his wife now live in Fort Wayne, Indiana, and are active with the local public access television station.

---

## NOTES

- 1 “LCU’s Distinguished Degree Holders” at Life Christian University’s website, <http://www.lcus.edu/lcu-distinguished-graduates/index.php>.
- 2 Joyce Meyer Ministries website FAQ at <http://www.joycemeyer.org/AboutUs/faq.aspx>.
- 3 Joyce Meyer, *The Most Important Decision You Will Ever Make: A Complete and Thorough Understanding of What It Means to Be Born Again* (Tulsa: Harrison House, 1991), 35–36 (emphasis in original).
- 4 Joyce Meyer, “Interrupting Satan’s Plan: Releasing the Supernatural Power of God through Prayer,” from the tape series “Violent Christians in a Violent Society,” recorded July 19, 2001.
- 5 Joyce Meyer, interview by Todd Wilken, *Issues, Etc.*, KFUO radio, May 23, 2005.
- 6 See “Board of Directors” at <http://www.joycemeyer.org/AboutUs/BoardMembers.aspx>.
- 7 See “Conferences” at <http://www.joycemeyer.org/Events.aspx>, last accessed October 11, 2013.
- 8 Joyce Meyer, *Change Your Words, Change Your Life: Understanding the Power of Every Word You Speak* (New York: Faith Words, 2012), 54–55.
- 9 *Ibid.*, 49.
- 10 *Ibid.*, 56.
- 11 *Ibid.*, 60.
- 12 Meyer, *Power Thoughts: 12 Strategies to Win the Battle of the Mind* (New York: Faith Words, 2010) 192–93.
- 13 Joyce Meyer, *Making Good Habits: Breaking Bad Habits* (New York: Faith Words, 2013), 52–53.
- 14 Meyer, *Enjoying Everyday Life*, October 27, 2009.
- 15 Meyer, *Change Your Words, Change Your Life: Understanding the Power of Every Word You Speak* (New York: Faith Words, 2012), 73–74, emphasis in original.
- 16 Meyer, *Enjoying Everyday Life*, August 21, 2008.
- 17 See Hank Hanegraaff, *The Osteenification of American Christianity* (Charlotte: Christian Research Institute, 2014).
- 18 Joel Osteen, *Become A Better You: 7 Keys to Improving Your Life Every Day* (New York: Free Press, 2007), 112.
- 19 Meyer, *Enjoying Everyday Life*, August 21, 2008.