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The Osteen Moment — Your Own Moment Will Come Soon Enough

Joel Osteen found himself forced to answer a question that every Christian — and certainly every Christian leader — will be forced to answer. When that moment comes, and come it will, those who express confidence in the Bible's teaching that homosexuality is a sin will find themselves facing the same shock and censure from the very same quarters.

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Joel Osteen didn't get where he is today by staking out controversial positions on biblical and moral issues. America's prophet of *Your Best Life Now* built his reputation and his international following on an updated version of prosperity theology, laced with ample doses of pop psychology. The ever-smiling and effervescent pastor of America's largest congregation has done his best to avoid association with doctrinal matters. More to the point — he has done his best to avoid talking about sin.



Osteen would rather offer platitudes about attitudes. "God wants you to be a winner, not a whiner," he asserts. Talking in any detail about sin would be to insert negativity into his relentlessly upbeat message.

But now, Osteen finds himself in the midst of controversy. Last night, Joel and Victoria Osteen appeared together on CNN's *Piers Morgan Tonight* and, boxed in by Morgan, Joel Osteen reluctantly confessed that he believes homosexuality to be a sin.

"Yes, I've always believed, Piers, the Scripture shows that homosexuality it's a sin," he said. He added: "But you know, I'm not one of those that are out there to bash homosexuals and tell them that they're terrible people and all of that. I mean, there are other sins in the Bible, too. I think sometimes the church — and I don't mean this critically — but we focus on one issue or two issues, and there's plenty of other ones. So, I don't believe homosexuality is God's best for a person's life. I mean, sin means to miss the mark."

Pressed even harder by Morgan, Osteen was asked if singer Elton John is a sinner. He responded: "Well, it's strictly back to what the Scripture says. I mean, I can't — I can't grab one part and say God wants you to be blessed and live an abundant life, and not grab the other part that says, you know what? You know, live — live that kind of life. So it comes back to the Scripture. I'm not the judge. You know, God didn't tell me to go around judging everybody."

Morgan appeared shocked at Osteen's statements and accused the pastor of being hateful and judgmental. He also asked what Osteen would say directly to Elton John or any other homosexual. Osteen made no reference to the Gospel at all, but he did say that God would give strength in the struggle.

At one dramatic moment, Morgan rebutted Osteen's claim to be non-judgmental: "I'm not so sure though, you see. I think you are a kind of judge. And I — I think you can't abrogate that responsibility. I think what — because of your influence — there's seven million — eight million viewers every Sunday, when you say things like homosexuality is a sin, it's a big statement to make. You are a judge, and you're encouraging your congregation to believe that."

To Morgan, making any moral judgment amounts to judgmentalism. Of course, this leads logically to total moral insanity, since the only way to avoid being identified with judgmentalism is to make no moral judgments whatsoever — which no sane person can do.

Osteen's statements, verbally cushioned in every way he could imagine, fell far short of the full wealth of biblical conviction. Nevertheless, he experienced what might be called the "Osteen Moment," when his entire ministry, in the public eye, came down to his answer to Piers Morgan's forced question. To his credit, Osteen did answer his question, and by staking his position on the Bible's teaching that homosexual acts are sinful, he took the only road available to anyone with any substantial commitment to the truthfulness of the Bible.

Piers Morgan's response was entirely predictable — as was the eruption of press coverage hyped by CNN itself. The network claimed that the Osteen interview was Morgan's "most controversial" since he took over the time slot previously held by *Larry King Live*.

Compare Osteen's comments last night to this report from *The Boston Globe* in 2006:

"I don't think it's God's best," the handsome Holy Roller said of homosexuality. "I never feel like homosexuality is God's best."

When pressed on the issue, Osteen said, "I don't feel like that's my thrust . . . you know, some of the issues that divide us, and I'm here to let people know that God is for them and he's on their side."

Joel Osteen found himself forced to answer a question that every Christian — and certainly every Christian leader — will be forced to answer. When that moment comes, and come it will, those who express confidence in the Bible's teaching that homosexuality is a sin will find themselves facing the same shock and censure from the very same quarters.

What happened last night on *Piers Morgan Tonight* is a sign of things to come. After this interview, Joel Osteen will never be seen in the same way by the secular media and a good segment of the public. His efforts to avoid talking about sin failed him, and he ran out of options. Thankfully, he did not deny that homosexuality is a sin. We can only have hoped that he would have given a more bold answer, followed by an equal boldness in the power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

In any event, Joel Osteen had his moment last night. Most Christians will not face that question on national television, but on a college campus, in a family discussion, in the workplace, or in the heat of debate. But, whatever the circumstances, that moment will soon come.

I am always glad to hear from readers. Write me at mail@albertmohler.com. Follow regular updates on Twitter at www.twitter.com/AlbertMohler.

[Transcript](#), *Piers Morgan Tonight*, CNN, Wednesday, January 26, 2011.

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