

Christian Apologists: Be Careful of Oprah's Spiritual Teachings

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(Photo: Peter Rice)

Apologists Josh McDowell (sitting) and Dave Sterrett (standing) explain to audience members why Christians should be careful when listening to Oprah Winfrey's spiritual teachings at an event hosted by McLean Bible Church in Vienna, Va., on Friday, January 22, 2010.

Vienna, VA. – She is persuasive, influential and does a lot of good, but Christians should be careful when Oprah speaks about spirituality, warned two apologists who recently co-authored a book on the subject.

To a crowd of more than 1,500 people at McLean Bible Church outside of Washington, D.C., on Friday evening, renowned apologist Josh McDowell and up-and-coming apologist Dave Sterrett explained the danger of adopting Oprah's spiritual teachings from a Christian perspective.

They pointed out that the talk show queen and the spiritual teachers she promotes teach pantheism – God is all and all is God – and that there are multiple paths to reach God. She also emphasizes that people should carry out their inner longings instead of restraining themselves if the act is said to be a sin by the Bible.

"Here is where you got to be careful," emphasized McDowell. "Not only Oprah but others use Christian or religious terminologies that Christians would accept as Christian."

"The Christian God is a personal creator God which all truth resides, who is totally outside of ourselves and outside of our universe," explained the best-selling author of *More Than a Carpenter*. "When Oprah and others refer to God, it is an impersonal force. And I think one way that comes out is that they will say, 'Look within you and find yourself from within. Find that God-consciousness. That is God.'"

In their book, *"O" God: A Dialogue on Truth and Oprah's Spirituality* the apologists warn that Oprah "uses the language of the Bible and Christian traditions" but mixes that with other traditions to "create a hodgepodge of personalized faith."

They point out in their book that Oprah, during her first A New Earth Web seminar on March 3, 2008, told participants that Christ came to show people that they can discover their own "Christ-consciousness."

One of the main characters in the book, Lindsey, who is struggling to make sense of Christianity and Oprah's spirituality, says at one point:

"Maybe Jesus was no more God than you and I are. Maybe we're all just part of the UltimateBeing that we call God or Universal Energy or that Eckhart (Tolle) calls Consciousness. Eckhart (author of Oprah Book Club's pick *A New Earth: Awakening to Your Life's Purpose*) doesn't feel that it is arrogant for me to say, I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life.' If Jesus said it, why can't I?"

"O" God Authors McDowell and Sterrett

But McDowell warned Friday that reliance on this inner consciousness is dangerous because it can justify sin since people should follow what they feel rather than an absolute Truth.

McDowell recalled an episode on an Oprah Winfrey Show last year where former evangelical leader Ted Haggard, who was involved in a gay sex and drug scandal, and his wife Gayle were guests. Gayle said that her husband has struggled with [homosexuality](#) since he was 12 years old and that he is trying hard to bring the desires under control and defeat it.

Oprah reacted by standing up and saying she disagrees and that one needs to look within oneself, to find the inner longings and live them out in order to be authentic.

"But wait just a minute," the respected apologist cautioned. "What if he was a child abuser? Would Oprah say the same thing? To be consistent she has to. What if he was a rapist? She would have to say the same thing."

McDowell and Sterrett, through examples of what Oprah teaches about spirituality, demonstrate that she cannot be consistent with her belief.

The apologists also addressed the opinion of Oprah and others who subscribe to religious pluralism – which says multiple religions, often contradicting, are equally true – saying that Christians are intolerant for saying Jesus is the only way. The apologists pointed out that people who say they cannot tolerate people who say Jesus is the only way are in fact showing they are intolerant with that statement. If they were as open-minded as they claim, the authors argued, they would tolerate people who disagree with them.

"I am not called in the Bible to be tolerant," McDowell declared emphatically. "I am not. I refuse to be tolerant. I think it demeans people. I am not called to be tolerant; I am called to be loving. I am not called to tolerate people; I am called to love people.

"When you tolerate someone, it demeans them," McDowell continued. "When you love someone, it projects value, dignity and worth in that person. As Christians we are called to not only love one another, we are called to love the ungodly."

McDowell's strong message about Christians not being called to be tolerant but to love resonated with attendee Denise Wingerd, 30, of Reston Bible Church.

"It clicked with me when he said Christians shouldn't be tolerant," Wingerd said to The Christian Post after the event. "The Christ standard is to love; to love those who persecute you. That is way above tolerance," she said.

Wingerd said she used to watch the Oprah Winfrey Show until a "defining moment" made her decide to stop. On one episode, Oprah congratulated a guest for divorcing his wife and leaving his family after coming out that he is gay. Oprah had told the guest it was time to celebrate that he is now his best self.

"I thought to myself, this woman does not deserve my attention," Wingerd said.

Meanwhile, Melanie McFarland, 29, a member of McLean Bible Church, appreciated McDowell's argument that if people followed Oprah's teaching on acting on their inner longings then child-abuse and rape would be acceptable.

"You can rationalize everything in the world," McFarland said. "He (McDowell) opened my eyes."

She added, "I don't watch Oprah but it's just amazing people take her word and don't look for the truth."

"O" God: A Dialogue on Truth on Oprah's Spirituality is written as a fictional Socratic dialogue where the reader feels he/she is sitting at the table with the characters discussing and comparing Christianity with pantheism and the spiritual teachings promoted by Oprah and her teachers. The book contains many exact quotes from Oprah and the authors she promotes on their views of spirituality.

Included in the back of the book are discussion questions that can serve as a guide in conversations about Oprah's spirituality in community groups, book clubs, and Sunday school Bible classes.