

# ***Become a Better You: Reflections on Joel Osteen’s Latest Book***

**By Michael Horton**



It was a pleasant afternoon a few years ago in my back yard, writing an article, when *Modern Reformation* executive editor Eric Landry informed me that he had scheduled me for an interview on Joel Osteen for “Dateline NBC.” Knowing nothing about Mr. Osteen or his message at that time, I declined—with no effect whatsoever on Landry’s force of will. “Here’s the book: *Your Best Life Now*. So you’d better get reading!”

Little did I know then that Osteen already was a phenomenon and would only become a greater one as months wore on. In retrospect, I am glad to have had the opportunity to talk to so many people who are confused about the message that Osteen preaches and that seems to pervade so much of ordinary American preaching and spirituality in our day.

A CBS “60 Minutes” interview sparked more recent requests for comment concerning Osteen’s new book, *Becoming a Better You: 7 Keys to Improving Your Life Every Day*. I took it with me on a recent flight and I offer the following reflections.

## **Heavier Emphasis on the Prosperity Gospel**

Under the Library of Congress identification, this book is classified as “1. Self-actualization (Psychology)—Religious Aspects—Christianity.” Even the Library of Congress seems to know what sort of message this represents. “You can be better,” Osteen invites. “The question is: ‘How? What must I do to become a better me?’ In my first book, *Your Best Life Now*, I presented seven steps to living at your full potential.” But with *Becoming a Better You*, he wants to go a little deeper. “I’m hoping to help you look inside yourself and discover the priceless seeds of greatness that God has placed within you. In this book, I will reveal to you seven keys that you can use to unlock those seeds of greatness, allowing them to burst forth in an abundantly blessed life.”

Remember, God has put in you everything you need to live a victorious life. Now, it’s up to you to draw it out...What does it mean to become a better you? First, you understand that God wants you to become all that He created you to be. Second, it is imperative that you realize that God will do His part, but you must do your part as well. To become a better you, you must:

1. Keep pressing forward.
2. Be positive toward yourself.
3. Develop better relationships.
4. Form better habits.
5. Embrace the place where you are.
6. Develop your inner life.

## 7. Stay passionate about life.<sup>1</sup>

The theme is “coming up higher.” From beginning to end, Osteen addresses his vast readership as though each person is “a child of the Most High God.”

God has breathed His life into you. He planned seeds of greatness in you. You have everything you need to fulfill your God-given destiny....It's all in you. You are full of potential. But you have to do your part and start tapping into it...You have the seed of Almighty God on the inside of you...We have to believe that we have what it takes.<sup>2</sup>

It is indeed true that there are appeals to the Bible scattered throughout this book. However, in nearly every case a verse is either torn from its context and turned into a “fortune-cookie” kind of promise that one can name-and-claim for oneself or it is actually misquoted to serve Osteen’s point. For example, we read that when God confronted Adam and Eve after their sin, “He said, ‘Adam, who told you that you were naked?’ In other words, ‘Who told you that something was wrong with you?’ God immediately knew the enemy had been talking to them. God is saying to you today, ‘Who told you that you don’t have what it takes to succeed?’”<sup>3</sup> Where, in the passage he refers to (Genesis 3:11), God asks Adam this question in order to convict him of his sin, Osteen makes it sound as if it were Satan who told Adam that he had failed the test.

As in his earlier book, Osteen here never speaks of sin as falling short of God’s glory, but of falling short of God’s best for your life. In fact, Osteen’s attachment to the prosperity gospel is even more explicit in *Become a Better You*. Just as Kenneth Copeland, Benny Hinn, and other “faith teachers” speak of believers as “little gods” who share God’s nature, Osteen has an entire chapter devoted to “The Power of Your Bloodline.” “You have the DNA of Almighty God.”<sup>4</sup> It’s “what’s in you” that is divine seed, he says.<sup>5</sup> It is not that God has imputed Christ’s righteousness to us and adopted us as his children. We are not saved by an external and alien righteousness, but by an internal and essential righteousness that belongs to us simply by virtue of our being created in his image. Therefore, throughout the book Osteen can address all of his readers as semi-divine without any reference to faith in Christ.

As if the fall never happened, Osteen writes, “He has programmed you with everything you need for victory. That’s why every day you can say things like, ‘I have what it takes. I am more than a conqueror. I am intelligent; I am talented. I am successful; I am attractive; I am an overcomer.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Joel Osteen, *Becoming a Better You: 7 Keys to Improving Your Life Every Day* (New York: Free Press, 2007), title page.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 5

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 9

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 34

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 35

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 37

Where Paul, in Galatians 3:29 argues that the inheritance of eternal life comes through the promise (i.e., Christ) rather than by the law, Osteen again lifts a single verse out of its context as a promise of temporal prosperity:

I love the Scripture that says, 'If we belong to Christ, we are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.' That means that we can all experience the blessings of Abraham. If you study Abraham's record, you'll discover that he was prosperous, healthy, and lived a long, productive life. Even though he didn't always make the best choices, he enjoyed God's blessings and favor.<sup>7</sup>

This is a clear example of how Osteen turns even the most obvious references to *Christ* (as the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy) into timeless examples of what can happen to us if we name and claim our blessings. He does not *interpret* Scripture; he *uses* it as a book of quotations to serve his own prosperity message.

The book is shot through with the lingo of the prosperity gospel: we are to “declare” God’s blessing, “speak” prosperity, and “prophecy” health, wealth, and happiness into our lives. All of this creates the impression that God has set everything up for our victory, but it is up to us to actually plug into the power-source and create our blessings by following the proper principles and procedures.

So in spite of the supernatural rhetoric, at the end of the day it all sounds deistic: God has set everything up, with the laws of prosperity in place, and now the ball is in our court. Following a well-worn path of “victorious life” teachers, Osteen speaks of “tapping into” the eternal realm. In this way, even religion becomes a species of technology: by knowing the right principles, formulas and steps, prosperity, blessing, and favor can be yours here and now. Once again, the Gnostic brand of spirituality is readily apparent.

He wants us to have a little heaven on earth, right where we are...[Y]ou can accomplish your dreams before you go to heaven! How can you do that? By tapping into God's power inside of you...Please understand that those are all things from which you have already been set free. But here's the catch: If you don't appreciate and take advantage of your freedom, if you don't get your thoughts, your words, your attitudes going in the right direction, it won't do you any good. You may be sitting back waiting on God to do something supernatural in your life, but the truth is, God is waiting on you. You must rise up in your authority, have a little backbone and determination, and say, 'I am not going to live my life in mediocrity, bound by addictions, negative and defeated.'<sup>8</sup>

I'm all for positive thinking—as long as we don't call it the gospel. I come from a long line of Wild West pioneers and can identify with Osteen's commendation of his parents as a major source of an optimistic outlook. The problem is when we blindly ignore the reality of our

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 40

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 41

condition before God. Whatever good things there may be about me, none of them commend me before God's righteous judgment.

Moving beyond positive thinking, Osteen embraces "positive confession," the prosperity doctrine that says if you not only believe for something but declare that it is already yours, the desired blessing will become true. God may be the source of this blessing in an ultimate sense, since he set things up, but whether we actually receive God's favor and blessings depends entirely on our attitude, action, and obedience.

Osteen devotes a chapter to "Making Your Words Work for You." "Every day, we should make positive declarations over our lives," he writes. "We should say things such as, 'I am blessed. I am prosperous. I am healthy. I am talented. I am creative. I am wise.'"<sup>9</sup> Joe's wife could not carry her pregnancies to full term, so Joe changed his name to the fuller name, "Joseph," meaning "God Will Add." "Several months after Joseph began believing his name," Osteen tells us, "his wife became pregnant again. And for the first time in ten years, she carried the child full term, and gave birth to a healthy baby boy...With our words, we can prophesy our own future."<sup>10</sup> "Something supernatural happens when we speak it out. That's how we give life to our faith...Declare it by faith and use your words to change that situation."<sup>11</sup>

This means that whatever God has done to make all of this possible, the victory that we are actually able to achieve and the blessings that we are actually able to receive depend on our effort. So in a chapter titled, "Have Confidence in Yourself," Osteen repeats his mantra, again misquoting the Bible:

The Scripture says, 'Our faith is made effectual when we acknowledge everything good in us.' Think about this: Our faith is not effective when we acknowledge all our hurts and pains. It's not effective when we stay focused on our shortcomings or our weaknesses. Our faith is most effective when we acknowledge the good things that are in us.<sup>12</sup>

The closest thing that I have been able to find to the wording cited by Osteen is Paul's statement in 2 Corinthians 12:9: "But he [Jesus] said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.' Therefore, I will most gladly boast all the more about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may reside in me."

Of course, if this is the verse that Osteen has in mind, it says exactly the opposite of Osteen's paraphrase. In fact, it is part of a larger explanation of why Paul, in contrast to the "super-apostles" who were leading the Corinthians astray with their "smooth talk and flattery," would "not boast about myself, except of my weaknesses." In fact, Paul says that God gave him a "thorn in the flesh, so that I would not exalt myself" (2 Cor. 12:5-10). In times of weakness,

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 109

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 114

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 115

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 129

distress, and difficulty, Paul says, where we lose our self-confidence to handle our situation before God, we are actually in the best position for God to show his power.

### **Redefining the Christian Message**

In the only clear reference to trusting in Christ that I came across in this book, Osteen still feels compelled to include us as the object of faith: “When we believe in God’s Son, Jesus Christ, *and believe in ourselves*, that’s when our faith comes alive. When we believe *we* have what it takes, we focus on *our* possibilities” (emphasis added).<sup>13</sup>

Even when the concepts of sin and redemption are employed, they are redefined. Sin is not a condition of rebellion that we inherit from Adam, but diseases, poverty, and bad attitudes that we inherit from our family line. In the Bible, a “curse” has its proper place in the context of the covenant. For example, in Ancient Near Eastern treaties, which form the pattern of covenantal thinking employed in the Bible, an emperor would bring down his judgment on a rebellious tribe or nation under his rule. This sanction would be called a “curse.” However, in the prosperity gospel, “curse” is more nearly related to the world of magic—the way we usually speak of curses in our culture today. So where the curses that God invokes upon humanity as a result of Adam’s sin in the garden are a judicial sentence, Osteen speaks of “generational curses” that have no obvious reference to divine judgment. You may have inherited your grandmother’s genes, which included the curse of diabetes. However, “You need to put your foot down and say, ‘Grandmother may have had it [diabetes]. Mother may have had it. But as for me and my house, we’re redeemed from diabetes. I’m going to live under the blessing and not the curse.’”<sup>14</sup>

A doctor named Vanessa refused to accept her joint disease and she was eventually delivered of it, Osteen relates. “This type of blessing is for believers, not doubters.”<sup>15</sup> His father had high blood-pressure, but kept saying, “Joel, I will never have a stroke.” “He was saying that by faith because he struggled with high blood pressure his entire life. He would say, ‘I’ll never be incapacitated. I’ll never come to the place where I cannot preach.’ And true to his faith, my father preached just eleven days before he went to be with the Lord.”<sup>16</sup> It would not be surprising, then, if such teaching led a sincere follower to conclude that a failure to be healed or to become financially prosperous was the result of one’s own disobedience.

If I am diagnosed with Grandma’s diabetes, am I a doubter rather than a believer? “The Bible calls it an *iniquity*,” Osteen writes.<sup>17</sup> It is a curse from generation to generation “until somebody rises up and puts a stop to it. For example, when Adam and Eve disobeyed God, that decision didn’t just affect them; it affected their children. Do you know who the first murderer

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 130

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 45

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 46

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 334

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 50

was in the Bible?...The iniquity kept getting passed down through generations of Cain's offspring."<sup>18</sup>

Therefore, in the place of the Christian doctrine of original sin (viz., the whole human race being guilty and corrupt in Adam) is the notion of "iniquity" as a genetic trait that someone in one's family tree allowed into the bloodstream. Quite literally, Osteen believes, the curse is in the blood, just as each person has God's DNA. The generational curse is lifted by our obedience, when someone in the family line finally "takes authority" over it. Absent is any reference to sin as a condition of being opposed to God, guilty before God, and corrupt in heart, mind, soul and will. The ethical character of sin as both a condition and specific actions of transgressing or failing to conform to God's law is exchanged for a magical conception.

At the same time, our victory over generational curses is entirely manageable. We can overcome the "iniquity" that has been passed down to us: "God has given you free will. You can choose to change...People who have been abused are the most likely to become abusers. Why is that? It is not because they want to. They know how destructive it is. It's because that negative spirit keeps being passed down. Thank God, you and I can do something about it."<sup>19</sup>

Just as sin is redefined as a failure to attain prosperity in all areas of life, redemption is now understood as freedom from pain, illness, poverty, as well as the bad attitudes and negative habits that our parents or grandparents passed on to us.

Think of it like this: Each of us has a spiritual bank account. By the way we live, we are either storing up equity or storing up iniquity. Equity would be anything good: our integrity, our determination, our godliness. That's storing up blessings. On the other hand, iniquity includes our bad habits, addictions, selfishness, lack of discipline.<sup>20</sup>

"Your faithfulness is noticed in heaven. You are storing up equity for both yourself and generations to come."<sup>21</sup> A more thorough-going works-righteousness is difficult to conceive:

Get up every day and give it your best effort. If you will do that, not only will you rise higher and accomplish more, but God has promised that your seed, your family line for up to a thousand generations, is going to have the blessings and the favor of God—all because of the life that you've lived.<sup>22</sup>

So we see once again that Osteen has not abandoned the "legalism" of previous generations. If anything, he intensifies it, but his followers do not recognize the tightening noose or the mounting burden because he makes it sound so easy. It is not easy, however, to be told that one's health, wealth, and happiness—as well as one's victory over sin and death—depend on

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 56

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 59

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 67

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 69

the extent of our determination and effort. A weak view of sin fails to bring us to the end of our rope; instead, it encourages us to try just a little bit harder to save ourselves. It's easy. *Really.*

Therefore, Osteen advises, we need to stop listening to accusing voices. Any voice that accuses, convicts, or condemns is the voice of Satan, according to Osteen. He nowhere suggests that this may be the voice of the Holy Spirit, showing us our guilt and helplessness before God's law in order to drive us to Christ. We are not morally bankrupt before God. Sin is reduced to certain attitudes and actions that we can put a stop to whenever we want. Therefore, we do not need a one-sided rescue operation outside of us. The seed of goodness is still within us, waiting to explode if we will just nurture it.

One wonders what Osteen would do with passages such as the following: "Our righteousness is like filthy rags" (Is. 64:6); "There is no one righteous; there is no one who does good, no not even one" (Rom. 3:10). Where Jeremiah says "The heart is more deceitful than anything else" (Jer. 17:9), Osteen says that his confidence before God is in the righteousness of his own heart: "I may not have a perfect performance, but I know my heart is right....Similarly, as long as you're doing your best and desire to do what's right according to God's Word, you can be assured God is pleased with you. Certainly, He wants you to improve, but He knows that we all have weaknesses." Sin is reduced to "human foibles and imperfections" that "poke through our idealism...."<sup>23</sup> "As long as we're doing our best, we don't have to live condemned even when we make mistakes or fail."<sup>24</sup>

Although he does mention God's forgiveness and mercy, this divine grace is not understood as something that comes at the price of Christ's atoning sacrifice. It is not because God has reconciled us to himself through the death of his Son, but because he is an indulgent father who let's bygones be bygones, that we can receive his forgiveness and move on.

Even Paul's experience in Romans 7 is reduced to a "nobody's perfect" kind of speech. "The Apostle Paul once said, 'The things I know I should do, I don't. The things I know I shouldn't do, I end up doing.' Even this great man of God who wrote half the New Testament struggled in this regard. That tells me God does not disqualify me merely because I don't perform perfectly, 100 percent of the time. I wish I did, and I'm constantly striving to do better. I don't do wrong on purpose, but like anyone else, I too have weaknesses."<sup>25</sup> However, this trivializes Paul's travail in that chapter, where he laments not simply his failure to score a perfect 100, but his failure—even as a believer—to gain victory over his sins. This does not lead him to say, in effect, Let's brush ourselves off and do our best anyway. He does not say, "Nobody's perfect. At least my heart is right," but rather, "Oh, wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" Only this deep anguish over the depravity of his own heart can lead him to look not within but outside of himself: "I think God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Rom. 7:24-25).

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 86

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 86-87

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 87

There is no clear sense in Osteen’s message that God has forgiven and justified us because even though we stand condemned according to the law we are declared holy by Christ’s imputed righteousness. Rather, God just ignores our guilt and focuses on the good things he apparently sees in us. “However, God does not focus on what’s wrong with you. He focuses on what’s right with you. He’s not looking at all your faults and weaknesses.”<sup>26</sup> Again, the “good news” according to Osteen is that God does not judge us according to his law (the 100 percent rule), but looks at our heart and sees something decent in all of us. “I am bold enough to believe that I am a friend of Almighty God, and that he is smiling down on me right now. I’ve accepted the fact that I don’t perform perfectly all the time, but I know my heart is right. To the best of my ability, I’m doing what pleases Him.”<sup>27</sup> His forgiveness is due not to Christ’s having borne our debts, so that there is no more guilt to be judged, but to God’s decision to overlook our faults: “He chooses not to remember your mistakes, your sins, your failures.”<sup>28</sup> “God approves you unconditionally, just as you are.” Again, no mention of Christ. “Frankly, it’s not because of what you have or haven’t done; God loves you because of who you are and because of who he is. God is *love*.”<sup>29</sup>

We do have to be careful here. Of course, God is love. He is also righteous, holy, and just. God’s love and justice are fully realized together—not by overwhelming these other attributes with his love, but by sending his own Son to live a perfect life in our place, suffer judgment in our place, and be raised for our justification. By setting the justice aside, Osteen actually obscures the glory of the cross and greatness of God’s grace.

Instead of acknowledging that we are still sinners, though justified and renewed in Christ, we need to confess that we are “no longer poor old sinners, we are sons and daughters of the Most High God.”<sup>30</sup> Osteen confuses the bad preaching of the law as scolding with the proper preaching of the law as driving us out of ourselves to Christ. “Sometimes religion tries to beat people down and make them feel bad about themselves. ‘You’ve done this and you failed here, and you didn’t treat this person right, and you didn’t raise your kids as well as you should have.’...‘Why don’t you lighten up and give yourself a break?...If you’ve made mistakes, just say ‘God, I’m sorry; I repent. Help me to do better next time.’”<sup>31</sup>

Instead of pointing us to Christ, where God’s record-keeping was justly satisfied and the court transcription was nailed to the cross (Col. 2:14), Osteen just gets rid of the idea of any negative record. God is certainly recording our good works, but not our sins. If this is the case, however, why do we need Christ at all? We certainly do not need him to live a perfect life in our place, but do we even need him to offer himself to death in our place if the only record-keeping that counts is the good things that we have done? Osteen adds,

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 89

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 91

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 91

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 101

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 102

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 39

He's not keeping a list of your shortcomings. God is not looking at everything you've done wrong over your entire life or your disobedience last week. He's looking at what you're doing right. He's looking at the fact that you have made a conscious decision to be better, to live right, and to trust Him. He is pleased that you are kind and courteous to people.<sup>32</sup>

Far from the struggle of Paul in Romans 7, Osteen makes it sound as if we can manage the sin-problem by our own positive outlook. "If you want to sin, you can sin. I sin all I want to," he says. "The good news is that I don't want to...Stop dwelling on everything that's wrong with you and taking an inventory of what you're not. The Scripture says in Hebrews, 'To look away from everything that distracts.'"<sup>33</sup> Once again, Osteen misquotes the Bible to make his point. Hebrews 12:1-2 actually reads, "Therefore, since we also have such a large cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us lay aside every weight and the sin that so easily ensnares us, and run with endurance the race that lies before us, keeping our eyes on Jesus, the source and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that lay before him endured the cross, despising its shame, and sat down at the right hand of God's throne." In other words, the counsel is to look away from ourselves—both our sins and our good works—and not let anything distract us *from Christ*. Yet Osteen's entire message represents a distraction from Christ. Who needs Christ if this is the gospel: "You're not perfect, but you are trying to live better, and God looks at your heart. He sees the inside, and He is changing you little by little"?<sup>34</sup>

Once again, Osteen's message—though perhaps a bit more explicitly oriented toward the prosperity gospel than most—is not all that different from the general drift of a lot of popular religion and spirituality that pervades even our own evangelical circles today. The focus is on us rather than on God, on our happiness apart from God's holiness, on our "ascending higher" by moral effort rather than on our being receivers of God's saving work in Jesus Christ. "I know, too, even when my plans don't work out, even when things don't go my way, because I am honoring God and striving to keep the right attitude, God will make it up to me."<sup>35</sup>

### **The Good News? God's Keeping Score!**

Having exchanged the gospel of Christ's doing, dying and rising, for a pep talk for our doing, declaring, and rising, Osteen can say, "The world does not need to hear another sermon nearly as much as it needs to see one."<sup>36</sup> Now *we* are the "good news." And here is the gospel according to Joel Osteen:

God is keeping the records. He sees every act of kindness you show. He sees every time you are good to somebody. He hears every encouraging word you speak. God has seen

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 103

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 104

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 105

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 218

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 186

all the times you went out of your way to help somebody who never said thank you. Your good deeds do not go unnoticed by Almighty God.<sup>37</sup>

But once we are placed back under the law for righteousness, on what basis can Osteen claim that God only counts the good works? Is there a single passage in the Bible that separates God's record-keeping in this way, so that our good works can bring God's favor and blessing but our sins do not count at all? If we are going to inherit God's promises by the "righteousness that is by the law," then Osteen's pleasant outlook hardly seems justified.

Make no mistake about it, behind all of the smiles, there is a thorough-going religion of works-righteousness: "God's plan for each of our lives is that we continually rise to new levels. But how high we go in life, and how much of God's favor and blessings we experience, will be directly related to how well we follow His directions."<sup>38</sup> God "is waiting for your obedience so He can release more of His favor and blessings in your life...My question to you is: How high do you want to rise? Do you want to continue to increase? Do you want to see more of God's blessings and favor? If so, the higher we go, the more disciplined we must be; the quicker we must obey."<sup>39</sup> "You don't get the grace unless you step out. You have to make the first move. God will see that step of faith and He'll give you supernatural strength to help you overcome any obstacles standing in the way of doing the right thing...Remember: How high you go in life will be directly related to how obedient you are."<sup>40</sup>

And if anyone has any questions about whether this plan is workable, Osteen offers himself as an example:

I know I'm not perfect, but I also know this: My conscience is clear before God. I know that I'm doing my best to please Him. That's why I can sleep well at night. That's why I can lie down in peace. That's why I have a smile on my face. Friend, keep your conscience tender, and you will discover that life keeps getting better and better.<sup>41</sup>

By contrast, Jesus and his apostles taught that the searching judgment of God through his law brings conviction, pricking my conscience that I have fallen short of God's glory. My conscience does not render a positive verdict in God's courtroom. The only reason I can sleep well at night is that even though my heart is still filled with corruption and even though I am not doing my best to please him, I have in heaven at the Father's right hand the beloved Son who has not only done his best for himself, but has fulfilled all righteousness for me in my place.

Just as Joel Osteen has decided for himself the message that he will preach, he has also tailored his own vocation. In interviews, he has said that he is not called to explain the Scriptures or expound doctrine. In this book he adds, "I'm not called to explain every minute facet of

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 301

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 302

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 308

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 316

Scripture or to expound on deep theological doctrines or disputes that don't touch where real people live. My gifting is to encourage, to challenge, and to inspire."<sup>42</sup> Ambassadors do not get to choose what they say. As ministers of the gospel, our "gifting" is to "preach the whole counsel of God" (Ac 20:27).

Have we actually come to a place in Evangelicalism where we will listen to people who clearly tell us that they are not called to explain and expound the Scriptures? A number of responses I have received after being interviewed regarding Osteen's message criticized me for failing to show a united front against the real enemies: the liberals. However, it is unclear to me how Osteen's message displays any higher regard for the authority and basic teaching of the Scriptures. Once upon a time, conservative Protestants imagined that theological liberalism was the greatest threat to authentic Christianity in our time. With liberalism almost completely irrelevant as an active school or movement, Osteen's success confirms my suspicions that evangelicalism itself is becoming a more serious obstacle to evangelical faith and practice today.

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 236