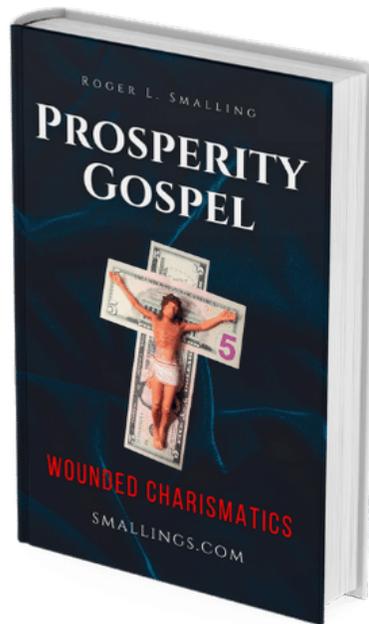


THE PROSPERITY GOSPEL

Wounded Charismatics



by

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Table of Contents

- [Chapter 1:](#) The "God" in the Mirror
- [Chapter 2:](#) Faith or Fiction
- [Chapter 3:](#) Sovereignty and Suffering
- [Chapter 4:](#) Origins of Word of Faith
- [Chapter 5:](#) Positive Confession
- [Chapter 6:](#) Wounded Faith
- [Chapter 7:](#) Just Like Your Soul Prospers...
- [Chapter 8:](#) As Rich as Abraham
- [Chapter 9:](#) Sufficiency, Yes!
- [Chapter 10:](#) The Jesus Died Spiritually Heresy
- [Chapter 11:](#) Job and the kingdom
- [Chapter 12:](#) The Psychology Behind the Word Movement
- [Chapter 13:](#) Denying the Symptoms: Is it valid?
- [Chapter 14:](#) Did Jesus Heal Them All?
- [Chapter 15:](#) How to Grow in Faith

- [Appendix A:](#) Comparative Chart, Word of Faith vs Bible
- [Appendix B:](#) On "Divine Nature" 2 Peter1:3-4
- [Appendix C:](#) 150 Verses Word of Faith Cultists Don't Like to Hear
- [Bibliography](#)

Endnotes

Preface

Jason drove away from the Bible school in despair. He had invested his life, money and faith in the teachings of the school.

He had watched a fellow student die the week before from dysentery, an easily curable disease. The unfortunate student, motivated by the teachings of the Word of Faith school, had not resorted to medical treatment.

Jason still believed in God. He simply did not want to pray to him. In Jason's mind, he was not abandoning God, for God had abandoned him. His Bible lay closed in a corner of the car as he headed home to attend a state university. He had decided on a career that did not include gospel ministry.

I met Jason at the university. He was a fellow student in an educational psychology course. We got acquainted through a mutual interest in Mexican food.

During lunch one day, I asked Jason if he was a Christian. He replied yes, though he had not read the Bible in three years nor attended church and had no plans for doing so. He then related the above story.

Jason did not know I had just finished writing the manuscript for this book. I gave him a copy and it changed his life.

Today Jason is a public school teacher and a member of a sound evangelical church. God had not abandoned him. He realizes now the true God had delivered him from the false one, taught at the Word of Faith school.

The last time I saw Jason, he told me a really funny joke and was laughing. I had not seen him laugh much before.

If you are looking for ammunition against the Charismatic movement, put this book down. It is not for you. Likewise if you are looking to support the view that spiritual gifts and miracles no longer exist.

I am not a cessationist, one who believes gifts and miracles of the Spirit ceased after the Apostolic age. The New Testament spiritual gifts exist today, though not necessarily for the same purposes nor in the same way as sometimes taught in Charismatic circles.

This is vital to clarify, because a common defense by the prosperity teachers against critics, is that we are "against the Holy Spirit" or "against spiritual gifts." I am against none of these. I am against false gods, false christs and false prophets.

The Charismatic movement initially had commendable aspects. Asking God for fresh empowering of the Holy Spirit and earnestly desiring spiritual gifts to edify the church, is laudable. Scripture commands it.

The movement tended to be a well-deserved rebuke to older and colder denominations. It was a fresh reminder of my own duty as a minister to pray for the sick...with occasional dramatic results.

A great reverence for the Word of God also characterized much of the movement. While some Charismatics mistakenly thought of the Bible as a magic wand to get what they want, some traditional denominations did not seem to think about the Bible at all.

Fresh enthusiasm in worship is another praiseworthy by-product of the Charismatic movement. Personally, I was getting tired of "climbing Jacob's ladder." Many fine worship songs in traditional churches today were born out of the movement.

What I do NOT appreciate is the manner in which large sectors of the Charismatic movement have been hijacked by a bizarre gnostic cult, known variously as The Prosperity Movement, Word of Faith or Faith Movement.

I appreciate even less the psychological and spiritual damage done to many former adherents of the movement who have crashed into the wall of reality. Perhaps these are the lucky ones. Thousands of others are still unaware they may be worshipping a false god and a false christ through revelations of false prophets.

This book is not intended as ammunition, but as a tool of mercy. I want it to help those whose faith has been injured by the Faith Movement and deliverance to those still involved, before they also crash into the hard wall of reality.

About the Author

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www.Smallings.com

Chapter 1:

The "God" in the Mirror

Pagan religions have a typical way of reconciling God and man. They split the difference by reducing God to more like a human and exalting man to the status of a god. Mythology, whether ancient or modern, invariably diminishes God to less than what he is, and exalts man to more than what he is.

To the Greeks and Romans, Zeus was king of the gods. He was similar to a very big man, powerful, but neither infinite nor omniscient. He could be fooled. These gods displayed all the foibles of human nature... jealousy, greed and fighting amongst themselves.

In typical pagan mythology, some gods were previously humans, ultimately deified by gaining the favor of a god, or by drinking the divine elixir, ambrosia. Some humans were exalted after death to become stellar constellations.

The Apostle Paul referred to this reduction-exaltation process in Romans 1:22-23:

Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools (23) and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.

Christian revelation, in contrast, brings man and God together in a relationship, while leaving both intact. The meeting point between God and man in Christianity is a mutual righteousness, that of Christ, credited to the believer's account through faith in Jesus (Romans 3&4). No change in quality of existence or essence of being takes place in either God or man.

In the gospel, God remains the sovereign, infinite, all-powerful being the Scriptures portray him to be. Man remains a dependent created being.

In the early days of the Word of Faith movement, some bizarre concepts were propagated about God having a form. One of them is the belief that God has a spiritual body shaped like a human.

Kenneth Copeland describes God as:

A being that stands somewhere around 6'2", 6'3" that weighs somewhere in the neighborhood of a couple of hundred pounds or a little better, has a hand span of 9 inches across...¹

Copeland exceeds the ancient Greeks in bringing man and God together. Referring to the creation of man, Copeland adds,

God and Adam looked exactly alike.²

Even Zeus was not *exactly* like a man.

Does God have a body?

Sometimes children, or new converts, have a humanistic view of God. They may picture him as an enormous grandfather sitting on a heavenly throne. While such mental imagery is inaccurate, it is not dangerous as long as a Christian eventually grows out of it.

In theology, the notion that God has a body is called "anthropomorphism," from two Greek words: *anthropos*= man, and *morphos*= form. Varieties of anthropomorphism range from the Mormon idea of a physical body, to the more benign view that God has a spiritual body shaped like a human.

Word of Faith teachers lean toward some form of anthropomorphism, though they differ among themselves as to what degree. Hinn, for example, does not endorse Copeland's views, although his own thinking is strongly anthropomorphic.

...Do you know that the Holy Spirit has a soul and a body separate from that of Jesus and the Father?God the Father is a separate individual from the Son and the Holy Ghost, who is a triune being who walks in a spirit body and he has hair...has eyes...has a mouth...has hands³

Though Hinn's concept of a Trinity with spirit-bodies falls short of biblical orthodoxy, at least he does not endorse Copeland's extreme anthropomorphism.

¹ Kenneth Copeland *Spirit, Soul and a Body* 1985 audio # 01-0601 side 1.

² Kenneth Copeland, *The Authority of the Believer IV; Tape #01-0304*

³ Orlando Christian Centre, October 13 1990. Quote from: www.cephasministry.com

Anthropomorphism is dangerous in that it leads to a denial of the three central attributes of God: Almighty (omnipotent), all knowing (omniscient) and infinite (omnipresent.) Scholars call these three qualities, "incommunicable attributes," because we finite creatures do not share them in common with God.

Whatever the nature of a body, whether physical or spiritual, it cannot possess any of these three qualities. A body, by definition, is limited. If God has a body, he cannot be infinite; if not infinite, then not omnipresent, etc.

If God has a body, even a very large spiritual one, then compared with infinity, he must be infinitely small also. I have never met an anthropomorphist willing to say God is infinitely small. Instead, the contradiction is ignored.

Although, over the years, this teaching has faded slightly, and most WOF preachers don't preach it from the pulpit anymore, this movement seems to have found new ways to add to its errors:

The «little gods» theory

While reducing God to a big human is theological disaster, equally serious is exalting man to a little god. ⁴

Earl Paulk says,

Adam and Eve were placed in the world as the seed and expression of God. Just as dogs have puppies and cats have kittens, so God has little gods; ... Until we comprehend that we are little gods, we cannot manifest the kingdom of God. ⁵

So, in Word of Faith thinking, created in the **image** of God implies being a **duplicate** of God.

Nigerian Prosperity preacher Pastor Chris Oyakhilome echoes Paulk with,

When God created Man, He created him in His image and after His likeness. That's why we look like Him; we have two hands the same way He has two hands. We

⁴ In theology, we call this error, *apotheosis*, the elevation of man to divine status. Merriam Webster Collegiate Dictionary.

⁵ Earl Paulk *Satan Unmasked* p. 97

have two legs, one head, one mouth, one nose, two ears and two eyes **just like Him.**

6

Do these teachers also confuse the difference between a mirror and a man? When I shave in the morning am I looking in the mirror at flesh and shaving cream? Not really. I'm looking at polished glass. It reflects what I am but does not bleed when I cut my cheek.

The notion of equality with God did not originate with Copeland or Paulk. Their mentor, Kenneth Hagin, taught,

Man...was created on terms of equality with God, and he could stand in God's presence without any consciousness of inferiority...God has made us as much like himself as possible...He made us the same class of being that he is himself...Man lived in the realm of God. He lived on terms equal with God...The believer is called Christ...That's who we are; we're Christ! ⁷

Here, Hagin makes no effort to define God. It's unnecessary. If Adam stood in God's presence on equal terms, with no sense of inferiority, then this alone reveals Hagin's concept of God's essence and Being.

The Bible, of course, teaches nothing of the kind. In Genesis we see God walking in the garden and communing with Adam. Is this sufficient to suggest Adam and God were equals? Hardly! If Adam were an equal, why did he try to hide from God when he sinned? He could have created his own universe and escaped.

Back to the garden

Let's go back to the Garden of Eden and see where the truth lies.

Genesis never deifies Adam. How can we have something restored that never existed in the first place? If Adam had deity by any definition, why would Satan bother to offer to make Adam and Eve, "as gods"? Eve would have replied, "No thanks, we already have some."

⁶ Oyakhilome, Chris, *Seven Things the Holy Spirit Will Do For You*, p. 41
Quote from the section "God gives birth to gods!" <https://bit.ly/3rJVpnm>

⁷ Kenneth M. Hagin, *Zoe: The God-Kind of Life*
Tulsa, OK: Kenneth Hagin Ministries, Inc., 1989), 35-36, 41

Yes, there is a promise in the Bible that we can become gods. But notice who made the promise. SATAN! And he is still making the same vain promise today. But the Lord God says,

*Before me no god was formed, nor will there be one after me. Is. 43:10
I am the LORD, and there is no other; apart from me there is no God. Is.45:5*

In Word of Faith mythology, Adam lost his privileges and status as a god. Man recuperates them through conversion to Christ. Benny Hinn explains,

Christians are little messiahs. Christians are little gods.⁸

In case we assume Hinn is speaking figuratively, notice these quotes:

Are you a child of God? Then you're divine! Are you a child of God? Then you're not human!⁹

I am a little messiah walking on earth,..... You are a little god on earth running around. ¹⁰ Christians are little messiahs. Christians are little gods.¹¹

It seems these teachers are not saying every human being is a god. Only Christians are gods. Copeland adds,

Every Christian is a god. ... You do not have a God in you; you are one. ¹²

Before Copeland, his mentor Kenneth Hagin taught,

You are as much the incarnation of God as Jesus Christ was...the believer is as much the incarnation as was Jesus of Nazareth. ¹³

Copeland parrots this error,

⁸ Benny Hinn, Praise-a-thon (TBN),11/90, “*Our position in Christ*, tape A031190-1

⁹ Benny Hinn, TBN, Dec 1, 1990

¹⁰ Benny Hinn, Praise-a-Thon TBN, Nov. 6 1990

¹¹ Benny Hinn, Praise-a-thon (TBN),11/90, “*Our position in Christ*, tape A031190-1

¹² *The Force of Love* (Fort Worth: **Kenneth Copeland** Ministries, 1987, audiotape #02-0028), side 1

¹³ Kenneth Hagin, *Word of Faith*, Dec. 1980, p.14

Jesus is no longer the only begotten Son of God. ¹⁴

Both Hagin and Copeland disregard the importance of the term “only begotten” in John 3:16. This word sets apart the sonship of Jesus as distinct from our own.

Not only do these teachers confuse “image” with “duplicate,” they also confound union **with** Christ and identity **as** Christ.

We are adopted children (Romans 8). Jesus was never adopted because he was in the family (the Trinity) from all eternity. It borders on blasphemy to apply the word “incarnation” to a mere human.

Paul Crouch and the TBN Network

The Trinity Broadcasting Network (TBN), is the biggest religious television network in history. Founder Paul Crouch is close friends with Hagin, Copeland, Hinn and other Word of Faith teachers. Crouch exclaims,

Christians are little gods.¹⁵

God draws no distinction between himself and us. God opens up the union of the very godhead (Trinity), and brings us into it.¹⁶

Declaring no distinction between God and us is pretty radical. If Crouch is referring to the God of the Bible, he should say Christians are omnipresent, omniscient, almighty and perfect. Either that, or he is referring to some other god.

In the Bible, our union with Christ is through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and the imputation of the righteousness of Christ. “Union” does not mean “deify.”

We would think Crouch and friends would hesitate to make such claims on public television. He must have known he would draw criticism. His reaction?

¹⁴ *Now We Are In Christ Jesus*, 1980, p24 Quote on August 27, 2004 borrowed from:
Let us Reason Ministries: <http://www.letusreason.org/Wf22.htm//>

¹⁵ TBN, grabado 7/7/86.

¹⁶ Paul Crouch, Praise-a-thon (TBN), November 1990

Do you know what else that's settled then tonight? This hue and cry and controversy that has been spawned by the Devil to try to bring dissension within the body of Christ that we are gods. I am a little god. I have his name. I am one with him. I'm in covenant relation. I am a little god. Critics be gone! ¹⁷

Crouch thinks the Devil is behind the criticism he and his friends have drawn though calling themselves gods. The critics should be silenced. In Crouch's mind, he is proclaiming self-evident truth.

His complaint did not silence the critics. Five years later, Crouch blasts them again with:

I think they're damned and on their way to hell and I do not think there's any redemption for them...the heresy hunters that want to find a little mote of illegal doctrine in some Christian's eye and pluck that little mote out of their eye when they've got the whole forest in their own lives and in their own eyes. I say to hell with you! ...Oh hallelujah. Get out of God's way, quit blocking God's bridges or God's gonna shoot you if I do not! ¹⁸

Apparently it is a "little mote" to redefine the Christian God. Those who disagree are damned with no hope of redemption. Crouch thinks they deserve that God should annihilate them.

Defending his Word of Faith friends, Crouch continues,

... if you want to criticize Ken Copeland for his preaching on faith, or Dad Hagin. Get out of my life! I do not even want to talk to you or hear you. I do not want to see your ugly face! Get out of my face in Jesus' name. ¹⁹

It is understandable we may say things we regret in a fit of frustration. We all offend in many ways. To date, there have been no expressions of regret from Crouch or his friends, nor a whisper of retraction of these teachings.

In paganism, a progression takes place. First, a human is **like** a god. Then he is **part** god. Then he **is** a god. In the final stage, he thinks he is God himself.

¹⁷ Paul Crouch, *Praise the Lord* program, July 7, 1986

¹⁸ Paul Crouch, Praise-a-thon 4/2/91

¹⁹ Ibid.

Word of Faith teachers stop short of this last stage. None of them have ever suggested they are God himself. They come close to it, however, by claiming a union with Christ so intimate that the demarcation between themselves and Christ is blurred.

By union with Christ, they mean a mixing of divine essences, not just personal relationship. Benny Hinn declares,

When I stand in Christ - I am one with him; united to him; one spirit with him. I am not, hear me, I AM NOT PART OF HIM, I AM HIM! THE WORD HAS BECOME FLESH IN ME! ...When my hand touches someone, it's the hand of Jesus touching somebody. ²⁰

I [Jesus] loved you enough to become one of ya! And I love you enough to make you one of me! ²¹

We would hope Hinn is speaking figuratively, but it does not sound like it. He confuses relationship with Christ, with mixture of divine essence.

Are you ready for some real revelation knowledge....you are God. ²²

It is possible Hinn meant to say, "you are **A** god." Hopefully he was not at this moment digressing toward the final stage of paganism.

What does God himself think of this?

The first two of the Ten Commandments reveal what the true God thinks about humanizing him:

*I am the LORD your God,...(3) You shall have no other gods before me.
(4) You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath... Ex.20:1-4*

Taken together, these two commandments tell us we have no authority to define God in any other terms than those he has clearly revealed. Doing so is idolatry.

²⁰ Benny Hinn, *Our Position in Christ* tape # AO31190-1

²¹ TBN, December 1st 1990

²² **Benny Hinn**, "Our Position In Christ, tape # AO31190-1

Do we have a right to a personal opinion about God? NO. By the phrase, *I am the LORD your God*, the Lord reserves the right to define himself. By so doing, he invalidates personal opinions and human definitions. He defines himself clearly through creation, his Word and through Christ. Any opinion contradicting this revelation is idolatry.²³

The easiest way to “*have another god*” before the Lord is with our imagination. It matters little if we make an idol out of wood or stone. If we suppose God is whatever we would like him to be, we are idolaters.

Idolatry is supremely serious, which may be why the commandments against it are first on the list. The worst form of idolatry is to make a god in our own image, and then worship it. This is exactly what Word of Faith teachers do.

Conclusions

It looks like the Word of Faith teachers have taken the pagan route in bringing man and God together. Their “god” is not even as big as Zeus.

If we thought these Word of Faith teachers were merely immature in their doctrine of God, we would be less alarmed. This is not the case. For decades they have paraded their teachings openly. Biblical scholars have tried to reason with them. Books have refuted their pagan doctrines. They have ignored every rebuke, refused every correction, disregarded sound scholarship and cursed those who have tried to help them.

Is there anything worse than worshiping a false god? Possibly. It would be for a person to imagine he is a god himself. Word of Faith teachers do both.

So be careful about sipping from the fountain of their teachings. The drink they offer is not ambrosia. It will not make you a god. It is deadly poison.

²³ I use the singular here deliberately. These three taken together constitute one united revelation.

From this chapter we learn:

- Word of Faith teachers replicate pagan thinking by redefining the Christian God as less than what the Scriptures reveal him to be and granting divine status to man.
- Word of Faith teachers are therefore prophets of a false god.
- The movement teaches that Christians are little gods, of the same essence as God himself.
- These teachers confuse man as image of God with man as a duplicate of God.
- The Bible teaches union with Christ through the Spirit. Word of Faith doctrine teaches **joining** with Christ though a **mixing** of our supposed divinity with his.
- Word of Faith teachers define their critics as unenlightened and spiritually dead, worthy of divine judgment.
- These teachers inadvertently break the first and second of the Ten Commandments in their teachings about God.

Chapter 2:

Faith or Fiction

Near my house is a gymnasium where personal trainers teach bodybuilding. Like these trainers, the prosperity teachers see their mission as helping Christians develop strong faith muscles to control reality.

Faith in God is the whole point of the Bible. How could anything be wrong with this emphasis? Nothing... assuming these teachers mean the same as the Bible intends by the words "faith" and "God."

Poison in a milk bottle

Filling a milk bottle with poison is not necessarily wrong. It would be bad, however, to give someone the bottle and call it milk.

This often happens in theology. Teachers take biblical words, empty them of their original content, add their own meanings and pass them off as legitimate. Followers end up accepting ideas they might ordinarily reject.

So, just because a teacher uses words like *God, faith, Jesus*, does not necessarily mean they are teaching the Word of God. It may be poison in a milk bottle.

Which faith?

Kenneth Copeland: Faith is a power force. It is a tangible force. It is a conductive force. ²⁴

Copeland: Faith is a spiritual force....It is substance. Faith has the ability to effect natural substance. ²⁵

These teachers see faith as a mystical force we manipulate to our advantage. In combination with our spoken words, faith becomes a catalyst to create our own reality.

²⁴ *The Force of Faith* [Fort Worth, TX: KCP Publications, 1989], 10

Quote borrowed from www.bible-reading.com/crisis.html#4b

This quote in turn from *Christianity In Crisis*, by Hank Hanegraaf.

²⁵ *Forces of the Recreated Human Spirit*: Kenneth Copeland Ministries, 1982, 8

Quote borrowed from Let Us Reason Ministries: *Copeland's Land of Biblical Revelations*: <http://www.letusreason.org/Wf22.htm>

They do not see faith as simple trust in God. It is a mystical power in its own right, **almost** like a law of nature such as gravity or electromagnetism. Though not really a **physical** law, it is powerful enough to effect matter.

We would be unconcerned if we thought they were speaking figuratively. Or, if we thought this view were uniquely Copeland's, we could ignore the anomaly. However, it typifies the movement. Charles Capps,

Faith is the substance, the raw material....Faith is the substance that God used to create the universe, and he transported that Faith with His words....Faith is the substance of things, but you cannot see faith. Faith is a spiritual force. ²⁶

In case we suppose Capps was speaking metaphorically, note the following,

Here, essentially, is what God did. God filled His words with faith. He used His words as containers to hold His faith and contain that spiritual force and transport it out there into the vast darkness by saying 'Light be!' That's the way God transported His faith causing creation and transformation. ²⁷

Copeland echoes Capps on the power of this force-substance in the creation scenario.

²⁶ Quote borrowed from borrowed from www.bible-reading.com/crisis.html#4b
This quote in turn from Christianity In Crisis, by Hank Hanegraaf

Another similar quote by Capps is:

He framed the world with His words. You cannot build without substance. He took words--faith-Filled words were God's substance. Here, essentially, is what God did. God filled His words with faith. He used His words as containers to hold His faith and contain that spiritual force and transport it out there into the vast darkness by saying 'Light be!' That's the way God transported His faith causing creation and transformation.

Dynamics of Faith & Confession [Tulsa, OK: Harrison House, 1987], 28-29, emphasis in original.

²⁷ *Dynamics of Faith & Confession*, Tulsa, OK: Harrison House, 1987 pp 28-29

God used words when he created the heaven and the earth....Each time God spoke, he released His faith -- the creative power to bring His words to pass. ²⁸

To these teachers, God has faith and depends on it for his creative power. The prosperity movement sees this as a self-evident fact. In discussing the potential of faith in the lives of Christians, Copeland refers to,

The very faith that God used when he created,...²⁹

Who made this mystical faith-substance on which God depends for his creative power? If God, why would he be dependent on it?

Where do we fit in?

According to prosperity doctrine, we have access to the same force God used to create the world. As little gods, we can tap into this faith-force at will and create the reality we wish. If we lack prosperity or good health, the problem is our ignorance of how to control the law of faith.

Throughout the centuries, Christian theology has understood "faith" to mean trust or belief in God. Whatever else prosperity movement adherents mean by the term; it is clear they do not mean **that**.

²⁸ Kenneth Copeland, *The Power of the Tongue* (Fort Worth: KCP Publications, 1980), 4. Quote borrowed from Let Us Reason Ministries: *Copeland's Land of Biblical Revelations*. www.letusreason.org/Wf22.htm

²⁹ Quote borrowed from Let Us Reason Ministries: *Copeland's Land of Biblical Revelations*. www.letusreason.org/Wf22.htm

Shock effect

Sometimes I like to grab the attention of my theology students by saying, "faith, *by itself*, has no inherent value, power or merit. It is not a good work and deserves no reward. In some circumstances, it may not even be a virtue."

My remark loses its radical tone after explaining that faith is like an empty box. It takes its value from its contents. If the box contains Christ, then its value is immeasurable. What if the box contains the Devil?

Faith itself is morally neutral, taking its value from the object to which it is associated. Looking at it this way, faith may not even be a virtue, unless it is directed toward Christ. In fact, it can even become a vice, such as faith in a false god, or faith in one's own righteousness.³⁰

Faith is the vehicle that brings Christ to us. When a friend pulls into our driveway, we think of the friend, not the vehicle. The relationship is what matters, even though it would not take place if a vehicle had not brought him. This relationship exists regardless of the vehicle.

This is what I mean by faith has no value, "*by itself*."

So, if faith has no inherent virtue or power, how could it be a creative force? Christ possesses all the virtue and power. Faith is merely the vehicle that brings him to us.

Is faith a "law"?

Throughout *The Laws of Prosperity*, Copeland portrays faith as an indispensable law. We sow seeds of faith like a farmer plants a crop, anticipating a harvest.

This is true as long as we understand it as a metaphor for simple trust in God's promises. If we go beyond this and make it a "law" in the sense of a mystical force, we fall into serious error.

Only once does the Bible refer to faith as a "law."

³⁰ What about 1Cor.13:13? Paul classifies faith as one of the three great virtues along with hope and love. The context assumes our affections are directed toward Christ. Paul does not imply faith in *anything* is a virtue, any more than he would consider love a virtue if it were directed toward a neighbor's wife. In the secular world people use the term *faith* when they really mean hope, self-confidence or a mystical religious feeling.

Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith. Romans 3:27 (KJV)

In context, Paul contrasts faith with works as the principle through which God communicates the gift of righteousness. This has nothing to do with mystical forces. The NIV translates the Greek term "law" as "principle," possibly to avoid such confusion. Scripture never portrays faith as a "law" in any other sense than this.

Faith in faith?

Hagin's booklet, *Having Faith in Your Faith*, became a milestone in the development of the Word of Faith movement. It crystallized the central concept that faith is a law to manipulate.

To Hagin, it makes perfect sense to have faith in our faith. If faith is a force we control, we should obtain more faith by growing in our confidence to manipulate it. Hagin viewed this process as an upward spiral leading to greater power.

Hagin was right if faith is a mystical substance we manipulate. If not, his reasoning is carnal self-dependence.

Grace out the window

The gospel is a "grace" movement, not a "faith" movement. When Paul said, *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith*, it settled forever the question as to what saves us. Faith does NOT do the saving. Grace does the saving. Faith is merely the vehicle by which God's grace comes.

Grace means unmerited divine favor. If faith were a force or substance we could manipulate, then salvation would be a work deserving reward. In that case, faith could be excluded for the same reason we exclude works...precisely because it would deserve reward.

The Apostle Paul clarifies,

Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. Romans 4:4

Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace... Romans 4:16

Why does he say, **so that**? Because he understands faith deserves no reward, and therefore is the only appropriate vehicle of grace.

How then could faith be a law, substance or a force we control to obtain blessing? Where does this leave grace?

Prosperity teachers miss this paradox: It is precisely because biblical faith is not a law, force or substance that grace comes through it.

Where does faith originate?

Faith is not a gift of grace in Word of Faith thinking. Grace contradicts the concept of a mystical force-substance manipulated at our own discretion.

The Bible teaches clearly that faith is a gift of grace. Even though saving grace comes through faith, this faith is generated by grace itself. This is not circular reasoning. God is the origin of the whole process.

..., He [Apollos] was a great help to those who by grace had believed. Acts 18:27

The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. 1Tim. 1:14

Shorthand

Christians often say we are saved by faith. Do we mean it is faith itself that does the saving? No. This is biblical shorthand for expressing faith is a vital instrumental for bringing Christ who does the saving.

A good example is when Jesus said to a repentant woman, *Your faith has saved you* (Luke 7:50). He meant the woman's faith opened the door to the One who does the saving. He would never imply that the woman's faith did the saving without him. If that were the case, she need not have bothered coming to Jesus at all.

At times Scripture associates two things so closely, that the one becomes a metaphor for the other. Example: In John 17:3 and 12:50, obedience to God's command is called "eternal life." The obedience itself is not the eternal life, but leads to it. We would hesitate to call obedience a mystical substance to manipulate in order to generate eternal life.

Likewise in Scripture, faith is so vitally associated with obtaining blessings, it may sound like faith itself generates the blessings. This is shorthand for

showing the importance of faith, not showing faith to be a mystical force, which properly manipulated, will produce whatever we want.

Does it denigrate biblical faith to question the so-called Faith Movement? No. Our intent is to give faith its rightful place, no more, no less. Christ, in turn, receives the glory he deserves.

The so-called Faith Movement is a misnomer. These teachers are not exercising faith in any biblical sense of the word. It is a pseudo-Christian movement of idolatry, egotism and narcissism. Idolatry? Yes. What idol? Themselves.

From this chapter we learn:

- The prosperity movement teaches:
 - faith is a mystical force and a spiritual substance.
 - God himself was dependent on the force of faith to create the universe.
 - as created gods, man has the ability to create his own reality by manipulating the law of faith.
 - we ought to have faith in our own faith.

- The faith movement does not teach faith by any biblical definition.

- Biblical faith is neither a law, a force nor a mystical substance.
 - Faith is simple trust in God.
 - Faith is morally neutral, dependent on the object with which it is associated.
 - The gospel is a grace movement, not a faith movement.
 - Faith is a gift of the grace of God.

Chapter 3:

Sovereignty and Suffering

I glanced across the large audience under the tent. Usual crowd. An interesting mixture of Ecuadorian faces, from toddler to elderly. A few teens hid shyly in the back shadows, fearful of being noticed by their peers.

Many had heard a rumor that the "gringos" were working miracles over at the tent and that constituted the best show in town. Besides, they didn't want to miss the free film we would show after the preaching.

This typical South American crowd had one thing in common. None had ever heard a clear presentation of the gospel and most of them never would again. Whatever I preached in the next few moments had to be simple and clear. I started with: "GOD IS A GOOD GOD!"

As I proclaimed this, I knew those saved that night would face trials in the coming months. We would need to help them through the lengthy process of learning who God really is and what he intends by the term "good." I also knew there are no short cuts.

Do I regret using the simplistic slogan, "God is good"? Not a bit. If I returned to Ecuador, I would start the next evangelism campaign with the same approach.

When people begin to mature in Christ, they soon realize that issues are not as simple as previously thought. Eventually the convert suffers a financial setback, an illness in the family, or the loss of a loved one. The suspicion enters that perhaps God has something wholly different in mind than was first imagined. The convert learns from the Bible that God is almighty. Why then did he not do something about this problem? Friends tell him the Devil caused it. Does this mean that God has no control over the Devil? Little comfort in that!

Soon the local faith-brigade comes along and dutifully informs him that it is his own fault because of a lack of faith. So it all depends on himself? But "self" does not seem quite up to it these days. Guilt feelings come as he wonders if he's starting to blame God.

In short, he eventually encounters the age-old dilemma: The sovereignty of God and the suffering righteous.

Is it possible to lay the responsibility at God's doorstep while continuing to love and trust him?

Part of the problem with the slogan, "God is a good God" resides in a perverted definition of the word "good." Left without explanation, it suggests a standard of goodness outside of God that he himself follows. This is nonsense.

No rules are tacked up on his throne-room wall for him to consult to make sure he does everything right. If any standard existed independently of him then it would be greater than he. The will of God alone is the ultimate standard of goodness.

In Genesis Chapter One, God planted a tree in Eden and called it "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." God forbade man to eat of it, and for excellent reasons. Man's finite nature restricts his ability to define correctly for himself what is good and evil. God alone has that prerogative. We repeat Adam's sin when we presume otherwise.

But before we address the issue of the highest good, we must not ignore the question of whether or not God is in absolute control. If He's not, then it does not matter what he esteems as the highest good because he cannot enforce it anyway.

The options are clear: Either he is sovereign or he isn't.

There was a time in church history in which anyone who even questioned the sovereignty of God, would have been considered heretical. Yet just today I read the first chapter of a book by a very popular evangelist who categorically denies that God is in control of this world. He claims that God's hands are tied unless someone prays. Such statements are blasphemous because the Bible says:

... He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: "What have you done?" Daniel 4:35

My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please. Isaiah 46:10

Our God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him. Psalms 115:3

But what about the "free-will" of man? Can God control that? Let's check some Bible examples:

Nebuchadnezzar

This pagan king of Babylon made three serious mistakes. First, he made a god to suit himself. (Daniel 3) How typically human!

Man wants a god he can manipulate. Non-threatening. Easy to live with.

But today people are more enlightened. Instead of using gold they simply invent gods of their own imaginations.

Secondly, he used every means at his command to get others to worship his sham god. (It's a good thing Nebuchadnezzar didn't have radio and TV at his disposal. He might have succeeded.)

Thirdly, he committed the most serious error. He attributed the works of the Almighty to his god. (Daniel 4:30)

The true God called him a madman.

What did God do about it? He reached inside Nebuchadnezzar, and yanked his mind out of his head...reason, free will, and all. It left him a raving beast for the next seven years.

Did God require Nebuchadnezzar's permission to do that? Did he need anyone's prayers to accomplish it?

After the seven years, when God was good and ready, he restored Nebuchadnezzar's mind.

What did Nebuchadnezzar understand about his experience when he came to his senses? *He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: "What have you done?"* Dan.4:35

The Antichrist and the Ten Nations

Who is going to be in control of the thought processes of the Antichrist...the false prophet, the Great Whore and the Ten Nations during the end times? The Devil?

For God has put it into their hearts to accomplish his purpose by agreeing to

give the beast their power to rule, until God's words are fulfilled. Revelation 17:17

The enemies of Jesus

This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge..." Acts 2:23 (NIV)

Did the apostles believe in God's sovereignty over man's actions and will?

..."Sovereign Lord," they said, "you made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and everything in them... Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed. They did what Your power and will had decided beforehand should happen." Acts 4:24,27 & 28 (NIV)

Did God control the Egyptians?

I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they will go in after them. And I will gain glory through Pharaoh and all his army, through his chariots and his horsemen. Exodus 14:17

Would any of us have been saved if God had paid any attention to the inclination of our thoughts and wills?

...the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Romans 8:7

He went on to say, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him." John 6:65

All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. John 6:37

Multitudes of Christians today are worshipping a false god. They praise a parody of the true God...the result of modern culture via the vain imaginations of honored and confused teachers. I call this the "sham god" of modern Christianity.

What is this "sham God" like?

- His highest ambition is to exalt man's wonderful self-potential.
- He waits humbly and patiently for the kind permission of man's free will in order to do anything.
- He depends on man's own self-generated faith.
- He is frustrated in his plans by his rebellious creatures, having been taken by surprise and helpless to stop them.

- His hands are tied unless someone prays.
- He is subjugated to a set of spiritual laws superior to himself.
- He rewards men with money in direct proportion to their faith.
- He is not really in control of this world.
- He is not sovereign.

However accommodating such a god may be to human reason, he has one fatal flaw: HE DOES NOT EXIST.

What is the true God like?

The God of the Bible is sovereign. He is in absolute control of all things. Some say, "This makes man a puppet"! I reply that anything else makes God a puppet!

Others add, "But this does not seem fair"! I remind these of Paul's admonition:

One of you will say to me: Then why does God still blame us? For who resists his will? But who are you, O man, to talk back to God?" Romans 9:19-20 (NIV)

Now that we see the Bible doctrine of the sovereignty of God, where does that leave us? Have we painted ourselves into a corner? We were trying to explain how to answer the dilemma of the suffering saint without laying the blame at God's doorstep. Yet we just proved that God does as he pleases, restricted by nothing and no one. Does not this add to the dilemma?

In the short run, yes. In the long run, no.

The tendency to deny God's sovereignty is a defensive reaction on the part of well-meaning Christians. We want to get God off the hook somehow.

But consider this possibility: Perhaps God does not want to be let off the hook. Perhaps he put himself there deliberately. If so, we must be careful not to let him off because he might resent it.

A problem with getting God off the hook is that the hook does not stay empty. Instead we find ourselves on it!

Many Christians consider this solution quite acceptable. They suggest that God has relinquished part of his authority to us, and that the answers to all our problems rests with ourselves. His hands are effectively tied, to a degree, unless we act. So, this wraps up the package neatly and we can all go home now.

A couple of knots on this package are loose, though, and I'd rather not go home just yet.

If God has relinquished any part of his sovereignty to man, we must determine what percentage he has given up. Then we'll know to what degree we can worship him. After all, we surely do not want to give him all the glory if we are partly in control. That wouldn't be fair, would it?

If he has given 25% of his sovereignty to man, then let us worship God 75% and man 25%. Or we can alter 2Corinthians 1:25 to read "for by 75% faith in God you stand: yea, the other 25% belongs to you." Instead of calling him the Almighty, let's call him the Almost Mighty. Forgive this sarcasm. But if we must talk about dilemmas, this is a royal one.

The basic error here is in failing to distinguish the difference between sharing authority and relinquishing it. It's like a joint checking account. If you add someone else's name to the account it does not remove your own authority to write checks nor are you limited to the approval of the other parties. If you want, you can set it up so that the others need your approval, but you do not need theirs. Perfectly legal and logical.

What a horrendous error to imagine that God has ever given up any of his authority just because he allows some of his creatures to share it!

That's why truths about our authority in Christ are no grounds for self-dependence. God controls the degree of our personal involvement in each case. If you drop the pen, do not worry. He can still write the check himself if he must.

Who has the key?

If the degree of responsibility is individual and personal, then it is irrational to judge a brother as faithless for being poor or sick. Example: A car requires gasoline to run. The car is not running. Therefore it is out of gas. Sounds good so far. But wait! A car can stop for many reasons. Perhaps the engine has failed...or maybe the owner does not intend to use it right then.

So it is with our problems. Lack of faith could be a factor. But, on the other hand, maybe the brother's faith "tank" is full. In such cases, the key is in the hand of our Owner and he will turn it at the time and place of his choosing.

God's sovereignty must never be used as an excuse for a poverty doctrine nor passive acceptance of illness. Few today believe the archaic notion that

suffering is intrinsically good for the soul. Or that we must submit passively to every affliction. But some fail to realize that the opposite view (that health and wealth are inherently good) is wrong. Both views are opposing sides of the same false coin. Many Christians imagine themselves full of fuel because they are whizzing down the highway. But some are just coasting downhill toward a crash. Knowing these things makes it easier to avoid judging our brother, doesn't it?

"Good"...by whose definition?

At the beginning of this chapter, I suggested that our perception of "good" might be distorted. Most people assume that man's welfare is God's highest priority. Then they define "welfare" in terms of creature comforts: Health, wealth, peace and security.

We are deceived if we imagine there exists any truth in these assumptions. The right answer is suggested with...

Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use? Romans 9:21

God's highest priority is to reveal his nature, not the welfare of man. The entire redemption story, both in salvation and condemnation, provides the background on which God displays his attributes.

Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God: Romans 11:22

His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. Ephesians 3:10,11

C.S. Lewis brought out the striking thought that Shakespeare was wrong when he said, "All the world's a stage and we the actors." As we look closer at the theater we discover that the play about us, but about God. He is the one on center stage, and we are merely the back drop.

Grace could not exist without a sinner. Like a flower growing out of manure, the very element that is so repulsive produces the beauty. But can grace exist for the majority? Hardly! If you do the same favor for everyone, then it becomes general policy rather than a favor. A neighbor brings us fresh home-baked bread as a sign of special friendship. If she did this for everyone, it would cease to be a special favor.

Neither could the wrath of God exist without a sinner. To demonstrate destructive power, there must be something to destroy. (Romans 9:21)

But what about the welfare of his children?

Does not God have their concern in top priority? Yes, he certainly does. He loves and cares for us and has planned our highest good from before the foundation of the world. He is determined to see us attain his best, whether we like it or not.

Recently, I was struck by the following comment in a book: "The ultimate goal of sanctification is nothing." After recovering from temporary befuddlement, I had to agree. Sanctification is the goal, and God loves us too much to back down from it. Holiness has no further purpose than itself.

It follows, then, that God defines the term "good" in consequence of whatever will produce holiness in us. All other scriptural principles are subservient to this.

Considering this, it becomes less surprising that Christians experience trials and sufferings. If anything could be cause for doubt, it should be that believers do not suffer more than they do.

I have observed Christians who maintain a Biblically solid understanding of God's sovereignty. They go through their trials easier and rarely ask the question, "Why did You allow this"?

What then are the options when we confront a serious trial? We have three, and only one is right.

Option one: Accuse God of injustice for leaving us in a helpless state.

All spiritual tests consist in being apparently abandoned by God. If this feeling were absent, it would cease to be a valid test.

Knowing that trials are inevitable is a potent weapon for going through them successfully. Don't worry, this knowledge isn't some sort of dangerous mystical confession that will magically produce the trials. Reality is reality regardless of what we say about it. Peter said,

Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin.... 1Peter 4:1.

He also warned,

Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. v.12.

Blaming God gives only a temporary and artificial feeling of relief... Like trying to put out a fire by throwing sticks at it.

Option two: Submit passively to the affliction

This reaction is almost as dangerous as the previous one. Exploitive religions use such reasoning to keep the oppressed in subjection.

In Judges 3:2, we read that God left enemies in the land knowing that they would attack Israel. Why did he do such an apparently mean thing? He wanted them to learn how to fight.

Suppose the Jews had assumed that God was teaching them humility. They might have just laid down in the streets and submissively let the chariots run them over. They would have learned humility all right, but that wasn't the lesson intended. Sometimes God allows the Devil to attack the believer so he can learn to fight.

I recall the story of a young Bible school student who suffered severe trials for several weeks. Nothing was going right. Everybody was hassling him. Constant depression. Then one night while alone, he suddenly lost his temper and shouted, "Satan! In the name of Jesus, get off my back!" Peace enveloped him. The pressures were gone. And a still small voice broke through to his spirit..."Well, son, I see you finally decided to stand up and fight."

Passive submission to every trial and affliction is both unscriptural and dangerous.

Option three: Submit to God but resist the affliction

Never in the history of humanity has a thorn existed as sharp as Paul's thorn in the side of Charismatics. Elaborate explanations have been devised to prove his affliction was not a physical illness...as though that was relevant.

By engaging in such disputes, Christians successfully rob themselves of the main points of the lesson. If God felt it mattered that much, he would have made it indisputably clear. Let's observe some of Paul's instructive reactions to this thorn:

First, he never stopped to enquire as to the source of the affliction. If it was bad, he fought it. Simple.

Second, observe the way he fought it. It was with humble and beseeching prayer. He asked God to remove it. He didn't command God, nor try to maneuver him. Nor did he try to manipulate it out of existence with some special knowledge of spiritual principles, such as "confession." He had better sense than that. He simply prayed.

Never try to manipulate God. Every time I attempt it, I get my hands slapped.

Notice also that Paul prayed more than once about his problem. Some have taught that it's unbelief to pray twice for the same thing. But Paul didn't think so. If my car does not start the first time, I try the key again until it does.

Isn't it amazing the clever theological devices that Christians invent to get themselves into bondage? Some people are absolute geniuses at making traps to catch themselves. Paul's approach to the problem demonstrated that the ultimate outcome depended on his sovereign Lord. Doubtlessly, if God had told him the answer was to stand on his head and whistle "All hail the king," he would have done it. He was open to whatever the Lord told him to do, even if it was to do nothing.

In fact, "nothing" is exactly what the Lord said to do. *My grace is sufficient for you.* Yet even then, Paul didn't lose his holy aggression. He reached out and took hold of the affliction and wrung out every last drop of grace he could. Then he picked up that grace and slapped the tar out of the Devil with it. Most likely when Paul was through, the Devil was sitting back on his haunches thinking that it would have been better to have left that preacher alone.

Someone asked me how to tell the difference between a satanic attack and a divine testing. Actually, it does not matter. Since God is sovereign, it is always both anyway. God allows Satan to attack us because he wants us to defeat him. If it weren't for the Devil, the church would be lazy, and Christians would learn little.

It distresses some people to learn that God and Satan can agree on anything, but it is so. For two parties to test a third, they must agree on the conditions of the test. The Book of Job illustrates this:

God declared Job's sincerity, while Satan denied it. This resulted in a test of Job's integrity, with Satan being the immediate and active cause and God the ultimate and passive cause.

The notion that Job's problems were his own fault, caused by his fear, (quoted out of context from Job 3:25) is easily dismissed by Job 2:3 *though you incited me against him to ruin him without any reason.* (No cause from Job's side of the fence). The only thing Job ever feared was God. (Job 1:1,8)

Not only does God affirm the test was without a cause in Job, he also takes full responsibility for it.

Both Satan and God used the same events but with opposite intent. The difference then between a satanic attack and a divine testing is not in the means but in the opposing purposes. Satan wants to prove the worst about us while God intends to prove the best. So it's a waste of time trying to figure out which is which. Just submit to God and fight the affliction. *In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing.* Job 1:22

The love Paul and Job had for God was a rare and beautiful kind. It was different from mere "natural affection," which is loving those who do good to us. As long as the relationship is profitable, we desire to maintain it. When it ceases to be useful, we drop it. Job's wife had this kind of love for God. It wasn't enough in a pinch. She wanted Job to curse God and die.

Natural affection is normal. Mothers love their children, husbands their wives. But the difference between agape love and natural affection shows up the minute the relationship ceases to be beneficial. The opposing reactions of Job versus his wife glaringly expose this difference.

Sometimes the essence of a spiritual trial revolves around the question of the quality of our love. We love the Lord because he does good things for us. But in his kingdom, this will not pass. He wants us to love him for himself. This involves a mental rather than an emotional choice. In times of testing this choice is made.

This sheds light on ordinary trials. But what about genuine tragedies? The loss of a loved one? A crippling accident? These can hardly come under the category of "trials."

A tragic accident occurred during our missions conference in Ecuador, in 1981. A pick-up truck carrying about a dozen young people overturned due to an error in judgment by the driver. She was going about 60 miles an hour

at the time. It was a miracle that no one was killed. But an eight-year-old boy was permanently crippled in his right leg. The driver, a missionary lady, was in anguish, filled with guilt and confusion. A few days after the accident, she asked me the inevitable question, "Why did God allow it? If God is in control of all things, why didn't he let me be the one injured instead of the child"?

I knew the question was coming and wanted to be prepared with an answer. So, partly out of my own frustration, I responded with another question, "Even if God were to give an answer, would it relieve this child's pain, or yours? No answer could ever replace the tragedy. So you might as well quit asking the question. Either God is God or he isn't. Sometimes that is the only question that he allows us to face." To my amazement, this brought tremendous comfort to the young lady. Though the experience left scars, she is a fruitful and happy missionary today.

Christians with a firm grasp on God's sovereignty go through their trials and tragedies much easier than those who doubt it. This truth has been the bulwark of saints throughout the ages, and as we enter the end-times, we must cling to it tenaciously.

Let no one imagine that because I proclaim these truths, that I am an expert sufferer. I admire those sweetly passive folks who accept difficulties with quiet repose. Are they that way by grace or is it really the result of a natural predisposition of temperament? It's doubtful if most of my readers are like that though. Personally, my disposition prefers temper tantrums.

To my chagrin, I discovered early that God remains unmoved by my protests. He just continues the operation anyway, as though it were none of my business. Apparently, we can add tenacity to his list of attributes. He seems determined to bless us with qualities we did not know were part of the bargain when we accepted Christ.

I could have done better in the past. I hope to do better in the future. It would be simple if we could only find a way to remove from suffering one minor detail: IT HURTS! Apart from that, suffering would be quite tolerable.

I say this to clarify that understanding a few truths about our trials, and how they relate to our sovereign Lord, will not relieve the pain, nor answer all the questions. It will still hurt. But at least it becomes endurable when we understand that there is meaning and purpose behind it.

I'm painfully aware (excuse the pun), that the views I've shared do not fully cover the ground any more than does the slogan, "God is a good God." I would be the prince of fools to say they did.

So let's lay the matter at God's doorstep, where he wants it to be, and go on with humility... knowing he is greater than any concept of him we could ever imagine.

From this chapter we learn...

- God is sovereign over everything, including evil. Though he is not the cause of evil, it is under his control.
- Since holiness is God's highest value for Christians, he allows us to suffer trials for our sanctification. Therefore, lack of faith may not be the cause of sickness or financial problems
- It is cruel, besides unscriptural, to accuse a person of unbelief because of illness or poverty.
- Despite the philosophical tension between the goodness of God and evil in the world, God calls us to trust him regardless.

Chapter 4:

The Origins of Word of Faith

Word of Faith has its roots in a pagan cult that rivaled Christianity during the first three centuries of the Christian era, known as Gnosticism. The early Church fathers, such as Irenaeus, eventually refuted and destroyed it.

Various Gnostic cults existed, but all held to a form of Dualism. This meant matter is bad and spirit is good. The Bible, however, teaches God created both realms and called all creation, spiritual and material, *good*.

Some Gnostics even taught two gods: An evil one that governed the material realm and a good one, the spiritual. All, however, held that a series of spiritual laws exist between the two dimensions by which both realms could be controlled. Certain spiritually elite people were endowed with a special "gnosis" or "revelation knowledge" by which they could learn to manipulate these laws to their advantage ... even to controlling their own spiritual destinies.

A Gnostic goal was to attain to divinity and become a kind of creative "god." This was through the "releasing" of his spirit from the material realm through his special "knowledge" of the mystical forces governing the universe.

Irenaeus, one of the third century fathers who combated Gnosticism in his book **Against Heresies**, comments on the spiritual pride characteristic of Gnostics:

They consider themselves 'mature', so that no one can be compared with them in the greatness of their Knowledge, not even if you mention Peter or Paul or any of the other apostles..."(I, XIII, 6)

...such a person becomes so puffed up that he ... walks with a strutting gait and a supercilious countenance, possessing all the pompous air of a cock! (III, XV, 2)

The parallels between ancient Gnosticism and Word of Faith are too striking to ignore. But how did Gnosticism get transported into our Century?

For this information, we are deeply indebted to Judith Matta, author of *The Christian Response to Gnostic Charismatic Heresies*.³¹ Judith is probably the foremost expert in the U.S. today on the Gnostic origins of Word of Faith. She is a graduate of Talbot Theological seminary and a first-class scholar.

The Word of Faith movement began with Phineas Parkhurst Quimby (1802 – 1866) who was the father of New Thought, a metaphysical cult associated with the theosophical society of Helena Blavatsky, the 19th century's most famous and notorious occultist. Quimby was a student of hypnosis, occult, spiritism and parapsychology. The theoretical formations of New Thought were the basis of Christian Science also known as Mind Science founded by Mary Baker Eddy as she visited Quimby and was supposedly healed by him. She took his teachings further which later led to the theology of the Word of Faith movement.³²

In 1875, Mary Baker Eddy published *Science and Health*, thus launching the Christian Science sect. The First Church of Christ Scientist was founded in Boston in 1879. Eddy had adapted many of the early Gnostic concepts in her writings, which included the denial of the reality of illness and matter.

The rise of spiritualism and occultism were intimately tied to a contemporary crisis in Christianity around that time. New Thought teachings have impacted many Christians, since the "excitements of Spiritualism offered a new way to connect with the spiritual, outside of old orthodoxies." Blavatsky for example, aimed to "reconcile religious life with a modern world dominated by a scientific spirit." A new era of false doctrines was born. Gnostic beliefs were on the rise again.³³

One of the early converts to Christian Science, and a member of the Mother Church from 1903 until his death in 1908, was Dr. C.W. Emerson. He founded a college in Boston around the turn of the century called Emerson School of Oratory. This was a prep school for boys, not a Bible school.

³¹ Matta, Judy. *The Christian Answer to the Gnostic Charismatic Heresies* Spirit of Truth Ministries: Los Osos, CA, 1999. The original title, published in 1984 was *The Born Again Jesus of the Word of Faith Movement*.

³² *Introduction to the Word of Faith Movement* by Borean Kenyan
Found on: <https://bit.ly/3cyoXxL>

³³ *Spiritualism, Science, and the Mysterious Madame Blavatsky*, by Matthew Wills,
Found on: <https://bit.ly/3vvWnpp>

One of the early students of Emerson's school was a young man by the name of E.W. Kenyon. Kenyon picked up some of the Gnostic concepts and incorporated them into his own writings later on.

The terms, "Word of Faith" and "Revelation Knowledge" are found throughout Kenyon's books. Positive rhetoric characterized his style and much of what he wrote is legitimate. He exalts the power and lordship of Christ skillfully and expounds certain aspects of the authority of the believer. Unfortunately, errors abound in nearly every chapter.

His booklet, *Two Kinds of Knowledge*, is especially dangerous because of its subtlety. In it, he falls into the usual Gnostic and mystic trap of using reason to deny the validity of reason. Information derived from our five senses, he terms "sense knowledge" and the correlation of that information is done by logic. But "revelation knowledge" comes directly to our spirit, bypassing both reason and five senses. Kenyon believed that since God is spiritual, it is impossible to understand God or spiritual truth without this special "revelation."

Through this, a dangerous and subtle error enters. If a person swallows it, then the Bible itself comes to be judged by the standard of the "revelation knowledge" that one experiences subjectively. Subtly and unconsciously, the reader of Kenyon becomes his own standard of truth.

Kenyon forgot the eye that reads the Bible, the ear, that hears it, and the brain that correlates it are all physical organs. The Bible is a human book as well as divine. Bypassing the senses and reason inevitably leads to bypassing the Bible also. Untrained Christians eager for supernatural experiences can easily fall into Kenyon-style mysticism.

Kenyon died in 1948, but the Gnostic torch didn't die with him. It was embraced by a young Pentecostal hungry for the supernatural, Kenneth Hagin ... the recognized founder and leader of the Word of Faith movement.

Hagin praises Kenyon to the skies in one of his first books, *The Name of Jesus*, and confesses his deep indebtedness to him. Hagin later passed on these teachings to Kenneth Copeland. Through Copeland came Charles Capps, Jerry Savelle, and others. T.L. Osborn also expressed deep debt to Kenyon in a letter to Kenyon's granddaughter in 1972, calling an him "an apostle."

Though Hagin based his views largely on Kenyon, he himself contributed some interesting "revelations" of his own along the way. In the introduction to one of the older editions of his *Art of Intercession*, he describes his eighth "visitation" of Christ. A spirit being, identifying itself as "Jesus Christ," came into Hagin's room, sat down and talked for about an hour and a half.

During this visit, the supposed Jesus-spirit gave him a startling "revelation." All the theologians in the past who taught that God was in absolute control of all things were wrong. Hagin claims, "God is not ruling in this world ... And God cannot do anything unless somebody down here asks him."

This "being" apparently forgot to do its homework before categorically denying the sovereignty of God.

Whatever the Lord pleases He does, in heaven and in earth...
Psalm 135:6

That the living may know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men..."
Daniel 4:17

In Hagin's seventh "visitation," the spirit-being told him not to pray for his needs any more but to command the angels to get them. Again, this "being" missed some key Scripture. *Our Father in heaven...give us this day our daily bread.* (Matthew 6:11) In the context, the Jesus of the Bible commands us to pray to the Father for the fulfillment of our needs.

Am I implying that the "being" who visited Kenneth Hagin and gave him the Word of Faith revelations is not really Jesus Christ, but a deceiving demon? Be assured, I am not implying it. I am stating it as a fact.

The Hagin hijack: How these teachings entered the Charismatic movement

The Charismatic movement took root in the late '60's and '70's. Sometimes styled Neo-Pentecostalism, it was characterized by a rejection of the dead orthodoxy in some traditional denominations, in favor of a new emphasis on the Holy Spirit and spiritual gifts. ³⁴

In its beginnings, the Charismatic movement was innocuous. Nothing is wrong with seeking new fillings with the Holy Spirit or spiritual gifts. In fact,

³⁴ The Evangelical Dictionary of Theology gives a balanced history of the movement

we are commanded by Scripture to do so. A fundamental flaw in the movement, however, was the lack of solid theological foundations.

Charismatics had rejected dead orthodoxy. However, many failed to appreciate the alternative....live orthodoxy. Instead, a mindless mysticism developed. Hagin's teachings found fertile ground in the new movement.

Many Charismatics were middle-class evangelicals. While interested in exciting experiences, they were less enthusiastic about joining with traditional Pentecostals. Classical Pentecostals were often from a poorer and less educated class.

Charismatics were ripe for fresh teaching within their own sociological context...a scenario primed for a Hagin hijack.

Though Hagin was the acknowledged leader, he was not as articulate as some followers. His country accent, poor grammar and obvious lack of formal education had little appeal to the middle classes.

The movement gained momentum with the more articulate and younger Kenneth Copeland. His book *Laws of Prosperity* launched him to Faith Movement stardom, offering a new worldview that filled in the theological gaps left by an abandoned orthodoxy.

Books by "faith" teachers flooded the market and the new Charismatics snapped them up like starving fish after bait. Sadly, cash flow rather than truth determined what books appeared in the Christian market. Those with a dissenting voice found it difficult to get their books published.

An even bigger boon for the Prosperity Movement came in the 80's when Paul Crouch of Trinity Broadcasting Network (TBN), announced the faith movement was the route he would take in his programming.

Jim Bakker of the PTL Network and Paul Crouch endorsed the faith movement's concepts, giving it worldwide exposure. Result: Gnosticism, disguised under the banner of "faith," began to root itself deeply into the psyche of American Charismatics.

A Roman-American parallel

As with the United States today, Rome had been a prosperous society. In the first three centuries as Christianity was taking root, Rome was declining. Corruption was rife with. Established governmental and religious institutions seemed helpless to stem perversity throughout society.

The culture struggled in vain to recover a sense of strength and dominance. A subtle but widespread insecurity permeated the population. In its wars, Rome struggled harder to defeat weak enemies than it did to overcome stronger ones before. We see this in America today.³⁵

The middle and upper classes of any society, whether ancient or modern, are used to controlling their own lives. Under insecure social conditions, optimism about the future weakens and their sense of control begins to slip.

These conditions generate a psychological crisis. American Christians today are subject to similar pressure. The dilemma: How to experience the comforts of the gospel while maintaining the sense of control to which they are accustomed. As in Rome, this provides fertile ground for a Gnostic-style pseudo-Christian movement like Word of Faith to take root.

As a convenient byproduct, the teachers reap a financial harvest. Middle and upper-middle classes have money and are responsive to the positive rhetoric and fresh revelations. Everyone seems happy...except God.

The influence of the Prosperity Movement has been partially stemmed by three factors. First, the Assemblies of God, the largest and most influential Pentecostal denomination in the world, repudiated the Word of Faith teachings in an official position paper.³⁶

Second, two books warning about the movement were published and became well known: Hank Hanegraaf's, *Christianity In Crisis*³⁷ and Dave Hunt's *Seduction of Christianity*.³⁸

Finally, the most serious blow came with the fall of Jim Bakker (PTL) in the late '80's, and similar scandals among American TV evangelists. These events, however, were only a trimming of the branches and failed to penetrate the roots of the movement, namely Hagin and Copeland and their false god. Though weakened, the tree still flourishes in the U.S. today. The

³⁵ This is a recurrent theme in Gibbon's *Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire*

³⁶ *The Believer and Positive Confession*. Official position paper of Assemblies of God, General Presbytery meeting August, 1980. Found at: www.ag.org

³⁷ Hanegraaff, Hank. *Christianity In Crisis*. Harvest House: Eugene, OR, 1993

³⁸ Hunt, Dave. *Seduction of Christianity*. Harvest House: Eugene, OR, 1985.

branches have spread to Africa and Asia and recently invaded the European mainland. The message is still the same but with even more appeal to a younger audience. The display is far more attractive, and the sermons often come with engaging stage scenes.

An historical irony has occurred. The same pagan Gnosticism which rivaled Christianity in the first centuries, which early fathers fought to destroy, has resurrected once again to infect the Church today.

From this chapter we learn...

- The Prosperity Movement is a revival of Gnostic concepts, translated into Christian language.
- These Gnostic ideas were conveyed by Mary Baker Eddy and her Christian Science cult, to Dr. Emerson of Boston. Eventually, E.W. Kenyon merged them with Christian doctrines.
- Kenneth Hagin embraced Kenyon's teachings and transmitted them to Kenneth Copeland and others.
- The Word of Faith movement found fertile soil in the Charismatic movement and virtually hijacked it.
- The movement's popularity can be explained in sociological terms. Conditions in the United States today are similar to those that fueled Gnosticism in ancient Rome.

Chapter 5:

Positive Confession

Our tongue controls the entire pattern of nature and all of our life's circumstances! A powerful spiritual force is generated within us when we speak positively, and this force changes the world around us.³⁹ Our tongue can change the most impossible situations. If the wicked prosper it is because we Christians have said that they are. Even the salvation of other people's souls depends on our positive confession! We can put curses accidentally on people by saying that they'll probably backslide. And when they do, it wasn't prophecy, it was our curse that made them do it!⁴⁰

These statements are mild representations of the Prosperity Movement teaching about the confessions of our mouth. As strange and extreme as these are, they do not stop there. Charles Capps even attributes the Virgin Birth to Mary's positive confession. She received the word of the angel into her spirit and then it was manifest in her womb.⁴¹

Both Copeland and Capps tell us that Satan has insidiously programmed us from our youth to speak death-dealing and perverse words. We must eliminate them from our vocabulary because they "set in motion the blazing fires of negative spiritual forces." What are these terrible words that Satan has taught us to say? They are, "That just tickled me to death," "I'm dying to do that," "That makes me sick," "I laughed until I thought I would die," "I doubt it," and all other similar expressions. Perverse speech! Death-dealing words! Contrary to God's Word!⁴²

If we had grounds for suspecting that these men were just exaggerating then we could ignore this teaching. But hundreds of groups are springing up around the country called "Word" churches dedicated to these doctrines with attendance in the hundreds or thousands. Adherents often isolate themselves from other Christians lest their sensitive spirits become contaminated by the negative confessions that the uninitiated might utter. This makes the matter critically serious.

³⁹ Copeland, Kenneth. *The Laws Of Prosperity*. Copeland Publications, 1974 p. 98

⁴⁰ IBID, p. 19

⁴¹ Capps, Charles. *The Tongue: A Creative Force*; Harrison House, 1977

⁴² Capps, Charles. *The Tongue: A Creative Force*; Harrison House, 1977 p. 81
Copeland, Kenneth; *The Power Of The Tongue*, Copeland Publications, 1996 p. 23

To support these ideas, the following texts are used:

"Have faith in God," Jesus answered. 23 "I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him. 24 Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. Mark 11:22-24

The most fundamental principle of faith is expressed in the last verse. We must believe that God has already answered before we see the request come to pass. This is the basis for a positive confession of our faith in God's willingness to hear and answer us.

Positive confession is certainly better than negative. But without a solid Biblical foundation, it can lead to a distorted view of reality.

The passage above was never intended as a blank check for whatever we want or say. It is rather a very basic pattern of faith to be exercised whenever God gives us a personal promise.

Notice that the text begins with the phrase, "have faith in God." In the original Greek, this is EXETE PISTIN THEOU. Literally translated it means, "have a faith of God." Some of the older manuscripts add the word EI, which is "if" and reads, "If you have a faith from God, truly I say to you..." Christ is telling us that the first step in the process is to hear from God and determine his will before acting. Some "Word" teachers understand and teach this.

In the context of the chapter, Jesus has just cursed a fig tree, and it withered. Curious Peter remarks about it in verse 21, *Rabbi, look! The fig tree you cursed has withered!* ...as if to say, "how in the world did you do that?"

The verses that follow is merely Jesus' explanation of how he did it. "Well, Peter, to start with, you have to be operating in the Spirit, and not be impulsive. You must first determine what is the intention of the Father in the matter, and knowing that, you will have a solid basis for acting in faith." Of course Jesus did not use those words, but a careful analysis of the text and other passages on faith will reveal that such is basically the intent.

There's a big difference between the ordinary exercise of faith in our lives and the special gift of faith given by direct revelation from God. The latter is

referred to in 1Corinthians 12:9 as a supernatural endowment. In the context it is clear that it is not meant for everyone at all times. Paul says, *to another faith by the same Spirit.*

The withering of fig trees and moving of mountains are not daily occurrences in the life of the believer. By their exceptional nature they necessitate a special gift of faith from God. Understanding this should lead us to a more balanced position with regard to faith and the positive confession that follows. Mark 11:24 is not a proof text granting us the right to anything we happen to desire. The exercise of our faith is based on the previously declared will of God in a matter. We can have whatsoever we say ... If God said it first!

James Chapter 3

The super-faith proponents often use this chapter to support the view that circumstances surrounding human existence are determined by negative or positive confessions.

Verse 6 is a favorite Word of Faith text since it refers to the tongue as capable of setting on fire, *the whole course of his life.* However, the context, plus analysis of the Greek text, leads us to conclude James means something other than the manipulation of reality by the tongue.

The phrase "course of nature" is ΤΟΝ ΤΡΟΧΟΝ ΤΗΣ ΓΕΝΕΣΕΩΣ in Greek and is difficult to translate. "ΤΡΟΧΟΝ literally means "wheel," whereas "ΓΕΝΕΣΕΩΣ means, "source," "origin," "birth," "existence," "life." Vine's Expository Dictionary describes this as a wheel that catches fire from its revolving axle and then spreads its fire outward, just like the mischief done by the tongue.

James is referring to the influence of our tongue in our relationships. He says, *With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness.* Is he referring to the control of our environment, or our health and finances via the tongue? Certainly not! He is talking about relationships. If we talk mean to people around us, this will naturally influence the course of our life. We will make enemies. Our gossip might destroy others as well as ourselves.

Using James 3 to prove that all the circumstances of our existence are controlled by the words of our mouth, in any sense beyond mere human relationships, is to do violence to the text.

Proverbs 6:2

...if you have been trapped by what you said, ensnared by the words of your mouth,

It is out of context to quote this verse as a warning against negative confessions. It refers to an injunction against indebtedness, especially with regard to being a "surety" (co-signer) for a friend. The above statement is actually one clause out of an extensive sentence which begins with, *My son, if you have put up security for your neighbor, if you have struck hands in pledge for another,...*

To resort to such a text to prove a positive confession doctrine is a demonstration of its weakness rather than its strength.

What about this word "confession" in the Bible? Does it ever carry the connotation that the movement claims? Some teachers are quick to point out that the term in the original Greek, HOMOLOGEO, is composed as follows: HOMO=same; LOGEO=to speak. Thus, they say, it means "to speak the same thing." So if we "speak the same things" that God says, we will have the desired result.

Wrong. The word originated that way in pre-Christian ages, but by the time the New Testament was written, it carried the meaning of "profess faith in something or someone."

Of the 40 times it is used in the New Testament, (in the above form and in the emphatic form EXHOMOLOGEONAI, and noun form HOMOLOGIA), nowhere does it support the view that the words of our mouth have inherent creative power. Notice some New Testament usages:

Profession of faith

Of false religious professors, Titus 1:16. Of profession of faith in Christ, Luke 12:8. Of Pharisees professing faith in angels and in a resurrection, Acts 23:8. Of spirits admitting or denying the Deity of Christ, I John 4:3.

Confession of sin

Of converted Ephesian sorcerers confessing publicly their deeds, Acts 19:18. Of Christians confessing their sine to God, I John 1:9. Of believers confessing faults to one another, James 5:16.

Promising something to someone: Judas promising to betray Christ, Luke 22:6.

Thanksgiving: Of Jesus thanking the Father, Luke 10:21.

Not a shred of a verse exists in the whole Bible to support the Word of Faith usage of the word "confess."

Two serious problems

Apart from the incorrect application of Scripture, there are two main problems with the positive confession teaching.

Excessive emphasis

The Epistles were written expressly to instruct Christians in victorious living. If this movement's degree of emphasis is correct, why do we not see these teachings stressed to the same degree in the Epistles? We could expect this aspect of teaching to be covered in detail were that the case.

Furthermore, we would not expect to see any negative confessions coming from the apostles. However, note some of Paul's statements:

...but Satan hindered us. 1Thessalonians 2:18

For it seems to me that God has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession, like men condemned to die in the arena. We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to men. 1Corinthians 4:9

To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless. 1Corinthians 4:11

We are hard pressed on every side, 2Corinthians 4:8

But in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, 2Corinthians 6:4

Responsible ministry will not teach people that negative spiritual forces are released merely by the use of common idioms. The apostles did not view statements of fact about reality as negative confessions, nor fear their consequences. Such fears are indicative of unbelief, rather than properly grounded faith.

Making universal absolutes out of particular cases

Of the two main problems connected with positive confession teaching, this is the most serious. Here is where people get hurt. As we have seen, "Word" teachers consider the prosperity and health of the believer to be universal

absolutes. Every Christian without exception is supposed to be healthy and wealthy right now, and God has already declared that this is his will, they say. To them, it is not only unnecessary but downright unbelief to pray and ask God to reveal his will regarding these two things.

As we continue to see why this Word of Faith premise is untenable, we will understand how dangerous it is for a person to launch out in faith without first ascertaining the will of God for himself personally. Those who fail to do this are heading towards trouble and pain.

A subtle trap resides at this point. Suppose it is the will of God for John to become prosperous. Though he does not seek the will of God first, he plunges on in faith, following the formulas in the books. The results? Behold! It works! He assumes then, that it worked because the "Word" teachers are absolutely right, and are expressing universal truths that everyone can experience. He does not consider that it happened to be the will of God for himself personally.

Now suppose he proclaims this good news to his friend at church. The latter promptly goes out and launches himself down the same road. But for him it ends in frustration and failure. He blames God, loses faith, and goes through an emotional crisis. If he had sought God's will first, he might have heard something like this, "No son, that is not for you. That was my will for John. I have something better for you. I want you to serve in India. And if you are faithful, I may count you worthy to suffer for my name's sake, or even let you water the ground with martyr's blood."

Shall we consider either superior if both find the will of God for his life?

The sort of gospel represented by this movement tends to make man the center of activity and God dependent upon him. God cannot act unless we say so. The positive confession message is a gospel of works, not grace; faith in man rather than God. As such it becomes a gospel of unbelief and not a message of faith.

The Assemblies of God, the largest Pentecostal denomination in the world, denounces this teaching with,

The positive confession emphasis has a tendency to include statements that make it appear that man is sovereign and God is the servant. Statements are made about compelling God to act, implying he has surrendered his sovereignty; that he is no longer in a position to act according to his wisdom and purpose. Reference is made to true prosperity being the ability to use God's ability and power to meet needs

regardless of what the needs are. This puts man in the position of using God rather than man surrendering himself to be used of God. ⁴³

As an example of the extremes to which the positive confession doctrine can lead, we can take a look at a shocker from Kenneth Copeland on TBN network, November 12, 1985.

After humbly asking God permission to utter this "truth" he then turned to Paul Crouch, the host, and asked him this question: "Do you know who the biggest failure in the Bible is?" Crouch was at a loss for an answer. So Copeland informed him. "The biggest failure in the Bible is God!" He went on to explain that God was unable to prevent his creatures from rebelling against him. He was taken by surprise.

But God didn't panic and make any negative confessions, because he knew that you're only a failure if you say you are. So God, Copeland explains, fished around for a solution. Praying wouldn't do because there was nobody to pray to. Fasting wouldn't do because God does not eat.

Then God hit on the solution: SEED FAITH! Yes! God would plant a seed because he knew the law of seed faith always works. What was the seed he planted? His Son Jesus, of course. Where did he plant him? He planted him in hell where he suffered for sin. Since Jesus was in hell as a condemned sinner in our place, as far as God was concerned, Jesus didn't exist.

The only hope that God had was the law of sowing and reaping. God knew that it always works. So when Jesus, who was in hell suffering as a condemned sinner, was born-again by the Spirit three days later, he came forth with power. Result: God not only got his son back, but he got many more sons besides.

Yes, Copeland explained, God had faith. he knew that the law of seed-faith always works.

The thundering applause and cheers Copeland received from the Christian audience for this revelation, including from Paul Crouch, was nearly deafening.

Blasphemy! Pure and simple.

From this chapter we learn...

- The Faith Movement practices occult mind-science through a distorted concept of positive confession.

- In occult theory, the mind controls reality. Words have inherent power to go forth and transfer mental images of the mind into reality.
 - According to Word of Faith teaching, a Christian should visualize what he wants and then speak it into existence by "positive confession."
- The term "confession" in the Bible carries two meanings only: The profession of belief in a truth, or the admission of guilt. It never refers to any inherent power in words.
 - This combination of errors has resulted in some of the most blasphemous utterances in the history of Christendom.

Chapter 6:

Wounded Faith

The hyper-faith victim lives in a psychological limbo between the real world and the fantasy world he tries to create with his positive confession. His heart is in the right place, but his understanding isn't. Eventually reality impinges at some point, usually through a financial or health problem, and he smacks into the hard wall of reality. It hurts. He begins to experience frustration and despair when the formulas fail.

Victims express their pain in different ways. Some feel despair. Others become angry at God. They feel he has failed to honor their faith. One man demanded God apologize to him for not keeping his word. If these people weren't hurting so badly, this would be amusing.

When a person comes to this point, he is more open to understanding how the enemy baited a trap and caught him in it. Yet he may not reject the false teachings right away. Human nature has an amazing tendency to cling tenaciously to the very illusions that do oneself the most harm.

My purpose is to help those who have been caught up in this movement and injured by it. But since I've never been in it, I cannot pretend to know what they feel. So I wrote to several former Word of Faith pastors who graciously gave me some guidelines. My prayer and theirs, is that they will restore confidence in God while at the same time liberating people from the errors that caused their crash.

One former hyper-faith pastor, Eric Hill of Georgia, wrote me,

If you want to reach these people, you must let it be well known that you pray for the sick and believe God for blessing. By so doing, you take away their crutch. The prosperity people see everything positive or negative, defeat or victory, poverty or wealth, sickness or health. Most feel they have no alternative between the Word of Faith movement and traditional bondage and unbelief. You must show that disagreement with Copeland's gospel does not necessitate returning to a poverty and defeat mentality. As a former slave of this deception, I know that many would turn from it if only they were brought face to face with the truth by a person living in victory.

Let's remember that Word of Faith leaders have no corner on the market when it comes to blessings and miracles. Many missionaries and ministers have lived by faith and held healing campaigns without the hyper-faith

teachings. So the question we are dealing with has nothing to do with experience, but with right and wrong doctrine.

So, guideline number one is:

Realize we can reject errors while still believing in healing and divine supply

Some feel uncomfortable discussing controversial doctrines. But did they feel uncomfortable when they first began to learn the Word of Faith teachings? Are these teachings any less controversial now? Doctrine affects the way we think, pray, and live, especially those that touch on our concept of God and of his dealings.

So the first area of teaching that we must examine, is our concept of God. If this point is distorted, then everything else becomes distorted also. An architect once explained to me that if the foundation of a building is just a half-inch out plumb, then the higher you build, the more the building leans. At the first floor, it is not noticeable. But after many floors, the half-inch grows to several feet, and the building i.e. leaning over. Eventually it will crash.

A right concept of God is foundational to Christian living. Both the heart relationship and sound doctrine are essential. One without the other always spells disaster.

*...but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me,
Jeremiah 9:24*

If you have been involved with Word of Faith, you might recall at first that their God appeared wonderfully accommodating and pleasantly manipulatable. However, this "God" has one distressing drawback ... HE DOES NOT EXIST!

If this sounds shocking, be assured that my intention is rather to bring comfort. We have every right to be upset with the hyper-faith god. God's Word allows us to feel angry against false gods. We needn't feel guilty about it.

This god is the product of our culture ... a sham god produced in the vain imaginations of ignorant men, whose coming was predicted in 2Peter 2:1-3.

Now let's take a look at some Scriptures that deal with this essential question: Is God absolutely sovereign?

I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted. Job 42:2

The LORD does whatever pleases him, in the heavens and on the earth, in the seas and all their depths. Psalm 135:6

My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please. Isaiah 46:10

(An extensive listing of verses on God's sovereignty is in the appendix.)

God cannot be manipulated via obscure spiritual principles. The hyper-faith teacher is senseless who said, "I have learned how to get God to work for me." One wonders what god he is talking about.

The true God understands that the hyper-faith victim was only trying to grow in Christ and attain to all that he thought God wanted. The Lord is merciful, patient and compassionate. If you are one of these victims wouldn't it be appropriate to apologize to him for worshipping a bizarre caricature of him?

This brings us to guideline number two:

Realize that you have been serving a false god, and repent

Now that we have considered the nature of the god of the movement, it is appropriate that we also discuss the quality of the faith taught. Different kinds of faith exist. Not all are good. The Nazis in World War II had great faith in Hitler. The communists have faith in the worthiness of their cause and its eventual victory. The Mormons believe in a humanoid god from a distant star system who migrated to earth and became Adam.

Several examples like these quickly expose faith as morally neutral. Whether faith is good or bad depends on the object on which it is focused. If the object is defective, so is the faith. Thus, such a thing as evil faith can and does exist.

The issue then is not so much the strength of one's faith, but the moral content of it. Far better to have a little faith in the true God than great faith in a false one.

This leads to a series of important questions. The answers should restore your confidence. Is the true God obliged to honor our faith in a perverse parody of himself? Is he obliged to honor promises he never made? Is he responsible for our misinterpretations of Scripture?

This last question is of supreme importance. Never in the history of humanity has there been so many Biblical resources available. The early church fathers would drool with envy if they saw the commentaries, chain-reference Bibles, study guides, Greek and Hebrew lexicons and multiple translations we have available. Much of it is by well-qualified scholars, trained to miss nothing of importance in textual analysis. But the faith teachers tell us that today we have access to something far superior. "Revelation knowledge," has supposedly supplanted sound doctrinal research.

This generation has less excuse than any other in history for such foolishness.

Who would permit an unqualified surgeon to operate on his mortal body? Yet people will flock by the thousands to let an ignorant person operate on their eternal souls! Yet when they end up hurt, it is God who gets the blame!

Someone might reply, "Yes, but it seemed to work at first." Acknowledged. But this is because the true God loves you and is patient and kind. He overlooks our mistakes. This kindness is precisely what prevents him from allowing such error to continue indefinitely. For those with sincere hearts, (not just the greedy and self-centered), he suspends every legitimate principle, if necessary, to get them to see the problem. God truly gives his word. But he leaves us the responsibility to interpret it properly. ...*a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.* 2Timothy 2:15

Following chapters contain a thorough analysis of the texts used by the hyper-faith teachers ... 3 John 2, Mark 10:30, Abrahamic Covenant, healing, etc. Study these carefully. Pay close attention to the quality of evidence presented. Form your own conclusions based on sound reasoning and scriptural evidence.

Jesus taught that if we build a house on sand, it is likely to crumble when the storm comes. Such is the way with faulty interpretations of his Word. It is imperative for hyper-faith victims to grasp fully the next guideline:

God is not responsible for misapplied faith nor erroneous interpretations of his Word

During involvement with the hyper-faith movement, the believer views his own faith as strong and reasonable. He usually feels sorry for those who hadn't seen the same wonderful light.

The sins of spiritual pride are common fruits of Word of Faith teaching. Yet those who have them usually fail to perceive them. They suppose they are just being factual. Rare it is to find an adherent who fails to manifest them to some degree or another.

So deadly, subtle, and so self-deceiving are these sins that the sincere believer must be severe with himself whenever he detects them in his life. We question if it is possible to hold to the faith message premises without living in these sins.

A victim of the movement needs to examine his conscience and memory. This is necessary in order to receive complete deliverance from the wounds. Are there people he has insulted by accusing them of unbelief or sin because they were in financial straits or illness? Has he used at any time such standard comments as, "Well, If you do not want to believe It, stay poor then"? Or, "It's all up to you if you want to be healed or not." To be completely clear of arrogance and spiritual pride before the Lord, he should confess these sins to God.

It might be helpful as God directs, to make apologies to those he may have offended. God can use this to bring healing of emotions both to both parties, and heal relationships also.

After all, it hardly makes sense to accuse others of unbelief and disobedience on the basis of doctrines that cannot be defended. Let's strive as Paul did. *So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man. Acts 24:16*

This brings us to our last guideline, one requiring courage and conviction. It opens doors to emotional healing for the hyper-faith victim.

Repent for any displays of spiritual pride and arrogance while you were in the movement.

One last important comment: As long as the believer perceives his involvement with the movement as merely "unbalanced," his liberation will be incomplete and the *peace that passes all understanding* will not be forthcoming. How can we "balance" a false god? How can we "balance" a twisted Scripture? The only solution to reject the false and replace it with the true.

My advice is to seek out a church that preaches sound reformation theology while at the same time believes in developing gifts of the Spirit. These are hard to find, but they exist.

From this chapter we learn...

- Faith movement followers live in a fantasy world created by their teachers. God may mercifully allow them to crash into the wall of reality.

- To be free, former adherents should:
 - Repent for worshiping a false god, however innocently. God's Word gives adequate revelation about who he really is.
 - Reject the errors without abandoning biblical faith for healing and divine supply.
 - Recognize God is not responsible for misapplied faith nor erroneous interpretations of his word.
 - Repent for spiritual pride while in the movement.

Chapter 7:

Just As Your Soul Prospers...

Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers. 3 Jn.2 (NKJV)

Rarely does a faith-message publication, however small, fail to quote from 3John 2. The prosperity teachers claim this verse proves conclusively that Christians will always prosper in direct proportion to the condition of their soul. Faith and obedience are the keys. To them, prosperity follows certain laws as absolute as gravity.

Basically, the faith teachers draw three premises from this verse:

- It is God's will that all believers prosper.
- Prosperity and health are God's highest priority for us.
- Our degree of financial prosperity is an exact reflection of our spiritual condition.

Have these brothers really found a spiritual formula and life style that can make us all rich? If so, I'm willing to accept it wholeheartedly under the condition that someone can adequately answer the following four Objections to their interpretation of this verse:

Objection No. 1 - There are no conditional clauses in this verse.

A conditional clause is the part of a sentence that states the condition for something else to happen. Often, these clauses are introduced by the word "if," as in the sentence, "if you believe, then you will be saved. The "if" part introduces the condition and the "then" part is the result.

Of course, not all conditional clauses contain the word "if." Sometimes it is implied by the grammar or another word might be substituted for it, such as "whoever" or "whenever."

The Greek language is very precise about this. Whenever a general condition is meant, certain grammatical constructions occur to indicate it. But the phrase ".just as your soul prospers," contains no such form, and therefore cannot be taken as a condition for anything.

Jerry Savelle uses a strange line of argumentation to overcome this. He points out that John 3:16 is a promise, and that the Apostle John wrote it. Since John also wrote 3John 2, therefore it too must be a promise.⁴⁴

He fails to notice that John 3:16 contains all of the characteristics of a promise, while 3John 2 contains none of them. The former uses the relative conditional clause "whosoever believes," with certain grammar aspects (the subjunctive), which make the verse a promise. If John intended 3John 2 to be a promise with equal force, no reason exists why he couldn't use the same construction.

The context bears this out. In the next verse, we see the same phrasing, but in a way that cannot possibly make it a condition for anything. *...and tell about your faithfulness to the truth and how you continue to walk in the truth.*

John is simply stating a fact about Gaius, not setting up a condition. This is called an indicative clause, because it simply indicates a fact, with nothing further intended.

Some have insisted that the words "even as" means "in direct proportion to." This word in Greek is KATHOS, and John uses it 45 times in his 5 New Testament books. While the word might, under certain circumstances, be translated that way, it is difficult to find examples of it in John's writing. Normally he uses it to simply indicate a fact. Some examples are:

John 17:11 ...so that they may be one as we are one.

John 13:15 I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.

1John 4:17 Because as he is, so are we in the world. (NKJV)

Prosperity teachers assume that because KATHOS can introduce a conditional clause, that this proves that the final clause of verse 2 is such. But being ignorant of Greek grammar, they fail to realize that it is not the presence of KATHOS that makes a clause conditional, but rather the form of the verb. The above examples illustrate this.

⁴⁴ Savelle, Jerry; *Prosperity of the Soul*, Harrison House

No reputable commentary that I have examined endorses the prosperity interpretation of this clause. Gray and Adams, for example, points out that John had knowledge of Gaius' spiritual condition via the visitors that had recently come from him. This is confirmed by the following four verses (3-6) in which he goes into detail about what he meant when he referred to the prosperity of Gaius' soul. In verse 3 John says he rejoiced when the brethren came and testified of the truth that was in Gaius. In verse 5, he commends Gaius' hospitality to strangers. In verse 6, he mentions that the visitors have testified of his love. In short, the clause, "even as your soul prospers," is simply an acknowledgement of the report given to him by the visitors from Gaius.

Objection No. 2 – This is a prayer, not a promise.

The old King James uses the word "wish" instead of the more accurate "pray." The Amplified Bible, the New International Version, the New American Standard, and the New King James all correctly render the original Greek word EUCHOMAI as "pray."

Vine's Expository Dictionary also states that even when the King James translates this word as "I would," or "I wish," as in 3John 2, the meaning still indicates that prayer is involved.

Since this verse merely records the prayer of John for his friend Gaius, it cannot be construed as a declaration from God for the whole body of Christ, nor should it be viewed as a promise.

Therefore, 3John 2 does not support the assumption that health and wealth is God's highest priority for man.

What then is God's highest priority? Paul explains it in Ephesians 1:5-6, "*having predestinated us ... to the praise of the glory of his grace...*" The glorification of himself, not our personal comfort, is the issue. Whatever it takes to bring about that purpose is legitimate with God; whether prosperity or poverty, persecution, or popularity.

Some have asked me, "which is more glorifying to God: A saint who is rich or one who is in poverty?" We could reply "which is more glorifying God: A saint who is victorious despite his riches, or a saint who is victorious despite his poverty?" The issue is victory, not economics.

Objection No. 3 - It is a common first century greeting.

This epistle modeled after the typical letter format of the first century. William Barclay, one of the world's outstanding scholars, points this out by

quoting from a pagan ship's captain, which uses almost identical phraseology at that found in 3John 2.

Howard Marshall, in the New International Commentary confirms Barclay's views in stating that the elder (John) follows the traditional custom of his time by expressing good wishes to his friend, Gaius.

Of course, this fact does not detract from the truth that it is inspired Scripture. It simply explains why it is found in that form. More important, it shows what it is not. It is not a universal declaration from God with regard to his will for all believers. To construe it that way is to remove it from its literary and historical context.

Objection 4 - It is not a universal declaration from God for the whole Body of Christ.

Although the Bible is a book for all of God's people, not everything in it is addressed to every person. Paul's commands to Timothy to watch out for Alexander, and to bring his cloak before winter, and his instructions to Titus to remain in Crete are all a part of the Word of God. But some fail to make this distinction. In the case of the prosperity teachers, they have confused the difference between an individual address and a universal promise.

Neither the grammar, nor the context, nor the historical background, nor reason supports the prosperity doctrine interpretation of the final clause of verse 2. In the light of sound Biblical research, the premise that we will always prosper in proportion to our spiritual condition comes crashing to the ground.

Does this mean that 3John 2 is worthless for Christians today, or that we are all condemned to live in poverty? No! This verse has its place as an example of the loving concern and prayerfulness that Christian brothers should have for each other. How encouraged Gaius must have been to see John's recognition of his qualities! How sensitive was John to the needs of his fellow believers!

The Bible is full of promises from God concerning his care of his children. It is his ordinary will that Christians enjoy life and have their needs supplied. But he does so on the basis of his grace, not on the basis of our worthiness.

In many years of missionary service in five countries, my wife and I have seen God supply our needs consistently. But never have we had to resort to unscriptural and indefensible interpretations of Scripture to stimulate our

faith. To me, the irony of the prosperity movement's view of 3John 2 is not in its falsity, but in that it is simply unnecessary.

Before leaving the prosperity doctrine, let's take a look at two other key Word of Faith texts.

Ten thousand percent interest

"I tell you the truth," Jesus replied, "no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age (homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields — and with them, persecutions) and in the age to come, eternal life. Mark 10:29-30

"The staggering return of 100 times is our divine right!," proclaim the leading prosperity teachers. "God is obliged to give us \$100 for every dollar we give to the gospel. And if we give \$1000, then God owes us \$100,000," they say. ⁴⁵

If these verses are a blanket promise for a 10,000 percent interest rate on our loans to God, then it merits thorough attention. We do not question the truth of the Bible. We question interpretations some give it. I was once exhorted to "Just believe the Bible," after a discussion on these points. However, to question a popular interpretation is not disagreement with Scripture.

There are three logical options for interpreting these verses: literally, partly literally, and figuratively.

Since a literal interpretation is the one presented by the Word of Faith movement, let us examine it first. By its very definition this requires that we read nothing into the verse nor remove anything from it.

Prosperity doctrine violates Its own literalism principle at two points. First, there is no mention of giving anything to anyone. The whole concept of giving things to God is absent here. Jesus did not say, "whosoever shall give to the gospel..." He said "*whosoever shall leave...*" The parallel text in Matthew uses the word "*forsake.*" That means completely abandon everything.

⁴⁵ Copeland, Gloria. *God'S Will Is Prosperity*, p. 49

The same verb describes the way the disciples forsook their nets to follow Jesus. It is used again when they abandoned him and fled. They didn't give Jesus to God. They forsook him. Nor did they go to the Temple to give away their nets. They walked away from them, and followed Jesus. There is no thought of offerings to God of material goods. The offering is rather of one's entire life. The goods are to be left behind and forgotten.

Secondly, money is not mentioned either. Only eight specific items are listed that will be restored 100 times. Six of the are various relatives and the other two are lands and houses. The choice of what to give, even if giving were the issue, is not ours to make because the list is limited.

If a literal interpretation is demanded, then we must also require that the thought of giving money be excluded from the conversation. Otherwise we violate the literalism principle. On the other hand, if we do not require a literal interpretation, then we cannot claim the 100-fold clause as literal either. Here, prosperity teaching finds itself impaled on a dilemma of its own making.

It looks like literalism has already run into snags. But there are others. How can we literally have 100 mothers or children? What about the disciples? Did they all cash in on this, or did they live and die as martyrs?

The clause, "with persecutions," at the end of the verse must not be forgotten. Some teachers remain undaunted by this, answering that persecution will only stay if we allow it. We can speak to it in the Name of Jesus and command it to go away. Positive confession will win the victory. But we never see the apostles practicing that view or teaching it to their converts in their epistles.

Let's look at the next option, partly literally. If we categorize the relatives as figurative, and the lands and houses as literal, we have a neatly wrapped package. Before we settle comfortably into this approach, let's ask this: by what authority can we arbitrarily divide a list like this into literal and figurative parts? Certainly not on the basis of unprovable, "revelation knowledge." If any part of the verse is figurative, why not all of it, including the 100 fold clause? It is poor scholarship to make such arbitrary divisions. It's preferable to interpret the whole list uniformly.

We have seen why a literalist interpretation is impossible and a division in the list is unlikely. We are left with a figurative approach.

Let's consider that these verses may be meant as a hyperbole. A hyperbole is a cousin to a parable used as a teaching device in ancient times. It is deliberate exaggeration to underline the certainty of a principle.

The parable of the sower, for example, contains a hyperbole. Jesus taught about the good seed multiplying 30, 60, 100 times. In the context it refers to the converts won for Christ. But it does not mean we will always get exactly 30 converts in every place we preach. As a missionary I have ministered in countries where it takes 20 years to get that many converts, and in Latin America where we might get that many in 20 minutes. In some places, there may be none. Jesus was illustrating the principle of the productivity of his Word.

The "100-fold" statements are similar. They express truths with regard to God's certain care and blessing upon those who give up all for the cause of Christ. It is possible that God may even supply 100 houses for someone who does that. It is certain he will take care of that person and use him. Christ wants us to expect earthly blessings for our sacrifices for him and not relegate everything to heaven.

He wants us to know that any blessings we receive now are not subtracted from our heavenly account. We will get the full measure there also. That is the whole point of these verses. In this, the prosperity doctrine is partly right. This principle is the basic content of the verses, whereas the comments about lands, houses and 100 fold are only the packaging.

He became poor... 2Corinthians 8:9

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.

Was the whole life of Christ a substitutionary sacrifice so that we can live prosperously? At first glance it may appear that the Word of Faith people are right on this point.

Though the proponents concede there exist other forms of riches than material ones, they point out that we cannot attribute spiritual poverty to Jesus; he was only poor in relation to the world's economy, not spiritually. So the verse can only refer to the guarantee of earthly wealth for us, through faith in Christ.

This argument is valid if we grant as an assumption that the verse refers to the entire course of the life of Christ. The whole interpretation hinges on the meaning of the clauses "*become poor*" and "*become rich*."

The verb translated "*become poor*" is an aorist participle in Greek. This grammatical construction causes the word to refer to a specific point in time, not of a continuous nature. If Paul meant to say that Christ lived a life of poverty during his time on earth, he would have put the verb in another form, (the imperfect indicative), which refers to continuous action in the past.

In contrast, the clause "*he was rich*" is in a continuous form (this time the perfect participle). Paul is affirming that there was a time when Christ was continuously rich. Then a definite event happened once which suddenly caused him to abandon those riches.

To correctly interpret the verse now, we must ask ourselves two questions: When was Jesus continuously rich? And in what did those riches consist? It certainly wasn't on earth; it was only in heaven. Therefore, what happened to Jesus in heaven to suddenly make him poor? The incarnation, of course. He left his continuous eternal dominion, to perform the act of coming to earth for us, that we might share the riches of that spiritual dominion.

Considering this, it becomes impossible to interpret the verse as meaning earthly riches.

The riches into which we are to enter are not earthly. They refer to our co-heirship with Christ, our sharing in his Sonship and participation in his grace. This is theme of the whole chapter.

Reputable Bible scholars confirm this view. Meyers points out that the Aorist denotes the single event of entering into poverty, and does not refer to the whole life of Christ. The International Commentary agrees that the Aorist refers back to the event of the incarnation.

When clear evidence exists for an alternate interpretation of a text than first proposed, one must refrain from dogmatism. It is fair to ask that the prosperity teachers not be dogmatic with regard to 2Corinthians 8

God sometimes blesses believers with prosperity to help advance the gospel. We have seen this even among our poorer Latin America believers. These Christians sometimes undergo moderate persecution. Some antagonists claim they only follow the gospel because the missionary pays the, which is

not true. Since God sometimes blesses believers materially, the unbeliever assumes this must be the case.

Yes, we acknowledge that God blesses people and our converts learn that. We do not promise they will be rich, because the Bible does not. When my wife and I mention there is a movement in the U.S. claiming that a person is lacking in faith if he is not rich, they burst out laughing.

From this chapter we learn...

- The Bible does not support the Prosperity Movement's premise that Christians should always prosper.
- The Bible does not support the assumption that the prosperity of a believer is directly linked to his spiritual condition.
- A text often quoted by prosperity teachers, 3Jn.2, lends no support to these views because,
 - No conditional clauses are found in the verse.
 - The word "wish" is more properly translated "pray."
 - It is a common first century greeting.
 - It is not a declaration for the universal Body of Christ.
- Prosperity teachers use other verses out of context, such as 2 Corinthians 9 and Mark 10:29-30.
- The Bible teaches it is God's will for believers to enjoy sufficiency, not necessarily riches.

Chapter 8:

As Rich As Abraham?

While discussing the Prosperity Doctrine in a restaurant with a Word of Faith pastor, I commented, "I cannot judge a Christian brother as being in sin or lacking faith just because he is poor." The pastor replied calmly, "But I can!"

His confident answer made me realize he hadn't intended to appear judgmental. To him, this was obvious, based on his faith-message premises.

He added, "You see, the Bible says we are all the children of Abraham by faith in Christ. Abraham was rich. So if we have lack, the cause is our own unbelief."

If any truth resides in this, we must investigate it. Many desire to be rich, and if God has revealed a plan for attaining it, let's find it. Years of watching spiritual fads pass across the evangelical scene has generated enough caution to cause me to research this doctrine thoroughly.

After reading about 40 books and publications by the leading "faith" teachers, their position is clear: Via Abraham's Covenant, we have access to wealth beyond our wildest dreams. Not merely prosperity, but more than we can ever use. The only hindrance is our lack of faith, they say.

The New Testament truly teaches we are Abraham's children through faith in Christ. Galatians 3:7 says, *Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham.* To be convinced of a prosperity doctrine on this basis, I must challenge the prosperity teachers to answer these five objections:

Objection I - The original Abrahamic covenant contains no promise of material wealth.

The covenant is portrayed in Genesis 12. Paul quoted from it in Galatians 3:15-16 and called it that.

If we go back to the original terms as found in Genesis 12, we read this:

I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. 3 I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.

Specifically, these terms are:

- He will make Abraham into a great nation.
- He will bless those who bless Abraham and curse those who curse him.
- All people of the earth will be blessed through him.
- He will make his name great.

The mention of material wealth to conspicuously absent. Paul said, *Just as no one can set aside or add to a human covenant that has been duly established, so it is in this case.* Galatians 3:15 It seems that the prosperity teachers "add to," the covenant, which Paul said not to do.

Objection 2 - Abraham was rich before the covenant was given.

This proves conclusively that Abraham's wealth had nothing to do with the covenant. In following him from Genesis 11, we see him going to Haran where his father Terah died. Then, after God gave him the covenant in Genesis 12:1-3, he took his wife and Lot, he took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, and *all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan...*

The "people" refers to slaves they had purchased. Poor people did not own slaves because they were expensive. We do not know how many he had, but we notice that when it came time to rescue Lot, Abraham armed 318 men of his own household!

When he arrived in Canaan he found a severe famine in the land. No business possible there, so he went down to Egypt.

Despite the clear Biblical chronology, prosperity teachers still insist that Abraham was wealthy because of the covenant.

Objection 3 - The New Testament defines the Abrahamic covenant in spiritual terms, not material.

Peter speaks of the covenant as forgiveness of sins in Acts 3:25-26, while Galatians chapters 3 and 4 links it with the promise of the Spirit through faith. Paul's discourse on justification by faith in Romans 4 uses the Abrahamic covenant as its basis. The writer of Hebrews tells us in chapter 6 that it means surety of salvation. All of these texts, refer to Abraham's covenant in spiritual terms rather than material.

If God wanted us to know that we can be wealthy via the Abrahamic covenant, he could have inspired these writers to say so. One simple phrase

would settle the matter forever, The overwhelming importance of it certainly would warrant it.

Objection 4 - There is no such thing as the "blessings of Abraham."

A diligent search through a Strong's Concordance reveals no such phrase as this in the Bible. Apparently it has been popularized through the teachings of the prosperity movement and some songs.

The closest we come to it is Galatians 3:14,

He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.

Note that the term "*blessing*" is singular here and not the plural "blessings." Paul defines this one blessing as the promise of the Spirit, lest anyone get confused and imagine it refers to anything else.

Some teachers have argued it is one blessing with many aspects, of which material wealth is included. The New Testament does not confirm this. Spiritual rather than a material blessing is always in view, summarized in one word: salvation.

Objection 5 - The covenant was irrelevant to certain aspects of Abraham's private life.

A contract with a man can be different from certain aspects of his personal life-style. Not everything that Abraham said and did had to do with his covenant with God.

Abraham took Hagar the slave girl as his concubine. He lied to Abimelech about Sarah. Were these events a part of the covenant?

No mention was made in the covenant about the rights of concubinage, nor that the term "*blessing*" would include anything he happened to desire. Granted this, his economic status was equally irrelevant. A person's life-style might contain circumstances irrelevant to a contract made with him. The burden of proof rests with the prosperity teachers to show why concubinage must be excluded from the covenant, but his wealth wasn't.

The plug for the hole: Deuteronomy 28

Many prosperity teachers are aware of these holes in their theology, so have tried to patch them up with an ingenious method. This is done by tacking on

the law of Moses as an extension of the Abrahamic covenant, and then quoting from the blessings of Deuteronomy 28. ⁴⁶

The teachers make no attempt to demonstrate why this is theologically sound. They simply declare it to be so. One teacher even proclaims the law of Moses as the "articles" of the covenant of Abraham. Others say the whole law of Moses was the result of God's covenant with Abraham.

Does the New Testament declare these two covenants can be blended like this? Let's see Romans 4:13-14.

For the promise, that he should be heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. For if they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect.

Paul said our faith is void and the covenant of Abraham annulled the instant we drag the law into it. The degree to which we attempt to do this is the measure of our spiritual immaturity and unbelief. Paul illustrates this point beautifully in Galatians chapter 4, using Sarah and Hagar as example.

Tell me, you who want to be under the law, are you not aware of what the law says? 22 For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman and the other by the free woman. 23 His son by the slave woman was born in the ordinary way; but his son by the free woman was born as the result of a promise.

30 But what does the Scripture say? "Get rid of the slave woman and her son, for the slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with the free woman's son." Verses 21-24, 30

Sarah represents the Abrahamic covenant, which in turn represented salvation by grace. Hagar represents the law of Moses. What does Paul conclude about these two? We can no more mix these two covenants than we could get Sarah and Hagar to be friends. Why? They were mortal enemies by the nature of their different relationships with Abraham.

⁴⁶ Most of the prosperity teachers do this. Examples are:
Capps, Charles; *Success Motivation*; Harrison House, 1982 p. 42
Cerullo, Morris; *A Guide To Total Health And Prosperity*; chapter 12
Savelle, Jerry. *Living In Divine Prosperity*, p. 126

How could this be if both covenants were from God? Prosperity doctrine uses this reasoning as grounds for claiming the law is merely an extension of the Abrahamic covenant.

Notice both women lived under the same roof. Both had children by Abraham. Each had her own independent relationship with him. Because of the nature of the covenant, however, they could not relate to each other. ... *for the slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with the free woman's son.* So Hagar got thrown out.

So God gave two separate covenants that related to himself independently for two different purposes, but not to each another.

Some prosperity teachers have tried to avoid this line of argumentation by affirming that Christ redeemed us from the curses of the law but left intact the blessings. Galatians 3:13 is quoted as proof,

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree."

This is a misinterpretation based on subjectively rewording the text. When they read the words, "*the curse of the law,*" they are thinking, "the curses which are under the law."

Paul is not referring to the specific curses in the law of Moses, but rather to the whole body of the law entirely. The contrast is not between the blessings and the curses, but between the two covenants and that which they each represent.

Nothing in the law of Moses corresponds to anything in the covenant of Abraham because the law itself is a curse. The law became a curse to the Jews rather than a blessing, because it condemned them. God did that so they eventually would realize their sinfulness and turn to the promised Savior.

The context of Galatians 3 bears out this interpretation. The prosperity teachers seemed to have missed verse 12 which says, "*And the law is not of faith:*" Well then, if the law has nothing to do with faith, why drag it into the covenant of Abraham? He goes on to add, "*but 'the man that does them shall live in them',*" meaning that if we want part of the law, we must take it all.

This principle becomes clear when we look closely at Deuteronomy 28 itself:

Moses stood before the people one day and began to summarize the commandments under the law. He starts in chapter one, verse 6 and continues uninterrupted for 32 chapters. Chapter 28 is a part of this quote, which contains the potential blessings for Israel along with the condition for receiving them. That condition was to keep all the commandments that Moses gave them on that day.

If you fully obey the LORD your God and carefully follow all his commands I give you today, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations on earth. Deuteronomy 28:1

What commandments are these? Animal sacrifices, marrying our brother's widow, feast days, circumcision, dietary restrictions, how to slaughter our enemies, among others. Are we willing to fulfill these conditions?

In contrast, Abraham did nothing to merit God's promises or blessings. Grace flowed freely from God's will, not his own.

The problems do not end there. The faith-message teachers adamantly affirm the church inherits promise made to Israel under the Law. This is a necessary part of their theology.

This is a complex theological point. Many evangelical scholars today, including this writer, reject the view that the church inherits the promises made to Moses, because strong biblical evidence exists against it.

This does not deter the faith-teachers at all. Apparently, they feel they have attained to a special track into the secret counsels of the Spirit which renders unnecessary sound biblical scholarship. What is this special something? It is called "revelation knowledge." The "Spirit" has revealed it to them and so we must all accept it as fact.

Let's look at some scriptural facts on this point:

The writer of Hebrews claims that the promises made under the law of Moses are inferior to the promises we now have. He says in Hebrews 8:6-13, *But the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, and it is founded on better promises.*

He then goes on to quote from Jeremiah 31:31-32, which explains how God intends to abolish the covenant made with Moses when he took them out of Egypt. The entire covenant is abolished because its promises are inferior. Deuteronomy 28 is a part of that covenant. Why therefore quote inferior promises from an abolished covenant?

The body of Christ is not an extension of Israel, but rather "*one new man*" according to Ephesians 2:12-22. It is a whole new species, a living organism neither Jew nor gentile. It is the church.

We are built on a different foundation than Israel. Ephesians 2:20, *...built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone*. New Testament prophets are meant here, as confirmed by Ephesians 3:5.

The promise made to Abraham was as unconditional as the salvation it represented. That is why the two covenants cannot mix. Their foundations are mutually exclusive. Abraham's descendants failed to grasp this principle.

For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. 3 Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. Romans 10:2-3

The prosperity doctrine is in danger of leading its followers to the same low spiritual perspective that blinded the Jews to the grace of God and eventually produced in them a degree of spiritual pride that made impossible the exercise of genuine faith.

From this chapter we learn...

- The covenant of Abraham does not support the Prosperity Movement premises because,
 - The original Abrahamic covenant contains no promise of material wealth.
 - Abraham was rich previous to the covenant.
 - The New Testament always defines the Abrahamic covenant in spiritual, not material terms.
 - There is no such thing as the "blessings" of Abraham. It is one blessing, righteousness through faith.
- Deut. 28 is not a promise to Christians. It is a warning to national Israel about keeping the Law.

Chapter 9:

Sufficiency, Yes!

Certain points in the prosperity teaching are true and helpful. I personally have been stimulated in my faith as a result of studying some of the writings of the faith-teachers insofar as their application is in a proper setting. These aspects are well worth reviewing.

As with many controversial doctrines, some aspects may be true and others false, which is precisely what makes it controversial.

Let's examine 2Corinthians 9:6-12

Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. 7 Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. 8 And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. 9 As it is written: "He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor; his righteousness endures forever." 10 Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. 11 You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God. 12 This service that you perform only supplying the needs of God's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God.

These verses clearly teach that it is the ordinary will of God for Christians to live at a level above subsistence. (Some exceptions to this exist which will be covered later on.) This text can be understood in terms of three principles:

Sowing and reaping

Repeatedly throughout Scripture we see the principle of sowing and reaping. Christ taught this as the fundamental law of giving by which the kingdom of God operates. In Luke 6:38 he taught,

Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."

Paul also taught,

A man reaps what he sows. Galatians 6:7

In the context of 2Corinthians 9, he is obviously referring to money. A principle is expounded by which Christians can prosper above the basic subsistence level and have enough left over to give toward the work of the Gospel, and those in need.

The first step takes in the law of sowing and reaping, accompanied with a pair of important adverbs, "sparingly" and "bountifully." These terms must be taken relatively, in proportion to one's means, rather than in comparison to the amount that another may give or that which the world may consider bountiful. Jesus revealed this at the temple when an unknown widow gave two "mites." He commented, *I tell you the truth," he said, "this poor widow has put in more than all the others.* Luke 21:3 By this we see giving is qualitative, not quantitative. The prosperity teachers are correct on this point.

Motives

Correct motives are essential in the process. The term "bountiful" (EULOGIA in Greek) literally means "blessing." This word is sometimes amplified by contrast with other words. In verse 5 it is contrasted with the word "covetousness" and is translated "sparingly." In verse 6 it is contrasted with "sparingly" and therefore means "generously."

Paul is underlining that the motive of the giver must be to see blessings accrue to another, and not to obtain riches for oneself. Covetousness must not be the motive in giving. The glory of God and blessing to others are the only correct motives.

In verse 7 we see exhortations toward other important attitudes in giving. There must be no sorrow nor grudging for the loss of the money given.

The poor are not to be forgotten. *...his gifts to the poor* V 9 It surprised me to discover that the pronoun "his" here does not refer to God, but rather to the believer who is giving. This is a quote from Psalm 112 and in the context clearly refers to the righteous man.

Results of giving

Now let us take a look at the general results of obedience to this pattern of giving:

First of all, verse 8 tells us that God will make all sorts of grace abound toward us. Divine grace will be evident in every department of life. We will be consistently independent. The Greek word here is AUTARKEIA, which literally means "self-rule," hence independence and sufficiency. He also says that we will have abundance for all sorts of good works. We will receive not only our basic needs, but also enough with which to be generous and to start the cycle of giving all over again.

In verse 10 we see that God will also increase the results of our ministry, "the harvest of your righteousness." The word "harvest" here (GENEMATA in Greek) means "offspring" or "progeny." It is the noun form of the verb "to beget." The fruit and results of our ministry are in view here, and will increase.

We will be, *made rich in every way so that you can be generous...* verse 11. What does this mean? "generous" (HAPLOTES in Greek) ordinarily means "single-mindedness," and is here translated "generous" in most modern translations.

Now let's look at a very key word in the context: "made rich," which is PLOUTIZO in the original. When studying another language, one often discovers the tone and flavor of a word that is felt in a richer and more varied sense than the mere dictionary definition. I think the term "be made rich" as in the NIV is a bit too strong for this word. There is another related verb for "to be made rich" which is stronger and is used elsewhere.

PLOUTIZO does not carry the strong connotation of being made rich in the sense of saying "I am a rich man." It is the word that one would expect to hear if two Greek businessmen were chatting and one asked the other "how is business lately?" He replies, "Business has been quite good lately. I'm doing well." This does not mean of course that he is a rich man, but that his business is doing fine, making a good profit.

Prosperous giving and receiving

We are not supposed to keep the prosperity! This is the literal meaning of the phrase, "made rich ... so that you can be generous..." The difference between our needs and our prosperity equals what is to be given for the gospel.

God blesses people so that they can be generous; not so that they can show off their prosperity or judge poorer Christians of unbelief and thus imply their own spirituality.

Here is the equation as Paul gives it: Prosperous income minus present needs equals excess given to God. The purpose of prosperity then, is not luxurious living, but advancement of the gospel.

Some Word of Faith teachers acknowledge this interpretation, but still hold to the false premise that it is guaranteed according to our own righteousness.

Beautiful exceptions

Sufficiency is the will of God for Christians in most circumstance. While an occasional test may occur, believers experience consistent patterns of financial supply, if not riches, as they learn obedience to the Lord in giving. Though we concede this is generally true, God has some beautiful exceptions.

Some are called by God to live at a spiritual level higher than prosperity. There are some patterns of divine dealings in Scripture that have an order of priorities to them. God calls some to forfeit blessings that others may enjoy. Not that they are less worthy, but more worthy.

Exception 1 - Certain kinds of missionaries

Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! You have become kings — and that without us! How I wish that you really had become kings so that we might be kings with you! 1Corinthians 4:8

The Corinthians had a problem... spiritual pride. God had blessed them materially, because Paul mentioned they were rich. We see how Paul mocks their spiritual pride, which resulted from their prosperity.

We can picture the Corinthians saying, "Wow! We have really tapped into the source of faith, power and prosperity! We have come into an understanding of the principles that govern the kingdom of God! We have begun to really reign in life with Christ, with wisdom and honor. Not only that, we have entered into a depth of life that even Paul does not understand. After all, Paul is poor. If he had faith he would be prosperous too. We'll just have to pray for Paul so that God will give him that faith!"

Paul had to pull the veil off their eyes so that they could see the depth of their sin of spiritual pride. He had to explain to them that his calling as an apostle was far beyond the level they had attained.

We are fools for Christ, but you are so wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are

strong! You are honored, we are dishonored! 1Corinthians 4:10

Some are called to a life of intercessory suffering on behalf of the body of Christ. Paul mentions this in Colossians 1:24, *...and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church.*

This intercessory suffering is not expiatory, because that aspect was completed at the cross. But there exists an intercessory life of suffering on behalf of the body of Christ. Paul expresses it as...

To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless. V.11

Such intercessory ministry involved more than just prayers. It was a life he led. He lived on a deeper level than most ministers experience even briefly.

God could not call upon the spiritually immature Corinthians for anything higher than mere prosperity.

Exception 2 - Persecution

In Hebrews 11, and throughout church history, we notice many Christians have been forced to suffer lack, within the sovereign will of God, as a result of their stand for truth. This is evident today in some countries for example. In Hebrews 11:37 we read,

...they were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated 38 the world was not worthy of them.

God's perspective on persecution is different from ours. We are like people standing underneath a tapestry, looking at the underside. We see a thread that looks out of place, and desire to pull it out. Viewed from the top, we see to our surprise that the thread is not only in place, but is a principal theme of the piece!

God wants his kids to share his glory. Can glory exist without opponents? No heroes without adventures; no Olympic medals without a race; no crowns without crosses.

Glory cheaply obtained is not glory. The wrestler's glory is not merely in his own strength but in that of his opponents. In the Christian's struggle, the idea of victory through weakness only adds to that glory. David defeats the

sword, spear and armor of a giant with a small stone; Jesus conquers death by submitting to it; the Christian defeats the hostile hand by turning the other cheek.

Persecution is both the seal of the believers' salvation, and of the rejecter's doom. Thus, God may see persecution at times as a necessity. Sometimes privations may be an outcome of such pressures from the world, and not just because people are unable to handle money.

Exception 3 - Spiritual Growth

I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. 12 I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. 13 I can do everything through him who gives me strength. Philippians 4:11

Paul found himself in a dilemma every missionary faces in thanking his donors. He wants them to understand his gratitude for their generosity, yet clarify he views the Lord alone as his source.

Paul confesses that at times he suffered lack and was humbled by it. Who among us dares to step forward and accuse him of a lack of faith? One "Word" teacher writes that the term "content" really means "sufficiency" and is the same word as used in 2Corinthians 9:8. He indicates that Paul really meant to express that he was not only living in wealth, but was preaching and teaching prosperity doctrine as a part of the atonement!⁴⁷

The words for "content" in Philippians 4:11 and for "sufficiency" in 2Corinthians 9:8 are basically the same Greek words, *autarkes* and *autarkeia* (sufficient, and sufficiency, respectively). In this, the teacher was correct. But he fails to note that the verb form, from which these two words are derived is found also in 1Timothy 6. *But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that.* No room there for a prosperity doctrine.

The Greek word AUTARKEIA has two meanings, depending on the context. It means either "sufficiency" or "contentment." In 2Corinthians 9:8 it means "sufficiency," because this is the definition forced by the context. In Philippians 4, however, the context is different. The prosperity teacher ignored the words, "abased" and "hungry" and "suffered need" in verse 12. Scripture must not be forced this way in order to fit our doctrine.

⁴⁷ Hagin, Kenneth; *Key to Spiritual Healing*, p. 9-10

Does God want us all to be in poverty? is poverty holy? Certainly not. To assume poverty is the will of God for everyone is as erroneous as saying prosperity is his will for everyone. Both have a supposition unsupported by Scripture.

Poverty doctrine is not necessarily the anti-thesis to prosperity doctrine. There is a third and Biblical option, CONTENTMENT.

... men of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain. 6 But godliness with contentment is great gain. 7 For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. 8 But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that.
1 Timothy 6:5-8

Paul is primarily concerned with the Judaizers of his own day, his persecutors and main source of opposition to the gospel. He was not thinking of twentieth-century teachers trying to get people to exercise faith.

Nevertheless, the Judaizers held the same premise as the prosperity message today. Paul reveals the cause of it in verse 4, which is spiritual pride. This problem is both the root of the tree as well as its primary fruit.

What does contentment mean? In the Greek middle voice, as in the above verses, it means «to be satisfied.»⁴⁸ A Christian is to have enough of the grace of God and power of the Spirit to have arrived at a state of faith and rest in Christ in which his external circumstances appear irrelevant to his relationship with God.

This must not be understood as resignation to poverty or oppression; nor is it fatalism nor a transcendental state of mind. It is a form of faith-rest in which the Christian's external circumstances are no longer viewed as reflective of his internal spiritual condition. Just the exact reverse of the faith-message premise!

A balanced believer does not view imprisonment for the Gospel's sake as a judgment from God nor a financial reverse as a lack of faith. Nor does he measure his spirituality by his bank account. He has matured in Christ enough to cease measuring spiritual realities by these things, and is

⁴⁸ Greek- ARKEO. Louw and Nida, Nu. G714,

therefore content in whatever condition God places him, as long as he knows that it is of God. His barometer of spirituality is internal, not external.

In none of the 40 or more publications that I have examined so far, can I find any reference at all to 1Timothy 6:5-6. None of the "Word" leaders even attempt to explain it in their terms. They avoid it altogether.

God gave us promises of sufficiency so we can have a sense of security regarding our material needs. With them, he also provided enough exceptions to the rule so we may never be tempted to judge our brother for having less. In God's eyes, he might really have more!

From this chapter we learn...

- It is God's ordinary will for Christians to have enough for their needs with some left over to bless others.
- The law of sowing and reaping is valid, if applied with godly motives and right teaching.
- God may prosper some believers so they may have resources to advance the gospel, not necessarily to raise their standard of living.

- Exceptions exist to the above.
 - Certain missionaries called to extraordinary circumstances.
 - Persecution
 - Spiritual growth

[Chapter 10:](#)

The Jesus Died Spiritually Heresy

The entire foundation of the Word of Faith movement consists of a bizarre and unscriptural view of Christ's sacrifice. E.W. Kenyon, in his book, *What Happened Between the Cross and the Throne*, was the first to systemize it. In theology, this has come to be known as the JDS Heresy (Jesus Died Spiritually). It forms the grounds for a shocking chain of errors are as follows:

The Body and Blood sacrifice of Christ on the Cross did not atone for sin. The physical death of Christ on the Cross served only to permit Jesus to die in his Spirit. He literally became sin itself on the Cross, and took upon himself a Satanic nature and was delivered over to Satan. Consequently, he lost his Deity and went to hell as a condemned man. It was there, not on the Cross that He suffered for sin. After three days, the Holy Spirit came down into hell and caused him to be born-again. This restored his Deity. A battle in hell took place in which He took away the keys of hell and death from Satan. He was then resurrected from the dead, and took his place on the right hand of the Father.

Horrid as these teachings are, believe it or not it gets worse!

Since Jesus had to be born-again like any other sinner, and since this restored his Deity, then when we as believers are born again, this grants deity to us as well. We become "gods" in our spirits. Our re-created spirits are made in the image of God, and are incapable of sin. Christians sin with their flesh but not with their spirits. We, as gods, have creative power. Just as God spoke the Word and created the worlds, so we also as "gods" with perfect spirits have the same creative power in our tongues. Through positive confession, we can speak creative words like a god and create miracles of healing and prosperity.

The above blasphemous doctrines are expounded in Copeland's tape series, *What Happened Between the Cross and the Throne*. Hagin mentions them also in his book *The Name of Jesus*. I heard him preaching JDS on radio in December of 1984. All of the Word of Faith teachers hold to this heresy since it forms a cornerstone of their theology.

"Blasphemous" is not too strong a term to qualify these doctrines. If a stronger term existed, I would use it. They amount to an attack on the value of the cross and the blood that was shed on it. If the cross was not a fully sufficient sacrifice, then neither is the blood shed. Jesus shed no blood in Hades.

Was the atonement corporeal or spiritual, according to the Bible?

... making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.... now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death.. Colossians 1:20-23

In him we have redemption through his blood... Ephesians 1:7

the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. I John 1:7

... we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. Hebrews 10:10

In the last chapter of this book, the reader will find a listing of about 30 verses from the New Testament showing that the sacrifice of Christ on the cross was of his body and blood (i.e. corporeal only). Jesus did NOT die in his spirit.

If these verses are not enough, let's let Jesus himself declare when it was that the atonement was completed. *When he had received the drink, Jesus said, "It is finished." With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. John 19:30*

What does *it is finished* mean? In the original Greek, this is the word TETELESTAI. It is taken from the common verb "to finish" (TELEO) and was used to sign receipts. It means ... IT HAS BEEN PAID IN FULL!

Glory to God! All that was necessary for our salvation was completed in that moment. Jesus did not descend into hell as a condemned man but as the conquering Lord.

What do the Word of Faith teachers say about this verse? Copeland replies,

When (Jesus) said, IT IS FINISHED, on that Cross, he was not speaking of the plan of redemption. The plan of redemption had just begun. There were still three days and three nights to go through. 6 What does Copeland think Jesus said was finished, if it wasn't redemption? But further problems exist for Copeland's interpretation:

Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." When he had said this, he breathed his last... Luke 23:46

Does this sound like Jesus was delivered over to Satan?

To the thief on the cross, Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise." Does this sound like Jesus went to suffer in hell as a condemned man?

What are some of the texts that JDS adherents use to support their doctrine?

For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit, 1Peter 3:18

The JDS teachers point out that "*made alive by the Spirit*" could mean "made alive in spirit." Thus, he had to be dead in spirit first in order to be made alive.

But some real problems exist with this interpretation. In the original Greek, there are two little untranslatable words, MEN ... DE. In a clause, these carry the connotation of "on the one hand ... on the other hand." Therefore the final words of the verse actually mean "on the one hand he was dead in the flesh, but on the other hand he was alive in spirit." Far from being a proof for JDS, this verse is actually a strong evidence against it!

The following verse confirms this interpretation. *...through whom also he went and preached to the spirits in prison* (V. 19) Do dead spirits in hell preach? In context, the verse means that Jesus was physically dead, but spiritually alive, which enabled him to descend into the underworld and preach.

The JDS teaching also conflicts with the word "*once*" in verse 18. *For Christ also hath ONCE suffered for sins...* Yet they teach that Jesus died twice; once physically and one spiritually. They dig a grave for their own doctrine by quoting from this verse.

He appeared in a body, was vindicated by the Spirit,... 1Timothy 3:16

JDS teaches that since Christ was justified in the Spirit, then there must have been a time when he was legally unjustified. Hence, he died in Spirit.

Again, ignorance of the original language is at the basis of this interpretation. The term "*justify*," contrary to popular thinking, does NOT mean "to be made righteous." It means "to be DECLARED righteous," or

"vindicated." The clause simple means that the Spirit of God declared that Jesus is righteous. This is the testimony of the Father with regard to the Son throughout the New Testament. The verse as a whole is a resume of the life of Christ and follows the pattern of his coming.

"Manifest in the flesh" = incarnation;
"Justified in (or by) the Spirit = resurrection;
"received up into glory = ascension.

And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross. Colossians 2:15

This is supposed to prove that a great battle took place in hell. The JDS teachers must be desperate to resort to such a text for evidence. A glance at the context blows away this interpretation. Note the previous verse:

...having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. Colossians 2:24

It was at the cross, not in hell, that he overcame principalities and powers. Again, the verse backfires on JDS.

And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death... Isaiah 53:9

JDS proponents quote this verse because they insist that the word *death* is in the plural in the Hebrew. This, they contend, proves that Jesus died twice... once physically and once spiritually.

Every beginning Hebrew student knows that the plural noun is sometimes used as an emphatic. This means that a singular noun can be pluralized in order to emphasize its importance. Thus, even if we grant that the noun "*death*" is plural in the Hebrew, it does not prove that Jesus died twice. It simply means that Isaiah is emphasizing the extreme importance of his death.

However, it is far from certain that this noun is actually pluralized in the Hebrew. In fact, it is the accompanying article, the word "*his*", that is in the plural, not the noun itself. Judith Matta in *The Born Again Jesus* explains it like this:

It is true this article is in the plural in some manuscripts. However, the noun "death" is not plural, in the Hebrew text. It too also true that the earliest manuscripts do not have the article "His" in the plural. This has led scholars to assume that the plural article is merely a copyist's error, since a plural noun does not accompany it as it should be. Like an elephant balancing on the head of a pin, Kenyon's assumptions about a Born-Again Jesus are balanced on this one article. He and his advocates rest their case on a few manuscripts, which have a copyist's error, not found in others. No translator has ever used the word 'deaths' in this verse.⁴⁹

Another text offered as proof of JDS is,

because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay. Acts 2:27

The word for "grave" here is the Greek, Hades, translated in the old King James as "hell." As the account of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16 reveals, Hades was composed of two parts ... the place of torment for the damned, and "Abraham's Bosom," or Paradise, for the saved. These were in close proximity to one another because the rich man could see Lazarus on the other side. Jesus did go into Hades. But nowhere does Scripture teach he went to the place of torments. There is evidence, however, that he went to the paradise side. Jesus answered him, *...today you will be with me in paradise.* Luke 23:43

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Matthew 27:46

This proves, say the JDS teachers, that Jesus was totally separated from the Father on the cross, and therefore, must have died spiritually. How could his communion be interrupted otherwise?

The clue to unraveling this resides in the first words he spoke: "My God." Why would Jesus address the Father as "My God" if he is God himself? The answer is that he was also fully man.

Sometimes Jesus spoke as God to man. Other times he spoke as man to God. This statement on the cross was one of these latter instances. It reminds us of John 20:17, after the resurrection, when he was speaking to Mary Magdalene: *Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'*" In this, his identity as perfect man is in view, just as in Matthew 27:46.

⁴⁹ Matta, Judy. *Born Again Jesus*, Spirit of Truth Ministries, 1984. p. 34

As perfect man, he was making the perfect sacrifice for us. His communion as man was broken, of course. But nowhere is there a hint this affected his Deity. Several texts indicate the contrary: *Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."* Luke 23:34 Hardly the words of a man with a Satanic nature! *"Father, into your hands I commit my spirit."* Luke 23:46 Does this sound like a spirit that had no communion with the Father? Into whose hands was he commending his spirit...Satan's or the Father's?

For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. 2Corinthians 5:21

JDS teachers lean on this verse with all their weight. They consider this to be devastating proof that Jesus literally became a sinner on the cross and died a spiritual death.

The key to understanding this verse lies in the word "HAMARITIA," "sin," in the first clause. To be "*made sin*" is a Hebrew idiom, here transferred to Greek, meaning, "to be a sin-offering."

The same word is used identically in Hebrew 10:6&8 *with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire...* I have underlined the portions translated by that one Greek word, HAMARTIA. These show that the meaning intended in 2Corinthians 5:21 is "sacrifice for sin" and "offering for sin," not literally sin itself.

Adam Clarke's Commentary also points out that the Hebrew word for sin offering "Chattah" is translated in the Septuagint (Greek Old Testament) by this same Greek word HAMARTIA, some 94 times in the Law of Moses where sin offering is meant.

In the Old Testament typology of the sacrifices, the sacrifice itself was never regarded as becoming sinful. The Levitical law called the trespass offering and the sin offering, "most holy." *These are the regulations for the guilt offering, which is most holy: Leviticus 7:1 ". . . it must be eaten in a holy place; IT IS MOST HOLY.* As the sin offering is , so in the trespass offering there is one law for them: Leviticus 7:6-7

Our Lord Jesus Christ, who was the fulfillment of these fore types, was holy at his birth, holy in his life, holy on the cross, holy at his death, holy in Hades, holy at the resurrection, and is still the one before whose throne the angels cry, HOLY, HOLY, HOLY ... LORD GOD ALMIGHTY!

The "battle in hell" aspect has a hole in it too. Not a scrap of Scripture exists to indicate Satan has ever been in hell, has dominion over it or even wants to go there. The Bible teaches he is "the prince of the power of the air" (Ephesians 2:2), he walks to and fro in the earth, (Job 1:7), and he was disarmed at the cross (Colossians 2:14-15). Satan-vs-Jesus-in-Hell stories have their roots only in Medieval mythology like Dante's Inferno, and in the imaginations of Word of Faith teachers.

The New Creation heresy

Clearly, JDS teachers lack support for their doctrine. Do these teachers abandon their position when confronted with the facts? No, because JDS is the foundation for the New Creation Heresy.

When Jesus was born-again in hell, so the story goes, this restored his deity. When we are born-again, this also restores our deity, which Adam lost in the garden of Eden. Thus, we become "little gods" again.

Copeland puts it this way, "When God made man he gave him a will that has power. It is actually a godlike will because man has the right to choose his own eternal destiny. Only a god has that kind of choice."⁵⁰

Copeland didn't originate this teaching. Kenyon was the first to formulate it in his books, *The Blood Covenant*, and *New Creation Realities*. In these he insisted that the believer, as a god, could... "walk as Jesus walked, without any consciousness of inferiority to God or Satan..."⁵¹ This is only logical if we are gods, isn't it?

Earl Paulk, on TBN Network in California put it even more clearly, "Until we comprehend that we are little gods and we begin to act like little gods, we cannot manifest the kingdom of God."⁵²

As God in the beginning created everything through speaking WORDS, so our inner god-spirits have similar creative power. When we speak WORDS (i.e. positive confessions) then these words become creative also, and bring us health and wealth, according to the Word of Faith teachers.

⁵⁰ Copeland, Kenneth; Tape, *What Happened from the Cross to the Throne* # 00-0303

⁵¹ Kenyon, E.W. *Blood Covenant*. Kenyon Publishers, 1981 p. 53

⁵² Paulk, Earl. *Satan Unmasked* Cathedral Shop Publishers, 1984 p. 96-97

Supposedly, this influence of our words, spoken by the power of our god-spirits, is so powerful that even the Lord Jesus Christ himself is moved by them. Dr. Paul Cho, pastor of the world's largest church, Seoul, Korea, states,

You create the presence of Jesus with your mouth. If you speak salvation, the saving Jesus appears. If you speak about divine healing then you will have the healing Christ. He is bound by your lips and by your words.⁵³

Wonderful! So I have the Lord Jesus himself as my private little slave! I command him to jump, and he says, "How high, my lord?"

Stranger still, the Word of Faith leaders insist our recreated human spirits are in God's Image and therefore perfect. We cannot sin in our spirits, only with our flesh. Our spirits have divine attributes, they say, and know things that we do not. Hagin, in his tape series on spiritual gifts, and also his teaching on guidance, tells us that we should always listen to our spirits. We will never err if we do.

Let's go back to the Garden of Eden and see where the truth lies.

First, where in Scripture does it say Adam had deity? How can we have something "restored" which never existed? If Adam had deity by any definition, then why did Satan bother to offer to make them "as gods"? Eve would have replied, "Sorry. No sale today. We already have some."

"You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman. 5 "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." Genesis 3:4-5.

Yes, a promise exists in the Bible that we can become gods. But look who made the promise. SATAN! And he is still making the same vain promise today. But the Lord God says, *Before me no god was formed, nor will there be one after me. Isaiah 43:10 I am the LORD, and there is no other; apart from me there is no God. Isaiah 45:5.*

What does the Bible say about the condition of the Christian's spirit?

Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of

⁵³ Cho, Paul. *The Fourth Dimension*. Logos Associates 1987 p. 9

reverence for God. 2Corinthians 7:1

Isn't it beautiful how one verse from the Word of God can cut through such a mountain of error? Paul understood that there is defilement of the Christian spirit as well as defilement of the flesh. A believer can sin with either. Sins of the spirit exist as well as sins of the flesh. One of the most common sins of the spirit is spiritual pride. Ironically, it is common among those adhering to the New Creation Heresy.

Can we look to our spirits for guidance? *I know, O LORD, that a man's life is not his own; it is not for man to direct his steps.* Jeremiah 10:23

Nowhere in Scripture are we told to look to our own human spirits for guidance. We are to look to the Spirit of God only.

What evidence does the movement present to prove we Christians are gods"?

A favorite text is John 10:34-36.

Jesus answered them, "Is it not written in your Law, 'I have said you are gods'? 35 If he called them 'gods,' to whom the word of God came — and the Scripture cannot be broken — 36 what about the one whom the Father set apart as his very own and sent into the world? Why then do you accuse me of blasphemy because I said, 'I am God's Son'?"

The JDS teachers consider this verse sufficient evidence for their views. What could be clearer than the plain statement "You are gods"?

Let's go back to Psalm 82, from which Jesus was quoting, and see if it sheds light on this. Verses 1-2, *God presides in the great assembly; he gives judgment among the "gods":*

What "gods" is the Psalmist talking about? It refers to the judges appointed to judge Israel according to the Law. The entire context confirms this.

The words for "gods" here, in Hebrew, is ELOHIM. Though this is a common word for God himself, Strong's Concordance says it is "occasionally applied by way of deference to magistrates." The context of the Psalm bears this out. The "gods" then are these unjust judges who are lording it over God's people and oppressing them. Regardless of your status in Israel, says the Lord, you are nothing but men and shall die as such under judgment. Verses

6-7, "I said, 'You are "gods"; you are all sons of the Most High.' But you will die like mere men

How does this relate to Jesus' comment in John 10? He was rebuking the Pharisees for their unjust and irrational appraisal of him. He was telling them they were no better than those unjust Judges in Psalm 82. If God called them "gods," who were unrighteous men, how do you call me a blasphemer, I whom the Father has declared as righteous, just because I said, *I am the Son of God*? In effect, he was saying something like, "You hypocrites. You would sooner acknowledge those unjust judges as being from God, rather than One such as I who has proven his righteousness by his miracles."

In no way can the clause "*You are gods*" be construed as meaning that Christians are creative gods. Even if such a doctrine were true, it could not be proven from this text, because nothing in it refers to Christians.

Of the many miracles throughout Christian history, one of the most amazing is how millions of believers have swallowed such blasphemies as the above. One would think Christians today had no Bibles. In Ecuador, when I was warning the churches of certain Word of Faith doctrines, a new convert asked innocently, "But Brother, do they not have Bibles in America?"

From this chapter we learn...

- The Word of Faith doctrine regarding the sacrifice of Christ is heresy. According to the teachers,
 - Christ's death on the cross was insufficient to atone for sin.
 - Christ needed to die in his spirit and suffer in hell as a lost sinner to complete what is lacking in the cross.
 - Christ took upon himself a satanic nature on the cross.
 - Christ lost his deity on the cross.
 - Christ had to be born again like any other sinner, whereupon his deity was restored.
 - Christ fought a battle in hell to overcome Satan.
- The above Word of Faith teachings are blasphemous.
- The Bible teaches,
 - The blood of Christ is sufficient for all sin.
 - Christ's sacrifice was corporeal, not spiritual.
 - Christ's descent into hell was triumphant, not as a lost sinner.
 - Christ's sacrifice was holy in all stages, just like the sin offerings in the Old Testament.

Recommended Reading

Alsobrook, David. *Was The Cross Enough? Or did Jesus die twice?*

Matta, Judith. *The Born Again Jesus of the Word of Faith Teaching*

Chapter 11:

Job and the kingdom

A contest on television took place several years ago in which a group of toddlers were required to put differently shaped pegs into their correct holes on a board. One little boy came to the last hole, which was a round one, but with a square peg in his hand. The dilemma and confusion were apparent on his face. The realization came that he must have done the entire problem wrong from the start. But that was too much to admit, so he did the typically human thing; he jammed the end of the peg into the hole and pounded on it with his little fist with all his might!

Some adults would have taken a more sophisticated approach to the problem. One might take out a pocketknife, shave off the corners, and then pound it in!

How often we Christians are tempted to do the same sort of thing with doctrine. Just about the time we get it all figured out, then horrors! Up pops a verse that contradicts the whole formula. So rather than go back to the basic premise, (the first peg) and start all over again with another one, we take the verse, shave off a few corners and just pound it in! Then we have our neat little doctrinal package that we think is irrefutable.

The dilemma of the suffering righteous as portrayed in the book of Job is the last peg the Word of Faith movement is obliged to confront if it is to maintain intact the universality of its premises.

This is done by declaring that Job's difficulties were brought about by unbelief, which in turn was caused by a problem of fear. Job 3:25 is cited as proof. *What I feared has come upon me; what I dreaded has happened to me.*

Jerry Savelle, a Word of Faith teacher, explains that God made Job wealthy but Job himself destroyed it all because of his fear. It was Job's own big mouth that got him into trouble, he says. But later on in the book, praise God, Job finally realizes this and positive confession pulled him through. ⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Savelle, Jerry. *Living In Divine Prosperity*. Harrison House p. 50

So, according, to this view, Job's comforters were apparently right after all. Job had it coming. He brought it all on himself by his own sin of unbelieving fear.

Let us return to the book of Job and see what it was that caused Job's problem.

Then the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil." Job 1:8

What was it Job feared? God and his judgments! So when Job said in chapter 3, *what I feared...* he was simply saying, in the poetic language of the book, that he thought it was God coming upon him in judgment. Job's entire line of discourse throughout the book confirms that this was his feeling.

It is worth noting also in Job 2:3 who accepts ultimate responsibility for Job's misfortunes.

The entire story of Satan's challenge, and God's plain statements about the blameless character of Job eliminates any possibility that the problems came about because of fault on Job's part. The Word of Faith position on this book might be valid if we had read that God said something like, "Well, after all, Satan, you do have a point here. Job does have that little problem of fear so I guess that really does give you the right to attack him." But we do not see that. Instead, God said, *and still he holds fast his integrity, although you moved me against him to destroy him without cause.* Job 2:3

Why would God call him "perfect" if Job had a problem with fear and unbelief? Was God lying? The fear of God is never at fault. He makes it adamantly clear that the disasters suffered by Job had no legitimate cause from Job's side.

Another peculiar use of the book of Job is chapter 36, verse 11. *If they obey and serve him, they will spend the rest of their days in prosperity and their years in contentment.*

Again, Savelle exclaims that if we obey and serve him, we shall live our life on earth in prosperity and pleasure.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Savelle, Jerry. *Prosperity Of The Soul*. Harrison House p. 22

He failed to notice that God is not saying anything at all in this verse. This is Elihu in the middle of his erroneous speech in which he insists that Job's problems are caused by some secret wickedness. In verse 17 of the same chapter he says, *But now you are laden with the judgment due the wicked; judgment and justice have taken hold of you.* Or in other words, "you've got it coming Job!"

Does the Lord confirm Elihu's basic premise? Look at this: *I am angry with you and your two friends, because you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has.* Job 42:7 Then God adds that Job should pray for them, *lest I deal with you according to your folly.* (V. 8)

God himself declares that the declarations of Job's comforters is sheer folly. It looks like he sent Elihu back to the drawing board to re-examine his premise that it isn't possible for a righteous man to suffer sickness and poverty. So we conclude that Elihu's statements in Job 36 were really divinely inspired examples of human folly, rather than a declaration of God's will for all believers.

All of the Bible is the inspired Word of God, but not all of it is a quote from God himself. Sometimes the Bible records the foolish things that people said and did so that we would not do likewise.

Sufferings within the kingdom and the will of God have no place within the Word of Faith teachings. A revised view of the earthly operations of God's kingdom on earth has become a necessity.

It is pointed out that certain Scriptures indicate that this kingdom has already come to earth in the form of the first advent of Christ. Luke 17:21,

...the kingdom of God is within you; ...for the kingdom of God is at hand.
Matthew 4:17

The reasoning is that since God has already established his kingdom on earth in the form of Jesus and his followers, we have access to all the blessings of the kingdom here and now in the present age. There is no disease or lack in heaven and therefore there should be no disease or lack among us here either. The kingdom is a present tense matter.

A leading faith teacher claims that he is convinced that the only thing we cannot have here on this earth is the glorified body.

True, the Bible speaks about the authority of the believer on earth and the establishment of God's kingdom here. But there seems to be a misplaced emphasis on this point. The kingdom is not yet established in its entirety. Many New Testament verses indicate that the kingdom is also in the future.

... Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, 2Timothy 4:1 ...and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom.. 2Timothy 4:18 ...and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God. Act 14:22

Furthermore Paul tells us that "*flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.*" 1Corinthians 15:50

There's a definite futuristic tone with regard to the kingdom throughout the New Testament. The "Word" teachers are stepping beyond the limits of the present development of it and want to drag the whole kingdom in right now. Naturally God desires that there should be no poverty, disease, pain, and sorrow on earth.

However, the application of God's will is in process and has not yet fully come. Therefore, its manifestations on earth through us, are correspondingly limited. Sometimes the most godly of saints experience pain and sorrow or other misfortunes during the present age. This, within the will of God.

Since the kingdom has not yet in its entirety, this produces nebulous areas in our understanding of its present state. That is why restraint and balance are required when the subject is taught.

The church at Smyrna is another snag in the Word of Faith assumptions about kingdom citizens. *I know your afflictions and your poverty — yet you are rich!* Revelation 2:8,9 Here, Jesus commends the church at Smyrna for their spiritual riches despite their tribulation and poverty. If the word "rich" referred to material wealth, then "poverty" by contrast would have to mean spiritual destitution. But God would not commend them for spiritual poverty.

The verse does not say their spiritual wealth depended on their material poverty. So it cannot be taken as support for a poverty doctrine any more than for a prosperity doctrine. We must interpret it to mean that God's blessings in the Spirit resided upon them and drew them to a higher plain despite their economic circumstances.

Apparently the Jews dispersed from Palestine after Pentecost did not always prosper either, according to James 2:5.

Listen, my dear brothers: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? 6 But you have insulted the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court?

The tone is "you poor believers who are godly versus the rich and ungodly." James' attitude seems inconsistent with a twentieth century prosperity doctrine.

We recoil from absurd medieval asceticism that grew out of an unbalanced interpretation of such texts. We must also reject the equivalent imbalance as reflected in the "Word" movement.

From this chapter we learn...

- The Prosperity Movement has difficulty reconciling the Book of Job with their suppositions.
- They reconcile it by claiming Job brought his calamities on himself through fear, and articulating that fear, which is a form of unbelief.
- The Book of Job reveals the cause of the calamities was a spiritual warfare between God and Satan. Nothing in Job was a cause.
- Any attempt to place the blame on Job for his troubles, falls into the category of "Job's comforters."

Chapter 12:

The Psychology Behind the Prosperity Movement

We need to depart momentarily from analysis of Scripture to speculate on the cultural and psychological influences behind the "Word" movement. Not all adherents show these characteristics, nor are these comments objective proof. But observant readers will note these tendencies in the books and sermons of some of the leaders.

Christian mysticism

A Christian mystic is one who bases his view of reality on the subjective and internal experiences he believes to come from God rather than the external and objective facts (such as scriptural analysis). He will accept only the facts consistent with whatever he believes he has heard from God. If those facts are inconsistent with his internal impressions, he brushes them aside with clever remarks or repartee, and continues proclaiming whatever he imagines he heard from God.

All believers experience subjective impressions from the Holy Spirit. We learn with time to try to be responsive to him. But all Christian theologians agree it is anti-Biblical to base doctrine on anything other than sound scriptural analysis. This is necessary because unfortunately the Holy Spirit is not the only spirit that tries to influence us. The Devil exists as well. Thus, we need an objective standard by which we measure truth. Ironically, the mystic may turn out to be right often enough to convince himself that his method is correct, but not wrong enough to realize it isn't.

We can easily see then why Christian mysticism is dangerous. The Word of God must always be the first and last court of appeal.

Some years ago I was chatting with a minister friend who believes that all divorced and remarried persons without exceptions are condemned. After pointing out some strong Biblical evidence to the contrary, I asked him what evidence he had to refute it. He made no effort to produce any. His answer was, "I have heard from God." No evidence. To him, none was necessary.

The same pattern of thinking is true in some of the leading Word of Faith teachers. After reading some 40 books by them, it became evident that they did not arrive at their beliefs as a result of Biblical research. All of them stated some form of "revelation knowledge" as the foundation for their views. Scripture was then chosen to merely confirm these revelations.

Because sound scriptural analysis is not what convinced them initially. Therefore, objective research will not change their minds.

At a certain point, the mystic becomes a victim of his own thinking. If he were to agree that the facts proved him wrong, this in turn would cause him to put in doubt many other things in his life and ministry he has also based on a mystical approach. The price he pays for questioning his own methods becomes too heavy to pay. Too much is at stake. Too much reality to face. Therefore, all persons and facts to the contrary must be Ignored. The mystic will then live out the rest of his life in a safe but unreal psychological bubble that he has constructed for himself. He will write off those who disagree with as unbelieving or unenlightened.

Absolutism

Similar to mysticism, absolutism views reality in terms of simple black and white. Everything is viewed as absolutely right or wrong; totally true or totally false.

The absolutist categorizes people similarly. To him, they are either good or bad, full of faith or completely unbelieving. He feels there is a right way and a wrong way to do any given task. The idea that there may be more than one right way or that a viewpoint may be partly right and partly wrong, does not fit well in the absolutist mind.

To the absolutist, if the Lord prospers the godly, then something is wrong with you if you are not rich. If you are sick, and God hasn't healed you, you must have sin or unbelief.

It would certainly be convenient if reality would cooperate and act that way. But it just doesn't. In fact, God himself does not. Have you ever noticed that every time we think we have a spiritual formula figured out, that God will do something to show that we do not? But that is how we grow. We try to find out why things didn't turn out as expected, and then God shows us truth that we didn't see before.

A responsible minister will not close his eyes to people's problems just because his formulas didn't work as planned. Nor will he write them off as insincere or Ignorant.

The most basic law of reasoning and research in any domain of life, spiritual or secular, works on this principle: if a phenomenon does not conform to accepted theory, then investigation is made until new knowledge is obtained. God uses this natural process to lead us to new understanding. If we

stubbornly close our minds, we are acting irresponsible to ourselves, to others, and to God.

Anti-Intellectualism

"Wouldn't you rather be with a bunch of uneducated preachers full of the Holy Ghost than with them old dry theologians?" said the preacher on the tape. Well, yes, I thought, any Christian would prefer to be with those full of the Holy Spirit, regardless of their education.

However, I am thankful this is not the only option available. Try this: "Which would you rather be with? A bunch of uneducated preachers full of the Holy Ghost or a bunch of theologians also full of the Holy Ghost?"

Some "Word" people would probably consider those options to be entirely impossible. Why? Because of the phenomenon in some Christian circles, which we call "anti-intellectualism."

This view holds that the intellect is worthless as a means for finding or evaluating truth. The heart is good and the head is bad. Reason is opposed to faith, or at least a hindrance to it. Education is a danger to spiritual growth. Those are anti-intellectual attitudes.

During the first half of the last century we saw great scientific advances. However, along with these advances was the proclamation of widespread humanistic philosophies in our universities. The growth of liberal theology and so-called higher criticism became rampant also.

This produced a climate that many Christians felt unable to handle. Rather than standing their ground and defeating these views on their own terms, many, though not all, retreated entirely from the area of the mind and intellect. Only the "heart" mattered but without properly defining what that term means. The worst wave of anti-intellectualism to hit the church since the middle ages was born.

The validity of reason as a test of truth must be accepted as a working premise without which no thought can possibly be valid, including Christianity. Without understanding this, we cannot even evaluate the truths of the Bible. One cannot possibly use the intellect to disparage the validity of the intellect. There is a term for that sort of thing: It is called cheating!

Anti-intellectualism can never be proved valid. It disproves itself by its own definition. Although it may be expressed in very "spiritual" terms and sound holy, it is always wrong.

Although our reason is valid, our level of knowledge may not be; especially if it has to do with knowledge outside the limits of the material creation, namely the spiritual realm. How can we know that any information that may be communicated from outside the creation is correct? To do that, we need a standard with which to judge. This standard must be rationally consistent within itself and with the criteria. Only the Bible fits this criteria, and can therefore be the only standard of revelation truth and knowledge.

Now we see why any "revelation knowledge" that urges us to bypass reason is actually urging us to bypass the Bible.

It also becomes evident how the Word of Faith doctrine unwittingly plays right into the hands of the existentialist and secular humanist. These latter affirm that Christianity is a non-rational belief. They declare a dichotomy exists between faith and reason; that the two are irreconcilable. They have emptied the word "faith" of all rational content, and replaced it with their own definition, i.e., faith as a non-rational leap of faith.

Such a view of faith is unbiblical, regardless of who holds it, Christian or humanist. Biblical faith is a logical step of trust, based on a God is always consistent with himself. So faith, in the Christian sense, cannot really be emptied of rational content.

In all other points, the humanist and the Word of Faith doctrine are opposed. But in their definition of faith, they agree. The humanist is able to point at Christians like that and say, "Look everyone! The Christians themselves admit that Christianity is not a rational option! It is therefore false!" And the honest seeker, who may happen to be intellectually honest and alert, is driven straight into hell; not so much by the humanist, but by the ignorance of the Christian.

Pragmatism

If it sounds right, feels good and seems to work, then it must be right. Many Christians today appear to use this formula to arrive at their doctrinal views.

Pragmatism is the assumption that whatever works in life must be true. This attitude is as deeply rooted in American culture as apple pie, and is a direct byproduct of our history.

A minister once walked into a Christian gathering one evening to find some of them playing with an Ouija board. "Don't you know that is wrong?" he

warned. "But it works!," they replied. It took some persuasion by the minister to convince them that the fact that it may work didn't make it right.

Obviously most Christians would not fall into that trap. But many fall into subtler kinds of error by that same sort of reasoning. It is possible that many followers of the Word of Faith movement believe it on these grounds alone; it sounds right, feels good and seems to work. They have not necessarily undertaken a thorough and balanced study of the subject from the Word of God.

Spiritual formulas will work if they are true, but the fact that something seems to work does not constitute the evidence that it is true. The reason is that the source may be a false spirit, as with the Ouija game. The evidence for the truth is the Bible and nothing else. For this reason the fact of prosperity in the life of an individual proves nothing at all.

Hero worship

"Well, if their doctrine is wrong, how do you explain the fact that they have such big ministries?," a church elder asked. To him, that was his "big gun," an argument that was meant to be devastating.

And I was devastated for a moment. Not because the question is difficult to answer, but because a person in an office of spiritual leadership would think this to be a convincing argument.

Many false cults have big ministries as well, among which are Mormons, Jehovah Witnesses, and others. The size of a ministry proves nothing about its truth content.

Nonetheless a certain psychological impact exists regarding a person with a large ministry. The good things that he had done in the past tend to lend an air of credibility to those things he says in the present.

But a good man can occasionally say a wrong thing. Peter was an example of this. He said and did some rather foolish things, even after Pentecost. We see that Paul had to rebuke him in Galatians chapter 2. Peter had a big reputation in the church, yet we find him doing something foolish that could have been dangerous to the future of the church. Paul corrected him for the sake of everyone. Good men start off well, but sometimes may say or do unwise things. That does not make them bad people, merely fallible ones, like us all.

In the course of my teaching ministry, I have noticed that believers rarely mature in all areas of life at once. Some have great wisdom and depth of knowledge in the Scriptures, but lack faith. Others have great love, but are weak in their stand for righteousness. Others love holiness to the point of appearing to be harsh.

Something similar may be the case with certain of these teachers. They may be gifted in some areas but lacking in scriptural analysis and scholarly skills necessary to adequately fulfill a role as teachers to the large.

From this chapter we learn...

- Word of Faith teachers show certain character attributes in common, a mixture of North American cultural norms with Gnostic mysticism.
 - Christian mysticism
 - Absolutism
 - Anti-intellectualism
 - Pragmatism
 - Hero worship

Chapter 13:

Denying the Symptoms. Is it valid?

-The evangelist isn't supposed to arrive sick!,- I thought. But there I was, fifteen minutes before the meeting, out behind the tent with a stomachache. Latin American food sometimes does that to us missionaries.

A missionary friend had been holding a revival about twenty miles away, and I went to encourage him. On the way, I had a suspicion that the Lord might have me preach. So when the national speaker didn't show up, I was not surprised at being asked to speak. The surprise was the stomachache!

«Well,»- I thought, «if God does not want me to preach, he could sure say it in a more dignified way than this. So it must be the Devil.» Suddenly, the Spirit of God clearly impressed to me that my affliction was a Satanic lie, and I should declare myself healed in Jesus' Name. I rebuked the Devil out loud and was healed before I could finish commanding. The meeting continued on schedule, with healings!

With the Charismatic movement, God has brought the healing ministry of the church to the forefront in a new and fresh way. It's a delight to have the Word of God preached with signs following.

Promises in the Bible with regard to divine healing exist. The burden of proof rests heavily with those who would presume that healing gifts and ministries have been removed from the church.

On the other extreme, popular books and televangelists constantly assure us we can be healed instantly of anything merely by the exercise of faith in Christ. A popular song urges us to just "rise and be healed" in the Name of Jesus. It is emphasized that God has already done all that he is going to do in that Christ died for our sicknesses as well as for our sins. If we are not healed it is because we have not been willing to appropriate what God offers.

I do not question the validity of divine healing because the testimony of Scripture is clear. My concern is for the many people who have tried to "rise and be healed" and couldn't. They know they believed God and waited expectantly for the results. When the healing was not manifested, guilt feelings entered. "Maybe I'm not using enough faith," they worry. "Perhaps there is something wrong with me spiritually." A cycle of self-doubt and unspecified guilt drives them to despair.

Nowhere does the New Testament guarantee the sick will be instantaneously and miraculously healed, on the sole condition of faith in Christ. In years of study on the subject of divine healing, I have failed to encounter such a promise. Nor will a uniform chorus of voices from the Word of Faith teachers put one where it does not exist.

The most popular approach to divine healing today, we may call "symptom-denying." It constitutes a major cornerstone of the "Word" movement. The afflicted person is urged after prayer to deny that his symptoms are indicative of the presence of a disease. These symptoms are called "lies of the enemy."

The premises upon which this method is based are as follows:

- It is always the will of God for a person to be in perfect health.⁵⁶
- One must believe he is already healed before the results can be manifested. All symptoms must be ignored. ⁵⁷
- Failure to be healed is clear evidence of a lack of faith or of hidden sin.⁵⁸

The leading teachers of this method are not entirely in agreement among themselves on the application. When it comes to the prosperity doctrine, there appears to be general agreement, but not so with healing.

Some believe that recourse to medical science is a demonstration of a lack of faith. Others see medicine as merely another manner in which God manifests healing to mankind and do not view their own visits to a doctor as a contradiction of their healing ministries.

Many Word of Faith teachers will deny the existence of a disease that strikes them. They prefer to call it "lying symptoms." Others do not deny the disease is real, but declare it has no right to be there. ⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Hagin, Kenneth. *The Word Of Faith*

⁵⁷ Hagin, Kenneth. *Key To Scriptural Healing*. p. 13

⁵⁸ Capps, Charles. *The Tongue A Creative Force*. Harrison House Publishers 1977 p. 35.

⁵⁹ Savelle, Jerry. *If Satan Cannot Steal Your Joy...* Harrison House 1983

A popular faith teacher, for example, explained how the symptoms of flu came on his body. He described how he was "attacked" with a runny nose and sore eyes, and muscular aches throughout his body, but that he absolutely refused to accept it. After a valiant fight of several days and through much positive confession, the lying symptoms went away and he claimed he never had the flu at all. ⁶⁰

In this section, it will be unnecessary to deal at length with certain texts and lines of argumentation because they are identical to those used in the prosperity doctrine. The chapters about positive confession, 3John 2 and Mark 11:24 apply equally to the question of healing and we shall allude to them when necessary to clarify a point.

It must also be made clear that not all who practice faith healing are members of the Word of Faith movement. The late Kathryn Kuhlman, for example, who was possibly one of the most outstanding practitioners of faith healing of all time, had little patience with those who maintain that faith will inevitably result in healing. In her book, "I Believe in Miracles," she declares with disdain that she had often seen pathetically sick people being told that they were not healed because of their own lack of faith. She mentions that she was often prone to react against those who judge others on this basis.

When once asked why she had never written a book on the mechanics of healing ministry, Kuhlman declared she had never done so because she did not understand it herself. She admits that at one time she thought faith on the part of the seeker was absolutely necessary, but God showed her otherwise via the healing of a partially deaf man who declared that he didn't believe in it.

Even with regards to the question of the will of God in healing, she had qualms. Although in a general sense she felt it was God's will to heal, she mentioned nevertheless that she did not feel she could say what was or wasn't his will in particular cases.

Kuhlman, then, if she were still alive, would not be classed among the Word of Faith teachers, because she rejected the premises of the movement. While some Word of Faith teachers might consider her views an expression of unbelief, few have drawn the crowds she did.

⁶⁰ IBID.

Since the main teachers do not agree among themselves, and because divine healing is a complex issue, we will limit our study to the symptom-denial method. We will examine the premises and Scriptures involved to determine if this method is defensible, and to what degree the modern emphasis upon them is justified. We hope to arrive at a balanced conclusion that can be maintained without damage to faith, or restricting the hand of a sovereign God; either with regard to his ability to heal, or the methods he may employ.

By his stripes

Does 1Peter 2:24 guarantee instantaneous and miraculous healing? Did Jesus heal everyone who came in faith, and does he still? Who is to blame when healing does not happen?

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.
1Peter 2:24

The slightest mention of the subject of healing in Word of Faith circles is almost guaranteed to provoke the cries of, *by his stripes you have been healed!* This clause is viewed as adequate evidence for the symptom-denial method, sufficient to silence all opposition.

This interpretation revolves around the past tense usage of the verb "heal." To the Word movement, our physical healing is a legally accomplished fact, as readily available as our salvation from sin. Since the latter is appropriated by faith alone, so is the former. The only possible barrier is unbelief. The whip marks (stripes) on Jesus' back were the substitute for our sicknesses, so there are no more legitimate grounds for being sick than for continuing in sin. Any symptoms of illness are lies from the enemy and are to be rejected.

Though miracles have taken place through this method, we are not dealing with testimonies but with analysis of Scripture. I reject the view that 1Peter 2:24 proves symptom-denial for the follow reasons:

It makes no difference whether or not healing is in the atonement.

Though we may acknowledge that this verse proves healing is in the atonement, it still does not prove that healing must always occur instantaneously or by miraculous means. The question of timing and method are not mentioned, but is only assumed by those who wish to interpret it that way.

Every good thing is provided for in the atonement. While many aspects of it are available to us in the present, others are not. The glorification of our bodies, the full restoration of the physical creation, our right to rule and reign with Christ on earth, are all in the atonement because they are all in the person of Christ himself.

Our moral perfection and sanctification were also accomplished at Calvary. We experience peace with God and security of salvation as a result. But how many of us are perfect yet? Sanctification is both a legal fact and a process

at the same time. God uses a variety of experiences to apply these benefits to our lives, some of which are pleasant and others less so.

The oversight in the Word of Faith interpretation of 1Peter 2:24 resides in a failure to distinguish the legal purchase made at Calvary, from its experiential outworking. Though some may argue that Jesus died for our sicknesses 2000 years ago, the question of God's timing and application still remains open.

Physical healing is not in the context

Upon seeing the word "healed," the concept of physical disease immediately leaps to mind. The figurative uses of this word are less frequent in English. But in the Bible, salvation is often spoken of as a healing. In Acts 28, Paul quotes from Isaiah chapter 6, *Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed.* In the context, both Acts and Isaiah, the purging of moral guilt is the subject.

Divine healing is mentioned nowhere in the entire book of 1Peter, although the apostle surely believed in it. The first half of the verse demonstrates that Peter was referring to the crucifixion of Christ for sin. *...himself bore our sins in his body on the tree...*

The New Testament uses three basic Greek words for "heal." One of them, THERAPEUO, means physical healing (literally "heal"). Another, SOZO, means "save," and is often used for physical healing because the individual is saved from the consequences of the disease. The third, IAOMAI, is the one used in 1Peter 2:24 and means "to cure, to make whole."⁶¹

This latter term has the peculiarity of being a chameleon word, taking on the flavor of its context. If the object is a spiritual thing, the word means spiritual healing. If it is a physical thing, it means physical healing. To interpret this verb, one must ask, "is the object of the verb a spiritual thing, or a physical thing?" The correct interpretation is given accordingly.

Applying this principle to 1Peter 2:24 we note that Peter is referring to a spiritual thing, sin. By Christ's stripes, we have been cured of the disease of sin; a concept that fits perfectly into the theology and emphasis of the entire book of 1Peter.

⁶¹ Strong's Nu. 2390 "to cure (literally or figuratively): — heal, make whole."

Louw and Nida Nu.G2615: Metaphorically, "to heal, spiritually, restore from a state of sin and condemnation."

If Peter wanted it made clear that physical healing was meant, then THERAPEO would have been a more appropriate verb than IAOMAI.

This is a quote from Isaiah 53:5

Some have argued that it would be repetitive to say the same thing twice in the verse. Therefore, Peter must have meant something other than sin by the last clause.

This quote is a typical Jewish form of poetry, called parallelism, of which the Book of Isaiah is an example. Hebrew poetry is rhyme of ideas rather than rhyme of words. The last part of a verse repeats the meaning of the first part, but in other terms. The Psalms constantly use this pattern, which gives them their beauty. An example is, *The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; Psalm 24:1*

Certain prophets were fond of this format, of which Isaiah is a foremost example. If the clause "*by his stripes you were healed*" refers to anything different from the first part of the verse, then it would cause a disruption in the poetic pattern of the entire 53rd chapter of Isaiah.

Some teachers have accidentally confused the difference between Isaiah 53:5 and the following verse, quoted by Peter. They go to great lengths to prove that verse 4 refers to physical healing, pointing out that "grief" really means "diseases." Somehow they blend that with the clause "*by his stripes,*" and presto! They make it refer to physical healing.

To be fair, we must be careful to distinguish these two verses and where they are quoted in the New Testament. Matthew takes verse 4 and quotes it in Matthew 8:17. This clearly refers to physical healing. But Peter took verse 5 of Isaiah 53 and quotes it in 1Peter 2:24, which does not refer to healing in the physical sense.

Is this important? Yes. Many who would otherwise be persuaded of the validity of healing gifts and ministries for today can be turned off by the misapplication of Scripture and thus discard the entire package. This is tragic. If a movement is to succeed, and have positive impact on the church, then the support of serious Bible scholars is essential. Inadequate scholarship sows the seeds of its own destruction through loss of those people whose support is most needed.

What New Testament verses support symptom-denial healing? The most likely candidate is Mark 11:24 which was discussed in Chapter Five.

Believing the answer has been granted in a legal sense, before the visible manifestation, is the essence of the text.

To deny the term "whatsoever" includes physical healing would be absurd. Neither can we exclude it on the grounds that it is not mentioned specifically in the chapter. This would obligate us to limit faith to mountain moving and withering fig trees! Since these two items are miraculous in nature, all supernatural effects of faith are intended.

The only caution we need regarding the application of this text to symptom-denial healing resides in discerning God's revealed will in the timing and method of application.

The Assemblies of God, a classical Pentecostal denomination that emphasizes divine healing, recognizes this balanced approach to symptom-denial.

When believers choose the King of kings as their model,...They will recognize the truth of Romans 8:17 ... "If so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together." Paul even went so far as to glory in his infirmities instead of denying them (2Corinthians 12:5-10).⁶²

Some believers have received healing through Mark 11:24, and I've enjoyed their testimonies. Their enthusiasm is understandable. It becomes easy for them to confuse the special gift of faith that they experienced with the general faith of the ordinary daily Christian life and, therefore, fall into doctrinal error or judgmentalism.

Do we find Jesus or the apostles applying a symptom-denial method of healing? Let's consider some possible examples:

The Ten Lepers - Luke 17:12-14

As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance 13 and called out in a loud voice, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!" 14 When he saw them, he said, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were cleansed.

The healing took place after the lepers believed his word and obeyed. This example clearly contains the element of faith but falls short of symptom-

⁶² *The Believer and Positive Confession*. Official position paper of Assemblies of God, General Presbytery meeting August, 1980. Found at: www.ag.org

denial in that Jesus didn't require them to confess their healing as fact before it actually occurred.

The Nobleman's Son - John 4:49-51

The royal official said, "Sir, come down before my child dies." 50 Jesus replied, "You may go. Your son will live." The man took Jesus at his word and departed. 51 While he was still on the way, his servants met him with the news that his boy was living.

The nobleman demonstrated the faith of Mark 11:24 in that he had no visible evidence of the healing other than Jesus' Word. This was impossible since the child was absent. Jesus didn't require him to deny any symptoms, but merely to believe his word.

The Centurion's Servant - Matthew 8:13

Then Jesus said to the centurion, "Go! It will be done just as you believed it would." And his servant was healed at that very hour.

The healing went into effect immediately when the centurion believed. He was required to believe that the servant would be healed if Jesus spoke the word. The servant's absence presents the same problem as in the previous example. These incidents are excellent examples of faith, but seem weak as proof for symptom-denial healing.

Other New Testament examples of the symptom-denial method of healing do not readily come to mind. If we grant that the above can be counted as examples of it, this leaves us with 3 out of approximately 30 New Testament healings. That represents about 10% of the total.

This raises the question of relative emphasis. Why is one method, which represents no more than a fraction of the total, presented as representing the whole? Is that proper Biblical perspective? Yet as I travel and visit Pentecostal or Charismatic churches, I notice that symptom-denial is practiced as the New Testament method.

Responsible ministry should submit this method to the specific leading of the Spirit in individual cases, and refrain from it when there is no indication that this is the method to be applied. The church needs to reconsider the whole question of balance in the modern approach to healing.

What about healings claimed by the "Faith" teachers? Are they genuine?

Perhaps. Not because of their teachings, but in spite of them.

Through familiarity with a variety of Christian groups, I have concluded these teachers do not experience any greater percentage of healings than others. They simply talk about them more and in a louder voice.

We discussed earlier "semantic manipulation," altering biblical definitions. The miracles experienced in the Faith Movement may be a reverse effect of semantic manipulation.

When faith teachers use the words "God, Christ or faith," hearers may assume they mean simple trust in the biblical God. They could be unaware the teachers really mean the manipulation of God and a mystical force called "faith." God may mercifully bypass the ignorance of the hearers and heal them anyway.

I suspect this happens frequently in Latin America. Catholicism teaches a correct doctrine of God, despite its glaring errors. Catholics, or former Catholics, may respond to the name of God because they have been taught to do so. God may graciously use this response despite the false content of doctrine preached to them.

From this chapter we learn...

- Faith Movement holds to false premises regarding healing.
 - False premise one: It is always the will of God for a person to be in perfect health.
 - False premise two: A person must believe he is already healed, ignoring symptoms, before the healing is manifested.
 - False premise three: Failure to be healed is evidence of lack of faith, or hidden sin.

- None of the above premises are scriptural.

- The key Word of Faith text, 1Pe.2:24, does not support these premises.
 - Even if healing is in the atonement, the context says nothing about timing or means of healing, or even if it will be in this life.
 - Spiritual healing from sin, namely forgiveness, is the topic of the verse, not physical healing.
 - This is a quote from Isaiah 53:5, which likewise has nothing to do with physical healing.

- While it is conceivable God may lead someone to deny symptoms of sickness, this must not be taken as the norm for all cases.

- Though Word of Faith proponents may experience some genuine healings, this may be due to God's mercy alone, incidental to question of correct doctrine. Nor is there convincing evidence they have more healings than other groups.

Chapter 14:

Did Jesus Heal Them All?

Any faith message stresses heavily the healing ministry of Jesus, and rightly so. Jesus is our healer.

Word of Faith teachers generally emphasize that Jesus healed all who came to him in faith. They quote texts such as Matthew 4:24. *...and they brought unto him all sick people ... and he healed them.* They then emphasize that *Jesus is the same yesterday today and forever* (Hebrew 13:8.) From this they assume Jesus always heals those who pray in faith today also.

Some are surprised to learn that Jesus did not always heal those who came to him. To prevent us from thinking he was under an obligation to do so, he left us this example in Luke 5:15-16.

Yet the news about him spread all the more, so that crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses. 16. But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed. (NIV)

In the King James, verse 16 starts with the word "and." The NIV correctly translates the Greek word "DE" as "but." This word is a conjunction of contrast. It means Jesus did not do what was expected of him in verse 15, which was to preach to the crowds and heal their sick. Instead, he kept withdrawing for prayer.

Jesus apparently wanted to teach his disciples that communion with the Father was more important than the ministry, however glorious that was. Therefore, as an unusual exception, he refused to heal a crowd of people.

We must also consider the factor of divine election in healing. Christians disagree as to what it entails. But we have an example of it in John 5:1-5, which relates the healing of the impotent man at the pool of Bethesda.

Jesus was not attracted to the faith of this invalid, since the man had none. This invalid was ignorant of the identity of Jesus before and after the healing. The miracle was detached from faith, related only to the sovereign will of God.

The ninth verse clarifies the invalid was healed while on his bed. This exhibited no more faith than that of any others present.

It would be futile to ask why Jesus chose this man and not another. The lesson in the incident would be defeated by such questions. Sovereign election in healing is in operation here, so the question is therefore unanswerable. God is uninterested in fitting it into our neat systems of logic, religious opinions or feelings about what is fair.

Timothy is another interesting exception to the super-faith stance. Paul urges him in 1Timothy 5:23 *use a little wine because of your stomach and your frequent illnesses.*

His afflictions were clearly physical. The word "stomach" can hardly be taken figuratively, nor could we expect wine to be administered for spiritual difficulties.

Could it be that Timothy lacked faith? In 1Timothy 1:2 Timothy is called *my true son in the faith*, which in the original reads *to Timothy, a genuine child in faith*. Paul compliments Timothy for the authenticity of his faith. He adds, in 2Timothy 1:5, *I have been reminded of your sincere faith*. There is no question about Timothy's faith level, yet he also had "infirmities."

Paul never exhorted him to "just believe God for your healing," nor did he call the problem a lying symptom. We remain ignorant as to why God did not heal him supernaturally. We only know that lack of faith was not the reason.

Throughout the New Testament, there is a noticeable lack of criticism on the part of the apostles toward the infirm. They criticized no one for lack in faith because of sickness or poverty.

Never has a thorn stabbed so persistently than Paul's thorn has done in the side of many healing evangelists. Complex explanations are offered to maintain the assumption that a man of faith and power will never be sick. Even more repugnant is the notion that God may actually use illness as a means of guidance in his ministry.

Yet nothing else can be inferred from Galatians 4:13, *As you know, it was because of an illness that I first preached the gospel to you*. The Greek term "DIA" translated *because of*, can only mean here that Paul preached the gospel in Galatia because of a sickness. He was delayed long enough to establish a church there. The assumption by some that this affliction was not physical is refuted by the phrase *in my flesh*, in verse 14.

The most common explanation for Paul's thorn is that it was really a demon assigned by Satan to follow him around and hinder his ministry. This is based on the words "messenger of Satan" in verse 7.

This interpretation becomes credible only if one has previously taken the position that a man of God will never be sick. Paul says it was something in his flesh. If it were a demon, then we must say that Paul had a demon in his body. Is this a reasonable view? Hardly! Nor does it square with verse 10, which says *therefore, I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake;*

If Paul's infirmity was persecution, then what does the word "persecution" mean in verse 10? Where in the Bible does it say that persecution is to be regarded as an "infirmity" on the part of the believer?

Paul was not the only one to suffer distresses and persecutions for Christ. Peter was jailed and nearly martyred. Stephen died by stoning and James by the sword. Apparently distresses and persecutions were common for early Christians. Was a special demon assigned to each of them? When believers are persecuted today, does it mean that they also have a demon assigned to them to keep them humble?

Some acknowledge Paul's affliction as physical but argue this does not apply to us today. It was through the abundance of the revelations that *a thorn in the flesh* was given him to prevent pride. To qualify for that, or so the argument goes, we would have to accomplish at least as much as Paul.

It is illogical to assume we must have accomplished as much as Paul to have a similar dealing from God. Some Christians are proud without ever accomplishing anything. The Lord's restraint was on Paul's pride, not his accomplishments. To assume that God does not exercise such restraints today is both irrational and presumptuous.

Explaining away Biblical exceptions is a poor way to face reality. Looking at them honestly and openly will lead us to the broader perspective that God wants to have, so that we can minister to the greatest number of people.

Jesus is truly the same person he was when on earth, but he does not have the same ministry. He presently holds positions of authority and directions of purpose different from those he was on earth.

He is now the head over the church, which is his body. This means his healing ministry has also undergone a fundamental change; it is exercised through imperfect human agents. This alone provokes new problems that should soften the hammer of dogmatism.

When we call people to Jesus we are also calling them to ourselves and the church. We have now become active participants in the healing process. It is no longer the hands of Jesus that are laid on people, but ours. Trembling seems more appropriate than boasting; humility rather than brash declarations.

Who is to blame?

"The harassment of the Christians in my church is almost as bad as the cancer!" said Judy, shaking. "I cannot stand it any longer and I'm on the verge of leaving the church." She had come to me for prayer and counsel.

This young lady, stricken with colon cancer, postponed her operation as long as possible, while she sought God and believed for her healing. Despite her faith, God did not heal her by miraculous means. She continued attending her popular Charismatic church where in each meeting Christians came up and said, "Oh, Judy, I wish you would just believe God for your healing!" Such comments cut deeply into her already sensitive and distressed emotions.

The time came when the operation could not be postponed. Her husband Tom took command and put her in the hospital, before her condition became inoperable.

"While waiting for the operation, reports Judy, Christians kept coming with books and tapes on faith for me to study. I couldn't hardly hold a book, let alone read one. They said, 'if you have enough faith you will not have to go through this operation.' I was believing with all my might. But since God didn't heal me, I began to feel more guilty. Even worse were the suggestions by some that I was harboring some secret sin. This vicious cycle and the harassment of the Christians nearly drove me out of my mind."

Her operation was successful, but upon returning to church, she was met with a lady who said, with a grieved tone of voice. "How sorry I am to see that you had that operation. How I wish that you had the faith to be healed. You wouldn't have had to go through that!"

Judy said that this comment felt worse than her incision! A surgical healing rather than a miraculous one was undeniable evidence of spiritual failure.

It would be comforting to imagine that Judy's experience was rare. But similar dramas are being re-enacted throughout the nation by hundreds of unfortunate believers influenced by the "Word" doctrines. On the basis of James 5:14-16, we see a number of errors committed in her case.

Is any sick among you? Let him call for the leaders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; 15. And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he has committed sins, they shall be forgiven him. Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed.

James is referring to serious illnesses. Since the afflicted person must "call for" the elders, he is, therefore, incapable of going to them. The phrase "save the sick" is a strong one, indicating the life of the person may be endangered. It is doubtful this text was intended for minor sickness.

Notice it is the elders called, not just any believer. While all believers have the right to pray for the sick, the leaders of the local church should deal with counseling of those with serious problems. *Let them pray over him*, refers in the context to the elders.

It belongs to men of God seasoned with experience to handle the delicate balance between soul and spirit, mind and body. Those who have merited ordination to offices of spiritual leadership are best qualified to understand the complexities of human nature. Occasionally confession of sin takes place that is only for the ears of the mature.

The elders, not the afflicted person, prays the prayer of faith. The text makes no mention about faith being demanded of the infirm. Though Jesus and the apostles normally expected faith of the recipient of prayer, it is not required in every case, especially severe ones.

Often, as in the case of Judy, there is such a weakening of the spirit through the illness that a person may experience great difficulty exercising faith. People facing the possibility of death are usually frightened and confused. Sometimes their only recourse is to call for help.

The word "*sick*" occurs twice in the text as translation of two different Greek words. The second one is found in the phrase "*and the prayer of faith shall save the sick.*" It illustrates the point. It is the verb KAMNO. Vine's Expository Dictionary expresses it as,

...the common accompaniment of sickness, 'weariness of mind', which not infrequently hinders physical recovery; hence this special cause is here intimated in the general idea of sickness.

The same verb is used in Hebrews 12:3 as *so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.*

Understanding this clarifies why serious illness ought to be dealt with by trained elders, not novices.

The leading faith teachers insist faith is a proposition on the part of the sick. No matter how much faith the minister may have, the doubts of the person will neutralize the minister's faith. This may indeed be true in some cases, but not all.

In James 5, the grammar indicates the faith of the elders is in view, not that of the sufferer. *...the elders of the church to pray over him... and the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well.*

How do we now stand with regard to the premise, "failure to be healed is clear evidence of unbelief"? We may ask, "unbelief of whom"? If the faith required is that of the elders, then let the evangelists and ministers share the blame when healing does not take place. Let them also be accused of hidden sin or unbelief. But it is doubtful if this suggestion will become popular!

A balanced premise

Since the Word of Faith premises are difficult to uphold in the face of Scripture and reality, we need some that conform better to both. Let's try these:

- It is the ordinary will of God for people to be healed.
- God ordinarily expects the sick to have faith, but he is not limited to its lack.
- Timing and method are God's sovereign choice, not man's.
- The use of natural means for healing, such as medicine, is not spiritually inferior to miraculous means, nor necessarily a proof of feeble faith.

- Enough complexities and exceptions exist that it is impossible to judge the sick as spiritually inferior on any grounds.

These guidelines provide adequate room for action without restricting the hand of God. By following them, the reader should experience a new liberty and peace in his ministry, and in his relationship to the suffering.

From this chapter we learn...

- Faith Movement teaching assumes God always heals those with sufficient faith.
- This assumes Jesus healed all who came to him. Jesus is the same today. So Jesus heals today all those who come to him in faith. This assumption is false.
 - Jesus did not always heal those who came to him, Luke 5:15-16.
 - Jesus is the same today. However, this is irrelevant. Though his person is the same, his purposes and ministry are different. Proving himself to be the Messiah was his mission on earth. His ministry in heaven today is the sanctification of his people.
- No one has adequately explained Paul's thorn in the flesh in terms of the assumption God always heals those with faith.
- The use of doctors and medicine is no indication of a lack of faith.

Chapter 15:

How To Grow In Faith

I thought a good stretch on the mission field would make me a nigh invincible man of faith and power. Though I've learned a lot, I still encounter areas of weakness.

Ministry has a way of drilling faith into a person. Faith or failure confronts us often. Difficult circumstances have made me a reluctant student at times, and I've occasionally felt more like a draftee than a volunteer.

I cringe to hear some preachers declare their strong faith in brash tones. NONSENSE! In private talks with such people, I find in them the same fears and frustrations that assault the rest of us.

An evangelist once shared with me his difficulty in believing God for finances. This humble confession blessed me and prompted a discussion on how our mutual strengths compensate each other's weaknesses. In our era of positive thinking, such a confession is out of vogue. Yet the Bible supports it.

Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. James 5:16

Faith is a fine tuned thing. I have a short wave radio at home, and if I want to get a certain station, it has to be dead on. Close is not enough. Faith is like that. People customarily use the word "faith" to describe other attitudes that mimic faith. They remain unproductive.

Faith has counterfeits ... So it is essential to make some distinctions.

Faith and planning work together

Take a look at Luke 22:35-36.

Then Jesus asked them, "When I sent you without purse, bag or sandals, did you lack anything?" "Nothing," they answered. (36) He said to them, "But now if you have a purse, take it, and also a bag; and if you do not have a sword, sell your cloak and buy one.

Jesus establishes two levels of faith here. First, he sent the disciples on a faith adventure. No money, no extra clothes. Just go out and preach, guided by the Spirit, and God will take care of you. It worked!

However, after they returned, Jesus said something surprising:
*"But **now** I say to you. . .*

Why the change? He was teaching them that going out under God's special guidance without ordinary preparation was an unusual exercise in faith. But ordinary Christian living is different. The daily life of faith entails adequate planning under the guidance of the Spirit, and then trusting God to make his plans work.

New missionaries may fall into this trap. Some go out with inadequate support, "just believing God." It intrigues me how they wind up poor. God sees them through with a few precious miracles of divine supply. Yet he cannot encourage this philosophy indefinitely. Good planning under the Spirit's leading, is the higher level of faith.

God's miraculous supply of manna for his people in the desert was the norm at that time. Yet the Jews were there only because of unbelief.

What happened when they finally entered the Promised Land? The manna stopped! God's supply came through the ordinary means of crops and harvest. This, not the desert, is the life of faith.

Pastors frequently have difficulty with board members who misunderstand this principle. Someone suggests, "Let's have a building project!" Another replies, "Well, what kind of building and how are we going to pay for it?" The response is, "Let's just start building by faith!"

I know a church in Texas that decided to build a Sunday School complex by this kind of "faith." They bought materials and went out behind the church and started digging a foundation. No blueprint. No budget. Pretty soon, along came the police asking, "Where is your building permit?" End of project. Since then, they sought God for a plan, and are now moving ahead again.

Faith is active

The opposite error to leaping ahead without planning, is to do nothing. Passive personalities occasionally fall into this trap. They assume that faith is merely a quiet confidence in God that requires no activity on their part.

Though they may imagine their faith to be strong, they might only be practicing passivity.

Christians may shy away from James chapter 2, fearing the error of salvation by works. Yet James' affirmation that "*faith without works is dead*" reveals an essential truth. We must distinguish between mere mental assent and the activity of true faith. Works activate faith. Without them, faith remains sterile.

Notice how God sent water to King Jehoshaphat in 2Kings 3:16-17. God had them pick up shovels and dig some ditches first. Cannot God dig his own ditches? He wanted them to demonstrate the genuineness of their faith. The right order is important here. God first gave the promise, and then the work to go along with it. Nobody said, "Let's dig some ditches and see if God fills them." That would be acting in foolishness rather than faith.

With healing, finances or other needs, we sometimes make this mistake. God frequently requires an act of faith, before the answer comes. He might stipulate that a believer give a certain quantity of money as a step of faith. Let's "dig our ditches" only when God tells us to.

Faith is superior to hope

Even Hell might be tolerable if it had hope. We should never minimize this important virtue. Hope is a vague expectation that something good might happen in the future. Faith, however, is a present tense affair. It counts a promise of God as a legally accomplished fact.

People live in hope for years, without results, imagining they are exercising faith. How tragic! Standing on the promises of God could transform hope into productive faith.

A good way to expose this difference is to ask a person, "What has God said to you about the matter?" A blank stare reveals that the person is standing in hope, not faith, and needs teaching.

Pragmatic Americans make similar mistakes, but in a more subtle way. We decide to give "faith" a try, in the hopes that it might work. If it does not, the gospel gets the blame! Those who "try" faith must understand that they have none. We cannot "try" faith. Either we believe God or we do not.

What turns hope into faith? Only a promise from God can do that. I encourage new converts to expect promises from God out of the Word, and

periodically review them. Without a grasp of divine promises, a Christian gets nowhere spiritually.

The life of Abraham illustrates this clearly. He wanted a son long before God gave him the promises. He hoped that one day Sarah would conceive. But when the promise came, he had more to stand on than mere hope, his hopes changed into unwavering faith.

Trying to have faith without a promise from God is an exercise in frustration. That amounts to hope only, and hope has no real substance to it. Faith gives substance to hope. So says the writer of Hebrews 11:1-

"..faith is the substance of things hoped for . . .

The context of the previous Chapter confirms this. In Hebrews 10:36-39, We are exhorted to stand on the promises of God. This turns hope into faith, as with Abraham.

Faith is not a matter of personality or temperament.

He who has charm walks an apparently smooth road. For the rest of us, it's a fight all the way. Charm is a wonderful thing if God controls it. Disaster follows when the Devil employs it, particularly if the charmer is in the pulpit.

When charmers get into the ministry, they may develop a blindly loyal following. Everything they do appears right. Their errors are excused, their opinions lauded and deemed wise, regardless of what they say. For years I've been puzzled how they do it. Though we might envy their charm, we can take comfort in this: Charm moves people, but faith moves mountains.

Some preachers develop an entertaining rhetorical style. This causes many to accept their views without thought. Confidence in a man quickly replaces sound Biblical study.

Similar to the charmers are preachers who imagine that strong opinions and dogmatic affirmations are an aspect of faith. When a person makes strong assertions about faith, ask yourself if he really has facts equivalent to the force of his statements.

Strong personalities often seem very sure about the will of God for others, and push people in directions contrary to God's will. Submitting to this is not faith. It might work for a while, but God wisely hinders it in the long run.

Similarly, evangelists with a genuine gift of faith may be impatient with those who do not experience the same. Take a dash of strong will, sprinkle on a bit of intemperate temper, spread on a dash of zeal without knowledge, and you have a potent concoction that injures the weak.

True faith makes us determined, but determination is not necessarily faith. We've seen many a minister or missionary plunge ahead "by faith," with a determined will. After creating a mess, they cry to God for help and he bails them out. Then in retrospect they justify their decisions because things worked out after all. They thought that they were moving in faith, but they were really moving in their own spirit by folly.

Strong willed Christians must distinguish the difference between faith and the exercise of their strong will. Isaiah warned:

... though on the day you set them out, you make them grow, and on the morning when you plant them, you bring them to bud, yet the harvest will be as nothing in the day of disease and incurable pain. Isaiah 17: 11

Once my father heaped fertilizer on our garden tomato plants. He was determined to make them produce an abundant crop. Instead, it killed them. He learned we cannot force gardens to grow.

God wants us to plant seeds of faith; not stomp them into the ground. Plants should be carefully watered but not flooded. Faith must be built with patience, not strong will and charm.

Faith Is Humble, Not Presumptuous

Presumption is the most dangerous counterfeit of faith. It resembles faith very closely. The difference is in the revealed will of God.

The Israelites learned this the hard way in the desert when they "*went presumptuously up into the hill*" to fight their enemies (Deuteronomy 1:43). What was wrong with that? They had fought enemies before and won. Why not this time also? Surely God would understand their intentions and overlook his orders not to go! The Amorites came out "*and chased them like bees*" and defeated them.

The only real difference between this incident and their previous battles, was the will of God in the timing and method. Yes, God wants us to win our battles, according to his strategy, not ours.

Presumption occurs in two ways: Either acting because of another's experience, or by confusing the difference between a universal promise and its private application.

What then is a good definition of faith? Faith is an active dependence upon God's ability to accomplish his revealed will. Faith then, contains three elements:

- It is grounded on a promise of God.
- It is active, not passive.
- It is dependent, not presumptuous.

If any of these three elements is missing, such "faith" is but an unproductive counterfeit.

Faith is connected to our whole being. It works by love, moves with patience, and walks in humility.

From this chapter we learn...

- Faith has many counterfeits.
- Faith and planning work in harmony.
- Faith is humble, not presumptuous.

[Appendix A:](#)

Comparison Chart

SUBJECT	WORD OF FAITH TEACHING	BIBLE TEACHING
God	Anthropomorphic. Some, though not all, still think of him like a spiritual being in human form.	He is incorporeal and infinite.
Man	A little god. Created to be equal with God, with the same creative powers. Image of God means duplicate of God.	A created being forever dependent on God. Image, not duplicate. Moral conscience and will are in common with God as his image.
Faith	A mystical force, substance or law on which both God and man depend for their well-being.	Simple trust in God.
Fall of Adam	Man lost his divinity at the fall, regaining it through regeneration.	Man lost fellowship with God. He never possessed divinity and never will.
Atonement	Christ's blood was insufficient to atone for sin. He needed to die spiritually, became a sinner and lost his deity, which was restored when he was born again in hell.	Christ's death on the cross was fully sufficient to atone for sin.
Confession	Words have mystical power to change reality via positive declarations.	The term "confession" in Scripture means professing the truth about something, or admitting guilt.
Healing	God's will is faith healing. We are healed by our positive declaration thereof. Illness is a proof of lack of faith. Symptoms are lies of Devil.	God heals by faith, but not always. Illness is NOT a proof of lack of faith. Scripture never requires denial of symptoms.
Creation	God created using a force-substance called faith, combined with his words.	God created 'ex nihilo', out of nothing, using his creative power, dependent on nothing but himself.

The Earth	Given to man by God and lost to God by the fall of man. God is recuperating it through cooperation with man.	God is owner forever. Man inhabits the earth but God is the owner. God lost nothing in the fall. Man was the only loser.
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[Appendix B:](#)

"Divine Nature" 2 Peter 1:3-4

*His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.(3) Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may **participate in the divine nature** and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. 2Pe.1:3-4*

I have heard Faith Movement proponents occasionally refer to the above text as support for their "we are gods" thinking.

Proponents interpret the clause, *partakers of the divine nature*, to mean we have the same divine essence as God and therefore must be god-like beings. This interpretation confuses God's **nature** with God's **essence**.

The word "essence" is a term theologians use to describe things like "spirit," which exist but have no material substance. Sometimes we use the word "being" for the same purpose.

The Greek word *phusis*, "nature," is used 14 times in the New Testament. It means "character" when referring to people, as in Eph.2:3, *we were by nature objects of wrath*. This means our character deserved God's wrath, not that we were *partakers* of a substance called "wrath."

The context mentions God's power. *His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness...* To partake in the divine nature means being objects of his sanctifying power. Obtaining *life and godliness* is through his active power in our lives, not through sharing his being or essence.

Do we obtain what we need for *life and godliness* through a mutual divinity? No. It is... *Through the knowledge of him who called us...* Knowledge of God is the key.

Character development is the point of the context. Peter shows no indication he thinks we are little gods. The "nature" to which he refers is similarity of character. *For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge....(v.5).*

Conclusion: *Partakers of his divine nature* means participating in his power, channeled through knowledge of God, for growth in virtue.

[Appendix C:](#)

150 Verses Word-Faith Cultists Do Not Want to Hear

PROSPERITY

("When you are walking in the Word of God you will prosper and be in health." K. Copeland, Laws of Prosperity, p.17 "You give \$1 for the Gospel's sake and \$100 belongs to you." G. Copeland, God's Will is Prosperity, p.54)

But the Bible says:

1Timothy 6:5-8 *...men of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain. 6 But godliness with contentment is great gain. 7 For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. 8 But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that.*

Philippians 4:11-13 *I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. 12 I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. 13 I can do everything through him who gives me strength.*

1Corinthians 4:11 *To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless.*

Acts 3:6 *Then Peter said, "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk."*

James 2:5-6 *Listen, my dear brothers: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? 6 But you have insulted the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court?*

Hebrews 10:34 *You sympathized with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions.*

2Corinthians 8:13-14 *Our desire that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality. 14 At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. Then there will be equality, may supply their lack, that their abundance also may supply your lack - that there may be equality.*

Romans 15:26 *For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem.*

Revelation 2:9 *I know your afflictions and your poverty — yet you are rich!*

Revelation 3:16-17 *So, because you are lukewarm — neither hot nor cold — I am about to spit you out of my mouth. 17 You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.*

POSITIVE CONFESSION

("The entire course of nature and the circumstances surrounding every human being are controlled by that person's tongue." K. Copeland, The Power of the Tongue, P.19)

But the Bible says:

1Corinthians 4:11 *To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless.*

2Corinthians 12:10 *That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.*

James 5:16 *Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.*

2Corinthians 6:4 *Rather, as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance; in troubles, hardships and distresses; 5 in beatings, imprisonments and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger;*

THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD

God ruling in this world. K. Hagin, Art of Intercession, Chapter 1. "Do you know who the biggest failure in the Bible is? The biggest failure in the Bible Is God." K. Copeland, TBN Network, November 12, 1985)

Is God in control of all his creation?

1Chronicles 29:12 Wealth and honor come from you; you are the ruler of all things. In your hands are strength and power to exalt and give strength to all.

Job 42:2I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted.

Psalms 47:2 How awesome is the LORD Most High, the great King over all the earth!

Psalms 87:7 As they make music they will sing, "All my fountains are in you."

Psalms 115:3 Our God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him.

Psalms 135:6 The LORD does whatever pleases him, in the heavens and on the earth, in the seas and all their depths.

Daniel 2:21 He changes times and seasons; he sets up kings and deposes them. He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning.

Isaiah 45:7 I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster; I, the LORD, do all these things.

Isaiah 46:10 I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say: My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please.

Philippians 3:21 who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

Is God in control of mankind?

Isaiah 43:13 *Yes, and from ancient days I am he. No one can deliver out of my hand. When I act, who can reverse it?"*

Isaiah 45:9 *Woe to him who quarrels with his Maker, to him who is but a potsherd among the potsherds on the ground. Does the clay say to the potter, 'What are you making?' Does your work say, 'He has no hands'?*

Daniel 2:21 *He changes times and seasons; he sets up kings and deposes them. He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning.*

Daniel 4:17 *'The decision is announced by messengers, the holy ones declare the verdict, so that the living may know that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes and sets over them the lowliest of men.'*

Daniel 4:35 *All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: "What have you done?"*

Acts 17:26 *From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live.*

John 12:39-40 *For this reason they could not believe, because, as Isaiah says elsewhere: 40 "He has blinded their eyes and deadened their hearts, so they can neither see with their eyes, nor understand with their hearts, nor turn — and I would heal them."*

Romans 9:16-18 *It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy. 17 For the Scripture says to Pharaoh: "I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth." 18 Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden.*

Romans 9:19-20 *One of you will say to me: "Then why does God still blame us? For who resists his will?" 20 But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? "Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?'"*

Revelation 17:17 *For God has put it into their hearts to accomplish his purpose by agreeing to give the beast their power to rule, until God's words are fulfilled.*

Is God limited by the wills and thoughts of men?

Proverbs 21:1 *The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD; he directs it like a watercourse wherever he pleases.*

Ezra 6:22 *For seven days they celebrated with joy the Feast of Unleavened Bread, because the LORD had filled them with joy by changing the attitude of the king of Assyria, so that he assisted them in the work on the house of God, the God of Israel.*

Exodus 12:36 *The LORD had made the Egyptians favorably disposed toward the people, and they gave them what they asked for; so they plundered the Egyptians.*

Exodus 14:17 *I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they will go in after them. And I will gain glory through Pharaoh and all his army, through his chariots and his horsemen.*

John 8:20 *He spoke these words while teaching in the temple area near the place where the offerings were put. Yet no one seized him, because his time had not yet come.*

Does God take ultimate responsibility for bad things also?

"God has never made anyone sick." K. Hagin, Key to Spiritual Healing, p.20. "It wasn't God who did these things to Job. Job got himself into trouble with his big mouth.: J. Savelle, If Satan Cannot Steal Your Joy, p.86.)

But the Bible says:

Exodus 4:11 *The LORD said to him, "Who gave man his mouth? Who makes him deaf or mute? Who gives him sight or makes him blind? Is it not I, the LORD?"*

Job 2:3 *Then the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil. And he still maintains his integrity, though you incited me against him to ruin him without any reason."*

Job 42:11 *All his brothers and sisters and everyone who had known him before came and ate with him in his house. They comforted and consoled*

him over all the trouble the LORD had brought upon him, and each one gave him a piece of silver and a gold ring.

Amos 3:6 When a trumpet sounds in a city, do not the people tremble? When disaster comes to a city, has not the LORD caused it?

THE «JESUS DIED SPIRITUALLY» HERESY

This doctrine, held by all Word-Faith leaders, affirms the corporeal atonement on the cross was insufficient for sin. Jesus also died in his Spirit, ceased to be God, became a sinner on the cross and descended into hell where he suffered for sin as a condemned man for three days. He was born again by the Spirit, overcame Satan in a battle, and then was resurrected. These doctrines are taught on K. Copeland's tape series 'What Happened Between the Cross and the Throne.'

Sufficiency of the blood

(i.e., Jesus didn't suffer for sin in hell because full redemption was already purchased by the Blood. No Blood was shed in hell.)

Matthew 26:28 This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

Acts 20:28 Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.

Romans 3:25 God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished —

Romans 5:9 Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!

Ephesians 1:7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace

Ephesians 2:13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.

Colossians 1:14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Colossians 1:20 and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

Colossians 1:21-23 Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. 22 But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation — 23 if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.

Hebrews 9:12 He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption.

Hebrews 10:19 Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus,

Hebrews 13:12 And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood.

Hebrews 13:20 May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, 21 equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

1Peter 1:2 who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance.

1Peter 1:18 For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, 19 but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.

1John 1:7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

Revelation 1:5 *and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood,*

Revelation 5:9 *And they sang a new song: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.*

Did Jesus Become a Sinner on the Cross, Take a Sinful Nature, and Get Delivered over to Satan?

Luke 23:34 *Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." (Note: Hardly the words of a sinful man!)*

Luke 23:46 *Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." When he had said this, he breathed his last.*

Luke 23:43 *Jesus answered him, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."*

Was the sacrifice of Christ corporeal or spiritual?

Luke 22:19 *And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me."*

Colossians 1:21 *Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. 22 But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation —*

Ephesians 2:15 *by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace,*

Hebrews 10:5 *Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: "Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me;"*

Hebrews 10:10 *And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.*

1Peter 3:18 For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit,

John 19:30 When he had received the drink, Jesus said, "It is finished." With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. (Note: This statement, It is Finished is a Greek word TETELESTAI, a formula used for singing receipts meaning "It has been paid in full." Thus, Jesus declares that full redemption had been accomplished on the cross.)

No battle took place in hell because:

Job 1:7 The LORD said to Satan, "Where have you come from?" Satan answered the LORD, "From roaming through the earth and going back and forth in it."

Ephesians 2:2 in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.

Colossians 2:14 having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. 15 And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross. (i.e., in the cross, not in hell.)

THE «NEW CREATION» HERESY

(That Christians have perfect human spirits that cannot sin, to which we look for guidance and by which we control our destinies via positive confession.)

But the Bible says:

2Corinthians 7:1 Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.

1Thessalonians 5:23 May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Jeremiah 10:23 I know, O LORD, that a man's life is not his own; it is not for man to direct his steps.

Psalms 130:5 *I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his word I put my hope.*

Faith is a gift from God, not generated by our own spirits

It would help you get faith down in your spirit to say out loud: faith in my faith.: K. Hagin's booklet, 'Having Faith in Your Faith'.

But the Bible says:

Acts 18:27 *When Apollos wanted to go to Achaia, the brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples there to welcome him. On arriving, he was a great help to those who by grace had believed.*

Romans 12:3 *For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.*

Philippians 1:29 *For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him,*

Hebrews 12:2 *Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross,...*

On dying the Bible way

(i.e. not dying of Sickness)

2Kings 13:14 *Now Elisha was suffering from the illness from which he died.*

On man's supposed ability to choose his destiny by his own will

John 6:65 *He went on to say, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him."*

John 15:16 *You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit — fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.*

John 17:9 *I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours.*

Romans 9:16 *It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy.*

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Endnotes

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2. Kenneth Copeland *The Authority of the Believer IV; Tape #01-0304*.
3. Orlando Christian Centre, October 13th 1990. Quote borrowed from:
www.cephasministry.com/word-of-faith-hinns-doctrine.html.
4. In theology, we call this error, *apotheosis*, the elevation of man to divine status
Merriam Webster Collegiate Dictionary.
5. Earl Paulk *Satan Unmasked* p. 97.
6. Kenneth M. Hagin, *Zoe: The God-Kind of Life*
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8. Benny Hinn, TBN, Dec 1, 1990.
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11. *The Force of Love* (Fort Worth: **Kenneth Copeland** Ministries, 1987
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12. Kenneth Hagin, *Word of Faith*, Dec. 1980, p. 14.
13. *Now We Are in Christ Jesus*, 1980, p24 Quote borrowed from
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19. Benny Hinn, *Our Position in Christ* tape # A031190- 1.
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21. **Benny Hinn**, "Our *Position in Christ*, tape # A031190-1.
22. *The Force of Faith* [Fort Worth, TX: KCP Publications, 1989], 10.
This quote is from *Christianity in Crisis*, by Hank Hanegraaf.
23. *Forces of the Recreated Human Spirit*: Kenneth Copeland Ministries, 1982, 8
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Copeland's Land of Biblical Revelations.
24. Quote borrowed from borrowed from *Christianity In Crisis*, by Hank Hanegraaf.
Another similar quote by Capps is:
He framed the world with His words. You cannot build without substance. He took words-- faith -Filled words were God's substance. Here, essentially, is what God did. God filled His words with faith. He used His words as containers to hold His faith and contain that spiritual force and transport it out there into the vast darkness by saying 'Light be!' That's the way God transported His faith causing creation and transformation. *Dynamics of Faith & Confession* [Tulsa, OK: Harrison House, 1987], 28-29, emphasis in original.
25. *Dynamics of Faith & Confession*, **Tulsa, OK: Harrison House, 1987 pp 28- 29.**
26. Kenneth Copeland, *The Power of the Tongue* (Fort Worth: KCP Publications, 1980), 4.
Quote borrowed from Let Us Reason Ministries: *Copeland's Land of Biblical Revelations*.
www.letusreason.org/Wf22.htm
27. Quote borrowed from Let Us Reason Ministries: *Copeland's Land of Biblical Revelations*. <http://www.letusreason.org/Wf22.htm>
28. What about 1Cor. 13:13? Paul classifies faith as one of the three great virtues along with hope and love. The context assumes our affections are directed toward Christ. Paul does not imply faith in *anything* is a virtue, any more than he would consider love a virtue if it were directed toward a neighbor's wife. In the secular world people use the term *faith* when they really mean hope, self-confidence or a mystical religious feeling.

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31. This is a recurrent theme in Gibbon's *Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire*.
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42. Most of the prosperity teachers do this. Examples are:
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51. Hagin, Kenneth. *The Word of Faith*
52. *Hagin, Kenneth. Key To Scriptural Healing. p. 13.*
53. Capps, Charles. *The Tongue A Creative Force*. Harrison House Publishers 1977 p. 35.
54. Savelle, Jerry. *If Satan Cannot Steal Your Joy...* Harrison House 1983
55. IBID.
56. *The Believer and Positive Confession*. Official position paper of Assemblies of God, General Presbytery meeting August, 1980. Found at: www.ag.org