1. **WHAT IS THE WORD OF FAITH MOVEMENT?**

Also known as health and wealth, name it and claim it, or prosperity gospel, this is a body of teaching which basically says that material prosperity and happiness should and can be yours, as long as you have enough faith and use your words to claim the things you want. From passages like Mark 11:22, they argue that if you have the faith that God has (they believe that God is able to do everything because He has mastered the laws of faith), then you can speak to any situation and it will yield to your desires. Although names like Kenneth Copeland, Crefflo Dollar, John Avanzini, Benny Hinn, and Joyce Meyer among others are the global face of the movement, the teaching has infected much of the professing Christian church today, it is difficult to think of any Pentecostal or Charismatic Church in Kenya which has not imbibed it in some measure.

**Its basic claims**

The word of faith movement has many sheds, its proponents may even differ on certain details and vary in the severity of their error. But most agree on the following claims:

1) That it is the will of God for His people to be healthy, wealthy and happy at all times. Put another way, it is never God’s will for people to suffer.

2) That through the atonement, and the principles laid out in scripture, God has made it possible for us to attain a life of material prosperity, free from all forms of suffering. Many word of faith preachers assert that the main reason Christ came was to defeat material poverty and sickness!

3) That the way to actualize these things is by releasing “the force of faith” through positive confession.

**The concept of “faith” in the movement**

The movement teaches that faith is a force, much like gravity, to which everything and everyone, including God is subject. Faith they claim, can be generated and operated by certain laws, which include **visualization**: Creating mental pictures of whatever you want, a car, a house, health or any other thing, this way you “conceive and incubate your miracle” they say.

**Sowing seed**: This means giving money to successful preachers. They believe that by associating closely and giving to those who “have made it”, you are “tapping into their anointing” which will be transferred to you. **Confession**: Means you start speaking as if you already have the things you want. If it is healing, you confess that you are already healed, to confess negative will produce a counter force which is fear, with defeat as the inevitable result. Faith released through words activates God and manipulates circumstances to create the realities we desire, essentially through the force of faith, we can impose our will on God who will have no choice but to fulfill it.

2. **WHY THE MOVEMENT IS ATTRACTIVE**

- False teachers historically hide behind what is good and attractive, often conscripting scriptural words in their evil course, “…even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light” (2 Cor. 11:14). Few words in the Christian vocabulary equal in importance the word FAITH. The Bible teaches that all blessings from God are received by faith, salvation is by grace through faith, without faith it is impossible to
please God. Faith is so central that God fearing people are normally called “men of faith”, so whenever it is mentioned, people pay attention. The movement under review has been called many things, but its proponents would like it to be called the “word of FAITH”, a phrase lifted from Romans 10:8 “the word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart (the WORD OF FAITH which we proclaim)...” The movement has quite cleverly leveraged on this very important Biblical phrase to gain acceptance among “people of faith”

- The allure of the movement has been enhanced by the fact that it doesn’t seem to threaten or compete with any of the established denominations or their doctrines. The movement claims to teach universal principles of faith which will work for everyone, even pagans! Indeed the movement’s influence can be seen across denominations as it blends in with anything and everything.

- Another critical pillar that has helped the movement spread so fast is its adept use of the mass media. The movement dominates much of the “Christian mass media”, TBN, Daystar, God TV, CBN etc. are all controlled by die hard word of faith adherents, singing the word of faith tune.

- Inadequate Biblical knowledge is another factor, many Christians lend an unquestioning ear to anyone who comes to them holding a Bible or quoting verses. Few are willing or even equipped to interrogate whether the verses are properly exegeted, or are just taken out of context and twisted to mean something different, something word of faith teachers do a lot.

- But perhaps the most important factor in the rapid spread of the movement is that its promise of wealth, health and happiness appeals readily to the carnal appetites of our sinful nature (1Jn. 2:17). We naturally crave for material comfort and detest suffering and pain. It is no wonder that the movement is recording fastest growth in parts of the world where poverty and disease is widespread.

These factors in my view have played the biggest role in the rapid advance of the word of faith movement as we know it.

3. **THE MOVEMENT EXAMINED**

There is a lot that can be said about this movement which for reasons of space and time we may not be able to say, so here I will seek to do the following:

- Interrogate whether the faith of the movement merits the title FAITH which they so proudly claim. We will seek to show that the “faith” of this movement is not consistent with the Biblical idea of faith, and poses mortal danger to souls.

- Seek to show that the basic propositions of this movement are not only utterly unbiblical, but are injurious to the prospects of sound Christian conduct.

- While doing this, we will seek to bring the correct Biblical perspectives to bear on some of the false teachings of this movement.
Is there true faith in the word of faith scheme of doctrine?

Three things are essential to true Biblical faith, faith must have a foundation, an object and must produce a certain character. We will now examine the word of faith theology against each of these three to see if the movement really merits the title it claims.

1. **W.O.F Assault on the foundation of faith (the Bible)**

True Christian faith is founded on the Bible—the word of God written. It reveals the way of salvation, upon it the Christian life is built and by it Christian service is directed. Simply put, the Bible tells us everything we need to know, believe and practice in order to be saved, live in a manner that pleases God and serve God rightly. All true faith must necessarily be rooted in what God has said in the scriptures. Rom. 10:13-17 teaches two things essentially, first, that faith is essential for salvation, and secondly that true faith is built on God’s word. Faith is inextricably connected to God’s word and so to undermine God’s word, the Bible, is to destroy the foundation of faith itself. It is my contention that word of faith teachers, by their attitude, words and actions undermine the scriptures, the foundation of faith, here is why:

- Since word of faith teachers believe in the “power of words”, we must take their words seriously, and consider them reflective of their true attitudes. Jesse Duplantis, a key figure in the movement, says he’s sure that when he meets David in heaven, the man after God’s heart will look back at some of the psalms he wrote and say “oh, I shouldn’t have written that one”. Benny Hinn and others openly castigate many of the “negative statements” in the book of Job, which they deem inconsistent with the laws of faith and often blame Job for bringing misfortune upon himself by his negative speech. This without regard to the commentary of scripture itself on Job’s conduct and words; “Job did not sin against God with his lips” (Job 2:10). It is clear that they consider their opinion on Job and his words more authentic than God’s! This attitude undermines the truth that “all scripture is breathed out by God”, that the authors were “moved by the Spirit” as they wrote. This attitude is the root of many of the movement’s errors as its proponents feel quite competent to modify words of scripture to serve their scheme of doctrine.

- Another way they undermine the scriptures is through the so called “new revelations”. The word of faith teachers claim to have special access to God (Jesse Duplantis claims to have had a number of visits to heaven, and that Jesus frequently visits and has tea with him in his house). During these encounters, God “speaks to them new words” often which conflict with scripture, these they often use to modify or even supplant what is written. These new revelations extend to new and strange interpretations of scripture passages. Benny Hinn for example received a new interpretation of Gen. 2:26, to the effect that when Adam was created, he could actually fly, even to outer space. “How can you have dominion over something…” he poses, “...if you cannot do the things it does, for Adam to really have dominion over birds, he must have been able to fly”. Two word of faith teachers can arrive at conflicting interpretations of a verse and then resolves that both are right because both interpretations came by a “fresh revelation from God”. The question must then be asked, are we to build our faith on the word of God written, or on these tenuous new revelations?
This special access to extra revelations by these “special men” confers on them an authority deemed equal to the Apostles, it is quite common to find certain men in the word of faith circles who have a special revelation in a certain area of doctrine or life being referred to as Apostles. Benny Hinn is recognized as the apostle of healing, the late Myles Munroe the apostle of wisdom etc. Such men are revered and large offerings given to them so that they can transfer their anointing to the faithful. No one is ever willing to challenge these people even when their “revelations” offend the scriptures. They, like the Pope, are an authority beside, even above the Bible.

All true believers agree that the Bible alone, and the Bible wholly is the all sufficient, final and absolutely trustworthy word of God. It is our complete, objective and reliable foundation and rule of faith we must conclude then that to the extent that word of faith teachers have moved from this conviction, they have moved from the foundation of true Biblical faith.

2. Assault on the object of faith

True Biblical faith is not an “independent force”, an all governing monarch or tyrant who answers to no one. True faith has an object, the Bible reveals to us God, and urges us to look to Him, to live for and by Him; that is what faith is. True faith is directed to God, “have faith in God…” (Mk. 11:22). The rudimentary principles of Christianity include among other things “…faith toward God…” (Heb. 6:2). It is to God we must come, faith points us to Him, we believe that He is (Heb. 1:6). True faith is not a reservoir of mystical power, mustered through some secret formula and used to manipulate things. It is a response of deference and reliance on one far greater, God who has revealed Himself in the Bible. Faith that has no object, which is an end in itself, is no faith and faith that has the wrong object is no true faith either.

How the movement undermines the object of faith (God)

- Proponents of the movement argue that faith is an independent force, to which all things are subject. They aver that God Himself needs faith and is subject to its laws. From Heb. 1:3 “by faith we know that the worlds were made by the word of God” they argue that God “unleashed His faith” through positive confession to create the world. But faith here is not exercised by God when He makes the worlds, but by us when we know that the worlds were made by the word of God. This is a clear case of twisting the scripture to suit the word of faith theology. They argue that when God “calls things that are not as though they are” (Rm. 4:17), He is releasing His faith through positive confession and therefore following the dictates of the law of faith. The passage properly understood means that God, by His sovereign authority and unlimited power, subject to no law or authority, by sheer fiat brings things out of nothing. The passage intends to show God’s sovereign, limitless power, not paint Him as one dependent on or subject to some other higher law or principle. Faith is exercised by the lesser towards the higher, God has none greater in who to exercise faith (Heb. 6:13). Word of faith teachers deify faith and subjects God to it. In effect they teach not faith in God but that faith is God.
A more direct way in which the movement undermines the God of the Bible as the object of faith is by stripping Him of the essential qualities, without which God would not be God. Their God is a strange one indeed; I just watched a video clip of Jesse Duplantis explaining Genesis 2:19-20, “the LORD God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name”. From this passage, he outrageously claims that even though God made the animals, He had no idea what they were, or what their names should be, and is actually “shocked and wowed by Adam’s genius” in giving appropriate names to each. This is as ridiculous as it is blasphemous, but is not an isolated case. Kenneth Copeland says that God was amazed by the capacities of the man He had created, He had no idea that man would turn out as he did. Dr. Myles Munroe, revered in the movement as an authority on wisdom, defines prayer as “earthly license for heavenly interference”. He teaches that God “cannot interfere on earth without the consent of human beings”. Commenting on Genesis 18 he argues that God had to negotiate with, and give concessions to, Abraham for the permission to carry out the destruction of the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Dr. Myles’ understanding of the incarnation is equally strange; that God being a Spirit, could not legally operate in the material world without a body, and so He had to “borrow Mary’s womb”, through which He could enter earth legally. These are just a few examples which paint a pitiful picture of a helpless, hapless god who is a far cry from the omniscient “(all knowing), sovereign Lord of the universe, who “does what He pleases in the armies of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth” (Dan. 4:35). He is needed by all and Himself needs no one. Clearly, the object of the movement’s faith is not the great and terrible Jehovah of the scriptures, he is the wrong object of faith.

Besides lowering God by subjecting Him to the law of faith, and painting a picture of an emasculated God who does not merit the title, the movement maintains that Christians are gods, claiming that man was created to be “god down here”, just like “God is God in heaven”. Kenneth Copeland braggingly declares, “When I hear God say ‘I am’, I say well, I am too”. What Christian fails to acknowledge the plain text of the first commandment, “You shall have no other gods before me...” or “…I am God and there is none before me”? That we are created in the image of God is not to inflate our pride to imagine that we are identical to Him, rather it should draw us to humble worship and adoration to Him who has made us, for yes we are made, and He is unmade, and that will never change. But these false teachers insist that when God created man, His intention was “to duplicate Himself”. They wrench Psa. 82:6 out of context to suggest that God Himself endorse the idea that we are gods. Looked at in context, “gods” here does not mean all powerful deities, or even “little gods”, it simply
refers to rulers or magistrates who exercise authority among men. Here, they are castigated for misusing that power (vs. 2), are commanded to use it justly (vs. 3-4) knowing that the Lord rules over them (vs. 1) and will ultimately visit judgment and punishment upon them (vs. 7-8). The supremacy of God is the theme here, not the godhood of man.

A faith which is an end in itself (without an object), or which has the wrong object (a strange god), and which installs man as god utterly undermines the supreme object of faith, the God of the scriptures, and does not therefore qualify as true faith.

3. Assault on the character of faith
One cannot talk about faith without at the same time talking about obedience, submission and dependence and trust. Faith agrees with, defers to and follows its object. Such is the character of faith. A system of doctrine which does not produce these qualities undermines the very idea of faith. The word of faith teaching tends towards independence from, rather than cultivate dependence on God. It humanizes God and deifies man, subjects both to the same law of faith. This diabolic system is not training men to submit, obey and depend on God, rather it is sharpening and readying them to declare independence from Him. It re-enacts the tempters words in the garden “ye shall be as gods”. I was taught in a word of faith college that “as you grow in faith, you rely less on prayer, and operate more by decreeing things into existence”. They may not directly attack prayer, but they present it as a lower level, an elementary stage in the operations of faith. We are to aspire to a higher dimension where we command things. Listen to the faith teachers on radio or TV and you will notice that they seldom pray for members, instead, they “decree and declare” things over their lives. The phrase “God willing” is dismissed as doubt and should not be in our mouths. Fred Price thinks it is stupid and an insult to God if we pray and say, “Lord if it is your will”. Well, James insists that “you ought to say, ”If the Lord wills, we will do…” (Jas. 4:14). Prayer is given to us among other things to remind us of our need of, and utter reliance on God, why and how can we outgrow that posture, unless we are seeking autonomy from Him, God? It is noteworthy that most of these teachers are not known for their humility, they do not have kind words for anyone who disagrees with their heresies and are utterly inaccessible even to their own flock. It is fair to say that having rejected the rule of God, they have become a law unto themselves. Is this the character that true faith produces?

Having examined the claim of this movement to the title of “faith” against the three pillars of true faith (the foundation, object and character of faith), we can fairly say that there is no true Biblical faith in the word of faith movement, it is a faithless movement which does not merit the title it claims.

Does scripture guarantee wealth and health always?
We must now ask the question, is it true that God wants everyone happy, wealthy and healthy always, that suffering is never God’s will for His people?
The big passage adduced in support of this proposition is 3 Jn. 1:2 “Beloved, I wish above all things that you may prosper and be in health, even as your soul prospers” (KJV). “There it is in black and white” right? Not really;

1. Notice that John is here writing a letter, and is introducing it in the normal way that letters are introduced, by wishing his hearers well. He is no more guaranteeing by this wish that his hearers will never be poor or sick, any more than Paul’s “heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel…” guarantees that all of them will be saved (Rm. 10:1), many indeed refused to submit to God’s righteousness (vs. 3), and died in their sins as many still do today.

2. Secondly, there is in the context of 3 John an indication of some kind of suffering or discomfort attending God’s people (John included), occasioned by the deeds of one Diotrephes.

3. Thirdly, to use this passage to suggest that Christians shouldn’t suffer will be grossly inconsistent with the wider teaching of scripture especially on the question of suffering.

A false view of suffering

Word of faith teaching associates suffering with lack of faith, ignorance of our rights in Christ or presence of sin. They claim that Christian maturity must issue in a life of material wealth, health and happiness. If this were true, what about Paul and his thorn in the flesh, his many struggles and troubles which included illness, rejection by his people, imprisonment and yes lack of material things? The Apostle who gave us most of the New Testament and was used by God to lay the foundation for most of the essential doctrines of Christianity must have been loaded with sins, had the weakest faith and was most ignorant of his rights in Christ!

Suffering and pain will continue to be part of our Christian life for as long as we are in this body, Scripture even indicates that believers will be subject of suffering more than the unbelieving. How are we then to look at suffering? Are we to avoid it at all costs, strive to rid ourselves of suffering as quickly as it comes? Should we measure God’s love for us, or our maturity in the faith by the degree to which our lives are free of suffering and abound in material prosperity?

What the Bible teaches on suffering:

The entrance of pain and suffering in the world was occasioned by sin, Adam’s sin (and us all in him-Rom. 5:12). This means that it is a deserved consequence of sin. A lot of us respond to suffering by asking “why me?” knowing why and how suffering came should lead us to ask when others suffer and not us “why not me”. To think that we are entitled to better is to claim innocence and accuse God of injustice.

We must also understand that the rest of creation suffers under the weight of Adam’s sin (Rm. 8:20-21), “cursed is the ground because of you” God said, nothing in the world operates or produces to its optimum capacity any more. This means that the effects of sin are working themselves out, not only in all humans naturally by illness, aging, dying etc, but also in his environment (limiting resources). We are fallen men in a fallen world, suffering is therefore inevitable, and that is not by accident but by divine ordinance.

All this raises the question of the place of the redemptive work of Christ in these circumstances, does it make any difference here and now? Certainly it does, the question is how? The Bible
teaches that Christ suffered and died in the place of sinners, satisfying fully the demands of God’s justice against sin. The word of faith teachers argue that this proves that Christians ought not to suffer at all. This interpretation of Christ’s work is alien to the New Testament, we must look at the meaning and results of the Cross work of Christ, not as our human reason or theological construction demands, but as the scriptures interpret it.

The bee has no sting

Paul employs this imagery in 1 Cor. 15, as he emphasizes the fact that the believer’s life in this body will continue to be plagued with weakness, physical degeneration and therefore suffering. But his consolation is that there is a hope set before him of a future state in which this will no longer be the case, when “the corruptible will put on incorruption, and the mortal immortality “. He uses death as the ultimate example, saying that it will be “swallowed up in victory”. Is he saying that Christians don’t die? No, but that they will be raised never to die again. It is then that all the weakness to which our bodies are subject now will be no more. But he is also saying that for the Christian, death and suffering have been redefined now. “Death, where is your sting?” he asks. What we dread in bees is the sting, the dread of death lies in the fact that it is a judgment from God, it signals God’s displeasure. This is what was told to Adam “in the day that you eat of it you will surely die”. That is why he says that as the sting of death is sin, so the power of sin is the law, for it is the law that calls for the penalty of death on sinners.

This paradigm helps us to understand what the sacrifice of Christ has done for the believer and how we ought to interpret it. Since it has settled the sin question once for all, the believer no longer regards physical death as judgment, he looks beyond it and sees an eternity with God, not under wrath. As Christ’s resurrection meant that He is no longer subject to the frailties which attended the days of His flesh, so the believer sees death as his transition to such glory, death as it were has been sanctified. This attitude of Paul about death is pervasive in his writings, “to be absent from the body is to be present with the Other Lord.” He says, “When our earthly tent is destroyed, we have a building from God”. Death is no longer a dreadful judgment for the believer, but a transition to glory, it’s sting has been removed. The ultimate terror of sin has been dealt with. This truth applies to our current sufferings as well, for those who are in Christ, they are a “...light affliction which is but for a moment,..., working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” (2 Cor. 4:17). In Rom. 8:28, suffering is included in the “all things” which work for our good, conforming us to the image of Christ. Christ’s work has in a manner of speaking brought “out of the eater, something to eat, and out of the strong something sweet”. So we “count it all joy when we go through various trials”, they are God’s instruments for the good of all who are in Christ. We can now see why David could say that, “It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I might learn your statutes” (Psa. 119:71), and why Paul thought the theme of “many tribulations” would provide necessary strength and encouragement for the souls of the disciples (Acts 14:22). Christ’s work has completely redefined these things for the believer, the word of faith system does not see this great accomplishment, which is why they look at suffering antagonistically as they do. True believers ought to align their thoughts and attitudes about suffering to scripture, and not fall for the counterfeit religion of the word of faith movement.
4. THE BITTER FRUITS OF THE MOVEMENT

It is the great Puritan Richard Baxter who wrote that “sound doctrine makes a sound judgment, a sound heart, a sound conversation (life) and a sound conscience”. Doctrine is never without effect, whether sound or unsound, its consequences will be borne by those who hold them. We shall now consider a few of the bitter fruits of this movement:

The doctrine denies us the comfort of the scriptures: James, while exhorting us to endurance reminds us of righteous Job, commends him for his patience in suffering and tells us that the Lord’s pity and tender mercies are seen more in our suffering (Jas. 5:1). Instead of pointing us to the Lord’s presence with us, and the blessings brought to us through suffering, word of faith teaching weighs us down with guilt and shame, condemning us for “lack of faith” when we fail to achieve the kind of life they prescribe. Many, feeling like an inferior breed of Christians have fallen into disillusionment and spiritual apathy. To others Christianity has become a lie, not realizing that they fell prey to a scam theology, which does not represent true Christianity.

Encourages hypocrisy and dishonesty: Those who find such shame too much to bear publicly resort to a life of pretense and hypocrisy. They won’t admit when they’re sick or in any problem, lest they are seen to be lacking faith and “confessing defeat”. During my days in the movement, I would rent a house I well knew I couldn’t afford, tried to keep my children in expensive private schools, only to accumulate heavy arrears. After all being a pastor I needed to demonstrate to my members that my faith was working. This madness of “faking it until you get it” is encouraged in the movement, “pretend that you are rich until you get rich”. It is quite common to find adherents who live on revolving debt, borrow here to pay there until “your breakthrough comes”. This dishonesty and pride is utterly unbiblical and self-defeating. Scripture exhorts us to “…be free from love of money, and be content with what you have…” promising that God “…will never leave you nor forsake you” (Heb. 13:5). But many in their lust for riches have erred from the faith and “pieced their souls with many sorrows” (1 Tim. 6:10).

Pulpit robbery and impious religion: The Bible’s warning of covetous false teachers who “with feigned words will make merchandize” of God’s people (2 Pet. 2:3) comes true in the word of faith movement. The movement teaches that to be blessed, one must not just “sow seed” but sow seed on “good ground”. Good ground here meaning preachers who appear to be already successful. Put bluntly, they teach that the way to be rich is to give to those who are already rich, “if you want to go up give upwards, not downwards” they say. To give downwards (to those in need) is to sow in “barren ground”. This concept has created a pyramid scheme style, one way traffic of resources, the preaching class sitting at the top of the pyramid. The public faces of the movement (the preachers) are getting richer and richer on the backs of their unsuspecting members. The result is that the Christian pulpit has to a large extent lost its credibility.

The blatant materialism of the movement “your best life now” has relegated the Christian hope of coming glory to the back banner, consequently, genuine Christian piety has suffered because only those who hold dear the hope of Christ’s appearing and our hope of being like Him “purify themselves even as He is pure” (1 Jn. 3:2-3). “Godliness with contentment” is frowned upon and being rich towards God is no longer a worthy pursuit as material success is the new measure of spiritual wellbeing. As true growth into Christ likeness takes a beating, shameless greed and scandal have become the defining features of the movement (and much of professing Christianity), and because of these things, the name of Christ has been much maligned.
CONCLUSION

Different people regard the word of faith movement differently, some hail it as a “revival sent by God” to breath fresh air into His Church. Others consider them as sincere brothers with a few extremes, good men whose only fault is to overemphasize certain “necessary truths” and in the process have ignored others. From the little we have said here (and we’ve only scratched the surface), it is my conviction that the movement does not represent true biblical religion. It is a dangerous cancer eating away at the soul of the Church and must be called out as such. May the Lord grant us the strength to stand against this tide of death in defense of the truth, and deliver such as have been entangled in the web of this soul destroying error. To God be the glory!

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