

THE DEATH OF FAITH IN THE WORD OF FAITH (1)

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1. WHAT IS THE WORD OF FAITH MOVEMENT?

This is 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 shades, so 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. They say this way you 'conceive and incubate your miracle'.
- **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 then be transferred to you.
- **Confession:** This 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 the negative will produce a counter force which is fear, and defeat is the inevitable result. Faith released through words activates God and manipulates circumstances to create the realities we desire. So essentially through the force of faith we can impose our will on God who will have no choice but to fulfil 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 Corinthians 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 faith 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 (1 John 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 are 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 but 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) The Word of Faith 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 and live in a manner that pleases God and to serve God rightly. All true faith must necessarily be rooted in what God has said in the scriptures. Romans 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, and 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 is 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 they 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’. These often conflict with scripture, which they then 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, claims to have received a new interpretation of Genesis 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 resolve 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, and 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 entire Bible, is the all-sufficient, final and absolutely trustworthy word of God. It is our complete, objective and reliable foundation and rule of faith. So we must conclude 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) The Word of Faith assault on the object of faith

True Biblical faith is not an ‘independent force’, an all governing monarch or tyrant which 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...” (Mark 11:22). The rudimentary principles of Christianity include among other things, “... faith toward God...” (Hebrews 6:2). It is to God we must come; faith points us to Him; we believe that He is (Hebrews 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.

We will now show 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 Hebrews 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” (Romans 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 (Hebrews 6:13). Word of Faith teachers deify faith and subject 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. 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. 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” (Daniel 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. Their ‘god’ 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. They claim 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”? We acknowledge that we are created in the image of God not to inflate our pride or 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 Psalm 82:6 out of context to suggest that God Himself endorses 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 (v. 2), are commanded to use it justly (vv. 3-4) knowing that the Lord rules over them (v. 1), and will ultimately visit judgment and punishment upon them (vv. 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) **The Word of Faith assault on the character of faith**

One cannot talk about faith without at the same time talking about obedience, submission, 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 cultivating dependence on God. It humanizes God and deifies man, and 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 tempter’s 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 live...”” (James 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 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!

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