



Media Spotlight

A BIBLICAL ANALYSIS OF RELIGIOUS AND SECULAR MEDIA

SPECIAL REPORT

WORD-FAITH/POSITIVE CONFESSION ITS PHILOSOPHICAL ROOTS

by Albert James Dager

Kenneth Copeland, appearing on the Trinity Broadcasting Network's *Praise the Lord* program, was asked by host Paul Crouch, "What is faith?" After stuttering for a few seconds, his mind seeking an answer, Copeland stammered, "It's, uh, well, it's like a force. It's just out there, and you have to learn how to plug into it."¹ And on this concept of faith, the program attempted to educate viewers as to how, if they can learn to plug into it, faith can be used for their benefit.

If it weren't so serious it would be amusing to see that Copeland, generally regarded as the premier spokesperson for the so-called word-faith movement, had to struggle to find a definition for something on which he is supposed to be an expert. But it amply demonstrated the fact that those who subscribe to the word-faith teachings (a.k.a., Positive Confession), don't really know what true faith is, or how it relates to our position in Jesus Christ.

To understand what faith is, it is helpful to know what it is not. And the most helpful source of information on what it is *not* is that which has duped many Christians into thinking that it offers understanding of what it *is*: the word-faith movement. This analysis, then, is not only intended to present what Scripture says faith is and how it is demonstrated, but what, in contrast, the word-faith movement says it is.

There are several elements of the word-faith movement which must be considered if we are to understand that contrast. And there are a few books available which treat these areas in greater detail than can be done in the space this report provides. But it isn't necessary to belabor every point in order to present the case for truth. The Holy Spirit will lead us into the truth if our hearts are in earnest for it. What we do with the truth once the Holy Spirit reveals it to us will depend upon our motives for seeking

the truth in the first place. Therein lies the determining factor as to whether we will apply the truth to our lives or, once having learned it, spurn it in favor of greener pastures offered by modern purveyors of deception.

FAITH WRONGLY DEFINED

Virtually all word-faith proponents agree with Ken Copeland's definition of faith, that it is a force into which anyone, believer or not, may tap for their personal benefit. Pat Robertson considers faith one of the immutable laws of the universe which must be mastered in order to receive from God. He, too, believes that anyone "believer in Christ or not" may tap into these immutable laws:

Do the laws of the kingdom work, even if a person is not a Christian?

Yes. These are not just Christian and Jewish principles, anymore than the law of gravity is Christian and Jewish. We are talking about universal law. . . . The laws of God work for anybody who will follow them. The principles of the Kingdom of God apply to all of creation.²

Where do the Scriptures tell us that non-believers may use the principles of God's Kingdom? They are not in God's Kingdom but in the kingdom of Satan. Whatever principles they apply are not in harmony with God's laws, but with witchcraft in one form or another.

More specifically, where do the Scriptures tell us that nonbelievers may exercise faith as an immutable law to receive what they desire? The fact is that they don't. Pat Robertson is voicing a theosophic concept of God and creation when he tells us that the spirit realm operates on immutable laws that apply to everyone. This is a basic tenet of witchcraft, as demonstrated by this quote from Gavin and Yvonne Frost's *The Magic Power of Witchcraft*:

Just as the humble plowman seeing the giant turbines and the power lines for the first time had no concept of the benefits available to him, so very few people have any idea of the vast cosmic forces which they can tap. But the forces are there: they should be used, though they should be used in constructive ways to help you change your life and, if possible, to make the world a better place.³

But if faith is not a force, or an immutable law of the universe, what is it? How do the Scriptures define faith? Hebrews 7:1 is used by most Christians "even some word-faith teachers" as a basic definition of faith:

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. (Hebrews 11:1)

Taking this verse out of context from the rest of the chapter, the word-faith proponents argue that faith is actually a substance, like energy, which cannot be seen; if one plugs into that energy, he will receive what he hopes for. This is done through positive confession and positive thinking. If one believes in and then confesses those good things for himself, he will receive those good things. If, on the other hand, he confesses negative things, he will be demonstrating a lack of faith and will reap negative consequences.

If this were true "if the principle upon which the word-faith tenets are based is an immutable law of nature" then *without exception*, every time someone said something negative (e.g., I wish I were dead.), he would die. And, *without exception*, every time someone said something positive (e.g., I have a million dollars.), he would receive the million dollars.

But, the word-faith teachers would say, this isn't enough; one must *believe* that what he says will come to pass. Yet if, in fact, belief and confession does put the force of faith into motion, the experience of word-faith practitioners overall does not confirm it.

The number is legion of former word-faith adherents who have been disappointed that what they believed for with all earnestness and spoke out loud to confirm never materialized.

Experience proves conclusively that this approach to faith is not true faith at all, but presumption upon God's Word. And it has resulted not only in people leaving the word-faith movement, but many have lost confidence in Jesus Christ and made their

faith shipwreck as a result of not receiving all that the word-faith teachers promised to those who follow their formulas.

If we apply Hebrews 11:1 in context, we'll see that faith often brings what one would consider negative circumstances in his life. After speaking of all the wonderful works performed by men and women of faith, the writer cites others who endured hardships because of their faith:

And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment:

They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented;

(Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.

And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise. (Hebrews 11:36-39).

If, as the word-faith teachers propose, good things come to those who exercise faith according to God's Word, and adversity comes upon those who lack faith, then how is it that men and women lauded for their faith suffered such tribulation?

This is a question generally ignored by the word-faith teachers. They will quote Hebrews 11:1-35 and stop there. Further, it is embarrassing for these people to suffer adversity because, in their misguided thinking, adversity proves one's lack of faith. Should one of them succumb to illness, they are conveniently called away and unavailable for awhile. Yet Scripture proves that the definition of faith offered by the word-faith teachers is erroneous.

This is a serious charge in view of the fact that everything we have in our relationship to God rests upon faith. For without faith it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6).

If the word-faith teachers have no proper answer as to why the righteous suffer tribulation, the Scriptures do give us an answer: this world offers only tribulation to those who follow God's truth:

These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world. (John 16:33)

True faith, then, is defined in part as trust in the work of redemption that was provided through Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection. It is the assurance that, no

matter what befalls us, Jesus has overcome the world and all things work together for our good. This, in turn, brings the peace that is found only in our relationship with God (Philippians 4:6-7).

Another Scripture generally misapplied by the word-faith teachers in conjunction with Hebrews 11:1 is II Corinthians 5:7: For we walk by faith, not by sight. It is assumed that what Paul was saying is that faith is belief that we will receive something we don't have yet—it isn't seen. This is also an aberrant application. For this verse in context shows that Paul was not speaking about receiving material goods or health, but about faith in our fellowship with Christ when we die:

Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord:

(For we walk by faith, not by sight:)

We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.

Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him. (II Corinthians 5:6-9)

FAITH AS A GIFT

Another aspect of defining faith, however, is that which is so clearly stated in Scripture, but either missed, ignored, or misapplied by the word-faith teachers. It is the biblical proposition that faith is a gift from God (I Corinthians 12:9). As a gift, it is given by virtue of His sovereign will in maturing His children according to His plan of redemption. This disproves the contention that faith is a universal force into which anyone can tap at will, believer in Jesus or not.

There is not even a germ of truth to the idea that unbelievers may appropriate faith. The closest thing to faith that they do have is knowledge that God exists:

For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness;

Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them.

For the invisible things of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead: so that they are without excuse. (Romans 1:17-20)

When, by God's sovereign grace, the Holy Spirit moves upon an unbeliever's consciousness, he may or may not appropriate that grace as he chooses. Beyond that modicum of knowledge given to all men through the evidence of creation "saving faith in Christ is a gift given only to those to whom God chooses to give it:

For by grace are ye saved, through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God;

Not of works, lest any man should boast.

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them. (Ephesians 2:8-10)

Faith is inseparable from God's grace. It is not so cheap that just anyone may appropriate it based upon works of the name-it-and-claim-it variety. The only valid works associated with faith are works of righteousness—the good works—that prove our faith is alive (James 2:14-26).

Three times in these verses James drives home the point that true faith produces good works. And these works are not works that promote self-gratification, but rather sacrifice for the benefit of others.

Faith, then, may be defined as a gift from God given to His children through the power of the Holy Spirit. It assures us of our salvation in Christ, and works to perfect us in holiness and love. It assures us that, as we sacrifice Self in our expression of love for God and for our neighbor, all that we encounter in our service to God (whether to our temporal benefit or temporal harm) will work for our eternal spiritual benefit and for the provision of all our needs in this present life.

HOW IS FAITH APPROPRIATED?

Word-faith adherents try to appropriate faith through positive thoughts and positive confession. Their theory is based on several fallacious presuppositions, three of which we will examine briefly: 1) man is a god, or in the god class; 2) as gods we can do as God does: speak into existence things that are not as if they were; 3) Jesus' suffering guarantees divine health and prosperity to all who have faith to claim it.

We will look at each of these presuppositions and see whether or not they align with Scriptural truth. Keep in mind that proper hermeneutics considers the clear meaning of a passage, and the context in which it occurs. A basic rule is that Scrip-

ture interprets Scripture. Mystical interpretations do not fit in with God's purpose of making His Word clear to all who are His (Isaiah 45:19; 48:16; I John 2:27).

Presupposition One

The first presupposition, that born-again believers are gods, or in the same class as God, is based on an erroneous interpretation of Psalm 82:6 (where God calls the judges of Israel *Elohim*) and John 10:34-35 (where Jesus cites that Psalm in confronting the religious leaders).

Guesting on TBN's *Praise the Lord* program, Kenneth Copeland quoted Psalm 82:6 in an attempt to prove that born again believers are gods. He then went on to pervert the meaning of Philippians 2:5 (taking it out of context) to air his belief that we should think of ourselves as equal to God⁴ (see our special report, *Out on a Limb: New Age Evangelism and the Church*, for the complete dialogue).

There is an obscure little New Age book by one Annalee Skarin, entitled, *Ye Are Gods* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1952), which offers the same proposition that the word-faith teachers offer: that all who are truly of God are gods themselves. The proof texts upon which she bases her doctrine are Psalm 82:6 and John 10:34-35. Her arguments are dissimilar to those of the word-faith teachers, only in that she also quotes Mormon writings.

A proper exegesis of Psalm 82:6, which exegesis has been maintained by the true Church since the first century, reveals that God called the judges of Israel *Elohim* because of their offices as judges. He was chastising them for failing to judge His people righteously, and pronounced the death sentence upon them.

Likewise, in John 10:34-35, Jesus was addressing rebellious judges of Israel in His time, making them see the error in calling Him a blasphemer because He said, I and the Father are one. He was being sarcastic in reminding them that they should not be upset if calls Himself the Son of God while believing that they, themselves, were gods. He knew that they did not rightly divide the Scriptures, but had been tainted by the same esoteric philosophies that have tainted today's god-men. In essence, Jesus was saying, If you think of yourself as a god, why are you upset with me for saying that I am the Son of God?

Now a bit of logic would be in order: the word-faith teachers tell us that godhood

only applies to born-again believers, not to everyone. But they use as their proof text Scriptures that address as gods fallen men who are in rebellion against God. These men Jesus addressed were not born again, nor were the *Elohim* of Israel addressed in Psalm 82:6 born again. The logical conclusion, then, is that the word-faith teachers have misinterpreted their own proof texts and have placed them-selves in the same category as the rebellious judges of Israel.

Even if we were to allow that God has ordained man as a lesser god, it would be unconscionably blasphemous to insist that we are equal to God Almighty or to Jesus Christ, who is the only-begotten of the Father⁵ true God in the flesh.

But Copeland is not the only one to espouse this belief. It is a staple of most word-faith teachers. Even some who might not be classified as word-faith, per se⁶ such as Earl Paulk, pastor of Chapel Hill Harvester Church in Atlanta, Georgia, and a leading proponent of dominion theology⁷ teach what is called the ongoing incarnation of God.⁵ The church, Paulk says, is now His Body, the only Christ, the only incarnation of God in the world today.⁶ Further, he transfers the office of Christ from Jesus to the Church, and calls those who do not recognize this incarnation as the antichrist:

The greatest test of the spirit of the antichrist is its attitude toward the church. The attitude isn't directed toward Jesus. Jesus is not personally a threat to any community unless there is a living, thriving church functioning in that community. Therefore, the spirit of the antichrist refuses to recognize that God is here in the flesh.

Consider some of the popular entertainers who make fun of the Church today. Study their lives. They do not attack Jesus Christ, nor do they talk about the Jesus who lived by the shores of Galilee. Instead they attack Oral Roberts, Kenneth Copeland and Jim Bakker. They attack the Church of Jesus Christ and its representatives. Mockery and criticism are the means by which the spirit of the antichrist operates most successfully.⁷

In view of these particular men's public records, Paulk's using them as examples of Christians is unfortunate. These men have been ridiculed not because of their faith, but because of their misdeeds which even the world recognizes as ungodly and contrary to the faith they profess.

Copeland has denigrated the blood of Christ by his insistence that Jesus' death on the cross did not save us spiritually.⁸

Bakker was rightly tried and convicted of unscrupulous financial dealings.

Roberts' false prophecies regarding his medical missionary program and the medical school at ORU are well known (see our special report, *Oral Roberts: An Open Letter Regarding False Prophecies*.) His record of prophesying in the name of the Lord is replete with unrealized claims. In his quest for financial gain for his programs he has repeatedly brought reproach against the name of Jesus.

In stating that any ridicule (in reality, often honest correction) of these men comes from the spirit of antichrist, Paulk implies that *these men* are now Christ in the world. If Paulk is correct that the spirit of antichrist is ridicule against Christians, then he and many of his associates are antichrist for their ridicule and attack against Dave Hunt for writing *The Seduction of Christianity*. Or is Dave not a member of Christ's body because he challenges spiritual error?

The idea that anyone other than Jesus can be considered the Christ of God is not biblical. Nor is it new. It is a Gnostic heresy condemned in the first century of the Church's existence. Paulk's and his friends' claims of Christhood is strikingly similar to that of theosophist John H. Dewey's statement:

The manifestation of God in one man [Jesus], demonstrates the possibility of a like demonstration in all men.⁹

Worse yet, their claims echo those of Lucifer:

... I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High. (Isaiah 14:13-14)

God answers the word-faith teachers as He answers theosophists, the Mormons, sorcerers, witches, and all who attempt to alter reality as only He can do:

Thus saith the Lord the King of Israel, and his redeemer the Lord of hosts; I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God. (Isaiah 44:6)

I am the Lord, and there is none else, there is no God beside me: I girded thee, though thou hast not known me:

That they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that there

is none beside me. I am the Lord, and there is none else. (Isaiah 45:5-6)

For thus saith the Lord that created the heavens; God himself that formed the earth and made it; he hath established it, he created it not in vain, he formed it to be inhabited: I am the Lord; and there is none else. (Isaiah 45:18)

Tell ye, and bring them near; yea, let them take counsel together: who hath declared this from ancient time? who hath told it from that time? have not I the Lord? and there is no God else beside me; a just God and a Saviour; there is none beside me.

Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else. (Isaiah 45:21-22):

How many times must God state His case before rebellious, self-serving men learn to humble themselves before Him as the only One who can rightfully be called God?

That men are gods is another basic tenet of witchcraft to which the word-faith teachers subscribe:

Drawing down the moon symbolizes the idea that we *are* the gods, or can, at least, become them from time to time in rite and fantasy. This idea was well expressed in the quotation at the beginning of the *Whole Earth Catalog*: We are as gods and might as well get good at it. The Neo-Pagan Church of All Worlds has expressed this idea by the phrase: Thou Art God/dess.¹⁰

Kenneth Copeland has expressed this idea in his claim that we should think of ourselves as equal with God.

It is a paradox that so many Christians took offense at Shirley MacLaine's blasphemous expression, I am God! in a scene from her television movie, *Out on a Limb*, yet many of these same Christians come to the defense of word-faith teachers who make similar proclamations.

The only gods referred to in Scripture besides Almighty God are, without exception, false gods: those who claim to be gods but are not. At best, the claims of the word-faith gods rest on shaky ground" certainly insufficient grounds upon which to build so important a doctrine.

Presupposition Two

The second presupposition of the word-faith teachers "that believers can call into existence things that are not as though they are" is based on an erroneous interpretation of Romans 4:17:

Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might

be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all,

(As it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations.) before him whom he believed, even God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were. (Romans 4:16-17)

The real reason the word-faith teachers wish to appropriate Godhood to themselves is that they hope to appropriate the power of God for themselves. They cite Romans 4:16-17 as their proof text that they can call into existence things that are not as though they are. Proper exegesis of this verse shows conclusively that it refers only to God Almighty and His act of creation. It has to do with His creating the material universe from nothing more than His spoken word. Yet these self-professed gods wish to do what only the true God of the universe can do" create from nothing something material that they can use for their own benefit.

God speaks to this fallacy as well:

Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said,

Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge?

Gird up now thy loins like a man; for I will demand of thee, and answer thou me.

Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding.

Who hath laid the measures thereof, if thou knowest? or who hath stretched the line upon it?

Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened? or who laid the corner stone thereof;

When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?

Or who shut up the sea with doors, when it brake forth, as if it had issued out of the womb? (Job 37:1-8)

Space does not permit a full rendering of God's chastisement of Job for "what? For praising God! For telling his friends of the wonderful works of God! In reality, for presuming to know what to tell his friends about God. For no man can know God apart from the One who declared Him to us: Jesus Christ.

But Jesus did not reveal everything about God to us, for we still do not understand fully all that His nature entails. Nor will we until we see Him face to face (I Corinthians 13:12).

The creative ability of God takes certain knowledge unattainable by mortal men. Yet insignificant men presume to imitate God in His creative acts. This is blasphemy. *For they can no more answer the questions of creative power than could Job*, a man of whom God boasted to Satan that there was none as righteous as he.

It is argued that born-again believers have the power of the Holy Spirit at work in them and, therefore, they can do the same things Jesus did" the same things God did in creating the heavens and the earth. But there is a fatal flaw to their reasoning. The Holy Spirit has been given to us as a seal of our salvation. He empowers us to be witnesses of God's provision for salvation through Jesus Christ, and to live holy lives in accordance with the Father's will.

If there is any power exhibited in our acts of service to God it is by the volition of the Holy Spirit acting within the parameters of God's will. We can not call upon the power of the Holy Spirit to do anything apart from the will of the Father. Attempts to do so emulate the sin of Simon the sorcerer who sought to buy the power of the Holy Spirit so he could use it at will. It wasn't the offer of money alone that marked his sin, but the desire for power.

If we would know how God desires to manifest His power through us, we should take our lesson from Jesus and imitate His humility. We must first know His will, and learn to live in accordance with His will. And we will be content to be used by Him accordingly. We will not focus on our lack of material wealth or physical health, but will focus on ministry to others.

The great truths of God appear paradoxical to those who are perishing: those who would be made strong must become weak; those who would be made wise must become foolish; those who would be exalted must humble themselves, not only before God, but before men.

Is this not the opposite of the bombastic claims of the word-faith heresy? And in spite of their denigration of those who do not subscribe to their ungodly claims of godhood, testimonies abound from people who have been rescued out of their clutches, that their experiences in life are no different than those of anyone else. There is as much poverty, sickness, and lack of understanding among the word-faith followers as there is among any other segment of society.

Should this not be a clue to us that the word-faith teachings do not match the truth of Scripture? Like the Pharisees and Sadducees of Jesus' day, the holiness of many word-faith proponents is external. They speak with great, swelling words, presuming to speak new truths never before revealed.

Presupposition Three

The third presupposition with which we are dealing involves the word-faith interpretation of Isaiah's prophecy regarding the wounded Christ:

He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem his stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.

But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. (Isaiah 53:3-5)

The word-faith interpretation of these verses states that we *are* healed of all physical infirmity on the basis that Jesus suffered physically for us. But, as stated earlier, a basic rule of interpreting Scripture is that Scripture interprets itself. In order to properly understand this passage we look to the New Testament where Peter, in speaking of the atonement provided by Jesus, makes reference to Isaiah 53:5:

Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed. (1 Peter 2:24)

We see that the healing of which Isaiah spoke was healing from our sins "the sins that Jesus bore in His own body. If, as the word-faith teachers insist, we are guaranteed divine health by claiming it by faith, then there must be some other proof text that speaks clearly to that concept. Certainly so important a doctrine must have at least one clear reference to which we may turn. But there are none.

In order to sidestep this clear teaching of Scripture and transfer Jesus' suffering and dying for our sins to suffering for our physical health, the word-faith preachers have devised another damnable heresy. It is the Jesus-died-spiritually teaching based upon the fantasy that, after Jesus was

put to death on the cross, He had to suffer torment and ridicule at the hands of Satan and his minions in hell. In Kenneth Copeland's words:

The death of Jesus Christ was not a physical death alone. If it were only a physical death, Abel would have paid the price for the sins of mankind. He was the first man who died because he honored God and His Word. He was the first man God dealt with in a prophetic manner after the Fall. Every prophet under the Abrahamic Covenant could have paid the price if our redemption was based on physical death alone.

8He [Jesus] stayed in the pit of hell "the bowels of the earth" for three horrible days and nights. He made Himself obedient to death and put Himself in the hands of God's enemy, Satan. The difference here between Adam and Jesus is that Jesus committed this act **BY CHOICE, not by treason**. He did it in order to pay the price for Adam's high treason. The same thing happened to Jesus that happened to Adam. He was separated from God. Spiritual death was lodged in His spirit. If the price for man's redemption only included physical death, it would not have been enough. If Jesus had not died spiritually, His body would have never died.¹¹ (Copeland's emphasis)

This is pure fantasy, unsupported by Scripture. Satan is not in control of hell, God is in control of hell. Satan will become one of the victims of hell. The commonly portrayed hell as a place under the control of Satan and his demons is pagan myth.

Although Copeland says Jesus' death was not enough to save us spiritually, Scripture states repeatedly that we have been redeemed spiritually by the shed blood of Christ (Romans 5:9, Hebrews 13:11-20, etc.) It makes no mention of His suffering in hell. To say that our redemption is by any other means is to deny the blood of Christ. It is another gospel by which no man can be saved. There is no other conclusion.

This does not mean that our physical healing is not included in the atonement, but that it is secondary to our spiritual healing. There are no guarantees of physical healing for all cases. This may come as a disappointment to some who are suffering and want, with all their hearts, to believe that the word-faith proposition is true. But the fact remains that, although God *does* still heal people from physical infirmities, His healing is according to His sovereign will for that person's life.

Does this seem pessimistic when contrasted with the perceived optimism of the word-faith message? Not at all. For our spiritual welfare is of far greater importance than our physical welfare; and only God knows what works to our good. Denial of the word-faith teachers aside, physical infirmity is often used for God's glory.

This should actually be encouraging to those who suffer affliction. Yet if anything, these teachers' promise of physical health is a discouragement to those who do not experience health in spite of their striving to claim it. They don't realize that we cannot claim what God does not promise. And if He does promise something, Scripture and Jesus' words specifically "tell us to ask, not claim or demand of God.

A careful study of Isaiah 43:11, which the word-faith teachers pervert (8and concerning the work of my hands command ye me. [KJV]) demonstrates that God is in control, and we cannot demand anything of Him. Keeping that verse in context within the chapter, and using proper exegesis, we find that He is chastising those who attempt to control His hand. His words are not encouragement to command Him, but a statement of fact that the ungodly attempt to command Him; it is accusatory (8you command me!).

Were divine health a promise of God's Word, then it would stand to reason that perfect health means we would never die. Nor, for that matter, would we even age. The aging process is itself the result of the curse upon Adam, and leads us inexorably toward death.

But ever inventive, some word-faith teachers propose that, eventually "when a sufficient number of Christians learn the secrets of the immutable laws of divine health" even death will be conquered. Having no scriptural basis for this belief, they have developed it as a natural extension of their health-and-wealth doctrine.

Scripture is clear that, until the resurrection and the gathering of the saints to meet the Lord in the air, we will be subject to death in our bodies.

Our bodies have not yet been redeemed. Otherwise, to come to Christ would be to immediately enter into immortalization. In that case, it would not take faith to come to Christ; everyone who saw the transformation would believe on the basis of sight.

The belief that certain overcomers among believers will eventually become immortal before the resurrection is, in fact,

a tenet of some word-faith adherents, particularly those whose backgrounds are in the Latter Rain-Manifest Sons of God philosophy. These are among the more aberrant teachings based on what has come to be called "revealed knowledge" special insight into God's Word given only to a select few.

REVEALED KNOWLEDGE

The excuse of the word-faith teachers for their extra-biblical teachings is that God has gifted them with greater understanding of His Word than He has anyone else. This greater understanding they call revealed knowledge. Their contention is that the Word of God is not effective for those who try to understand it with their minds; the deeper things of God can only be understood with the spirit. Therefore, because they have learned the secret of listening to God with their spirits, they have received understanding that is withheld from those who use their minds only. In fact, as do all cults, the word-faith proposition rests on the idea that the mind is an enemy of God. It must be subverted in favor of communication through the spirit. What they neglect is the fact that, no matter where an idea originates, our minds must evaluate and judge it by its conformity or non-conformity to Scripture.

To the mystical-minded person the idea of subverting the mind sounds like just the ticket to unlock the mysteries of God and establish oneself as god over his own destiny. To the serious believer, committed to following Jesus no matter what the cost, it sounds like witchcraft.

This belief in secret knowledge is rooted in Gnosticism, a Greek philosophy which taught that emancipation from the restrictions of the physical world is attained through higher knowledge. The secret to this higher knowledge can only be learned through adherence to a priesthood of adepts whose initiation into Gnosis allowed them power over the physical realm.

Gnosticism crept into the Church as a higher mystery. It was this higher mystery that Paul debunked in His writings to the Colossians, by pointing to the only mystery of God which is hidden in Christ within us, the hope of glory (Colossians 1:25-27).

What Gnosticism and its present-day counterpart, the word-faith message, offer is a magical formula that doesn't work, in spite of the testimonies of some who claim

to have benefited from practicing these magic arts.

A Magical Priesthood

In his definition of *magic*, W.B. Crowe states,

The word *magic* comes to us, through Latin and Greek, from a Persian word meaning the work of the priests or wise men. Such activity was and is done for the benefit of mankind. But the word has altered its significance, and is now usually applied to acts of a selfish or even harmful kind. Many authors distinguish such as *black magic* [sic]. The latter, however, is very frequently a parody or perversion of the work done by priests.¹²

If we look at the concept of revealed knowledge, we'll see that those who claim to have received it from God have placed themselves in the role of just such a priest. They teach that the average Christian cannot receive revealed knowledge himself unless he receives it from the word-faith teacher who acts as a mediator between him and God. The word-faith priest dispenses that secret knowledge to those willing to accept his priesthood.

The word priest is never uttered, however, because that would tip Christians off to the unscriptural position to which these teachers have elevated themselves. However, a priest is not a priest because he calls himself such, but because he assumes the duties of such.

Contrary to a true minister of Jesus, priests expect (sometimes even demand) compensation from those to whom they minister teaching and intercession. This is characteristic of the word-faith teachers who tell their adherents that, in order to make their prayers effective, they must sow seed-faith into the ministry of the teacher (priest). This financial gift, it is implied (strongly), allows them to come into agreement. Without agreement their prayers won't be heard by God.

So in order to receive the benefit of secret knowledge that God has given only to them, one must become a partner in their ministry.

Another witchcraft technique that the priests of the word-faith heresy promote is that of point-of-contact. One must touch something that the priest has touched or prayed over so that the magic power of the priest can be transferred to the believing recipient. Some who utilize the seed-faith and point-of-contact formula in a manner *par excellence* are Oral Roberts, Rex Hum-

bard, Robert Tilton, Peter Popoff and John Avenzini.

Priests of magic are not adverse to utilizing curses or threats to coerce the gullible into surrendering their wills and their wallets to them. They are told that, unless they send their seed-faith gift "the most they can possibly muster" they cannot expect God to give them their miracle. Yet the priests stop just short of the full threat by using words like may or may not rather than will or will not. But the same ploy of using ambiguity is found in their offer of benefit.

An example is Oral Roberts' February, 1990, fund-raising letter: God has given me a word for you. . . I believe He is going to help you overcome **BAD NEWS** with **GOOD NEWS** this month! (Emphasis Roberts)

The writer of this appeal letter did not say, He is going to. . . He cleverly qualifies this promise with, *I believe* He is going to. . . This meets the legal requirements that prevent being shutdown by the U.S. Postal Service for false claims pursuant to fund raising. It also protects it from law suits for breach of promise.

Oral (or whomever his writer is) goes on to say,

You are holding a letter that is supernaturally designed to become a source of **MIRACLE INFORMATION** and **ENCOURAGEMENT** to you! It is birthed from a divine word of knowledge that God has made clear to me this morning!

When you read the following words that the Holy Spirit is prompting me to write (right this very moment), by faith, I'm expecting the harmful effects of any kind of **BAD NEWS** that you may be facing to be removed by some powerful personal **GOOD NEWS** that is coming from God through me to you. (Emphasis Roberts)

It seldom dawns on those who read such letters that the priest is claiming that God has given him an inspired word equal to Scripture. This is not unusual for word-faith teachers.

Further, Oral tells his entire mail-list that, I feel Jesus wants me to send you a little plaque that says, Don't be afraid. . . **ONLY BELIEVE**. This plaque is the point-of-contact "God's personal word to you that you can turn your Bad News into Good News."

Now the catch to receiving the plaque is that one must respond to the appeal letter by returning a prayer sheet with the needs

listed so Oral can lay upon it his right hand through which he feels the power of God flowing. He then says,

NOW THIS IS VERY IMPORTANT. With your faith, enclose a Seed-Faith gift TO GOD in your return envelope. As you mail that seed to this ministry, I want you to do the other thing Jesus said to do concerning real Seed-Faith. . . . He says both to SOW and SAY for your miracle to happen! This is Jesus' law of making your faith a SEED. SAY out loud to yourself, I am sowing my seed OUT OF MY NEED to move my mountain of BAD NEWS. (Emphasis Roberts)

Now, if Oral was telling the truth that he believed *"really* believed" that Jesus wanted him to send everyone on his mail list that plaque, why didn't he just send it? Why was it necessary to first get a commitment from the person and then send it?

Well, of course! The plaque won't work as a point-of-contact unless the person sends a seed-faith gift.

Many, particularly those believed to be healers, use the point-of-contact means of fund raising. Each month they send some cheap trinket packaged in a gaudy, scribbled over appeal letter. They insist that their followers either anoint themselves with the trinket, rub it on their sore spot, wrap it around their necks, or some other such nonsense, then send it back so it can be prayed over by the priest.

Some Examples are Oral Roberts' prayer cloth and Robert Tilton's picture of the soles of his shoes for people to stand on when they pray. One of the most bizarre is Rex Humbards gold-colored horseshoe which the recipient is to wear around his neck on a string provided by Humbard's fund-raisers.

These trinkets generally come with the insistence that one send his best gift in order for the point-of-contact to work.

Is this any less the selling of indulgences that scandalizes Roman Catholicism, and which sparked the Reformation? Is it any less priestcraft, which Jesus hates?

Sadly, most of the targets for these shenanigans are the elderly, invalids, those who are desperate for hope.

The priests of the word-faith teachings have done a masterful job in placing themselves between the Father and His children"those who fall victim to their false promises. They have developed within the Church a cult that threatens the fabric of the Faith and undermines the ministry of

local bodies. Their infection is spread like a cancer through the mass communications media"particularly Christian television, radio and bookstores. These powerful media hypnotize the young in the Faith, the immature, and the gullible to believe that they cannot approach God or receive anything good from Him unless they subscribe to the teachings of the word-faith proponents. They have no genuine faith of their own"it is tied to the faith of the word-faith teacher.

GUILT-EDGED PROFITS

When the word-faith adherents do not receive a bonanza of financial blessings, they become guilt-ridden, thinking that they lack sufficient faith to get what they want or need. This guilt is further driven home by the word-faith teacher who castigates them for their lack of belief in the teacher's proclamations. It isn't the teacher who is wrong"it is the recipient of his teachings. If they wish to get right with God they must continue to learn more about faith. They must ante up more money for tapes, books, and seed-faith gifts to the priest's coffers.

Whether their adherents receive what they perceive to be blessings or not, the priests of the word-faith teachings reap financial gain. Those followers who don't experience abundance and health are conditioned to think that they have not learned how to master the laws of prosperity and so-called divine health. So they send for more tapes, books, and publications, not to mention trinkets that act as their personal point-of-contact. Nothing is offered free, of course. At the least, they are told that a gift is necessary to demonstrate their faith.

Those who do experience health and prosperity in life are also eager to learn more so they can have more. And even the most prosperous and healthy will find some area of lack in their life on which they can focus. In any case, they, too, are conditioned to buy more, and to send more gifts to the priest.

But what about those testimonies of good fortune for those who practice word-faith? What the word-faith practitioners have going is a numbers game. By sheer volume, from among the millions of their adherents, there are bound to be some who will testify that, after sending their seed-faith gift, they experienced a financial windfall. But the same type of testimonies prevail among witches and other purveyors

of philosophies that promise material reward for financial gifts.

If I were to address several hundreds of thousands of people and tell them that they can become wealthy by scratching their noses at 12 noon every day for ten days, there are bound to be some who would inherit a fortune, or get a raise, all in the due course of their lives anyway. But they would associate their new-found wealth with the action I had prescribed, simply because they *want* to believe.

The test of whether something is of God is not that it seems to work, but that it conforms to Scripture rightly divided.

ARROGANT SPIRITS

Among the worst tactics employed by these priests-for-profit is their arrogance and the demeaning manner in which they address their adherents. They glower at them; they as much as call them stupid; they pronounce curses upon them if they do not ante up their seed. Some even tell their adherents that if they do not sow their seed money into their particular organization they will suffer calamities: they will live in poverty; they will suffer illness; they will experience divorce, and other curses.

The word-faith teachers brag about how perfect their own health is, and revel in the prosperity that their merchandising of God's Word has brought them. But you can be sure that each and every one of them has his or her earthly treasures insured against fire and theft, and that part of their corporation's benefits include health insurance. Just like you and I, they lock their doors when they leave home.

While these teachers glory in their personal abundance, they strew spiritual wreckage in the wake of their travels, leaving local pastors and cult-watchers to pick up the pieces of those disillusioned souls who are self-condemned because the formula didn't work for them.

THE ROOTS OF THE HERESY

While Kenneth Copeland is considered today's premier spokesperson for the word-faith error, there is no question among its leading expositors that the father of the movement is Kenneth E. Hagin, affectionately known among his peers as Dad Hagin. Many credit Hagin with being the one who opened their eyes to the truth of revealed knowledge and the effectiveness of the spoken word in receiving health and prosperity.

Comparison of Hagin's writings with those of E.W. Kenyon reveals that Hagin's theories were not his originally, but that he plagiarized them from Kenyon. In many cases, his plagiarizing is word-for-word that of Kenyon's, whose teachings predated Hagin's by almost four decades. The reader can find this plagiarization documented in D.R. McConnell's *A Different Gospel*. Hagin's incredible defense for the similarity of his writings to Kenyon's is the claim that the same Holy Spirit gave the revelation to them both.

If this is true, it is a markedly singular occurrence in all of history that the Holy Spirit "or any spirit" would have done such a thing. Even the four Gospels are not word-for-word to the extent that Hagin's are with Kenyon's.

But whether Hagin stole from Kenyon or not isn't the essential issue. The important thing is where the concepts espoused by these two men originated. Since Kenyon's revelations preceded Hagin's, and since it is highly unlikely that Hagin didn't plagiarize Kenyon, it is advisable that we look into Kenyon's background to see what formed his religious philosophy.

New Thought Influences

Kenyon denied that he taught religious science. Yet the fact remains that much of his schooling was at the hands of those who practiced that philosophy. Particularly influential were his years at the Emerson College School of Oratory, named after one of its most famous professors, Charles Wesley Emerson, an adherent of New Thought metaphysics. Emerson joined Christian Science in 1903 and remained in that religion until his death in 1908.

Kenyon's own religious philosophy reflected a blending of New Thought with biblical Christianity "an obvious attempt to meld the best of two worlds.

Kenyon's personal acceptance or rejection of New Thought during his days as a student is not altogether clear, but that he was exposed extensively to its teachings and healing practices at Emerson College is a historical certainty. The mission of the college was to produce graduates who would believe, practice, and preach the New Thought gospel of Charles Emerson.¹³

In spite of Kenyon's denunciation of some major metaphysical tenets, his own writings displayed a leaning toward certain such tenets. McConnell quotes Kenyon:

We are not dealing with mysticism, philosophy or metaphysics. We are dealing with realities. . . . we are dealing with the basic laws of man's being, the great spiritual laws that govern the unseen forces of life.

This is not a new metaphysics or philosophy. This is reality. This is God breaking into the sense realm. This is God imparting His own nature to the human spirit.

This is not psychology or metaphysics. This is absolute fact. God becomes a part of our very consciousness.¹⁴

McConnell explains:

In each of these, Kenyon claims that his teaching is not metaphysical and then immediately follows his disclaimer with a central dogma of metaphysics. For example, when he speaks of the great spiritual laws that govern the unseen forces of life, he is espousing *deism*, the metaphysical world view that the universe is governed by impersonal, spiritual laws rather than a personal, sovereign God. When Kenyon refers to God breaking into the sense realm, he is espousing *dualism*, which is the metaphysical view of reality that the spiritual realm and the physical realm are mutually exclusive and even opposed to one another. Finally, when Kenyon refers to God imparting his own nature to the human spirit and God becoming a part of our very consciousness, he is espousing *deification*, which is the metaphysical view that salvation entails man becoming a god (and which, in the quotation cited earlier, he criticizes New Thought for teaching). Although it is not at all clear that Kenyon was doing so intentionally, nevertheless, these types of disclaimers are also the classical ploys of modern day cultists, who use them to confuse and disarm the intellectual defenses of those whom they are indoctrinating into their cult.¹⁵

Jesus said,

For a good tree bringeth not forth corrupt fruit; neither doth a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.

For every tree is known by his own fruit. (Luke 6:43-44)

No doubt, some of the proponents of the word-faith teachings are sincere; but they are wrong. If we look at the roots of the word-faith movement, we'll see that the Gnostic tree from which their philosophy of religion sprang is evil. We will shun their teachings for the pure Word of truth.

NOTES

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3. Gavin Frost & Yvonne Frost, *The Magic Power of Witchcraft* (West Nyack, NY: Parker Publishing Co., Inc., 1976) p. 7.
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7. *Ibid.*, p. 124-125.
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12. W.B. Crow, *A History of Magic, Witchcraft and Occultism* (Hollywood, CA: Wilshire Book Co., 1968), p. 12.
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15. *Ibid.*

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