

Liberty University Baptist Theological Seminary

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PROSPERITY GOSPEL: A PLEA FOR RETURN TO  
BIBLICAL TRUTH

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By

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Liberty University Baptist Theological Seminary

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## ABSTRACT

### AN EXAMINATION OF THE PROSPERITY GOSPEL: A PLEA FOR RETURN TO BIBLICAL TRUTH

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The prosperity gospel teaches that the Bible promises health, wealth and uncommon success to all believers. A problem surfaces when the prosperity that is promised does not materialize to all members of the congregation. In examining the validity of this teaching, extensive writings, books, articles and sermons by leading proponents, have been reviewed. Additionally, interviews with at least one hundred pastors inform this writing. The purpose of the research is to furnish contemporary, active insight to this project. The conclusion of this writer is that the prosperity gospel offers an unbalanced application of scripture, which results in a departure from a clear biblical orientation for articulating the doctrine of Jesus Christ. Hence the ramifications of the prosperity message when measured by fundamental Christological dogma leads to doctrinal poverty.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

Does the prosperity gospel distort, or modify the reality of the person of Jesus Christ in order to accommodate the various tenets of the word of faith movement? An examination is needed to determine if there have been fundamental adjustments to the theological views of the essence of Christ. These include His person, His position within the trinity, and his redemptive role for mankind. This study examines the issue of an integrative motif of prosperity being imposed over sound hermeneutical interpretation of scripture. A wide synthesis of teaching material and documents have been reviewed in order to recognize and quantify whether there is a deviation from established Christological dogma. The teachings of major contributors of the prosperity gospel will be charted to codify their teachings regarding Jesus. The focus of this research is to examine if an elevation of the prosperity gospel has in effect diminished the doctrinal position of the biblical Jesus. In summary, this writer believes that the prosperity gospel replaces Christ with a smaller Jesus. An intentional effort will be given to realign the reader to the highly exalted Christ of the Bible.

#### **Statement of the Problem**

Sadly, many Christians today are lacking in a foundational knowledge of truth. It is not because opportunity to ascertain truth is not readily available. Neither does it stem from the scarcity in the presentation of the gospel. In fact the gospel message has never been dispersed in the magnitude and brilliance that it is today. Technological advancements have propelled the preaching of the gospel literally around the globe through mass media including satellite



television, international radio broadcasts and the worldwide web. Then to what may be attributed the shortfall of biblical knowledge? The answer lies, at least partially, in a hostility toward theological training.<sup>1</sup> This results in vulnerability among Christians to teachings within the church that are not grounded on a solid biblical foundation.

This writer will report findings from research done that addresses the problem of the popular word of faith movement articulating a message that is more materialistic than Christocentric. The emphasis is redirected from what the Bible says to an agenda that seeks to validate by scripture a message that is concentrated heavily in personal gain. This has caused much confusion in the body of Christ and created pain and disappointment among those who have discovered the things taught to them did not materialize. Charles Farah states that “the word of faith message is perhaps the most attractive message being preached in the contemporary church.”<sup>2</sup> The popularity of the message does not in itself give it legitimacy but it does obligate the prudent pastor to address the issue in an informed and adequate manner.

This writer’s personal relationship as a pastor for over thirty years to individuals who have been damaged by the teachings of word of faith have been numerous. The task has been to pick up and reassemble the broken pieces of disillusioned believers who were led to believe that they could have whatever they wanted by simply speaking it. When their expectation did not materialize and they were left empty-handed, they became confused and often disappointed in God. When this inevitably happens it is not the word of faith teacher that is consulted but the local pastor. One such member exclaimed in tears, “But pastor I invested my life savings of

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<sup>1</sup> Stanley J. Grenz and Roger E. Olson, *Who needs Theology? An Invitation to the Study of God* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 9.

<sup>2</sup> Charles Farah, “A Critical Analysis: the Roots and Fruits of Faith Formula Theology”, *Pneuma* 3:3-21. 1981

\$40,000 into that ministry and they took my money and gave me nothing in return.”<sup>3</sup> She had hoped to receive, by virtue of her faith and her financial gift, a beautiful retirement home. When the ministry folded she was left financially broke as well as broken-hearted and confused. Regrettably she is one of countless numbers of people who have been left in the same condition or even worse. This writer will explore the ramifications of this type teaching and issue enlightening information that will help pastors in addressing this complex issue. The goal is to assist pastors in being adequately equipped to give guidance to those who have been disillusioned by wrong interpretations of biblical texts.

Prosperity preachers have common denominators in their teachings that involve health, wealth and success. The view that is promoted is one that it is not just a privileged status but it is a right promised by God. Scriptures are used to support the belief that these are promises that can be claimed in any and every situation. Emphasis is given on faith being the great actuator of these promises. It is a type of glorified slot machine where you insert your request and the answer rolls out. Usually it involves a gift of money commonly referred to as a faith promise. This also is problematic because the promises of God are based on humble and gracious recipients who realize that gifts are not based on merit but it is the grace of God that imparts gifts to whom He wills. These gifts do not always assume material form or even an affirmative response.

### **Statement of Limitations**

An incredible amount of writing has been done upon this subject. It is not within the realm of this thesis to survey all of it; however, many sources have been contacted and perused

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<sup>3</sup> This statement was made by a parishioner in a church pastored by this writer.

in a concentrated effort to give a balanced understanding of the schools of thought and basic tenets of word of faith teaching. A generalized examination of material has not revealed an accurate and theological agreement. There is considerable confusion in building a systematic theology because of the flexibility of the teaching to accommodate various applications of the teaching. This writer seeks to identify those fringe elements being taught in the word of faith theology that interpret the personage and deity of Christ. The search is disjointed and fragmented because there is no common creed to which all adhere. This will be brought to surface in order to warn of the danger of departing from the true gospel and accommodating another gospel.

### **Theoretical Basis for the Project**

It is the focus of this writing to document the major contributors to the origins of the teachings of the word of faith movement as well as to consider its development into a widely recognized teaching. Where names are mentioned it is not the intention to castigate, demean, discredit or criticize those mentioned. The purpose for mentioning names is simply for source documentation purposes and to inform the reader by using their own statements. Where possible the personal application of the individual being quoted is used to avoid inaccurate or biased assessment.

Effort has been made to seek out what has been stated as well as what is implied. In some cases where Christological doctrine enters the picture it is not the specific focus of the message but rather an implied viewpoint that comes into focus. In other words it is a view of Christ that is extra-biblical. In such cases it becomes impossible to exegete because there is no scriptural text for the belief. Some of the teaching claims personal revelation through spiritual visitations, dreams and the gifts of the Spirit. Additionally, literature has been reviewed that refutes the

views of the word of faith preachers. Where fair treatment is displayed in the writings, the critique as a general rule is considered relevant to this research. Where a doctrinally prejudiced agenda becomes discernible it is not considered by this writer to meet the criteria for this examination. Those easily characterized as harsh, critical and mean-spirited were forfeited in lieu of less contentious and more scholarly material. This is not to say by eliminating them that those arguments are deemed to be unsound but that they are outside the intended purpose of this writing. There are other arenas where that kind of debate may be deliberated.

Undergirding the doctrinal orientation of this author is the fundamental view that Christ is the uniquely unchallenged only begotten Son of God. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit within the womb of the Virgin Mary and was birthed in human form as the unrivaled sinless savior of the world. He was both fully human and fully divine. He lived a sinless life of godly perfection upon this earth and revealed himself as the Son of God. He died on the cross and by shedding His innocent blood for the propitiation of the sins of all humanity became the only means whereby anyone can be saved. On the third day he arose from the dead and after forty days was received up into Heaven from which he came and sat down on the right hand of the Father as mediator. Upon this foundational doctrinal framework the inferences of the word of faith teachings will be critiqued. Where there is any divergence from them it will be clearly delineated. Biblical exegesis will be utilized in order to substantiate doctrinal deviations that are highlighted in this writing, thus this account will clearly reveal areas where prosperity preachers have added to or distracted from biblical doctrines regarding Christ and His salvific role to mankind.

Did Christ have a perspective on money? What did he say about it? Did He possess money and material possessions? Were his disciples endowed with financial prosperity? What

are the answers given to us by prosperity preachers? Do they believe that the disciples were prosperous in material wealth? What about houses, benefits and accessories? All of these are issues that need to be answered in order to clarify the Christology of the word of faith teachers. Christ gave us an ominous warning regarding those who would come pretending to represent Him and would even use His name in order to draw people after them. The warning resulted in the effort to supplant the real church with a counterfeit one. This accentuates the importance of this research. It is important that the effort to draw away followers from Christ be confronted by offering a distinct message of truth. Any teaching that replaces a concentration on Him with another focus should be viewed with suspicion. Rigorous examination should follow and if this is found to be the case then it is to be refuted. It is the thesis of this writer that the emphasis of the word of faith movement has shifted attention from the person of Christ to an obsession with material possessions with an inordinate obsession with this life rather than eternal life. When Jesus is no longer the emphasis then his essence is put on trial.

### **Statement of Methodology**

The methodology of this study was structured in a manner to lead to an academic determination of the nature, significance and understanding of the question that is raised in this writing. The problem focused on is what kind of adjustments have been made to the doctrinal views of who Jesus is and what this entails to those who are His disciples. A biblical and theological examination of the pertinent issues will be brought forward. Although there are variations and mediations from one teacher to another there are certain common concepts that arise out of the material. Although the study was bordered by practical theology, it was intended that the study would prove helpful in instructing those within the church who have been drawn

away with various tangents of the word of faith movement. In order to achieve this goal a methodology of insightful analysis was used. This analysis involved contextualizing the scripture in its proper setting. A wide array of material was reviewed and summarized in order to establish scriptural derivatives that may point clearly to error in theology. Examples from major proponents of the doctrine were also reviewed.

A major feature of the propagation and dispersion of the message of the word of faith movement is that its' most noted and influential preachers utilize Christian television. Since that is the major method of disseminating the message today televised programs, including weekly broadcasts, talk shows, interviews and telethons will be used as references. Religious broadcasts of word of faith preachers will be an important ingredient to substantiate the assertions being made by this writer. Media clips will be documented in order for the reader to retrace the steps of the research and validate the tenets of this type of preaching. An important reason that this type of validation is needed is because some of the teaching is so far outside the realm of orthodox Christianity that it is difficult to grasp. If observations made in this paper are met with disbelief perhaps inspiration to personally investigate will follow. If this is the case then the purpose to inspire an informed opinion regarding the subject will have been served.

One of the most critical issues that come to bear is that the word of faith preaching is based on an interpretation of scripture. There are specific texts that are favorites and are quoted often with the aim of promoting a predetermined message to the listener. Flexibility of interpretation of scriptural texts is frequently adapted to fit the promoted faith belief without careful examination of the text. This problem will be researched by selecting favorite pericopes of scripture and by exegeting them in order to determine whether tenets of the word of faith teaching are inaccurately utilizing scripture. The writer will analyze the texts by contextualizing,

performing word studies and translating from the original language. This type of hermeneutic will steer away from misapplying the text within the framework of a contemporary cultural setting.

There will be a historical review of the movement in Chapter Two. The origins of the movement are relatively clear. Various writers document the source of the word of faith theology by tracing them back to a specific personality. The teachings of this individual will be defined and discussed. Included in this chapter are the major leaders that emerged. There is a natural chronological date (1980) that separates the earlier founders of the movement. This writer's research did not surface an abundance of scholarly writing prior to that date. However, from 1980 until the present there is much more attention given to writing about the word of faith movement. Multiple resources have been documented that will be helpful in doing a detailed assessment of the doctrines and applications of the teachings. Chapter Two gives a wide sampling of these works.

Chapter Three is an evaluation of the theology and practical application of selected scriptures. In this chapter the writer will document the sources that are used to formulate a system of believing that the Bible promises in specific scriptures certain promises of health, wealth and prosperity. Also, scriptural derivatives that are commonly used by the word of faith teachers will be discussed. These are modalities borrowed from the Bible to supply examples as a basis for expanding the teachings. There are four main references that form the platform for much of the imaging for a framework of teaching the various tenets. These four tenets utilized by the word of faith community are 1) the Abrahamic covenant 2) the atonement 3) faith 4) prosperity. These are not considered to be separate entities that stand alone but are interwoven within the fabric to formulate a system of beliefs. Each can draw support from the other and each

can be borrowed to complete the teaching of the others. These will be treated with more detail in Chapter Three.

Chapter Four will give a textual treatment of scripture texts that are pertinent to the word of faith teachers. These scriptures will be exegeted in order to evaluate the legitimacy of tenets of the word of faith teachings. Included in this chapter is an assessment of Romans 4:17. This scripture is used to support the creative capability of man by “calling things that be not as though they are.” (KJV) Another selection is III John 2. In this text the writer wishes “above all prosperity and health” upon the readers. This verse will be exegeted. A third scripture that is used abundantly by the word of faith teaching is Mark 11:24. This scripture states that “whatsoever you say believing you will have it.” Here is where some have dubbed the movement by the title “Name it and Claim it.” Another proof text of the movement is Psalm 82:2-7 and St. John 10:33-34. These texts are a reference to men as gods and is quoted by Jesus in John 10. This is used to support the tenet that people are little gods. Through exegeting these texts a picture will be projected to represent an accurate portrayal of what the Bible has to say about this facet of the subject. By ascertaining the biblical voice it is the persuasion of this writer that a fair and accurate conclusion may be approached.

Chapter Five, the conclusion, will summarize major tenets of the word of faith movement as presented in this thesis and offer constructive approaches in dealing with this subject. The implications of specific tenets of the theology are addressed. The effects of the movement both positive and negative will be assessed. Doctrinal distinction will be clarified and a plan offered to confront the errors in a constructive manner. This will be done by approaching elements of scriptural validity within the word of faith theology. There will be realignment of specific scriptures and their application to the word of faith theology. The impact of these scriptures will



be evaluated in regard to current ministerial mandates. An evaluation of pastoral authority regarding false teachings is offered. A survey of contemporary senior pastors will provide current input from pastors who choose to participate in responding to a survey mailed to one hundred senior pastors. The results of the responses will be reported in Chapter Five. The response will address the extent of the effect of the prosperity message within the congregation. There is a responsibility for the pastor to guard against false teachings entering the flock. To confront those is not the most comfortable position to take. It is easier to take the posture of looking the other way, but when something is proven to be harmful to the health and livelihood of the flock it is incumbent upon the pastor to confront the harmful proponents. This further legitimizes the importance of this writing.

### **Review of Literature**

A search of the literature upon the Word of Faith movement has revealed that there are ample resources available. There are some scholarly works that have invested a fair amount of critical assessment of the movement, its theology and its doctrine. Among those are B. Barron <sup>4</sup>; Charles A. Farah <sup>5</sup>; Gordon Fee <sup>6</sup> D. R. McConnell<sup>7</sup>. These are important because they assess the historical elements of the teaching. There are also works included in this research that come from a defensive view of the validity of the teachings from an academic approach. Examples of these are: DeArteag 1992, Veeland 2001.

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<sup>4</sup> B. Barron. *The Health and Wealth Gospel* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1987).

<sup>5</sup> Charles. Farrah. "A Critical Analysis: The Roots and Fruits of Faith Formula," *Pneuma* 3:3-21. 1981

<sup>6</sup> Gordon Fee *Gospel and Spirit: Issues in New Testament Hermeneutics* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994).

<sup>7</sup> D.R. McConnell "The Kenyon Connection: a theological and historical analysis of the cultic origins of the faith movement." (Doctoral diss., Oral Roberts University, Tulsa, OK. 1982).

Others have taken on the subject from an apologetic evaluation. Examples of these are Hanegraaff 2009; Hunt 1985; MacArthur 1992. The writer of this project makes no claim to fully assess all the writings that are available. However, a fair sampling will be rendered. Where duplication adds no additional information the work may be referenced to demonstrate that the source has been checked. These sources treat the word of faith tenets with critical analysis by connecting them to the cultic origins of the mind sciences.

The works of Essek W. Kenyon are considered informative for the purpose of this writing project in that several of the contributors claim Kenyon as the originator of many of the doctrines and theological viewpoints of the modern faith movement. Authors that have been located up to this point that offer this historical view of origin and are used in this paper are John MacArthur, Hank Hanegraaff and D.R McConnell. Each of these writers makes the observation that elements of this faith movement are found in Kenyon.

As a young man Kenyon was affiliated with the Methodist Church but later pastored several Baptist churches. He found his place as a Baptist and remained there until the time of his death in 1948. In 1892 he enrolled in Emerson College of Oratory, a college known for its emphasis on the metaphysical school of thought and taught the transcendental meditations. This is the thought process that provided the basis for Mary Baker Eddy's Christian Science organization and other schools of mind science. Several writers connect Kenyon to the Emerson influence on the development of his theology. Hank Hanegraaff is an author who makes this connection and will be referenced to support this view.<sup>8</sup>

Daniel McDonnell explains that the teachings of Kenyon escaped the boundaries of both the teachings of the Methodist and Baptist teachers. They charged him with teaching theology that

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<sup>8</sup> Hank Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis: 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, (Nashville, TN, Thomas Nelson, 2009).

was not conventional. For example in reflecting on the Abrahamic covenant, Kenyon taught that David's soldiers became giants or supermen and were shielded from death during the wars fought by David. Kenyon hoped to create a generation of superhuman people who were not bound by human qualities. He advanced the concept of humans living in perfect health without physical limitations. Further he championed the idea that humans were endowed with the same creative powers that were enacted by God in the original creation.<sup>9</sup> Kenyon's influence on the word of faith movement is apparent and therefore considered a worthy consideration in this writing project.

If Kenyon is a type of the originator of the foundational teachings of the modern faith movement then his student and follower Kenneth Hagin, Sr. is the second generation of the movement. He is often referred to as "Dad Hagin" demonstrating the extent of his influence upon his many students.<sup>10</sup> He was born with a congenital heart disease and claims to have died but was brought back to life and healed.<sup>11</sup> Through this miraculous healing he was converted in 1933 and began teaching as a lay preacher. He was baptized in the Holy Spirit in 1937 and began preaching among the Pentecostals. He founded the Rhema Bible Training Center in 1974 and by 2000 had 16,500 graduates. He is important because of his extensive influence through mass media and his writings. His influence was extended across the broader spectrum of the

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<sup>9</sup> D. R. McConnell, "The Kenyon Connection: a Theological and Historical Analysis of the Cultic Origins of the Faith Movement" (Doctoral Diss., Oral Roberts University, Tulsa OK, 1982).

<sup>10</sup> Daniel Ray McConnell, *A Different Gospel*, (Peabody, MA.: Hendrickson, 1995), 4

<sup>11</sup> R. Riss, Kenneth E. Hagin, In Burgess S (ed), *the new international dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic movements*, (MI: Zondervan, 2003), 687

Pentecostal and Charismatic ministries. This is important because his theology was borrowed from the works of Kenyon.<sup>12</sup>

Hank Hanegraaff accuses Kenneth Hagin of plagiarizing the works of Kenyon in at least eight of his books.<sup>13</sup> Hanegraaff's work is important as an analytical source of understanding the transmission of theology from Kenyon to Hagin but also in citing many of the books authored by Hagin. Some of the books authored by Hagin will be referenced in this thesis as original sources. A sample of the writings of Hagin is *Redeemed From Poverty, Sickness, Death*.<sup>14</sup> In this work Hagin insists that poverty, sickness and death are a curse and that they were nullified by Jesus Christ on the cross. Another of Hagin's publications is *How to Write Your Own Ticket With God*.<sup>15</sup> In this volume, Hagin explains how to get what you want from God by positive confession and faith. The power of positive confession is one of the essential doctrines that is foundational to the faith movement. An assessment of Hagin's writings is important because he inspired much of the teaching that has been popularized in the word of faith movement today.

Another major contributor and a kind of third generation of the word of faith movement is Kenneth Copeland. He is still active today and may be seen on his live Believer's Voice of Victory television show. Just as Kenneth Hagin received much of his teaching from Kenyon, Kenneth Copeland began his ministry by memorizing the sermons of Kenneth Hagin. He assimilated the theology of Hagin and took it to another level. For example he connected the faith and healing ministry directly to the Abrahamic covenant. Hence since the believer is connected to the Abrahamic covenant the same level of prosperity is extended. An assessment of

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<sup>12</sup> Daniel Ray McConnell, *A Different Gospel* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson), 1995

<sup>13</sup> Hank Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis: 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson), 2009

<sup>14</sup> Kenneth Hagin, *Redeemed From Poverty, Sickness and Death* (Garland, TX: Kenneth Hagin Ministries, 1963)

<sup>15</sup> Kenneth Hagin, *How To Write Your Own Ticket With God* (Tulsa, OK: Faith Library, 1979)

this teaching is evaluated in Bruce Baron's work, *The Health and Wealth Gospel*.<sup>16</sup>

Copeland, while standing on the shoulders of Kenyon and Hagin, advanced the prosperity gospel to a new theological dimension. He taught that the death of Christ on the cross did not complete the atonement. According to Copeland's teaching, Jesus went to hell and suffered for three days and was reborn.<sup>17</sup> This is an important divergent view of the orthodox view of Christ's death on the cross. It is commonly taught in mainline theological circles that Christ's death on the cross was a completed work and that no further suffering or sacrifice was necessary. This teaching by Copeland will be looked at more carefully in Chapter Four. These primary sources are important to this project because they demonstrate the early foundation and origins of the theology of the word of faith movement. These examples demonstrate each of the four theological tenets which are the Abrahamic covenant, the atonement, faith and prosperity. These points will be expanded upon when the theology of the word of faith movement is discussed in more detail.

For the purposes of the bibliographical review, a selected number of major scholarly authors who have contributed to a balanced understanding of the word of faith evolution of theology are highlighted. Charles Farah, Jr. who has served as professor of theology and historical studies at Oral Roberts University beginning in 1967 has given a scholarly treatment of the word of faith movement. In *From the Pinnacle of the Temple: Faith or Presumption* Farah asserts that much of what is claimed in the word of faith movement is not genuine biblical faith but presumption.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Bruce Baron, *The Health and Wealth Gospel* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1987), 56-57

<sup>17</sup> Kenneth Copeland, *Walking In The Realm of the Miraculous* (Fort Worth, TX: Kenneth Copeland Ministries, 1979).

<sup>18</sup> Charles Farah, Jr. *From the Pinnacle of the Temple: Faith or Presumption* (Plainfield, NJ: Bridge Logos Publishers, 1980), 205

A significant indictment is brought by Farah when he asserts that “from Kenyon comes a specific strand of religious humanism that is developed by the word of faith theology. It has been developed into a form of charismatic humanism. The result is a disproportionate emphasis on the present world, where revelation knowledge becomes the new hermeneutical principle.”<sup>19</sup> He makes the distinction that the word of faith has begun to be confronted with a demand for more solid biblical exegesis. While there is a move away from it by many in the charismatic circles there is still a great number that are swayed by its attractive message. Farah’s work is important as a reference which has been used by others who build off his observations.

Gordon Fee, professor of New Testament at Regent College is another author that is utilized for this research. In his book *The Disease of the Health and Wealth Gospels* he addresses the issues of perfect health and material prosperity. His problem with these excesses is that they fail to properly exegete the scriptures and apply an accurate hermeneutic.<sup>20</sup> Daniel McConnell is another major contributor to this research project in that he is quoted by many others in their analysis of the word of faith gospel. He was a graduate assistant at Oral Roberts University who researched and submitted a thesis in 1982 for his doctorate titled, *The Kenyon Connection: A Theological and Historical Analysis of the Modern Faith Movement*. He then updated this work in 1995. His main thesis is that the origins of the word of faith movement were not in charismatic circles but rather in the mind science cults of the nineteenth century.<sup>21</sup> McConnell’s contribution is important because he documents the Kenyon influence upon the word of faith theology.

John MacArthur who wrote *Charismatic Chaos* in 1992, writes from a reformed tradition.

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 13

<sup>20</sup> Gordon Fee, *The Disease of the Health and Wealth Gospels* (Vancouver, BC: College Publishing, 2006), 8.

<sup>21</sup> Daniel R. McConnell, “The Kenyon Connection: A Theological and Historical Analysis of the Modern Faith Movement” (Doctoral Diss., Oral Roberts University, 1995)

He reinforces the writing and opinions of other writers before him. He views the word of faith gospel as having roots that should not be viewed primarily as Christian but as cultic.<sup>22</sup> Hank Hanegraff takes on this subject in his book titled *Christianity In Crisis* written in 1993. This book was updated in 2009 and titled *Christianity In Crises: the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. Hanegraff heads up the Christian Research Institute and is the editor of the Christian Research Journal. He offers a historical view of the origins of the word of faith theology. He spends the bulk of his discussion on the most noteworthy tenets of the word of faith theology. He covers the subject of men as little gods, faith in faith, atonement, wealth and sickness and suffering. These doctrinal positions will add to the insight sought in this project.

An assessment of works cited up until this point have been weighted on the side of critical assessment of the word of faith movement. There has been a common sharing of the idea that the roots of the movement extend backward to the mind science teachings of Phinehas Quimby. Varying elements have been developed and expounded upon by writers such as Farah, Bruce Barron, Gordon Fee, and D.R. McConnell. In addition John MacArthur deals with the fringe elements of the movement with a weakness that he shows no distinction from mainline classical Pentecostals and charismatics. From this evaluation it becomes obvious to the researcher that there is need for further investigation. The search for a balance of the analysis is found in the writings of William DeArteaga.

William DeArteaga offers to the debate an apologetic publication titled *Quenching the Spirit: Examining Centuries of Opposition to the Moving of the Holy Spirit*. He evaluates the movement as a whole, admitting that there are excesses to any revival movement but contends that it is unfair to judge the entire movement by those who go overboard. He identifies the

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<sup>22</sup> John MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992).

problem of Pharisaism as “an attempt to restrict the flow of spiritual experiences, until religion becomes a purely intellectual and theological exercise, and in so doing, quenches the Spirit.”<sup>23</sup>

This volume assesses major spiritual awakenings dating back to the book of Acts and the early Christian revivals. He traces the revivals leading up to the modern Charismatic renewal. He coins the term “messy revival” to illustrate that in every revival movement there have always been those who went to peripheral extremes with excesses. DeArteaga states that “except for a few areas of weakness, the Charismatic renewal (including the word of faith component) contains all the evidences of a genuine revival as articulated by Jonathan Edwards.”<sup>24</sup> It is the perspective of this writer that this point is historically true but it does not excuse the necessity of exposing every tenet of teaching to proper examination by thorough and accurate biblical exegesis. This further verifies the need for biblical exegesis which will be offered in Chapter Four.

In Chapter Four numerous biblical texts will be examined. Mark 11:24-26 is commonly utilized to substantiate the power of positive confession. The words you speak become powerful creative forces. This scripture speaks of applying faith to command the mountain to be removed. The extent to which this power reaches and into what kind of context will be examined. III John 2 is used by many promoters of the prosperity gospel to proclaim that health and prosperity are promised to all according to this text. Proper exegetical exposition of this text within the greater context of all 14 verses will give a fuller understanding of why John made the statement “above all things” as giving priority to the health and wealth wish. Romans 4:17 is another key text to

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<sup>23</sup> William DeArteaga, *Quenching the Spirit: Examining Centuries of Opposition to the Moving of the Holy Spirit* (Altamonte Springs, FL: Creation House, 1992), 17

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 288.



the prosperity gospel. The Abrahamic covenant is spoken about in this text and the famed statement “and calleth those things which be not as though they were.” This is important in examining the Abrahamic covenant and the implication of the power to create with the power of the tongue. This text will be exegeted in Chapter Four. Genesis 22:18 and later 26:4 are used to explain the foundation of the Abrahamic covenant teaching. In the New Testament the Abrahamic covenant is referenced in Galatians 3:7-9 and in Galatians 3:14. These are commonly referenced scriptures in validating the Abrahamic covenant teaching.

The atonement is the hinge upon which much of the healing teaching is based. Examples of this teaching is Fred Price,<sup>25</sup> Jerry Savelle,<sup>26</sup> and Kenneth Copeland.<sup>27</sup> The scriptures are replete with references to the atonement; for instance, Matthew 20:28; John 1:29; Romans 4:25; I Corinthians 15:3; Galatians 1:4; I John 2:2. These scriptures are specific in stating that Jesus atoned for all our sins. The following scriptures however focus on healing of the body; Acts 12:28; I Corinthians 12:28; James 5:14-16. Additionally II Corinthians 8:9 speaks of spiritual riches through the atonement but is popular among prosperity advocates to imply also material riches and physical health. There are many more scriptures that defend the belief in healing but the question that needs to be answered is whether this is a promise for all to be healed in every circumstance as is commonly taught within the word of faith movement.

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<sup>25</sup> Fred Price. *Is Healing for All* (Tulsa, OK: Harrison House, 1976), 20

<sup>26</sup> Jerry Savelle, *If Satan Can't Still Your Joy* (Tulsa, OK: Harrison House, 1982), 9-10.

<sup>27</sup> Kenneth Copeland, (West Coast Believer's Convention: Audio recording, 1991).

## Summary

This project has plotted a course to explore the origins of the word of faith movement and determined from this search that there is a common catharsis of assessments of the movement that it is traced to the teachings of Essek William Kenyon who was influenced by cultic teachings of mind science. From a formulation of these teachings into a theology of health and wealth a foundation was laid that would influence the early theological assertions of the word of faith movement. A second observation from the literature review reveals many of the key components of the movement. A third element that is derived from this search deals with the critical analysis of noted authors who help to challenge the biblical premise of the most prominent teachings of the movement. Assessment takes to task the lack of scholarly and proper hermeneutics in using scripture to support many of the beliefs. This thesis presents examples of proper exegesis that will guide readers away from fringe teachings that have distorted the intended meaning of biblical texts. The conclusion offers suggestions to help counsel those who have been damaged spiritually, emotionally, and financially by the acceptance of false teachings

## CHAPTER TWO

### HISTORICAL REVIEW OF THE PROSPERITY GOSPEL MOVEMENT

#### **Chapter Introduction**

Early in the review a general consensus becomes clear that the origins of the movement may be traced to a specific individual. Various writers document the source of the word of faith doctrine to Essek William Kenyon. The teachings of this individual will be defined and discussed within this chapter. Included are the major leaders that emerged. 1980 is a natural chronological date that separates the earlier founders of the movement from the more contemporary promoters. Previous to that date this writer's research did not surface an abundance of scholarly writing; however, from 1980 until the present much more focus with voluminous detail is given to writing about the word of faith movement. Multiple resources have been documented that will be helpful in doing a detailed assessment of selected teachings in a latter chapter. This chapter attempts to provide a fair sampling of these works, but to exhaust all of the available sources is outside the parameters of time and space for this project. To this end, this chapter provides a historical review tracing the movement from Phineas Parkhurst Quimby, Essek W. Kenyon, Kenneth Hagin, Sr., Kenneth Copeland, Oral Roberts, and some of the contemporary prosperity gospel evangelists. Included are references to more contemporary leaders of the word of faith movement such as Jim Bakker and the PTL Club, including the subsequent scandal that followed, as well as his defrocking and imprisonment. In addition, a review of Jimmy Swaggart, Benny Hinn, and Paula White is followed by a review of Paul and Jan Crouch and the CBN network along with other familiar personalities. Finally, a summary of the research and important findings concludes this chapter.

## Overview of the Word of Faith Movement

An important observation to consider when tracing the origins and following the development of the doctrinal beliefs of the prosperity gospel is that it is personality driven. The doctrinal derivatives were formulated by an individual personality then passed down to a mentor who picked up on the original teachings of the predecessor and added to it personal interpretations, revelations, and perspectives. Unlike the sacred canon which had a defining closure the prosperity gospel lies wide open for expansion and additional interpretation, functioning somewhat in a “Wikipedia” fashion of expanding information. A search of the historical roots then is of necessity a perusal of personality driven proponents.

The prosperity gospel or word of faith movement in the United States is largely associated with popular figures such as Kenneth E. Hagin, Kenneth Copeland, and Frederick K. C. Price, who teach that believers should "claim their inheritance" as children of God by using carefully articulated prayers as "positive" or "faith" confessions.<sup>1</sup> Today, the word of faith movement is a global phenomenon. A 2006 study from the Pew Research Center indicates that more than three-quarters (78%) of self-described Pentecostals and Charismatics in the United States, Latin America, Africa, and Asia affirm that "God will grant material prosperity to all believers who have enough faith."<sup>2</sup> What began as an obscure movement in the U.S. has now become a global phenomenon. The origins of the word of faith movement can be traced to two seminal ministers in particular, Phineas Quimby and Essek W. Kenyon, who are discussed in the following sections.

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<sup>1</sup> Christopher A. Stephenson, “Proclaiming the Mystery of Faith Together: Toward Greater Common Witness between Pentecostals and Roman Catholics on the Lord's Supper,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 48, No. 1 (Winter 2013): 85.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

## Significant Figures

### Phineas P. Quimby

Phineas P. Quimby had an unequivocal influence upon Essek Kenyon who is often credited to be the founder of the word of faith movement. Therefore in order to accurately trace the origins of the word of faith doctrines one must begin with the source from which the founder based his fundamental teachings. The following is a brief biographical snapshot of Phineas P Quimby (1802 – 1866). Some scholars researching the word of faith movement credit Phineas P Quimby as the founding father of the mind over matter word of faith phenomena. Dr. J. Lee Grady writer for charisma magazine in his book *The Holy Spirit Is Not For Sale* further confirms this origin of word of faith.<sup>3</sup> During his career from 1847 until his death on January 16th, 1866, Phineas Quimby was committed to healing the sick.<sup>4</sup> In late 1859, Quimby launched his operations at the International House Hotel in the city of Portland, Maine. His youngest son, George Albert Quimby, worked as his office clerk. Additional secretarial services were supplied by two of his new patients, the sisters Emma and Sarah Ware. Dr. Quimby, as he was now known, treated over 12,000 patients during those years.<sup>5</sup> Most notable were Warren Felt Evans, a practitioner and author of mental healing; Julius and Annetta (Seabury) Dresser, early organizers of New Thought; and Mary M. Patterson (Mary Baker Eddy), of the Christian Science movement.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> J. Lee Grady, *The Holy Spirit is Not For Sale: Rekindling the Power of God in an Age of Compromise*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Chosen Books, a Division of Baker Publishing Group, 2010)

<sup>4</sup> Paul P. Reuben, "Chapter 4: American Transcendentalism: An Introduction." PAL: Perspectives in American Literature- A Research and Reference Guide. (July 13, 1998), 37.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

Horatio W. Dresser, son of Annetta Julius Dresser, explained Quimby's ideas in a seven element list.

The omnipresent Wisdom, the warm, loving Father of us all, Creator of all the universe, whose works are good, whose substance is an invisible reality.

The real man, whose life is eternal in the invisible kingdom of God, whose senses are spiritual and function independently of matter.

The visible world, which Dr. Quimby once characterized as "the shadow of Wisdom's amusements"; that is, nature is only the outward projection or manifestation of an inward activity far more real and enduring.

Spiritual matter, or fine interpenetrating substance, directly responsive to thought and subconsciously embodying in the flesh the fears, beliefs, hopes, errors, and joys of the mind.

Disease is due to false reasoning in regard to sensations, which man unwittingly develops by impressing wrong thoughts and mental pictures upon the subconscious spiritual matter.

As disease is due to false reasoning, so health is due to knowledge of the truth. To remove disease permanently, it is necessary to know the cause, the error which led to it. "The explanation is the cure."

To know the truth about life is therefore the sovereign remedy for all ills. This truth Jesus came to declare. Jesus knew how he cured and Dr. Quimby, without taking any credit to himself as a discoverer, believed that he understood and practiced the same great truth or science.<sup>7</sup>

Medical practitioners today recognize the power of suggestion in influencing people to behave in ways they might not otherwise.<sup>8</sup> "Quimby's ability to cure the sick appears to be directly related to his charismatic and mesmerizing personality. In its simplest application, Quimby's teaching was hypnotic. He used the power of suggestion to those in the hypnotic state. He did not write prescriptions for his many clients because he claimed they were only a placebo

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<sup>7</sup> Reuben, "Chapter 4: American Transcendentalism," 37.

<sup>8</sup> "The power of suggestion: What we expect influences our behavior, for better or worse," *Science Daily* (June 6, 2012).

that could do no good or harm.”<sup>9</sup> Though he claimed to be a Bible reader he professed no religious commitment nor did he perform any religious practices in his treatment of patients such as prayer, use of scripture texts or laying on of hands. He simply used hypnosis and mind over matter to allegedly heal.<sup>10</sup>

When considering his methods of healing it is not easily identified with the word of faith practices; however, close observation will reveal them as having influence on the formation of thinking regarding mind over matter. The following is a consideration of that belief as it is contextualized into the thinking of the word of faith origins. In summary, Quimby is seen influencing the formative beliefs of the word of faith adherents. He believed in positive confession, mind over matter, and a conviction that all sickness came as a result of improper thinking. His method became a strategy of treating the sick and infirm by a process of leading the sick into a transformation of thoughts of wellness. He believed that man is a part of God. He was negative toward organizational religion but he lived in revelation knowledge that happiness or misery is determined already according to your beliefs. He believed in the power of the spoken word and that man is a type of god. Considering all the similarities it is relatively easy to draw the conclusion that he and not Essek Kenyon or Kenneth Hagin, Sr. is the true father of the word of faith movement.

One of the foundational thoughts upon which the word of faith movement is formed is the creative power of words. In other words the New Thought of Phineas Quimby gave structure to the belief that was espoused by Essek Kenyon that man was gifted with the power to create by the power of the tongue. This would become a foundation stone upon which Essek

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<sup>9</sup> Horatio W. Dresser, *A History of the New Thought Movement* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company Publishers, 1919) pp.31-32.

<sup>10</sup> Reuben, “Chapter 4: American Transcendentalism,” 37-38

Kenyon, Kenneth Hagin and Kenneth Copeland and others would build their kingdom of faith. The claim that the teachings of Essek W. Kenyon can be traced to the teachings of Phinehas Quimby is substantiated by irrefutable evidence. This will become clear as one takes a closer look into the teachings of Essek Kenyon.

### Essek William Kenyon

The person who has wide acceptance today as being the founder of the word of faith movement and who set forth many of the original teachings of the word of faith movement is Essek W. Kenyon.<sup>11</sup> “Alternatively referred to as “the prosperity gospel,” “name it, claim it,” or “positive confession theology,”<sup>12</sup> prosperity theology maintains that God is obligated by the promises made in scripture to provide material blessings. Although accounts of its origins differ, this doctrine is generally traced to E. W. Kenyon, but it may have its roots in New Thought metaphysical ideas, the notion that anything from health to abundance was available simply through the proper disposition of the mind.<sup>13</sup> He was very influential in laying the foundation for the growth of the word of faith movement; however, it is noteworthy to observe that he was influenced by some of the teachings that were well circulated by the time he began.<sup>14</sup> Upon reviewing his writings, it becomes irrefutable that he was influenced by those persuasions; nevertheless, while it is clear that Kenyon had a significant impact on the modern word of faith

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<sup>11</sup> Dale H. Simmons, *E.W.Kenyon and the Postbellum Pursuit of Peace, Power and Plenty*. Lanham. MD :Scarecrow Press, 1996. In this volume Simmons gives a thorough biography of E W. Kenyon.

<sup>12</sup> David C. Jones, “The Bankruptcy of the Prosperity Gospel:An Exercise in Biblical and Theological Ethics,” website: Bible. Org. <https://bible.org/article/bankruptcy-prosperity-gospel-exercise-biblical-and-theological-ethics>.

<sup>13</sup> Randall Balmer, *Encyclopedia of Evangelicalism* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2004), 562.

<sup>14</sup> Stanley M. Burgess and Eduard M. van der Mass, eds., *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, Positive Confession Theology Rev. ed., Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2003. Kindle edition.



movement, he is a relatively obscure character in American religious history. For example, Walton emphasizes that, “In fact, were it not for Daniel McConnell's *A Different Gospel*, which proves that the professed founder of the word of faith movement, Kenneth E. Hagin Sr., plagiarized entire sections of Kenyon's theological writings, Kenyon would have probably remained hidden in the shadow of the movement he helped to construct.”<sup>15</sup>

Essek W. Kenyon (1867-1948) converted to Christianity during his adolescence and first preached in a Methodist church when he was nineteen years old.<sup>16</sup> According to one biographer, “Given that Kenyon was born in 1867 and raised during the rapidly expanding industrial revolution, his health-and-wealth orientation makes him a product of his time. The cultural atmosphere was one of anxiety, greed, optimism, and despair.”<sup>17</sup> Indeed, Kenyon’s entire career was shaped by an overarching conviction in the prosperity gospel. For instance, following his enrollment at Boston’s Emerson College in 1892, he learned about the New Thought movement which heavily influenced his subsequent doctrinal thinking concerning Christianity. After a transition from Methodism to the Baptist faith, Kenyon became an itinerant evangelist and later established the Bethel Bible Institute.<sup>18</sup>

During the early 1920s, Kenyon moved to California where he made friends with Aimee Semple McPherson. Following a brief tenure as a Baptist minister in Pasadena, Kenyon moved to Los Angeles where he founded an independent church. In 1931, he moved to Seattle where he

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<sup>15</sup> Jonathan L. Walton, *Watch This! The Ethics and Aesthetics of Black Televangelism* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 97.

<sup>16</sup> “Charismatic Roots.” *Seeking 4 Truth*, Paul P. Reuben. "Chapter 4: American Transcendentalism: An Introduction." PAL: Perspectives in American Literature- A Research and Reference Guide. (July 13, 1998). Accessed on 3/5/2015.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Balmer, *Encyclopedia of Evangelicalism*, 380.

founded the New Covenant Baptist Church as well as a radio program, “Kenyon's Church of the Air.”<sup>19</sup>

In each of these settings, Kenyon’s message was consistent with respect to the health-and-wealth orientation.<sup>20</sup> Basing his theology on scripture, Kenyon’s message is straightforward and clear. For instance, in his book, *Two Kinds of Faith*, the chapter entitled “Things That Belong to Us,” Kenyon provides the following guidance:

The believer does not need to ask the Father to heal him when he is sick, because ‘Surely he hath borne our sickness and carried our diseases; yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God and afflicted.’ God laid our diseases on Jesus. Isaiah 53:10 states that it pleased Jehovah to make Him sick with our sicknesses so that by His stripes we are healed. If we are healed then we do not need to pray for our healing. All we need to do is rebuke the enemy in Jesus' Name, order him to leave our bodies, and thank the Father for perfect healing. It is all so simple.<sup>21</sup>

Despite the simplicity of the message and being one of the first-movers in the word of faith movement with a radio program, Kenyon remained fairly obscure during his life and it was not until after his death in 1948 that his concepts concerning faith and healing received substantive attention from the religious community. Part of this increased attention was due to the numerous texts he had published (*Jesus the Healer* received the most attention) that were reviewed by a number of independent Pentecostal evangelists, including most especially Kenneth Hagin and Kenneth Copeland. These and like-minded evangelists have used Kenyon's belief that

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<sup>19</sup> Balmer, *Encyclopedia of Evangelicalism*, 380.

<sup>20</sup> Jonathon L. Walton, *Watch This!*, 98.

<sup>21</sup> Essek Kenyon, “*Things That Belong To Us*,” in *Two Kinds of Faith: Faith’s Secret Revealed*, (Lynnwood, WA: Kenyon’s Gospel Publishing, 1989),

God will provide health and wealth to the faithful<sup>22</sup> in ways that have been exploitive of ones who are the most vulnerable. The movement had been given roots and found in the next personality to be discussed the acceleration to a new dimension not realized up to this point.

### Kenneth Hagin, Sr.

Born prematurely in McKinney, Texas, Kenneth Hagin (1917— 2003) was a sickly child who became a Christian at the age of fifteen while still bedridden from illness.<sup>23</sup> After reading Mark 11:24 “What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye shall receive them, and ye shall have them.”<sup>24</sup> Hagin came to believe in the power of divine healing and began receiving visions. When he was just seventeen, Hagin claimed his first healing and started his ministry at a Roland, Texas Baptist church. Hagin became interested in Pentecostalism, and by mid-1937 had started speaking in tongues, an event that he interpreted as being a divine blessing on his ministry.<sup>25</sup> According to Hank Hannegraff he was “excommunicated from the Southern Baptist in 1937.”<sup>26</sup> During the decade from 1937 to 1947, Hagin was an Assemblies of God minister in East Texas serving small congregations prior to becoming an itinerant evangelist.<sup>27</sup>

In 1962, Hagin founded the Kenneth E. Hagin Evangelistic Association which was later renamed Kenneth Hagin Ministries, Inc., gradually ending his relationship with the Assemblies of God.<sup>28</sup> By 1966, Hagin was ready to expand his religious operations further and moved to

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<sup>22</sup> Balmer, *Encyclopedia of Evangelicalism*, 315.

<sup>23</sup> Balmer, *Encyclopedia of Evangelicalism*, 315.

<sup>24</sup> Mark 11:24, (KJV).

<sup>25</sup> Balmer, *Encyclopedia of Evangelicalism*, 315.

<sup>26</sup> Hank Hanegraff, *Christianity in Crisis: 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Nashville TN: Thomas Nelson, 2009): 20.

<sup>27</sup> Balmer, *Encyclopedia of Evangelicalism*, 315.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 315.

Tulsa, Oklahoma where he launched the Faith Seminar of the Air radio ministry, established The Word of Faith magazine and, in 1974, the Rhema Correspondence Bible School in Broken Arrow, Oklahoma, an affluent suburb of Tulsa, next to the Rhema Bible Church.<sup>29</sup> Each year, Rhema students celebrate the Christmas season with a spectacular light display on their Broken Arrow campus that attracts hundreds of thousands of visitors from the Greater Tulsa Metropolitan Area as well as surrounding states. The event is also featured on local limousine tours and attendance is completely free of charge, although student volunteers accept donations from appreciative visitors. More than anyone before him he had given notoriety and promotional recognition to the teaching that would now continue to spread.

#### Kenneth Copeland

Like Kenneth Hagin, Kenneth Copeland teaches that the faithful should "claim their inheritance" as children of God through the use of specially designed prayers that serve as "positive" or "faith" confessions.<sup>30</sup> Both Kenneth Copeland and his wife, Gloria, as well as Creflo A. and Taffi Dollar, Paula White, Benny Hinn, Joyce Meyer, and Bishop Eddie Long were investigated by Senator Charles Grassley (Republican-Iowa) in 2007 in response to charges that ministry funds were being misallocated to support the lavish lifestyles of these religious leaders which would violate their religious organization tax-exempt status.<sup>31</sup> Although Senator Grassley's investigation was focused on these six ministries, it affected the reputation of the

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<sup>29</sup> Balmer, *Encyclopedia of Evangelicalism*, 315.

<sup>30</sup> Christopher A. Stephenson, "Proclaiming the Mystery of Faith Together: Toward Greater Common Witness between Pentecostals and Roman Catholics on the Lord's Supper," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*.48, No. 1 (June 2011), 85.

<sup>31</sup> Denis J. Bekkering, "From 'Televangelist' to 'Intervangelist': The Emergence of the Streaming Video Preacher," *Journal of Religion and Popular Culture*, 23, No. 2 (July 2011), 101.

entire word of faith movement. The investigation, though, was hampered by the fact that word of faith ministries are not required to report their financial transaction details due to their tax-exempt status, a status that the senator challenged based on widespread reports of financial abuse of ministry funds.<sup>32</sup>

In response to these charges, Kenneth Copeland was only one of two organizations (Joyce Meyer was the other) that provided the financial information requested by Senator Grassley.<sup>33</sup> He went on to conduct a vigorous public relations campaign that was intended to buoy declining public opinion concerning his ministry and opulent lifestyle.<sup>34</sup> For instance, Copeland dispatched his son, John, to defend the Copeland ministry in an interview on Dallas television in June 2008. In the interview, Copeland's son "defended his parents' huge mansion, private jet and other trappings of wealth"<sup>35</sup> and countered that the investigation was misplaced. The younger Copeland, who serves as the chief executive officer of the Kenneth Copeland Ministries, asked the interviewer, "Where in the Bible does it say you should have watchdogs and judgment groups that watch over ministries?" and added, "How can you reach the world if you don't have money to do it?"<sup>36</sup>

Moreover, John Copeland addressed charges that the ministry was misusing funds by explaining that ministry partners specifically provided the funds for a private jet for Copeland's use. According to the younger Copeland's interview account, "They gave money towards that jet

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<sup>32</sup> Catherine A. Brekus and W. Clark Gilpin, *American Christianities: A History of Dominance and Diversity* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 300.

<sup>33</sup> Jonathan L. Walton, "Tax-Exempt? Lifestyles of the Rich and Religious," *The Christian Century* 125 (January 29, 2008), 13.

<sup>34</sup> "Prosperity Gospel' Minister Steps Up War of Words with Republican Senator." *Church & State* 61, No. 7 (July-August 2008), 19.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

to buy it. Yes, I do believe that. A lot of people may see that as a luxurious lifestyle, but when you hit 19 countries in 12 months, what are you going to do that with? The jet is a tool. It's just a tool to use in ministry.”<sup>37</sup> When the younger Copeland was queried concerning the lifestyles of other religious leaders who reject material wealth, he made it clear that Kenneth Copeland Ministries believed otherwise. According to the younger Copeland, “There's a lot of doctrine that teaches that you're not a good Christian unless you're poor. But, that's not our doctrine. That's not what we believe.”<sup>38</sup> In addition, John defended his parents’ palatial 18,000-square-foot home by emphasizing that the espoused prosperity gospel would make it hypocritical for them to live otherwise. Based on their prosperity gospel convictions, John stated that, “It would be kind of silly [to] put your pastor in a 2,000 square foot house. Yes, it's larger than the average person's home. It's a nice home. I'm not going to argue that.”<sup>39</sup> Although all six ministries were cleared of wrongdoing by the Grassley inquiry, the damage had been done to the reputation of the prosperity gospel messengers. In addition, two ministries (Joyce Meyer Ministries and Benny Hinn Ministries) made changes in the manner in which they govern their ministries or set compensation as a result of the investigation.<sup>40</sup>

Notwithstanding their tax-exempt status, these defenses are part of a growing trend on the part of televangelists to analogize their operations to those of major corporations. For instance, Walton points out that, “Aside from selectively quoting the Bible in order to justify their lifestyles, televangelists have become particularly adept at latching their social identities onto the cultural mores of the business world. The argument is essentially this: if it is all right for Donald

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<sup>37</sup> “‘Prosperity Gospel’ Minister Steps Up War of Words with Republican Senator.” *Church & State* 61, No. 7 (July-August 2008), 20.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> Rachel Zoll, “Televangelists escape penalty in Senate inquiry” NBC News. Accessed February 3, 2015..

Trump to live in luxury as the CEO of his own company, how can it be problematic for those who head multimillion-dollar ministries to do so?”<sup>41</sup> The fact remains, however, that the lavish lifestyles of many religious leaders is problematic for critics who argue that televangelists are not held to the same level of accountability as their private sector counterparts, an issue that was especially salient for the Oral Roberts Ministries discussed in the following section.

### Oral Roberts

One of the most well-known evangelists of the word of faith movement is Oral Roberts. His impassioned tent crusades were broadcast in black-and-white on local television in Tulsa, Oklahoma in the early 1950s, and the countless cures attributed to his interventions helped propel him to national and then global fame. In fact, when NBC began broadcasting his tent crusades in 1954, Roberts became the second evangelist to appear on television (the first was Rex Humbard who preceded him by a few months)<sup>42</sup> In 1967, Roberts launched a 30-minute television program that aired on Sundays, and just 10 years later it was the top-rated religious television program in the country reaching more than one million, one hundred thousand American households.<sup>43</sup>

Originally ordained by the Pentecostal Holiness Church, Roberts later became a member of the United Methodist Church in 1968 but severed his ties in 1987.<sup>44</sup> According to one biographer, “To millions, Roberts's name was synonymous with faith healer, though it was a

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<sup>41</sup> Walton, *Watch This!*, 13.

<sup>42</sup> “Pioneer Televangelist Oral Roberts Dies at 91,” *The Christian Century* 127, No. 1 (January 12, 2010), 14.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> David Edwin Harrell, Jr., *Oral Roberts: An American Life*, (Indiana University Press, 1985): 295.

term Roberts himself disliked, saying, ‘God heals--I don't.’”<sup>45</sup> Harvard theologian, Harvey Cox, described the impact that Roberts had on the word of faith movement: “Before Roberts came on the scene, the idea of healing within a religious service was left to Christian Scientists or people who went to Lourdes. Now, it's fairly common in churches across the board. In his own way, he made that happen.”<sup>46</sup> A Pentecostal historian, Vinson Synan, maintains that Roberts was among the most important Christian leaders during the latter half of the 20th century and points out that, “Roberts was widely loved for bringing Pentecostals, once derided as ‘holy rollers’ for their spirit-filled worship and speaking in tongues, into the mainstream.”<sup>47</sup>

Part of Roberts’s modern legacy is a series of inspirational books he wrote over the years. Especially noteworthy were his earlier works written prior to his independent ministry, including: *Salvation by the Blood* (1938) and *The Drama of the End-Time* (1941).<sup>48</sup> According to one biographer, “Probably the most important book ever written by Roberts was the small volume which he used to launch his healing ministry: *If You Need Healing -- Do These Things!* (1947).”<sup>49</sup> Originally published in May 1947, the book was revised several times over the years, eventually selling millions of copies.<sup>50</sup>

In 1961, Roberts announced that he had received a message from God to build a university in Tulsa. Following the announcement, many local residents expected a small Bible college to be

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<sup>45</sup> David Edwin Harrell, Jr., *Oral Roberts: An American Life*, (Indiana University Press, 1985): 295.

<sup>46</sup> “Pioneer Televangelist Oral Roberts Dies at 91,” *The Christian Century* 127, No. 1 (January 12, 2010),14.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid

<sup>48</sup> David Edwin Harrell, Jr., *Oral Roberts: An American Life* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1985), 500.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 501.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.



constructed; however, the reality was a futuristic appearing 4-year liberal arts university complete with a prayer tower (see Figure 1 above) which was opened in 1965.<sup>51</sup>

By the 1970s, the Oral Roberts Ministry began drawing on the doctrine of seed-faith to solicit contributions using various marketing techniques such as coupon booklets and token “gifts” the ministry sent its donors.<sup>52</sup> In January 1987, Roberts made international news when he announced that his followers must help him raise \$8 million by March 31 in order to save the medical research center and hospital at Oral Roberts University, or “God would call him home,” claiming that a 900-foot tall image of Jesus had appeared to him.<sup>53</sup> The announcement worked and the medical facilities at the university were saved. In January 2008, after years of declining enrollment and morale and amid charges of lavish lifestyles for Roberts’ son, Richard Roberts and his family, just six days following the forced resignation of Richard Roberts as president, the Oral Roberts University unanimously accepted more than \$62 million from Mart Green and his family, founders of chain stores Hobby Lobby and Mardel. A press release from the donating family’s representative, Mart Green, reported that, “We stand together today knowing the future of ORU is strong.”<sup>54</sup> Oral Roberts remained in his capacity as the chancellor of ORU and was also named a lifetime trustee<sup>55</sup> until his death at the age of 91 in Newport Beach of complications due to pneumonia.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> “Pioneer Televangelist Oral Roberts Dies at 91,” 14.

<sup>52</sup> Harrell, *Oral Roberts*, 501.

<sup>53</sup> John W. Anderson, “A Heavenly Home for TV Preachers,” *The Nation* 246, No. 10 (March 12, 1988), 388.

<sup>54</sup> “ORU Accepts Donation,” *New Direction* (2008). Accessed February 2, 2015.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> “Pioneer Televangelist Oral Roberts Dies at 91,” 14.

### Jim Bakker and PTL

Today, Jim Bakker is the host of a daily hour-long television program broadcast from a 700-acre complex in Blue Eye, Missouri that airs throughout North America as well as other parts of the world.<sup>57</sup> According to Bakker's Web site, "God is blessing this ministry as people are being saved and healed from this beautiful 700 acres in the Ozark Hills."<sup>58</sup>

Many observers marvel that Bakker has managed to resurrect his ministry following the scandals that marked his Praise the Lord Club. Jim and Tammy Bakker's "Praise the Lord" or PTL Club is described by Collum as "a fundamentalist hybrid of Johnny Carson and Oprah, best remembered for Tammy's frequent bouts of on-air weeping and the damage these did to her monumental eye makeup."<sup>59</sup> The Bakkers were originally itinerant evangelists who specialized in puppet shows for children's ministries, and Jim was ordained in the Assemblies of God Church. The Bakker's fortunes improved in 1965 when Pat Robertson hired them to perform on his newly launched Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN).<sup>60</sup> According to one biographer, The Jim and Tammy Show became popular with viewers, and Jim Bakker's tearful pleas for money produced a flood of contributions."<sup>61</sup>

By the early 1980s, the Bakkers were experiencing significant success with their televised productions and had an audience and donors in the millions and even launched a Christian-themed resort until their house of religious cards collapsed for all to see.<sup>62</sup> According

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<sup>57</sup> "About Us," *The Jim Bakker Show*. Accessed February 2, 2015, <http://jimbakkershow.com/about-us/>.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Danny D. Collum, "An Apostle to the Hip: These Are the Anti-Megachurches," *Sojourners Magazine* 36, No. 4 (April 2007), 54.

<sup>60</sup> Balmer, *Encyclopedia of Evangelicalism*, 51.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Collum, "An Apostle to the Hip," 55.

to one biographer, “The Bakker empire crashed and burned when the public discovered that Jim Bakker had committed adultery with a church secretary, Jessica Hahn, and used PTL money to buy her silence.”<sup>63</sup> In response to these allegations, Bakker resigned as chairman of PTL on March 19, 1987 and reported that “a ‘hostile force’ was threatening him with blackmail in order to take over his religious empire.”<sup>64</sup> It was subsequently revealed that the “hostile force” in question was Jimmy Swaggart, who characterized Bakker as a “pretty-boy preacher” and called him a “cancer on the body of Christ.”<sup>65</sup>

Although the charge of adultery was a civil matter, the ministry money that was used to buy the secretary’s complicity was a criminal issue. In this regard, Collum reports that, “When the feds opened the books, they found other misuses of donor money, and Jim Bakker went to jail. Tammy divorced him and their young son, Jay went down the rabbit hole of drugs and alcohol.”<sup>66</sup> This high-profile incident led to widespread public disapproval of televangelists, and many ministries experienced a drop in viewership and membership as a result.<sup>67</sup> Others attempted to salvage what they could of the PTL Club by turning its operation over to a fellow televangelist, Jerry Falwell, but another televangelist, John Ankerberg, put the nail in the PTL’s coffin when he announced that Bakker was also bisexual.<sup>68</sup>

This outcome was all the more ironic given the praise that was heaped on Bakker and his ministry by other televangelists prior to the attempted tryst with Hahn. For instance, at one point in his career, in an introduction to one of Bakker’s books, Oral Roberts said of Bakker: “Jim is

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<sup>63</sup> Collum, “An Apostle to the Hip,” 55.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Bekkering, “From ‘Televangelist’ to ‘Intervangelist,’” 101.

<sup>68</sup> Balmer, *Encyclopedia of Evangelicalism*, 52.

down on greed” and cited Bakker’s assertions that, “Too many people have made gold their god.... Our dividend is not dollars, it's souls. We are placing souls into the bank of Heaven, and that's where our dollars and cents are. That's where our profit lies--in souls. Souls, souls, souls.”<sup>69</sup> This message was reinforced by a picture of a sobbing Jim Bakker as he was “overwhelmed by God’s goodness,” but Gardner suggests that, “More likely he is overwhelmed by the amount of gold he is putting into earthly banks.”<sup>70</sup>

These events were highly publicized in the national media, including the television programs Good Morning America and Nightline as well as cover stories in Newsweek and Time. Although televangelists such as John Copeland have succeeded in justifying their opulent lifestyles by analogizing their roles with those of the heads of large corporations, the Bakkers were less successful in this regard. For instance, Balmer reports that, “The Bakkers' lifestyle of conspicuous consumption—gold-plated bathroom fixtures, Rolls Royces, air-conditioned doghouses—soon came to light, along with a salary and bonus package that exceeded a million dollars annually, all while Heritage and PTL sank deeper and deeper into debt.”<sup>71</sup> The PTL fortunes were further imperiled when the Internal Revenue Service initiated an investigation following their petition for bankruptcy, and the Assemblies of God Church dismissed Bakker due to his sexual misconduct.<sup>72</sup>

Bakker stood trial in 1989 for financial improprieties surrounding PTL and Heritage USA. He was convicted and initially sentenced to forty-five years in prison, a sentence later reduced to eight years, of which he served five. While in prison, Bakker renounced his prosperity

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<sup>69</sup> Martin Gardner, “Oral Roberts on Jim Bakker,” *Free Inquiry* 14, No. 3 (Summer 1994), 15.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> Balmer, *Encyclopedia of Evangelicalism*, 52.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

theology. “I began to look up all the Scriptures used in prosperity teaching, such as ‘Give and it shall be given unto you,’ he recalled in a 1998 interview. “When I put that Scripture back into its context, I found Christ was teaching on forgiveness, not on money. He was teaching us that by the same measure that we forgive, we will be forgiven.”<sup>73</sup> In addition, Bakker also noted, “I believe the harlot of the book of Revelation is materialism.”<sup>74</sup>

During his incarceration, Bakker was divorced by Tammy Faye who remarried in October 1993. Following his release from prison in 1994, Bakker moved to Charlotte, North Carolina where he became involved with Samaritan’s Purse. In late 1998, Bakker also remarried and moved to what he described as “the ghetto of Los Angeles” to work with various street ministries until his move to Branson and then Blue Eye, Missouri where he ministers today.<sup>75</sup>

### Jimmy Swaggart

Jimmy Lee Swaggart was born in 1935 and remains one of the more colorful individuals to emerge during the period of twentieth century evangelicalism. Born in Ferriday, Louisiana to two Assembly of God evangelistic parents, Swaggart began his preaching career at the tender age of six and purportedly experienced a religious conversion and baptism of the Holy Spirit at the age of eight.<sup>76</sup> According to the Jimmy Swaggart Ministry web site, “Ministering the Word under the anointing of the Holy Spirit, he preached to stadiums filled with capacity crowds around the world and, pioneered televangelism through his weekly telecast.”<sup>77</sup> During its heyday

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<sup>73</sup> “The Re-education of Jim Bakker,” *Christianity Today*, (Nov. 7, 1998).

<sup>74</sup> Balmer, *Encyclopedia of Evangelicalism*, 59.

<sup>75</sup> “About Us,” 2.

<sup>76</sup> Balmer, *Encyclopedia of Evangelicalism*, 52.

<sup>77</sup> “A Brief Biography of Jimmy Swaggart,” *Jimmy Swaggart Ministry*. Accessed on 3/02/2015.

during the 1980s, Swaggart's weekly television broadcasts were carried by more than 3,000 television stations and cable networks with an audience estimated at 8 million in the United States and more than half a billion globally. This viewership ranked Swaggart's television programming as the most widespread prosperity gospel ministry in the world.<sup>78</sup>

A high school dropout, part of Swaggart's popularity is attributable to his singing and musical abilities that he shares with two well-known and talented cousins, Mickey Gilley and the Jerry Lee Lewis.<sup>79</sup> In fact, Swaggart has recorded a number of gospel music releases during his career.<sup>80</sup> Although he was initially denied, Swaggart was ultimately ordained by the Assemblies of God in 1961.<sup>81</sup> Perhaps it would not be preposterous to question whether his famous cousin, Jerry Lee Lewis, helped to bolster his ministry. The royalties from his more than fifty gospel music recordings which have sold over 15 million copies helped to finance Swaggart's radio program, "The Camp Meeting Hour," the success of which prompted Jimmy Swaggart Ministries, Inc. to launch a television program in 1973.<sup>82</sup> During its hayday period during the early 1980s, the Jimmy Swaggart Telecast became the most widely watched gospel program in the world, with millions of viewers and donors. The money generated by the Jimmy Swaggart Telecast then helped to fund further expansions of the Baton Rouge-based ministry, including a printing plant, a recording studio, the Jimmy Swaggart Bible College, a television production center, a church sanctuary, the 7,000-seat Family Worship Center, and a periodical, *The*

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<sup>78</sup> "A Brief Biography of Jimmy Swaggart," *Jimmy Swaggart Ministry*.

<sup>79</sup> J.D. Davis has written a book *Unconquered: The Saga of Cousins Jerry Lee Lewis, Jimmy Swaggart and Mikey Gilley*. The musical influence of each to the other is highlighted.

<sup>80</sup> Balmer, *Encyclopedia of Evangelicalism*, 52.

<sup>81</sup> KnowLA, "Encyclopedia of Louisiana," Jimmy Swaggart. Accessed 9/03/2015.

<sup>82</sup> Balmer, *Encyclopedia of Evangelicalism*, 52.

*Evangelist*.<sup>83</sup> Swaggart's radio program was discontinued in 1981 based on the enormous success of his television broadcasts.<sup>84</sup> The beginning of Swaggart's misfortunes started in 1987 following charges of conspiring to destroy the ministry of a fellow Assemblies of God televangelist, Jim Bakker.

According to Balmer, "Swaggart and his minions leaked news of Bakker's adulterous tryst, but Swaggart himself soon faced accusations of voyeuristic liaisons with a prostitute."<sup>85</sup> Swaggart provided his audience with a tearful confession of his misdeeds in his "I have sinned" speech on February 21, 1988 in a televised broadcast in which he begged for forgiveness.

In response, the Assemblies of God placed a three month restriction on Swaggart's preaching activities (the normal penalty was one year) and Swaggart initially complied with the church's decision for a few weeks. When the penalty was changed to the standard one-year suspension, Swaggart refused to comply. As one biographer points out, "The survival of his empire demanded large influxes of cash from his television program. Defrocked by the Assemblies of God in April 1988, he resumed his telecasts, but this time to sharply diminished ratings. Additional accusations of scandal have whittled his audiences further."<sup>86</sup> Nevertheless, Jimmy Swaggart continues to minister serving as the pastor of Family Worship Center, Baton Rouge, LA in addition to beaming his message around the clock on SBN (SonLight Broadcasting Network).<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Balmer, *Encyclopedia of Evangelicalism*, 52.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>86</sup> Bekkering, "From 'Televangelist' to 'Intervangelist,'" 101.

<sup>87</sup> "Jimmy Swaggart Ministries."

## Benny Hinn

Televangelist Benny Hinn subscribes to the Pentecostal seed-faith tradition championed by Oral Roberts that combines wealth with faith healing. According to the Benny Hinn Ministries' Web site,

Benny Hinn was born on December 3, 1952, in the port city of Jaffa (part of modern Tel Aviv), Israel, where his family had set up residence as immigrants to Palestine from Greece. In 1968, not long after the Six-Day War, he moved with his family to Canada.<sup>88</sup> While attending high school in February 1972 (apparently at age 20 years), Hinn was born again in the Christian faith after praying with some friends. Two years later, Hinn, then suffering from a stutter, reported receiving a vision wherein people were falling into an inferno and heard the divine warning that, "If you do not preach, every soul who falls will be your responsibility!"<sup>89</sup> When he was 22 years old, in 1974 Hinn delivered his first sermon and found that his stuttering had been cured and was convinced of the legitimacy of his mission.<sup>90</sup>

At present, the Benny Hinn Ministries are estimated to generate more than \$100 million a year and Hinn's worldwide "healing crusades" are achieved by means of luxurious transportation and accommodations.<sup>91</sup> As noted above, Hinn was one of the six ministries investigated by Senator Grassley due to his lavish lifestyle. According to one critic, "While Hinn's claims that he can intercede to heal people have made him world famous, people have died at his crusades, or have passed away shortly after attending and being 'healed.'"<sup>92</sup> Hinn has been sued a number of times over the years. One lawsuit filed against Hinn was filed by the family of Ella Peppard.<sup>93</sup> According to Shaffer, "On September 18, 1986, Peppard fell at a Hinn crusade. An usher rushed over to help, but Hinn said, "Leave her alone. God will heal her." Hinn was wrong. Peppard died

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<sup>88</sup> "About Pastor Benny," Benny Hinn Ministries (2015). Accessed February 4, 2015.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> Ryan Shaffer, "Behind Benny Hinn's Healing Crusades," *Skeptic* (Altadena, CA) 14, No. 4 (Winter 2009), 44.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>93</sup> "The Washington Post," Healing Evangelist Sued. (August 29, 1987).



on October 3 from a blood clot, a result of her injuries. Hinn was sued for \$5 million and settled out of court.”<sup>94</sup> “In addition, in May 2000, a 4-month-old infant, Clondin Adhiambo, was presented to Hinn at a healing crusade in Nairobi, Kenya, but the baby grew even sicker and died at the crusade. In 2002, a 42-year old man died and seven others (including a pregnant woman) were injured when more than 2,000 people without tickets tried to slip past security barricades at a sold-out crusade in Manchester, England.”<sup>95</sup> Perhaps an obvious question is, “If Hinn can heal, one wonders, why did he not use the same power to prevent death or heal injuries at his own rallies?”<sup>96</sup>

These high-profile incidents, though, are only some of the tragic outcomes that have resulted from people seeking Hinn’s cures. For example, in 1998, a 39-year-old cancer patient, Joyce Vaughn appeared on stage with Hinn in Australia and convinced of her cure, she terminated her chemotherapy treatments and died a short time later.<sup>97</sup> In 1999, Marcano Siewkumar was hospitalized and died from kidney failure and heart disease despite Hinn’s public assurances that he had been cured.<sup>98</sup> “In 2004, three more people died at a Hinn crusade in Nairobi when they left hospital beds to attend. In addition, ten other attendees were injured, breaking bones after falling out of trees in an effort to get a better view of the evangelist.”<sup>99</sup> As Shaffer points out, “Not one of them was healed by Hinn.”<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Ryan Shaffer, “Behind Benny Hinn's Healing Crusades,” *Skeptic* (Altadena, CA) 14, No. 4 (Winter 2009), 45.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>97</sup> “Beware False Healers,” *Trinidad & Tobago Express* (2000), 4.

<sup>98</sup> Julien Neaves, “Controversy follows TV evangelist,” *Trinidad & Tobago Express* (May 21, 2006), 37.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>100</sup> Shaffer, “Behind Benny Hinn’s Healing Crusades,” 46.

Paradoxically, like many of the prosperity gospel evangelists described in this chapter, Hinn seems like a teflon don in that he manages to come back time and again with this health and wealth message despite these and numerous other high profile lawsuits and setbacks. For instance, Shaffer notes that, “Whether it is his lavish life style, his failed predictions (he claimed Jesus would appear at one of his events in 2000), or his many lawsuits, there is no shortage of controversy surrounding Hinn.”<sup>101</sup> Indeed, several widely publicized accounts of Hinn’s ministries have depicted him in an unfavorable and even fraudulent light, including a documentary director, Antony Thomas, who initially bought in to Hinn's claims. In 2001, Thomas collaborated with Hinn to produce an HBO documentary, “A Question of Miracles,” but despite attending numerous crusades at which claims of miracle cures were made, Thomas was unable to confirm any of them. In an interview with the *New York Times*, Thomas said of his experiences with Hinn, "If I had seen miracles, I would have been happy to trumpet it. ... In retrospect, I think they do more damage to Christianity than the most committed atheist.”<sup>102</sup>

### Eddie Long

Bishop Eddie Long is the pastor of the New Birth Missionary Baptist Church in Lithonia, Georgia, at one point 30,000-member strong.<sup>103</sup> As noted previously, Bishop Long was among the six ministries investigated by the Senator Grassley inquiry. These six prosperity gospel teachers would become known as “the Grassley Six” and were the focus of Grassley’s investigation concerning the manner in which millions of dollars in church donations and federal

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<sup>101</sup> Shaffer, “Behind Benny Hinn’s Healing Crusades,” 46.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>103</sup> Anthony Stanford, *Homophobia in the Black Church: How Faith, Politics, and Fear Divide the Black Community* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2013), 71.

grants had been applied by Bishop Long and the others. Some observers suggest that the inclusion of some of the prosperity gospel ministers as part of the Grassley Six was politically motivated. For instance, Stanford reports that,

Deliberately or otherwise, some of the ministers targeted by Grassley’s investigation had been major supporters of President Bush and longtime Republican supporters, putting Grassley at odds with the Republican Party and powerful Christian Coalition, and from the outset prompting speculation related to the motivation for the inquiry.<sup>104</sup>

In fact, Bishop Long had been an ardent supporter of the Bush administration and Republican agenda for the future of America. In this regard, Stanford adds, “Minority ministers caught up in Grassley’s investigation — Eddie Long and Creflo Dollar — had to some extent also supported the president’s domestic agenda, especially Bishop Long.”<sup>105</sup>

Born in 1953 and married with three children, Bishop Long has also been the focus of a number of high-profile scandals in recent years, including allegations of sexual misconduct with several male teenagers (which he denied but did admit to providing them with financial assistance and gifts). Although the details differ according to the source of the story, the gist of the matter, according to Blake, was as follows: “In 2011, Long settled a lawsuit filed by four young men who accused him of pressuring them into sexual relationships while they were teenagers and members of the congregation. Long denied the allegations. His ministry has never recovered.”<sup>106</sup> In addition, Long has been the target of a lawsuit by members of his church over

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<sup>104</sup> Anthony Stanford, *Homophobia in the Black Church: How Faith, Politics, and Fear Divide the Black Community* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2013), 71.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>106</sup> John Blake, “Reluctant Guide to Investigative Reporting What a Veteran Features Reporter Learned Investigating a Televangelist,” *The IRE Journal* 35, No. 4 (Fall 2012), 28.

investments in a failed multi-million investment and a petition for divorce filed by his wife (which was later retracted).<sup>107</sup>

It would also seem that even when he purports to apply the monies sent to him by his faithful for charitable purposes, this charismatic prosperity gospel leader manages to benefit substantially as well. Indeed, Blake points out that, “Long had created a charity to help the needy, but he became the charity's biggest beneficiary. The charity, Bishop Eddie Long Ministries, Inc., had given him use of a million-dollar home and \$350,000 Bentley automobile, and more than \$1 million in salary over four years, including \$494,000 in 2000.”<sup>108</sup> Taken together, the prosperity gospel has proven lucrative for Bishop Long, just as it has for another popular televangelist, Paula White who is discussed below.

#### Paula White

Currently, Paula White is the senior pastor of New Destiny Christian Center, a non-denominational, spirit-led church located in Apopka, Florida.<sup>109</sup> White’s was one of the four ministries implicated in the above-mentioned Grassley investigation that refused to provide any information for the Senate inquiry.<sup>110</sup> In response to the senator’s requests for financial information, White said she was concerned about the precedent of the Grassley investigation and its chilling effect on the religions community in general and the prosperity gospel community in particular. For instance, according to Walton, “[White] was apprehensive about how it [would]

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<sup>107</sup> Stoyan Zaimov, “Bishop Eddie Long Accused of Abusive Gay Relationship in 'First Lady' Book,” *Christian Post*. Accessed February 8, 2015.

<sup>108</sup> Blake, “Reluctant Guide to Investigative Reporting,” 29.

<sup>109</sup> “Paula White” *Paula White Ministries*. Accessed February 10, 2015.

<sup>110</sup> Adelle M. Banks, “Report Cites Ways for IRS to Curb Lavish Ministries,” *The Christian Century* 130, No. 1 (January 9, 2013), 16.

impact the privacy of ministry supporters as well as the church's protection from governmental interference.”<sup>111</sup>

Born to a middle-class family in Tupelo, Mississippi, in 1966, White became a born-again Christian at age 18.<sup>112</sup> As can be discerned from her promotional picture, White could easily have been a successful fashion model instead of a prosperity gospel preacher. In reality, though, it is conventional for women evangelists to present a sophisticated and elegant appearance to their audiences because this appears to be part of their allure and popularity. For instance, Walton notes that, “It is standard to see women evangelists in sequined outfits, four-inch heels, and custom-fitted ecclesiastical robes. For women with a constant television presence, notable facelifts are not uncommon.”<sup>113</sup>

Paula White stands out as one of the more successful televangelists discussed herein, due to her tendency towards self-deprecation and willingness to discuss her own troubled background as part of her prosperity gospel message. Like many of the other religious figures discussed herein, White is also a television personality and best-selling author. For instance, Lee reports that, “Few spiritual leaders have distinguished themselves with an honest and naked faith more than a self-proclaimed ‘messed-up Mississippi girl,’ Paula White, a best-selling author, noted conference speaker, life coach, and television personality.”<sup>114</sup> The White Ministries have received significant boosts from purportedly helping several celebrity figures, including political and sports figures.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Walton, *Watch This!*, 13.

<sup>112</sup> “Paula White” *Paula White Ministries*. Accessed February 10, 2015.

<sup>113</sup> Walton, *Watch This!*, 82.

<sup>114</sup> Shayne Lee, *Holy Mavericks: Evangelical Innovators and the Spiritual Marketplace* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 110.

<sup>115</sup> Walton, *Watch This!*, 13.

White's rise to prosperity gospel fame occurred quickly by virtue of her televised ministerial programming with the first Paula White Today program airing in December 2001. Just five years later, Paula White Today was carried on nine television networks, including Daystar, Trinity Broadcasting Network, and Black Entertainment Television.<sup>116</sup> Her growing popularity has been attributed to her willingness to discuss her own troubled past and her God-given ability to overcome these constraints. The Paula White Ministries reportedly generated nearly \$40 million in revenues in 2006 alone.<sup>117</sup> During that same year, White began broadcasting her television program to one of the country's largest prisons, the Coleman Federal Correctional Facility in Florida, at the invitation of the prison's chaplain and warden.<sup>118</sup>

Despite her growing popularity, White is not without her critics, especially within the religious community itself. For example, according to Lee, "The lion's share of White's detractors come from the church rather than the secular world. Some Christians often tag her as style over substance, suggesting that her popularity relies on marketing and packaging rather than preaching talent or anointing."<sup>119</sup> There are also a number of online resources devoted to criticizing White's aggressive fund-raising methods and her prosperity gospel message. Moreover, even her gender has been the source of a significant amount of controversy and some critics have resorted to biblical proscriptions against females in the clergy as ammunition against her while others have made lascivious references to her feminine appeal.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> "Orlando The Cities Magazine," Holy High Roller. May 2012. Accessed 3/7/2015.

<sup>118</sup> Walton, *Watch This!*, 13.

<sup>119</sup> Lee, *Holy Mavericks*, 110.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 113.

### Paul and Jan Crouch

In very sharp contrast to the stylish image presented by Paula White, the Crouches in general and Jan in particular are known for their garishness and flamboyance which they parlayed into a multi-million dollar empire. Trinity Broadcasting Network is headquartered in Costa Mesa and has sixteen global television networks operating on 78 satellites, with thousands of cable affiliates worldwide.<sup>121</sup> The main tenet espoused by the Crouches was the, "Have a need? Plant a seed" philosophy, which encouraged donors to "plant a seed" to grow their future wealth. In 2012, TBN reported revenues of \$144.9 million, a decrease of 18 percent from \$176.7 million in 2011.<sup>122</sup> During their tenure with TBN, Jan Crouch was the highest-paid executive at \$416,942 per year and Paul Crouch was the second-highest with \$415,385 per year.<sup>123</sup> Although she was the co-founder of the Trinity Broadcasting Network (TBN), Jan played a relatively minor role in the early years of this ministry. During the 1990s, like Jim Bakker, Paul was also charged with bisexuality when he employed a young lad as chauffeur and reportedly had a sexual relationship with him. As the lawsuits and gag orders proceeded and allegations of payoffs emerged, Jan became a more important actor in the TBN's money-making machine, and she did it her way. Indeed, Jan even publicly acknowledged the pending charges against her embattled husband since she herself was not directly implicated. She underwent a series of changes that were publicly evidenced by a more flamboyant dress and an oversized wig that has been referred to by some critics as the cotton candied pink wig. Her evolution also included some disturbing personality changes as well.

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<sup>121</sup> TBN website. About Us. Accessed September 5, 2015.

<sup>122</sup> Teri Sforza, "About TBN," *Orange County Register*, Accessed February 7, 2015.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

In December 2013, Paul Crouch died, leaving what the *New York Times* described as a dirty legacy. A salient excerpt from the *Times*' obituary for Paul included the following observations:

The [couple's] lavish perquisites, described by [estranged granddaughter and former financial officer Brittany] Koper and corroborated by interviews with two other former TBN employees, include additional, often-vacant homes in Texas and on the former Conway Twitty estate in Tennessee, corporate jets valued at \$8 million and \$49 million each and thousand-dollar dinners with fine wines, paid with tax-exempt funds.<sup>124</sup>

It would seem that Jan's evolution has taken an ever sharper turn into the bizarre after her husband's death. Holding true to the prosperity gospel's "seed-faith" tradition, though, Jan remains focused on leveraging her zany appearance and emotionally charged rhetoric into fresh tithes for her ministry. In fact, she claims that Jesus restored her dead pet chicken to life when she was younger, and convinces her audience that some type of miracle will happen if they just have enough faith to send her money and lots of it.<sup>125</sup> In summary, Jan Crouch continues to prey on the vulnerable with false promises of future riches in exchange for donations to her today.

#### Pat Robertson and the Christian Broadcasting Network

The Christian Broadcasting Network was founded by Marion Gordon "Pat" Robertson in 1960. The network currently enjoys a global audience through popular programming such as "The 700 Club, a "news program anchored by Robertson.<sup>126</sup> In addition, Robertson is also the founder of Regent University, International Family Entertainment Inc., Operation Blessing International Relief and Development Corporation, American Center for Law and Justice, The

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<sup>124</sup> Erik Eckholm, "Family Battle Offers Look Inside Lavish TV Ministry," *The New York Times*, Accessed February 9, 2015.

<sup>125</sup> "Grace To You, Unholy Trinity." December 11, 2009. Accessed September 4, 2015.

<sup>126</sup> John W. Anderson, "A Heavenly Home for TV Preachers," *The Nation* 246, No. 10 (March 12, 1988), 338.



Flying Hospital, Inc. as well as numerous other organizations and broadcast organizations.<sup>127</sup>

Born on March 22, 1930 in Lexington, Virginia, Robertson is the son of a U.S. Representative and Senator and one of his ancestors, Benjamin Harrison, was a signatory to the Declaration of Independence.<sup>128</sup> Further, Robertson is a former Marine officer with a distinguished service record, including a combat tour in Korea. To his credit, Robertson seems to have the intellect to succeed at whatever he attempts. For instance, he was a Phi Beta Kappa in college and beside earning his master of divinity degree in 1959, Robertson also earned a juris doctorate in 1955. To date, Robertson has published 18 books, including titles such as, “Miracles Can Be Yours Today,” “Courting Disaster,” “The Ten Offenses,” “Bring It On,” “Six Steps To Revival,” and “The Turning Tide.”<sup>129</sup>

Like other clergy discussed in this chapter, Robertson has experienced his fair share of criticisms. For instance, Anderson reports that, “In October 1987, Republican presidential candidate and former head of the Christian Broadcasting Network Pat Robertson admitted to misinforming the public about when he was married, to cover the fact that his child was conceived out of wedlock.”<sup>130</sup> Furthermore, Robertson has been castigated in the mainstream press for his outspoken ultraconservative views, and was characterized by Senator John McClain as “an agent of intolerance” in 2000. According to McClain, “Robertson's views exist in the outer reaches of American politics.”<sup>131</sup> Indeed, some critics charge that Robertson's Christian Broadcasting Network is overtly political. For instance, Goff reports that CBN “has provided

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<sup>127</sup> “Pat Robertson Biography,” The 700 Club. Accessed February 10, 2015.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> “Pat Robertson Biography,” The 700 Club. Accessed February 10, 2015.

<sup>130</sup> Anderson, “A Heavenly Home for TV Preachers,” 338.

<sup>131</sup> Daniel Vaca, “Saving America's Soul: Religion and Politics at Pat Robertson's Church Kempsville Presbyterian Church, Virginia Beach, Virginia,” *Anglican and Episcopal History* 74, No. 1 (March 2005), 137.

support to various right-wing causes, from Nicaraguan contras to Mozambican guerrillas. In the United States, CBN has broadcast glowing coverage of the South African and Israeli governments during the 1990s.”<sup>132</sup> More recently, Robertson has also been attacked in both the mainstream as well religious media for his public statements concerning various political and military issues, his stance against homosexuality and even his views on the control of the weather.<sup>133</sup> Despite these charges, Robertson remains a highly influential figure in the prosperity gospel industry today and his television programming and print publications reach millions of people around the world.

### Chapter Summary

The original founders of the prosperity gospel theology, Essek W. Kenyon and Kenneth Hagin, Sr. likely never could have envisioned how their simple message of divine healing and other miracles paid for by the sacrifice of Jesus could be perverted into the scandal-ridden industry that exists today. The roster of prosperity gospel ministers after 1980 sounds more like a most-wanted list and includes many pastors who were indicted for criminal charges or civil suits for various misconducts, including sexual promiscuity and bisexuality. Although these high-profile episodes are certainly not restricted to prosperity gospel ministries, the lavish lifestyles and hypocritical “do as I say not as I do” mindset preached by these ministers are damaging to the authentic message of Jesus Christ.

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<sup>132</sup> Frances Rivers, “Making Waves: Christian Broadcasters Beam Their Messages to the World,” *The Progressive* 57, No. 11 (November 1993), 24

<sup>133</sup> Philip Goff, *The Blackwell Companion to Religion in America* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 209.

Inexplicably, preachers such as Jim Bakker, Jimmy Swaggart and Pat Robertson have managed to overcome seemingly career-ending events to resurface yet again as relentless messengers of the prosperity gospel faith. It would be unfair and inaccurate to infer that all prosperity gospel advocates are excessive in their life-styles and engage in the peripheral edges of apostasy and promiscuity; however, a survey of the major personalities influencing the greatest number of people are significant in determining the detrimental effect of the movement in general. In this chapter prosperity gospel has been traced from its origins in the mind sciences and demonstrated that an expansion of the doctrine has been passed on through popular personalities who adapted it with their own new revelations and visions. In essence the historical survey is a biographical study of individuals who shaped their message into an evolutionary doctrine that is subject to continual change. The method of this chapter has centered on major personalities and the next chapter will be centered on the theological teachings within the movement.

CHAPTER THREE  
THEOLOGICAL EVALUATION OF TENETS OF THE WORD OF FAITH MOVEMENT

**Chapter Introduction**

This chapter provides an evaluation of the theology and application of scriptures by the word of faith teachers. The writer will document the sources that are used to form a system of believing that the Bible promises health, wealth and prosperity. Also, scriptural derivatives commonly used by the word of faith teachers will be discussed. These are modalities borrowed from the Bible to expand a network of teachings. There are four main references that form the framework for teaching the various tenets. These four tenets are 1) the Abrahamic covenant, 2) the atonement, 3) faith, and 4) prosperity. These are not considered as separate entities but are interwoven within the fabric of the whole to formulate a system of beliefs. Each can draw support from the other and each can be borrowed to complete the teaching of the other. These are treated in a more detailed manner below.

**Background and Overview**

There is no common creed that is declared for all adherents of the word of faith movement. In fact, some authorities maintain that the word of faith movement and the prosperity

Gospel are not synonymous. Indeed, Sandra Barnes notes that, “Some writers contend that Prosperity theology and Word of Faith theology are not the same. However, the general consensus appears to suggest that proponents of the latter group embrace the general tenets of Prosperity theology.”<sup>1</sup> Likewise, Randall Stephens points out that, “The prosperity gospel is a major strain within evangelicalism, but the two are not synonymous. There are many evangelical Christians who do not embrace the gospel of wealth, and even recoil at the movement's name-it-claim-it theology.”<sup>2</sup>

This makes it difficult to characterize all factions under one theological treatise. However, there are shared theologies that provide the basic framework upon which various other ideologies are formed. In this chapter, some basic theological tenets are explained. It is a shared belief among prosperity preachers that these concepts are supported by biblical texts. In fact, not everything they say is false and prosperity gospel teachers frequently apply legitimate Christian doctrines but intersperse these teachings with a particular spin that supports their teachings but diminishes or changes the authentic message of the biblical text.

Moreover, these doctrines are taught with a dimension of confidence that smacks of arrogance against closer exposition of those texts. Indeed, David Jones points out that “Teachers of the prosperity gospel encourage their followers to pray, and even demand, of God,<sup>3</sup> “everything from modes of transportation (cars, vans, trucks, even two-seat planes), [to] homes, furniture, and large bank accounts.”<sup>4</sup> Not surprisingly, these teachings are abhorrent to many

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<sup>1</sup> Sandra L. Barnes, *Live Long and Prosper: How Black Megachurches Address HIV/AIDS and Poverty in the Age of Prosperity Theology* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 203

<sup>2</sup> Randall Stephens, “Holy High Rollers,” *The Wilson Quarterly*, 37, No. 3, 13.

<sup>3</sup> David Pilgrim, “Egoism or Altruism: A Social Psychological Critique of the Prosperity Gospel of Televangelist Robert Tilton,” *Journal of Religious Studies*, 18.1-2 (1992): 3.

<sup>4</sup> David Jones, “Is The C3 Movement A Cult Of Prosperity”? *C3 Churchwatch*. Accessed March 1, 2015.

mainstream Christians and smack of greed and a perversion of Christian theology. As Stephens points out, “To many within the conservative Protestant fold, the prosperity gospel's brazen divine materialism is as much bad taste as it is bad theology. In 2009, a branch of the Lausanne Movement, an organization founded in part by Billy Graham, described the prosperity gospel as ‘false and gravely distorting of the Bible.’”<sup>5</sup>

There are many facets within the prosperity gospel that are too numerous for exposition in this thesis. Consequently, for the purpose of expediency the focus is narrowed to the following four. These are: The Abrahamic Covenant, The Atonement, Faith and Prosperity including both health and wealth. Upon these basic biblical concepts the network of the word of faith teachings are formulated.

As noted in the previous chapter, the prosperity theology is variously called the prosperity gospel, the health and wealth gospel and more derisively labeled the name it and claim it, blab it and grab it, gospel of success. For instance, Roberts reports that, “Critics of ‘positive confession’ parody it by branding it as a gospel which simply states: ‘Name it and Claim it!’”<sup>6</sup> The title, whatever the form, portrays the concept that the will of God explicitly promises spiritual blessings as well as material prosperity including good health. These promises are realized by cashing in on the covenant promises from God to humankind. The guarantee of these exponential blessings is realized by faith in them. This covenant is actuated by first of all coming to the knowledge of those promises usually through the exposition of a prosperity preacher and believing them followed by a proclamation or confession of them.

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<sup>5</sup> Stephens, “Holy High Rollers,” 13,

<sup>6</sup> Richard H. Roberts, *Religion and the Transformations of Capitalism: Comparative Approaches* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 167.

## The Abrahamic Covenant

Biblical scholars have for centuries understood that God made a covenant with Abraham that is termed "the Abrahamic covenant."<sup>7</sup> For instance, Niehaus notes that, "Peter makes the same point when he refers to 'the covenant God made with your fathers' and lest there be any lack of clarity as to who the 'fathers' are, he qualifies that covenant by adding: 'He said to Abraham, "Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed," thus indicating, to use the OT phrasing, the 'covenant [God] made with [the fathers] Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.'"<sup>8</sup> Moreover, Peter explains the promise of universal blessing with "the covenant [God made with your fathers]" because God promised this blessing to Abram in Genesis 12:3: "I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you," a promise that is reiterated in Genesis 22:18 and Genesis 26:4.<sup>9</sup> These scriptures are as follows:

...and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me," Genesis 22:18,<sup>10</sup> and  
 "I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and will give them all these lands, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed," Genesis 26:4.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Jeffrey J. Niehaus, "God's Covenant with Abraham," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 56, No. 2 (June 2013), 249.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 250.

<sup>10</sup> Genesis 22:18 (NIV).

<sup>11</sup> Genesis 6:4 (NIV).

The foregoing promises were the basis for the statement by Peter concerning the Abrahamic covenant and the rationale in support of his assertion that God made “a covenant with your fathers” and that it is renewed from generation to generation. It is important to note, though, that the Abrahamic covenant was comprised of several promises from God, including the following:

I will give all these lands, Genesis 17:8;  
I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky, Genesis 26:4; and  
Through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, Genesis 12:3 and 22:18.

In summary the Abrahamic covenant sets forth a number of promises from God for the eternal benefit of humankind that are part of a series of divine covenants beginning with the Noahic Covenant. The thread of redemption is the foundation upon which each covenant is predicated. Gods covenant with Noah involves God saving a remnant seed upon the earth. From Noah’s seed would come forth the replenishing of the earth. With Abraham the covenant demonstrated God’s desire to have righteous nation. Based upon no merit of man God elected Abraham to be the father of this chosen nation. From that nation God would reveal himself even to a greater extent a loving God who desired to save people and bring them back to his original purpose. Nothing is more clear in the scripture than that the covenant was intentionally redemptive and not a contract to make them rich in material things.

Even with the Davidic covenant the promise was an everlasting kingdom issuing from the seed of David and culminating in the birth of a savior who would save His people from their sins. The plan was never intended to be a how to get rich plan.



Notwithstanding the divine beneficence comprehended by the Abrahamic covenant, some biblical scholars argue that its use by prosperity gospel teachers has transcended these promises and warped them into a set of materialistic guarantees. In fact, even the use of the term “Abrahamic” is intended to connote the ancient authority of the promises in order to legitimate their use by modern prosperity gospel ministers. According to Hughes, the origins of the term “Abrahamic” can be traced to “the polemical desire to exclude and to demonstrate superiority over rival claimants. The notion of Jesus and his followers as the ultimate recipients of the Abrahamic covenant is the bedrock of Christian identity. To show this, those who believe in the new covenant of Jesus had to claim the covenant of Moses.”<sup>12</sup>

This inextricable connection with ancient authority has been routinely cited by many religious authorities as an essential part of its widespread acceptance today. For instance, in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Reverend Dr. Samuel Worcester wrote that, “So plain it is, that the church under the Christian dispensation is only the ancient, Abrahamic, church continued and enlarged according to the promises, made to Abraham and his seed; and that this church, and, of course, the covenant by which it was originally formed, is to be continued down to the latest generations.”<sup>13</sup>

Like the Fourteenth Amendment that extended the protections of the Bill of Rights to all U.S. citizens, the revelations contained in the New Testament concerning the Abrahamic covenant extended its promises to humankind to the present day. In this regard, Hughes points out that,

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<sup>12</sup> Aaron W. Hughes, *Abrahamic Religions: On the Uses and Abuses of History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 49.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

It is only in the later revelation, symbolized by Jesus and the giving of the ‘new’ covenant, that we are provided with the hermeneutic keys to unlock the ‘old’ one. Once read in this manner, the Abrahamic covenant now becomes open to all, witnessed as early as Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians, through the salvific power of Jesus and through the faith of the individual believer.<sup>14</sup>

According to Pousson, the use of the Abrahamic covenant by prosperity gospel ministers highlights material blessings to the exclusion of spiritual redemption and salvation which take a backseat. For instance, Pousson notes that from the prosperity gospel perspective, “Christians are Abraham’s spiritual children and heirs to the blessings of faith.... This Abrahamic inheritance is unpacked primarily in terms of material entitlements.”<sup>15</sup> In other words, according to the prosperity gospel teaching, the primary purpose of the Abrahamic covenant was for God to bless Abraham and subsequent generations to the present in a material fashion.<sup>16</sup>

Because modern humans are “Abraham’s spiritual children,” it is the position of prosperity gospel teachers that they have likewise become the beneficiaries of the material blessings promised by the Abrahamic covenant. Indeed, the Abrahamic covenant is used throughout the teachings of prosperity gospel ministers including: Kenneth Copeland’s *The Laws of Prosperity* (Fort Worth, TX: Kenneth Copeland Publications, 1974), Gloria Copeland’s *God’s Will Is Prosperity* (Fort Worth, TX: Kenneth Copeland Publications, 1973), *Our Covenant with God* (Fort Worth, TX: Kenneth Copeland Publications, 1987), Edward Pousson, *Spreading the*

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<sup>14</sup> Hughes, *Abrahamic Religions*, 49.

<sup>15</sup> Edward Pousson, *Spreading the Flame* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 158

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

*Flame* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), and, Kenneth Copeland, *The Troublemaker* (Fort Worth, TX: Kenneth Copeland Publications, n.d.).<sup>17</sup>

Based on their interpretation of the Abrahamic covenant, prosperity gospel ministers have claimed that these divine guarantees of material wealth need only be claimed in order to activate them. For example, Kenneth Copeland claims that, “Since God’s Covenant has been established and prosperity is a provision of this covenant, you need to realize that prosperity belongs to you now!”<sup>18</sup> Indeed, in his book, *The Laws of Prosperity*, Kenneth Copeland draws on the antiquity of the Abrahamic covenant to lend credence to his teachings, including the use of a stereotypical racial slur to highlight his point: “Anything God taught Abraham or his descendants about operating financially will work just as well today as it did several thousand years ago. If you don’t believe it, you’ve never met a Jew!”<sup>19</sup>

Likewise, Kenneth Hagin has drawn on the Abrahamic covenant to support his prosperity gospel teachings. For instance, Cox describes the prosperity gospel teachings of Kenneth Hagin thusly: “Through the crucifixion of Christ, Christians have inherited all the promises made to Abraham, and these include both spiritual and material well-being.”<sup>20</sup> Prosperity gospel ministers including Hagin and Copeland typically draw on Galatians 3:14 to justify these assertions because it states that “the blessings of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus.”<sup>21</sup> Like many of the other scriptural readings that are warped to their purposes or

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<sup>17</sup> David Jones, *The Bankruptcy of the Prosperity Gospel: An Exercise in Biblical and Theological Ethics*, (Accessed February 3, 2015).

<sup>18</sup> Kenneth Copeland, *The Laws of Prosperity*, 51.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>20</sup> Harvey Cox, *Fire from Heaven* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1995), 272.

<sup>21</sup> Galatians 3:14 (NKJV).

otherwise taken out of context, Galatians 3:14 is routinely used by prosperity gospel teachers to support their views concerning the need to activate faith as a prerequisite to claiming the material blessings that are humankind's birthright by virtue of the Abrahamic covenant. For instance, Asamoah-Gyadu notes that, "Galatians 3:14 is particularly significant in the 'gospel of prosperity' hermeneutic: 'He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.'"<sup>22</sup> The *English Standard* version of Galatians 3:14 reads as follow: "So that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit[e] through faith."

According to Jones, the prosperity gospel interpretation of Galatians 3:14 is flawed on two fundamental counts:

In their appeal to Galatians 3:14, prosperity teachers ignore the second half of the verse, which reads, "That we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith."<sup>23</sup> In this verse Paul clearly was reminding the Galatians of the spiritual blessing of salvation, not the material blessing of wealth.<sup>24</sup>

Prosperity teachers claim that the conduit through which believers receive Abraham's blessings is faith. This completely ignores the orthodox understanding that the Abrahamic covenant was an unconditional covenant. That is, the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant were not contingent upon one man's obedience. Therefore, even if the Abrahamic covenant did apply to Christians, all believers would already be experiencing the material blessings regardless of prosperity theology.<sup>25</sup>

From a theological perspective, prosperity gospel teachings communicate the belief that Abraham's blessing has already been conveyed by God to humankind as subsequently mediated

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<sup>22</sup> J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics: Current Developments within Independent Indigenous Pentecostalism in Ghana* (Boston: Brill, 2005), 211

<sup>23</sup> Galatians 3:14 (NKJV).

<sup>24</sup> Jones, *The Bankruptcy of the Prosperity Gospel*, 3.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

by the sacrifice of Christ. The 'blessing of Abraham' in prosperity hermeneutic refers to his wealth in cattle, silver and gold, menservants and maidservants, camels and donkeys, and the gift of a son, as attested to by his servant (Genesis 13:2; 24:35–36).”<sup>26</sup> Translated into modern terms by prosperity gospel teachers, the Abrahamic covenant is God’s absolute promise to deliver material blessings, virtually upon demand. In this regard, Asamoah-Gyadu suggests that, “[The Abrahamic covenant] means God wants believers to prosper, not only spiritually, but in marital life, child upbringing, profession, business and every area of life.”<sup>27</sup> Prosperity gospel teachers also draw on Galatians 3:7-9 to support their views. The English Standard Version of Galatians 3:7-9 reads as follows: “Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, in you shall all the nations be blessed. So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.” According to Asamoah-Gyadu, “This is the interpretation advocates of prosperity read into Paul’s thoughts in Galatians 3 where he indicates that those who believe in Christ become inheritors of the Abrahamic covenant: they 'are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith' (Galatians 3:7–9).”<sup>28</sup>

### **The Atonement**

Beyond the foregoing misinterpretations and misapplications of the Abrahamic covenant by prosperity gospel teachers today, they have also promoted a flawed perspective concerning the Atonement in support of their prosperity gospel message. According to one biblical scholar,

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<sup>26</sup> Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics*, 211.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

“The prosperity gospel claims that both physical healing and financial prosperity have been provided for in the Atonement.”<sup>29</sup> This assertion is congruent with the actual teachings of prosperity gospel ministers such as Kenneth Copeland who has written that “the basic principle of the Christian life is to know that God put our sin, sickness, disease, sorrow, grief, and poverty on Jesus at Calvary.”<sup>30</sup> These views are consistent with the interpretation provided by a number of biblical scholars wherein Atonement represents a fundamental step in reuniting humankind with God. For instance, Murphy advises that, “Atonement is needed because creation is alienated from God, an alienation revealed by human sin. In Romans 1, Paul emphasizes that refusal to acknowledge the true God as Creator is the basic human problem.”<sup>31</sup> However, the wording used does not represent the understanding that Atonement is not only a step in reuniting man with God but it is the only plan implemented by God to effect the same.

Like the other tenets of prosperity gospel, the view of the Atonement is based on some basic misinterpretations and misapplications of the scriptural message. For instance, some televangelists who subscribe to this interpretation of the Atonement either do not fully understand the life of Christ or choose to invent circumstances that are consistent with their teachings. For example, one prosperity gospel teacher maintains, “Jesus had a nice house, a big house,” and that “Jesus was handling big money”; indeed, Jesus even “wore designer clothes.”<sup>32</sup> Based on these assertions, Jesus was truly “living the American dream,” and it is a simple matter

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<sup>29</sup> Ken L. Sarles, “A Theological Evaluation of the Prosperity Gospel,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 143 (Oct.-Dec. 1986): 339.

<sup>30</sup> Kenneth Copeland, *The Troublemaker*, 6.

<sup>31</sup> George L. Murphy, “Chiasmic Cosmology and Atonement.” *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith*, 60, No. 4 (December 2008), 215.

<sup>32</sup> John Avanzini, “Believer’s Voice of Victory,” program on TBN, (20 January 1991). Quoted in Hank Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1993), 381.

to recognize how such a message would appeal to those who have been marginalized. As Jones points out, “It is easy to see how such a warped view of the life of Christ could lead to an equally warped misconception of the death of Christ.”<sup>33</sup>

Jones points out another major misinterpretation of the Atonement that has regularly been used by prosperity gospel teachers is based on the message in 2 Corinthians 8:9 which states: “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.”<sup>34</sup> According to Jones, “Without exception, this is the verse to which prosperity teachers appeal in order to support their view of the Atonement.”<sup>35</sup>

Although 2 Corinthians 8:9 does in fact appear to state that the sacrifice by Jesus was an intentional act to ensure the wealth of future generations, the wealth is of a different sort than material blessings, a fact that is simply avoided by prosperity gospel teachers. For example, Jones points out that, “The problem with this interpretation is, of course, that in this verse Paul was in no way teaching that Christ died on the cross for the purpose of increasing anyone’s net worth materially. In fact, Paul was actually teaching the exact opposite principle.”<sup>36</sup> This assertion is borne out by other biblical scholars as well. For instance, writing in 1909, Browne noted that, “This word of St. Paul's is very interesting for both its matter and its manner. Its

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<sup>33</sup> Jones, *The Bankruptcy of the Prosperity Gospel*, 3.

<sup>34</sup> 2 Corinthians 8:9 NIV.

<sup>35</sup> Jones, *The Bankruptcy of the Prosperity Gospel*, 4.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

matter is essentially the doctrine of the incarnation of the Divine Son for the redemption of men.”<sup>37</sup>

The debate over the spiritual riches of redemption versus material blessings becomes even more one-sided when the actual context of 2 Corinthians 8:9 is taken into account. In this regard, Jones points out that, “Contextually, it is clear that Paul was teaching the Corinthians that since Christ accomplished so much for them through the Atonement, then how much more ought they empty themselves of their riches in service of the Savior.”<sup>38</sup> In fact, Paul encourages his ancient audience to divest themselves of all of their material wealth to support the indigent in a subsequent passage wherein he states that “now at this time your abundance may supply their lack.”<sup>39</sup>

Taken together, it is apparent that the prosperity gospel view of the Atonement is flawed from the outset because it is based on biblical authority that is taken completely out of context. This point is also made by Jones who notes that this misinterpretation of Paul’s explanation of the Atonement by prosperity teachers has also been used to justify their seed-faith solicitations and exploitation of the most vulnerable. As Coakley and Pailin point out:

Paul meant that what we become through Christ is what, in the purpose of God, we are meant to be -- truly human; men and women are recreated in God's image, they are children of God, enjoying the liberty and privileges of God's children, and reflecting his glory. It is no accident that the language Paul uses when describing the redemptive activity of Christ refers to him in language which is appropriate to one who is truly what Man is meant to be: he is the Son of God.”<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Borden Parker Browne, *Studies in Christianity* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1909), 87.

<sup>38</sup> Jones, *The Bankruptcy of the Prosperity Gospel*, 4.

<sup>39</sup> 2 Corinthians 8:14 (NKJV).

<sup>40</sup> Sarah Coakley and David A. Pailin, *The Making and Remaking of Christian Doctrine: Essays in Honour of Maurice Wiles* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 76.



Although the Atonement represents the greatest gift of all, prosperity gospel teachers ignore this promise in favor of the immediate gratification that comes from the accumulation of material wealth. According to Jones' interpretation of 2 Corinthians 8:9, "The logic implicit in the statement of this great truth is too obvious for anyone to miss it. Apparently, however, the champions of the prosperity gospel have indeed missed it."<sup>41</sup> In reality, though, it is reasonable to suggest that even the most ardent prosperity gospel minister understands the context of 2 Corinthians 8:9, but simply elect to ignore it in favor of his own interpretation because it is the basis of generating revenue.

Even during prosperous economic periods, it takes a great deal of influence to convince people to part with their money but prosperity gospel teachers manage to attract enormous sums of money even during periods of economic down turn because of their reliance on these one-sided interpretations. For example, Jones emphasizes that,

One of the most striking characteristics of the prosperity theologians is their seeming fixation with the act of giving. The prosperity gospel encourages its followers to give generously and challenges them with such pious statements as 'True prosperity is the ability to use God's power to meet the needs of mankind in any realm of life,'<sup>42</sup> and 'We have been called to finance the gospel to the world.'<sup>43</sup>

Although these appear to be worthwhile goals, when carefully scrutinizing them it becomes clear the intent of these statements is to encourage donations to prosperity gospel ministries rather than an altruistic motivation. The emphasis on donations is attributed in large part to the so-called "Law of Compensation" propounded by Robert Tilton. The "Law of

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<sup>41</sup> Jones, *The Bankruptcy of the Prosperity Gospel*, 4.

<sup>42</sup> Kenneth Copeland, *The Laws of Prosperity*, 26.

<sup>43</sup> Gloria Copeland, *God's Will Is Prosperity*, 45.

Compensation” is purportedly drawn from Mark 10:30 which states “Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sister or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel’s who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions and in the age to come, eternal life.”<sup>44</sup> In summary, the “Law of Compensation” means that when people donate to prosperity gospel ministers, they will receive a hundred-fold return on their “investment.”<sup>45</sup> In support of this assertion, Jones cites Gloria Copeland’s guidance to her congregation to, “Give \$10 and receive \$1,000; give \$1,000 and receive \$100,000; ... in short, Mark 10:30 is a very good deal.”<sup>46</sup>

This is a powerful promise and it is readily understandable how some people might be caught up in the excitement of a hundred-fold return on their seed-faith donations, but these assertions fly directly in the face of Christ’s admonition in Luke 10:35 to the disciples to “give, hoping for nothing in return.”<sup>47</sup> Indeed, Luke 10:35 has simply been ignored by prosperity gospel teachers in order to cater to the desperation that is experienced by many Americans who remain marginalized and who believe they will never achieve the American dream otherwise. As Jones points out, “Prosperity theologians teach their disciples to give because they will get a great return. One cannot help but agree with the observation that the stewardship of ‘the prosperity message is in captivity to the American dream.’”<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Mark 10:30 (NKJV).

<sup>45</sup> Jones, *The Bankruptcy of the Prosperity Gospel*, 5.

<sup>46</sup> Gloria Copeland, *God’s Will Is Prosperity*, 54.

<sup>47</sup> Luke 10:35 (NKJV).

<sup>48</sup> Jones, *The Bankruptcy of the Prosperity Gospel*, 5.

## Faith

Besides warped interpretations of the Abrahamic covenant and the meaning of the Atonement, the prosperity gospel also weighs in on the matter of faith in ways that are contrary to the actual meaning of the Scriptures. Christian faith is generally understood to be comprised of “trust in the person of Jesus Christ, the truth of His teaching, and the redemptive work He accomplished at Calvary.”<sup>49</sup> Prosperity teachers approach the issue differently in ways that promote their own self interests. For example, Kenneth Copeland’s book, *The Laws of Prosperity*, includes the remarkable assertion that, “Faith is a spiritual force, a spiritual energy, a spiritual power. It is this force of faith which makes the laws of the spirit world function. . . . There are certain laws governing prosperity revealed in God’s Word. Faith causes them to function.”<sup>50</sup>

Taking this assertion at face value, it would appear that Copeland is comparing faith to a key that unlocks a treasure trunk of material wealth that is available only by asking. For instance, Kenneth Copeland adds that, “If you make up your mind . . . that you are willing to live in divine prosperity and abundance... divine prosperity will come to pass in your life. You have exercised your faith.”<sup>51</sup> According to Kenneth Copeland, though, the proper exercise of faith pursuant to prosperity gospel teachings means that adherents not only have to claim what is already theirs, they must “plant a seed” in the form of a donation in order to actualize the process. For instance, in his book, *The Laws of Prosperity*, Copeland reports:

The laws of prosperity work the same as the laws of salvation, healing and so forth. We are dealing with the same God, the same Word, the same

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<sup>49</sup> Jones, *The Bankruptcy of the Prosperity Gospel*, 5

<sup>50</sup> Kenneth Copeland, *The Laws of Prosperity*, 14-15.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

Jesus, the same force of faith and the same thief, Satan, who is trying to steal it away from you! . . . A farmer can intend to have a good crop, but if he never plants the seed, how can he possibly produce a harvest? These laws, both spiritual and physical, must be followed if you expect to get results.<sup>52</sup>

It is conspicuous that not included in this previous characterization is the exercise of faith through regular donations of seed-faith money to prosperity gospel ministries. It is also noteworthy that this characterization reduces faith to little more than a telephone call to God asking for a weekly allowance, a process that must be viewed with skepticism. As Jones emphasizes, “According to prosperity theology, faith is not a theocentric act of the will, or simply trust in God; rather it is an anthropocentric spiritual force, directed at God. Indeed, any theology that views faith solely as a means to material gain rather than the acceptance of heavenly justification must be judged as faulty and inadequate.”<sup>53</sup>

The foregoing interpretations of salient biblical passages to support the prosperity gospel’s messages concerning the Abrahamic covenant, the Atonement and faith are based on flawed biblical scholarship and outright distortions. In this regard, Sarles notes that prosperity gospel teachers’ “method of interpreting the biblical text is highly subjective and arbitrary. Bible verses are quoted in abundance without attention to grammatical indicators, semantic nuances, or literary and historical context. The result is a set of ideas and principles based on distortion of textual meaning.”<sup>54</sup> A review of the written teachings of prosperity gospel ministers is replete with these types of misinterpretations.

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<sup>52</sup> Jones, *The Bankruptcy of the Prosperity Gospel*, 15.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>54</sup> Sarles, “A Theological Evaluation of the Prosperity Gospel,” 339.

## Prosperity

Another example of a scripture being distorted to insert personal interpretations to support the prosperity doctrine is III John 2. John proclaimed, “Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers.”<sup>55</sup> This biblical verse has been interpreted by prosperity gospel teachers to mean that “God wants all believers to prosper in all things.”<sup>56</sup> According to one prosperity gospel critic, “This greeting to John’s friend Gaius has been a foundational scripture for preachers of the prosperity gospel.”<sup>57</sup> According to prosperity gospel teachings, 3 John 2 is used to “[justify] the belief that God wants us to prosper both in our health and our personal economy and will reward us with these things according to our faith. To prosperity preachers, poverty is both a curse and a sign of weak faith.”<sup>58</sup> Again the greater problem is not poverty in the material realm but poverty in the hermeneutical realm. This common greeting of good will to John’s friend Gaius is simply high-jacked and misapplied.

The connection of material wealth to faith represents a cornerstone of the prosperity gospel teachings, and despite the seeming incongruity of this assertion with modern thinking, prosperity gospel teachers continue to attract legions of new followers using the same messages in new communication media.<sup>59</sup> For instance, Lear reports that, “Millions of believers around the world hear and subscribe to this belief in some way. The prosperity message is disseminated via

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<sup>55</sup> 3 John 2 (NKJV).

<sup>56</sup> Shayna L. Lear, “The Bankrupt Theology of the Prosperity Gospel,” (2014) *Prism Magazine*. Accessed February 3, 2015.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 2

<sup>59</sup> Shayna L. Lear, “The Bankrupt Theology of the Prosperity Gospel,” (2014) *Prism Magazine*. (Accessed February 3, 2015), 2

churches, television, internet, iTunes, and bookstores.”<sup>60</sup> Irrespective of the media that is used by modern prosperity gospel teachers, though, the message that is being communicated remains consistent: “God wants you to be healthy and rich. And all you need to do to get there is remain faithful to the commands of the Lord—especially in giving financially.”<sup>61</sup>

Perhaps even more troubling is the connection made by prosperity gospel teachers between spiritual growth and material wealth. For example, Oral Roberts, one of the founders of prosperity theology, maintained that instructions from God directed him to read 3 John 2 which he interpreted as “a revelation of the prosperity gospel.”<sup>62</sup> This revelation would result in Roberts developing a money-making machine based on his seed-faith concept that took the prosperity gospel message to new heights both literally and figuratively. For instance, according to Modisett, “Roberts wasn't squeamish about asking for money, which he called ‘seed-faith.’”<sup>63</sup> In his 1970 book, *Miracle of Seed-Faith*, Roberts counseled his followers to put money aside for Christ by sending it to him and then to “expect a miracle.” In essence, Roberts advised his followers that, “When the monthly bills come in, pay Jesus first. Apparently, enough people sent money to Jesus to make Roberts rich.”<sup>64</sup>

Apparently, enough people also believed that God talked directly to Oral Roberts to fund his other costly visions as well. Roberts subsequently reported that God told him to launch a medical school and hospital in Tulsa, despite his claimed ability of his ministry to effect healing

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<sup>60</sup> Shayna L. Lear, “The Bankrupt Theology of the Prosperity Gospel,” 2

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Jones, *The Bankruptcy of the Prosperity Gospel*, 5.

<sup>63</sup> Mitchell Modisett, “What Can Reasonable People Learn from a Faith Healer?” *The Humanist*, 66, No. 4 (July-August 2006), 43.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 44.

through the hands of God. These healing hands are represented by two giant bronze hands at the entrance to ORU which were cast in Mexico and were reportedly modeled on Oral's own hands.<sup>65</sup>

In response to severe backlash from the community because it was believed that the Tulsa area already had more than adequate hospital coverage, Roberts proclaimed that he had yet another visitation from God in 1980 wherein he received the now-infamous guidance from a 900 foot tall Jesus that he must raise enough money to support these visions or "God would call him home." In support of his assertions, Roberts claimed that his vision of Jesus appeared next to a Tulsa water tower of known height and he was therefore able to make an accurate estimate.<sup>66</sup> Some observers suggested that a guaranteed trip to heaven should appeal to anyone, but Roberts acted forcefully in response to this vision. According to Modisett, "Roberts reported that the Christ figure stooped and lifted the unfinished buildings of the City of Faith Medical Center, declaring, 'See how easy it is for me to lift it.' Roberts took the vision to be an affirmation from the deity that the medical center, strapped at that time for lack of construction money, would be completed."<sup>67</sup>

Despite the ridicule he received from many Americans in general and Oklahomans in particular in response to his 900 foot Jesus vision, Roberts persevered and construction on the City of Faith and ORU College of Medicine proceeded apace but not without some personal sacrifice. In this regard, Modisett points out that, "After that vision Roberts began to fall on hard times. Perhaps Jesus could raise the medical center but Roberts couldn't, not even by modifying

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<sup>65</sup> Mitchell Modisett, "What Can Reasonable People Learn from a Faith Healer?" 45.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

his own lifestyle. As a result, Roberts had to sell his four Mercedes-Benz automobiles, his three vacation homes in California, valued at more than \$4 million, his Tulsa home, his son's home, and three other homes owned by the Roberts organization.”<sup>68</sup> Notwithstanding a number of subsequent visitations by Jesus, Roberts was unable to sustain these enterprises and by 1987 the City of Faith was \$25 million in debt and was closed.<sup>69</sup>

The story of Oral Roberts did not end with the closure of the City of Faith, though, and scandal continued to mar the ministry's fortunes for the next several years. For example, after assuming the presidency of Oral Roberts University in May 1993, Oral's son, Richard Roberts, and his wife, Lindsay, became the target of increasing criticisms as a result of his family's lavish lifestyle and other irregularities. A series of emails from Richard Roberts obtained by a Tulsa newspaper in 2008 revealed that Richard had attempted to intervene in local political elections despite the school's nonprofit status. According to a report from *Church & State*, “ORU has been rocked by a growing scandal, with charges flying that Roberts and his wife, Lindsay, spent university money extravagantly and that she had inappropriate contacts with male students. Richard Roberts resigned as president in November [2008] after the tenured faculty passed a no-confidence vote on his leadership.”<sup>70</sup> Apparently, their “faith” had carried the ministry to places that could not be sustained. By the trappings of their own theologies they were condemned.

Likewise, a contemporary of Roberts, Kenneth Hagin, began his ministry by drawing on the teachings of 3 John 2 to support his notions concerning the appropriate way to handle individual finances. According to Hagin, his followers were already entitled to their wealth and

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<sup>68</sup> Mitchell Modisett, “What Can Reasonable People Learn from a Faith Healer?” 46.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> “Oral Roberts University President Sought Advice on Political Activity,” *Church & State*, 61, No. 1 (January 2008), 15.



all they had to do was exercise faith to claim it. For instance, Hagin advised, “Don’t pray about money. Claim it.”<sup>71</sup> Indeed, prosperity gospel teachers such as Hagin maintain that everyone has been “pre-approved” for material wealth through Christ’s sacrifice on the Cross, providing that faithful adherents conform to its tenets of seed-faith donations. As Richard H. Roberts points out, “Prosperity Theology clearly parallels Calvinism in its stress on the connection between grace and material prosperity, but combines this with a notion that the benefits of grace are available to all who submit to the faith.”<sup>72</sup>

It is reasonable to suggest that Hagin, who died in 2003, was able to take advantage of the prosperity gospel road that had been plowed by Oral Roberts in general and in the Tulsa, Oklahoma area in particular. By the 1960s, Kenneth Hagin Sr. had organized a small group of white preachers they called "word of faith" ministers who became the vanguard of the prosperity theology movement during the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It should be pointed out that like Roberts, Hagin’s case is of special note in the prosperity theology movement because he established an elaborate infrastructure that was designed to ensure that his message and teachings would be perpetuated after his death. In this regard, Lee reports that, “Hagin, who preached over the radio and wrote books in the 1960s, formulated a worldview that gave Christians total control over their fates and destinies. In the early 1970s, he started a Bible institute in Oklahoma that trained ministers in this new way of faith and helped the movement grow dramatically a decade later.”<sup>73</sup> Likewise, Smith emphasizes Kenneth Hagin Sr. has left a powerful legacy that continues to preach the prosperity gospel message to a growing cadre of believers. In this regard,

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<sup>71</sup> Kenneth Hagin, *The Midas Touch: A Balanced Approach to Biblical Prosperity* (Broken Arrow: Faith Library Publications, 2000), 37.

<sup>72</sup> Roberts, *Religion and the Transformation of Capitalism*, 168.

<sup>73</sup> Lee, “Prosperity Theology,” 229.

Smith reports that, “Many of the best-known mega-church pastors have been influenced by the Faith movement begun by white evangelist Rev. Kenneth Hagin Sr. in 1934 and continued by his son, Rev. Kenneth Hagin Jr., pastor of the Rhema Bible Church in Tulsa, Oklahoma.”<sup>74</sup>

Similarly, Kenneth Copeland has consistently promoted his prosperity gospel ministry by drawing on a flawed interpretation of 3 John 2. In fact, Copeland was Oral Roberts’ private pilot before launching his own Fort Worth-based ministry and is widely regarded as Hagin’s successor in the word of faith movement. For instance, Coleman reports that Copeland “travels extensively around the world, frequently with his wife, Gloria, and has become well known for his teachings on the 'laws' of prosperity.”<sup>75</sup> According to Kantzer, the “[Kenneth] Copeland misinterprets this [verse] as a universal promise,”<sup>76</sup> and others suggest that “the Copelands use these words so often that they appear to be the key verse of their ministry.”<sup>77</sup>

When subjected to careful exegesis of the supporting biblical authority, it reveals the flawed nature of this teaching. As Jones points out, “A careful study of 3 John 2, however, reveals that this verse is not a carte blanche approval of prosperity gospel teachings.”<sup>78</sup> Despite this misinterpretation and misapplication of 3 John 2, the Copelands have been successful in accumulating a significant amount of wealth and prestige based on their teachings on material prosperity which also emphasizes the inextricable relationship between human and divine action in relation to the allocation of material assets. For instance, Kenneth Copeland writes: “Did you

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<sup>74</sup> Vern E. Smith, “Where Do We Go from Here?,” *The Crisis*, 113, No. 4 (July/August 2006), 31.

<sup>75</sup> Simon Coleman, *The Globalisation of Charismatic Christianity: Spreading the Gospel of Prosperity* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 30.

<sup>76</sup> Kenneth S. Kantzer, “The Cut-Rate Grace of a Health and Wealth Gospel,” *Christianity Today*, vol. 29 (June 1985): 14.

<sup>77</sup> Jones, *The Bankruptcy of the Prosperity Gospel*, 6.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

ever stop to think that in giving, Almighty God also received? In fact, that is why He gave His Son, so that He could receive many more sons! Hallelujah!”<sup>79</sup>

Using Copeland’s teaching as a guide, Christ’s death was a gift from God that created a new covenant with humankind whereby prosperity is available to all and accepting material blessings is a fundamental duty of all people because “Jesus hates poverty.” For instance, Coleman writes, “The idea of giving can therefore refer to the investment of many different kinds of 'resource', ranging from money to other material goods to, in God's case, his son. Cheerful acceptance of the resultant benefits then becomes a duty.”<sup>80</sup> Significantly, the duty does not end there but rather extends to repeating the process through more seed-faith donations to ensure that wealth remains in circulation for the benefit of all humankind. For example, Kenneth Copeland counsels that, “The world has the idea that if you get rich, you have to keep everything. But you can give it all away if you want to. Just keep the sowing going.”<sup>81</sup> “Keeping the sowing going,” of course, translates into continued donations to the coffers of the Copeland ministries.

Taken together, these issues represent a real threat to the integrity of the Christian church and its perfect message of Good News, but there are other considerations as well that have implications for mainstream Americans, including the following: The prosperity gospel incorrectly implies that poverty is a sin. Indeed, Robert Tilton even said that “being poor is a sin.” Robert Tilton, “Success in Life,” program on TBN, 27 December 1990. Likewise, Kenneth

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<sup>79</sup> Kenneth Copeland, *Believer's Voice of Victory* (1985 12): 4.

<sup>80</sup> Coleman, *The Globalisation of Charismatic Christianity*, 189.

<sup>81</sup> Kenneth Copeland, *Believer's Voice of Victory*, 12:4.

Copeland wrote that “poverty is under the curse of the Law.”<sup>82</sup> The prosperity gospel “appeals to the poor and the sick to put more faith in the ultimate fulfillment of their desires than in the Word of God.”<sup>83</sup> When the prosperity gospel does cause positive changes in a believer’s life, the prosperity teacher gets most of the credit, and when the believer does not experience prosperity, the blame is usually left upon that individual. For example, Robert Tilton offered several reasons why some believers did not experience blessings: “Individuals lacked faith, refused to follow his directions, and criticized Tilton’s ministry.”<sup>84</sup>

### **Summary**

In conclusion, there are five fundamental aspects of prosperity gospel that indicate the erroneous nature of its teachings and claims concerning wealth. The following are demonstrations of those misapplications. The prosperity gospel misinterprets the Abrahamic covenant, the atonement, the nature of giving, the meaning of faith and the comprehensive nature of the promise of prosperity. Jones clarifies these five contextual distortions in his article “The Bankruptcy of the Prosperity Gospel.”<sup>85</sup>

When consideration is given to the weaving and warping of these biblical pillars to build the prosperity gospel one can easily see how people are being led astray by distorted biblical texts leading them to a wrong conclusion. A greater concern evolves than the prosperity message itself which involves a view of God that is inappropriate. God is reduced to a celestial being

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<sup>82</sup> Kenneth Copeland, *Laws of Success*, 51.

<sup>83</sup> Sarles, “A Theological Evaluation of the Prosperity Gospel,” 343.

<sup>84</sup> Jones, *The Bankruptcy of the Prosperity Gospel*, 6.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

whose very purpose becomes to serve the demands of his creation. When this happens God becomes less than sovereign and man become more than subservient.

When evaluating the prosperity gospel by examining closely the theological foundation stones upon which it rests the conclusion is that it is built upon shifting sand. It certainly does not follow the counsel of Jesus when he referenced a wise man building his house upon a rock but rather swings to the opposing categorization of the foolish man who built his house upon the sand.<sup>86</sup>

The prosperity gospel lacks the solid foundation of Christian orthodoxy. It stands in the face of established teachings that have remained consistent through centuries of church history. It breaks free of what theologians and church fathers have understood to be solid footing for two thousand years. This laxity regarding accountability to church history has opened the exposition of biblical concepts to fit the whim of the new expositor. A new creativity drawing from 19<sup>th</sup> century philosophical trends of the mind sciences and transcendental meditation has been blended together with a non-academic approach to interpreting scriptures and has produced a hybrid gospel that has been justifiably referred to as another gospel.

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<sup>86</sup> Matthew 7:14.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### EXEGESIS OF SCRIPTURES RELATIVE TO THE WORD OF FAITH THEOLOGY

#### **Chapter Introduction**

This chapter provides a textual treatment of scriptures that are pertinent to the word of faith teachers. These scriptures will be exegeted in order to evaluate the legitimacy of tenets of the word of faith teachings. Included in this chapter is an assessment of Romans 4:17. This scripture is used to support the creative capability of man by the exhortation “calling things that be not as though they were.” Another selection exegeted below is 3 John 2 in which the writer wishes “above all prosperity and health” upon the reader. A third scripture that is routinely used by the word of faith teaching is Mark 11:24 which states that “whatsoever you say believing you will have it.” Here is where some have dubbed the movement by the title “Name it and claim it.”

Another proof text of the movement is Psalm 82:2-7 and St. John 10:33-34. These texts are a reference to men as gods and are quoted by Jesus in John 10 to support the tenet that humans are “little gods.” Through exegeting these texts a picture develops that more precisely represents an accurate portrayal of what the Bible has to say about this facet of the subject. By ascertaining the biblical voice, it is the persuasion of this writer that a fair and accurate conclusion can be achieved.

#### **Romans 4:17**

The *New International Version* of Romans 4:17 reads, “I have made you a father of many nations. He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed — the God who gives life to

the dead and calls into being things that were not.”<sup>1</sup> “Calling into being things that were not” may relate to the creation of wealth, of course, but in this context this passage more accurately relates to the Abrahamic covenant and its implications for Christians. For instance, according to Roth, “Paul’s letter to the Romans asks Christians to see themselves as descendants of Abraham, depending on faith in ‘the God in whom he believed.’”<sup>2</sup> In this context, “calling into being things that were not” also means “things that will be.” In this regard, *Barnes’ Notes* points out that, “Contextually, this passage is founded in part on the fact that the past tense is used (‘I have made thee’) and that God spoke of a thing as already done, which he had promised or purposed to do. The sense is, God had, in his mind or purpose, constituted Abraham the father of many nations; and so certain was the fulfillment of the divine purposes, that he spoke of it as already accomplished.”<sup>3</sup>

In this situation, taking context into account is especially salient because it can help illuminate the true meaning of the Abrahamic covenant according to Paul. As J.V. Fesko emphasizes, “Paul’s original historical context is equally as important as the things that he writes, because questions of agreement and disagreement, continuity and discontinuity, can provide important confirmation of Paul’s views or vital foils by which one can contrast the apostle’s understanding of a particular subject.”<sup>4</sup> The duality of the past tense and promises for the future appears to be the primary source of the prosperity gospel teachings on this subject. For example, according to Chretien and Davenport, “Saint Paul’s statement in the Epistle to the Romans (4:17)

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<sup>1</sup> Romans 4:17 (NIV)

<sup>2</sup> Robert Roth, “Nations and Creation,” *Sojourners Magazine*, 34, No. 6 (June 2005): 48.

<sup>3</sup> *Barnes Notes*: Romans 4:17 Accessed February 10, 2015.

<sup>4</sup> J. V. Fesko, “For Whom Did Christ Die? The Extent of the Atonement in Paul’s Theology,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 56, No. 2 (June 2013): 434.

that God ‘calls into being what is not’ (*kalountos ta mè onta hōs onta*), or in Latin *vocat ea quae non sunt tanquam ea quae sunt* (he calls what is not as well as what is), may be understood to refer to the gift of promise, election, and predestination as well as to the gift of creation, according to the double possibility of the call.”<sup>5</sup> Although the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* or “creation out of nothing” was not specifically articulated in the Old Testament, it occurs in two places in the New Testament in Hebrews 11:3 “Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear”<sup>6</sup> and Romans 4: 17.<sup>7</sup> According to Peacocke, “It soon became the presupposition of Christian faith [that] the world of nature, the stuff of the world, had been created by God, it had a dependent existence, but it was good because it was made by God and because (cf. Genesis I) he was regarded as having declared it to be so.”<sup>8</sup>

Faith is an integral part of the gift of promise because it means that people believe that God does in fact have a plan for them. For instance, according to McDermott, Romans 4:17 means that while “things didn't exist in themselves they existed as known beforehand and pre-ordained in God. So God's law, eternally conceived, is truly an eternal law, ordained by God for the government of things known by him beforehand.”<sup>9</sup> Moreover, the reciprocal nature of the relationship between God and humankind with respect to these promises is underscored by Romans 4:17. According to Craddock, “This statement reminds us that God is both the subject

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<sup>5</sup> Jean-Louis Chretien and Anne A. Davenport, *The Call and the Response* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004), 19

<sup>6</sup>Hebrews 11:3 (KJV).

<sup>7</sup> Arthur Peacocke, *Creation and the World of Science: The Re-Shaping of Belief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 288.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Timothy McDermott, *Selected Philosophical Writings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 417.



and the object of faith. As the subject of faith, God initiates faith. God called Abraham; God promised Abraham. Here faith begins and is sustained. And the one who believes is responding to and trusting in the God who calls and promises.”<sup>10</sup> The duality of the call-and-response message of Romans 4:17 relates to its educational value as well as its ability to provide spiritual nourishment by referring to the Creator as one "who gives life to the dead" as well as “calling into existence the things that do not exist" which combine to form a totality rather than an introduction. In this regard, Craddock notes that, “Paul is not entering into the debate about whether creation is out of nothing rather than out of some primordial mass. Rather, Paul is affirming that God gives life to the dead in the sense that God gives life and being where there was none before.”<sup>11</sup> Prosperity gospel teachers such as Kenneth Copeland, though, draw on Romans 4:17 to convince their followers that the only thing standing between them and material wealth is a sufficient amount of faith. For instance, in his publication, “Everything Changes with Faith and Hope!” Kenneth Copeland writes, “Faith makes all the difference. It affects everything around you, from your success to your relationships, from your well-being to your finances.”<sup>12</sup>

In summary, then, rather than perverting Romans 4:17 to suit the teachings of prosperity gospel ministers, Roth suggests that the real message of the biblical passage relates to the Abrahamic covenant and that, “With the right spirit, we can hear hope in Paul's words that the God of Abraham blesses all and is ‘the father of many nations.’”<sup>13</sup> This point is also made by *Matthew Poole's Commentary* on Romans 4:17, which adds that, “God so honoured Abraham’s

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<sup>10</sup> Fred Craddock, “Lenten Roadmap: To Travel through Lent without Faith Is to Be a Tourist Rather Than a Pilgrim,” *The Christian Century*, 120, No. 5 (March 8, 2003), 18.

<sup>11</sup> Craddock, “Lenten Roadmap.,” 18.

<sup>12</sup> Kenneth Copeland, “Everything Changes with Faith and Hope!” *Kenneth Copeland Ministries*. Accessed February 13, 2015.

<sup>13</sup> Roth, “Nations and Creation,” 48.

faith, that he made him a father, in some respects like himself. As God is a universal Father, not of one, but of all nations, so was Abraham. Again, as God is their spiritual Father, not by carnal generation, so was Abraham also.”<sup>14</sup>

### 3 John 2

Another passage used to support prosperity gospel teachings that has been skewed from its true meaning is 3 John 2. The *New International Version* of 3 John 2 reads: “Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well.”<sup>15</sup> Likewise, the *King James Version* of this passage reads: “Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth.”<sup>16</sup> Contextually, this passage represented a traditional greeting from John and an intention to forge an initial rapport with his audience, but the references to “prosper” and “prospereth” have been the source of an enormous amount of debate and have also been the foundation of prosperity gospel teachings, but for the wrong reasons. According to Klauck and Bailey, “The conventional health wish in 3 John 2 marks this letter as the most secularized in the New Testament. . . Only the reader unfamiliar with this formula from the stock of epistolary topoi would fall prey to the mistake some interpreters make.”<sup>17</sup> In other words, 3 John 2 is tantamount to the salutation that was included in draft notices during World War II greetings. As Museltof points out, “It is indeed lamentable that this typical farewell message from the apostle John to Gaius the Elder has

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<sup>14</sup> *Matthew Poole's Commentary*. Accessed February 19, 2015.

<sup>15</sup> 3 John 1:2 (NIV)

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Hans-Josef Klauck and Daniel P. Bailey, *Ancient Letters and the New Testament: A Guide to Context and Exegesis* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2006), 32.

been picked up and distorted by so many during the last few years. The truth is, this message is little different to one which we use all the time today, 'I trust that this letter finds you well.'"<sup>18</sup>

From a content perspective, there is an important message contained in 3 John 2 as well. In this regard, Klauck and Bailey note that, "The children, including Gaius, who are mentioned in the expression of joy in each proem are Christian believers in the churches being addressed. To the author's great joy they show, at least partly through their conduct, that they have made room in their hearts for God's truth and are following his love commandment."<sup>19</sup> A concomitant goal that is achieved in this passage is that of a *captatio benevolentiae*, a component that helps to forge a rapport between the speaker and his audience with the expectation that the message would be better received. For instance, according to Klauck and Bailey, "This Latin phrase for a well-known figure of ancient rhetoric signifies the speaker's or writer's 'fishing for goodwill' with his audience. By praising the addressees—or even, when necessary, by flattering them—this rhetorical figure seeks to put them in a good mood that will make them receptive to the message."<sup>20</sup> Upon review, these messages are fairly straightforward but they have been warped beyond recognition by prosperity gospel teachers who rely on 3 John 2 by making fundamental contextual and grammatical errors. When this verse is considered contextually it is obvious that its original intent was not to teach doctrine. The will and intent of the author was to send a polite greeting as to inspire a positive reception to the message being sent. Therefore, it is shaky theological footing to attempt to build the doctrine of prosperity on this verse. Further when one examines the meaning of the prosperity it is even more telling. The word prosperity is a Greek word that does not mean "gaining material possessions," but rather "to grant a

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<sup>18</sup> N. I. Museltof.. "3 John 2; What is the Meaning?" *UK Apologetics*. (2014): Accessed February 10, 2014.

<sup>19</sup> Klauck and Bailey, *Ancient Letters and the New Testament*, 33.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

prosperous expedition or expeditious journey,” or “lead by a direct and easy way.”<sup>21</sup> Therefore the nuance of the original meaning of the word prosperity is not consistent with the modern conclusion of prosperity gospel teachers. Likewise, Museltof explains that the “prosper” reference in 3 John 2 is a generic salutation rather than a specific promise from On High. In this regard, Museltof advises that, “‘Prosper’ here in the Greek simply means something like ‘to go well with you.’ More specifically, the Greek word, *eudoo* (*eudow*), means ‘to succeed in reaching’ or ‘to succeed in affairs, including business ones’ but the word is not specifically concerned with prosperity.”<sup>22</sup> The etymology of the Greek word *eudoo* is derived from two root words that mean, alternatively, “to finish,” “to accomplish,” “to do,” or “to make” and “to further” or “to progress” (such as on a journey). According to Museltof:

Prosperity teachers claim the word is all about prosperity which reveals their lack of knowledge of New Testament Greek. The particular claim which one sometimes hears is that ‘prosper’ at the beginning of this verse concerns prosperity of a financial nature while ‘prosper’ at the conclusion of the verse only concerns spiritual matters. But this is entirely incorrect and - in both cases - the same Greek word is being used (*eudow*). Indeed, if John the Apostle expresses his wish that the elder might prosper ‘in all things’ does not this remark itself show that this is not being confined to one’s financial life?<sup>23</sup>

By connecting their teachings with these misinterpretations of scripture, prosperity gospel teachers are creating highly persuasive and powerful messages that hold enormous interest for the downtrodden and marginalized who see little or no promise in their futures. In virtually every other aspect of life, people are cautioned that if something “sounds too good to be true,” then it probably should be avoided, but prosperity gospel ministers insist that their teachings are

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<sup>21</sup> Joseph Henry Thayer, *The New Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1981), 37.

<sup>22</sup> Museltof, “3 John 2; What is the Meaning?,” 3.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

scripture-inspired and therefore true. The only thing holding people back from reaping their material benefits from God is asking for what they want, and “planting a seed” as an act of faith.

In this regard, Museltof notes that,

Some of those who uphold the 'prosperity gospel' say that God wants us all to be healthy and wealthy and we are denying ourselves these things by not 'claiming the promises in faith,' they also seem to imply that words themselves have some sort of magical properties to them, so that if we will only boldly say we will have this or have that, we can have those things!”<sup>24</sup>

All of this certainly sounds too good to be true, but prosperity gospel teachers have other scriptural ammunition at their disposal to help convince any remaining doubters: “They even occasionally quote those famous words in Genesis, 'Let there be Light.' If God had faith in His Word, we can have faith in our words, they tell us, so that we too can boldly bring what we desire into existence!”<sup>25</sup> Like the sitcom, “I Dream of Jeannie” and “Bewitched” who possessed the ability to “bring what they desired into existence,” prosperity gospel teachers would have their followers believe that all they have to do is twitch their noses, say a few magical words, and the world’s material wealth will be poured at their feet. Not only are these teachings lacking in scriptural authority, they can have some self-fulfilling qualities that make them even more dangerous for people who have little to spare in the first place. When prosperity gospel adherents make a seed-faith donation and subsequently experience some type of financial or material gain, they will inevitably attribute any gain following their donations to their prosperity gospel leader. Conversely, when adherents fail to have material blessings materialize, they may simply attribute their lack of success to a lack of faith or insufficient seed-faith donations and become even more involved in the movement. By appealing to scriptural authority the teachers are emboldened to

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<sup>24</sup> Museltof, “3 John 2; What is the Meaning?,” 3..

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

unwaveringly declare these things to be absolute truth. However, enquiring minds should raise a question to the accuracy of these conclusions. James 4:3 speaks of unanswered prayer due to disqualifying conditions of the petitioner involving an inappropriate motive and that motive preventing an answer.”<sup>26</sup> In addition, by convincing people that all they have to do is tell God what they want, prosperity gospel teachers are diverting people from taking more positive steps in their lives such as stopping substance abuse, saving their money, pursuing additional educational opportunities or securing gainful employment. Indeed, the meaning of 3 John 2 has been grossly misinterpreted by prosperity gospel teachers to convince their followers that not only can they ask God for what they want, God is contractually obligated to deliver. As Museltof points out, “This biblically-unwarranted claim is now usually called 'positive confession.' These people seem to hijack the biblical understanding of faith (which is always tied in with the will and sovereignty of God) turning it into something which requires God to give us whatever we want, if we will only be bold and brazen enough to ask for it!”<sup>27</sup> In fact, prosperity gospel ministers teach that the atonement achieved through Christ’s sacrifice on the cross is insufficient in and of itself to achieve true salvation because “believers have the ability to transcend any realm of sin as well as literally speak into existence a cornucopia of tangible blessings that include physical health and material wealth. This latter part leads to positive confession.”<sup>28</sup>

Because positive confession forms such an important component of the prosperity gospel teachings, it is important to examine its foundation carefully in order to determine if there are any elements of truth contained therein. A careful reading of 3 John 2 and other passages used to support the positive confession thesis, though, shows that this passage has been warped beyond

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<sup>26</sup> James 3:2.

<sup>27</sup> Museltof, “3 John 2; What is the Meaning?,” 4.

<sup>28</sup> Walton, Watch This!, 153.

its original meaning to suit the specific needs of prosperity gospel teachers. In this regard, Asamoah-Gyadu points out that, “The teaching on positive confession does not stand up in the face of biblical evidence. The difficulties raised by such formulaic theology of positive confession are not only theological, but also pastoral.”<sup>29</sup> From a theological perspective, positive confession as articulated by prosperity gospel teachers is flawed because “it presents a wrong view of God as being there merely to service the wants of humankind once the right principles or formulae are applied.”<sup>30</sup> This “all-or-nothing” approach to petitioning God for material wealth is not only founded in a flawed interpretation of relevant biblical authority, the positive confession aspects of prosperity gospel teachings can have enormously severe consequences for the unwary. As Asamoah-Gyadu points out:

The explanations offered for setbacks in terms of 'unconfessed sin', 'non-fulfilment of monetary obligations to God and the church', 'negative confessions' and 'lack of faith' are simply inappropriate and insufficient as far as the enigmas of life are concerned. The result has been the pain, suffering and disappointment caused to many believers through these principles. It is simply unrealistic, pastorally insensitive and unbiblical to preach that Christians could enjoy a pain-free, problem-free life merely by 'positive confession' and payment of tithes. In the experience of Paul, it is in carrying in one's body the death of Jesus that the life of the resurrected Christ may also be revealed in the body of the believer (II Corinthians 4:9–10).<sup>31</sup>

Therefore, it turns out that the “too good to be true” issue also holds true for 3 John 2 as well, but this has not stopped prosperity gospel teachers from using their twisted interpretation to persuade people from believing and donating. For example, according to Museltof, “This teaching is so odd and so decidedly unscriptural that it might be considered amazing that any would ever listen to it, unfortunately however, many who are not well grounded in the Word of

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<sup>29</sup> Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics*, 221.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

God do listen to it!”<sup>32</sup> When prosperity gospel teachers are challenged on these points, they pull other scriptural references out of their hats to justify their (mis)interpretations. In this regard, Museltof notes that, “While even some very basic research will show that 3 John 2 really cannot be abused in that way, prosperity adherents will often turn to John 10:10 to back up their point.”<sup>33</sup> The *King James Version* of John 10:10 reads: “The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.”<sup>34</sup> Prosperity gospel ministers frequently draw on this scriptural reference by using it out of context, maintaining that the abundance refers to material wealth rather than spiritual salvation and eternal life. A more careful reading of this passage, though, makes its meaning clear and prosperity gospel teachers have wandered far from scriptural authority in their claims about these meanings. As Museltof concludes, “It might be said to have relevance for Christians in this life, but any notion that Jesus is explicitly referring to financial prosperity here is, frankly, laughable.”<sup>35</sup> Although it may be laughable, the use of 3 John 2 alone or in combination with other scriptural passages, provides word of faith ministers with some powerful authority to support their views. For instance, author Michael Moore reports that word of faith ministers tend to combine legitimate interpretations of scripture together with their skewed versions of selected passages such as 3 John 2 to support their teachings: “Just as one can find in them positive, commendable values, alongside with negative, deplorable ones, so do they illustrate functional, as well as dysfunctional communication patterns.”<sup>36</sup> Although their specific mix of passages

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<sup>32</sup> Museltof, “3 John 2; What is the Meaning?,” 4.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> John 10:10 (KJV)

<sup>35</sup> Museltof, “3 John 2; What is the Meaning?,” 4.

<sup>36</sup> Michael Moore, “Problematic and Pathogenic Communication Patterns in Prayers,” *ETC.: A Review of General Semantics*, 56, No. 2 (Summer 1999), 192.



differs, prosperity gospel teachers draw on both well-known and obscure scripture to support their views about health and wealth. For example, according to Barnes:

Prosperity theology [ministers] promote their beliefs via sermons on the Internet and cable television, during Bible studies, in books, and through international and national speaking tours. Verses such as Deuteronomy 8:18, Malachi 3:10, Isaiah 53:5, Matthew 8:17, John 10:10, and 3 John 2 are commonly understood to convey the message that health and wealth are expectations and evidence of God's favor in the lives of supporters."<sup>37</sup>

When prosperity gospel teachers resort to these types of intentional misinterpretations of Scripture for their own personal gain, they are putting bad wine in old skins and engaging in deceitful practices for their own self-enrichment that would not be tolerated in any other industry, but the deception does not end there but extends to include other passages.

### **Mark 11:24**

The *New International Version* of Mark 11:24 reads as follows: "Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours."<sup>38</sup> A fundamental tenet of the Christian church is a belief that prayers are effective and God answers them,<sup>39</sup> provided that they faithfully believe...and their prayers are in earnest, with "nothing wavering."<sup>40</sup> In this regard, Ragle reports that, "In Mark 11:24, Jesus promises his followers

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<sup>37</sup> Barnes, *Live Long and Prosper*, 68.

<sup>38</sup> Mark 11:24 (NIV)

<sup>39</sup> John Anthony McGuckin, *The Orthodox Church: An Introduction to Its History, Doctrine, and Spiritual Culture* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 194.

<sup>40</sup> Pulpit Commentary on Mark 11:24. Accessed February 19, 2015.

tremendous power from their faithful prayer.”<sup>41</sup> Moreover, this promise is repeated elsewhere in the Bible, including:

Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you (Matthew 7:7);  
 So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you (Luke 11:9);  
 And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son (John 14:13); and,  
 If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you (John 15:7), and many others.

Indeed, some biblical scholars agree that Mark 11:24 is congruent with these and other biblical passages concerning the appropriateness of different types of prayers that include prayers of gratitude and praise as well as prayers of petition.<sup>42</sup> Other biblical scholars, though, argue that prayers of petition are not always answered in the affirmative and represent the least essential of the various types of prayer. For example, Block points out, “Our Lord in Gethsemane made a petitionary prayer (and did not get what he asked for)... This is the lowest and least essential kind of prayer.”<sup>43</sup> From this perspective, prayers for wealth as conceptualized by prosperity gospel teachers are like the mental pleas from desperate gamblers who are about to put their last dollar in the slot machine and who are hoping for that big jackpot payoff as a result. Petitionary prayers, then, are viewed by prosperity gospel teachers as the ATM card to a “heavenly bank.” As Block concludes, “Nearly all the things people pray about are unpredictable: the result of a battle or an operation, the losing or getting of a job, the

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<sup>41</sup> Brian Ragle, “Prayerful Science: More on the Relationship between Prayer and Healing,” *Skeptic*, 12, No. 4 (Winter 2006), 11.

<sup>42</sup> Ed Block, “Pray It Forward: Whether Your List of Intentions Is Seven or 700 Items Long, Praying for Others Takes Us outside Ourselves and Connects Us with the Body of Christ,” *U.S. Catholic*, 73, No. 4 (April 1, 2008), 37.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

reciprocation of a love. We don't pray about eclipses.... It is only our ignorance that makes petitionary prayer possible."<sup>44</sup> Certainly, it would be disingenuous for a Christian to petition God for material wealth that was already possessed, or if there was certainty that it would be provided, so the prayers described in Mark 11:24 appear to relate more to salvation and redemption rather than prayers of petition. Despite the true meaning of Mark 11:24, prosperity gospel ministers such as Kenneth Copeland advises the faithful to use this prayer of faith together with John 16:23 “And in that day ye shall ask me nothing. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you”<sup>45</sup> and counsels his followers to, “Watch how you pray. Get your attitude straight. Make a point of praying in faith, speaking right words in prayer.”<sup>46</sup> In fact, a guide by Pastor George Pearsons published by Kenneth Copeland Ministries incorporates Mark 11:24 into a so-called “Seven Point Bank of Heaven Withdrawal.” In summary this heavenly bank account has a natural process to it: Decide on the amount, agreement with others, claim it, bind the devil, loose the angels, praise God for it. Add to that forgiveness and you can make your draw on heavens bank.

This “seven-point” withdrawal slip on the Bank of Heaven might appear spurious to many mainstream Christians, but prosperity gospel ministers draw on Mark 11:24 in combination with these and other biblical passages so frequently that Mark 11:24 has become the clarion call for the word of faith movement. One Christian minister who is critical of the prosperity gospel message, Pastor Rayshawn Graves, notes that, “The reason that I believe that [Mark 11:24] is their biggest proof text is because it is the passage of scripture that is constantly

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<sup>44</sup> Block, *Pray It Forward*, 38.

<sup>45</sup> St. John 16:23 (KJV).

<sup>46</sup> Kenneth Copeland, “Believer’s Voice of Victory” (1978). Accessed February 11, 2015..

referenced in many prosperity teachers writings and sermons.”<sup>47</sup> In support of this assertion, prosperity gospel teachers, Kenneth Hagin, Kenneth Copeland, and Gloria Copeland, are examples of faith teachers who incorporate this passage to build their doctrinal position. While these uses of this scripture have slight variations there are common implications that are similar to each. They each involve confession which results in what one may eventually possess and by mere speech circumstances can be changed.. These interpretations, though, fly in the face of the true meaning of Mark 11:24 and the other passages that are used in support of the prosperity gospel teachings. Rather than being stored in a Heavenly Bank where true believers can make withdrawals of blessings at their discretion, the blessings from God, including prosperity from time to time, are just that, gifts, rather than the answering of petitionary prayers which represent the least important in the eyes of God. As Graves points out, “Yes, God does bless His people with prosperity at times and yes, He does heal, but nowhere does He guarantee this to anyone in the Bible - it is a gracious gift when He gives it.”<sup>48</sup> This observation should take the wind out of any prosperity gospel teacher’s sails, but more controversial still has been the application of Psalm 82:2-7 to the word of faith teachings as discussed in the following section.

### **Psalm 82:2-7**

The *New International Version* of this Psalm reads as follows:

How long will you defend the unjust and show partiality to the wicked?  
 Defend the weak and the fatherless; uphold the cause of the poor and the  
 oppressed. Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of  
 the wicked. The ‘gods’ know nothing, they understand nothing. They walk

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<sup>47</sup> Rayshawn Graves, “The Prosperity Gospel's Biggest Proof Text,” *Adjust My Thoughts*. Accessed February 12, 2015.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*.

about in darkness; all the foundations of the earth are shaken. “I said, ‘You are “gods”; you are all sons of the Most High.’ But you will die like mere mortals; you will fall like every other ruler.”<sup>49</sup>

Not surprisingly, these passages have been the focus of an enormous amount of biblical scholarship. Some authorities have interpreted Psalms 82:2-7 to mean that at one point there was a council of gods with Yahweh as a member only, with humans being tasked with carrying out their directions. For example, Gerstenberger reports that,

Modern exegetes have been mesmerized by the problem whether Psalm 82 is talking about foreign gods or about dominant political powers acting in the name of their deities. Wherever justice was at stake in the ancient Near East, the deities played an important role, but those humans in charge were always involved with the execution of the law.<sup>50</sup>

In sharp contrast to the monotheism that would evolve, Gerstenberger suggests that this perspective was characteristic of ancient Israel’s concept about the Godhood. In this regard, Gerstenberger points out that,

Psalm 82, for its part, not only uses the first person of God but also portrays his action in the divine council. The concept of God's acting among a pantheon of deities was apparently common throughout Israel's history, in spite of later monotheistic restrictions of any polytheistic models (only the ‘God alone’ formulas in Deut 4:39 or Isa 44:6).<sup>51</sup>

The admonition that “You are ‘gods’” carried some heavy baggage for the ancient Israelis, just as it does for modern Christians. For example, the editors of *Sojourners Magazine* report that, “In Psalm 82, remarkably, the poetry suggests that even the gods are held to such neighborly expectations to ‘Give justice to the weak and the orphan ... Rescue the weak and the

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<sup>49</sup> Psalm 82:2-7 (NIV)

<sup>50</sup> Erhard S. Gerstenberger, *Psalms* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 114.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

needy' (verses 3-4)."<sup>52</sup> Moreover, rather than assigning god-like qualities to humans, this true meaning of these passages relates to the need for people to conform to these high standards in terms of how they treated their fellow humans: "All of these texts concern 'the new self' in the new community in response to the newness of God. 'Worthy of the Lord' consists in neighborly mercy and justice, a life congruent with God's own life."<sup>53</sup> Once again improper interpretation is forged to support an errant doctrine of the prosperity gospel.

### **John 10:33-34**

A companion text used along with the previous OT Psalm to mirror the subject of "you are 'gods'" is found in the NT text of John 10:33-34. The *New International Version* of John 10:33-34 reads as follows: "We are not stoning you for any good work," they replied, "but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God. Jesus answered them, "Is it not written in your Law, 'I have said you are "gods.""<sup>54</sup> In this context, the response by Jesus to charges of blasphemy draws on the teachings of Psalm 82:6. According to Bryan, "What, exactly, was [blasphemy] (blasphemein— [to abuse, to insult])? It was not only, as is sometimes claimed, a matter of cursing the divine name (Lev. 24.16) but also any matter that involved deriding, demeaning, or insulting the God of Israel."<sup>55</sup> From this perspective, it would seem reasonable to suggest that the charges of blasphemy were appropriate for anyone claiming to be a god or acting for Him. In this regard, Bryan notes that, "Such demeaning is implicit in the words and works of

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<sup>52</sup> "Signs of New Creation" *Sojourners Magazine*, 39, No. 7 (July 2010), 48.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> St. John 10:33-34 (NIV)

<sup>55</sup> Christopher Bryan, *Render to Caesar: Jesus, the Early Church, and the Roman Superpower* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 58.

any who illicitly claim for themselves prerogatives that are God's alone (hence John 10.33: ['It is not for a good work that we stone you but for blasphemy; because you, being a man, make yourself God'])."<sup>56</sup> In truth, the judges did have some highly damning blasphemy ammunition that they could use against Jesus in this matter. For instance, Bryan adds that other synoptic evangelists agreed that, "Jesus spoke of God's judgment upon the Temple and, moreover, associated himself with that judgment. He spoke of God's purposes in the coming kingdom and judgment and again uniquely associated himself with that fulfillment."<sup>57</sup> As with the other biblical teachings that are used by prosperity gospel ministers, John 10:34-34 has been skewed beyond its original and true meaning and purpose in order to support the proposition that humans are "little gods" who are uniquely worthy of material blessings from on high. Prosperity gospel teachers claim that Jesus made it clear that everyone is a god in their own right, equal to and with powers equivalent to and not reserved only to the Almighty. When the passage is placed in its proper context, though, this interpretation is exposed to the light of harsh reality. In other words, the word of faith interpretation of this meaning alters the fundamental relationship between the Creator and the created, the Father and his children. Some evidence of this misapplication of the true meaning of John 10:33-34 can be discerned from the practices used by prosperity gospel teachers to convince their followers to keep the donations pouring in. For instance, in his essay, "Beware the Pretenders," Pastor David C. Forsyth reports that,

[Kenneth] Hagin is notorious for receiving 'visions' which give guidance to his ministry. One of his frequently recounted visions recalls a time when he and Jesus were talking together and were confronted by a 'demon monkey.' In the vision, Jesus was unable to control the monkey, but Hagin rescued the moment by rebuking the demon in Jesus' name.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Bryan, *Render to Caesar.*, 58.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> David C. Forsythe, "Beware the Pretenders," *Christian Fallacies*. Accessed on February 9, 2015.

The rest of Hagin's vision included guidance concerning how he was able to prevail over the "demon monkey." According to Forsythe,

Weird, bizarre, and heretical visions like these are the hallmarks of Hagin's ministry; however his direct teaching on Christians becoming 'little gods' is one of his worst. This teaching, picked up by Hagin's protégé Kenneth Copeland, is based upon a misapplication of John 10:33-34 whereby Copeland has declared that all believers are part of a 'god class.'<sup>59</sup>

The origins of this so-called "god class" can be traced to Adam, Copeland maintains, who was the equal of God until he subjugated his will to that of Satan at which point he was cast from the "god class." Prosperity gospel teachers tell their faithful that it is possible to be restored to this status and some claim they have achieved it. For instance, Forsythe adds that, "When a person becomes a believer they regain their god status, to the point where Copeland even equates himself with the 'I Am.' This false and heretical doctrine is a direct outgrowth of Kenyon's 'supermen' teaching."<sup>60</sup> As noted above, some of the practices used by word of faith teachers would not be tolerated in other industries and would be viewed as outright criminal in some, but Hagin and others have managed to parlay this line of reasoning into major empires that defy scrutiny by tax authorities and governmental regulators. Moreover, the word of faith movement has become a self-perpetuating juggernaut that may be difficult to counter. As Forsythe points out, "The false teaching does not end with Hagin and Copeland however, since Hagin's Rhema Bible Training Center, founded in 1974, has turned out over 10,000 graduates."<sup>61</sup> In addition, because of his popularity, Hagin has spawned numerous copycats. It is even reported by Hagin's own son that some of these men have preached his father's sermons almost verbatim

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<sup>59</sup> Forsythe, "Beware the Pretenders,"

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 4.



from his tapes.”<sup>62</sup> Besides bilking the vulnerable out of billions of dollars, these false teachings have also served to adversely affect the manner in which many Christians are conceptualizing their relationship with the Almighty. This assertion is supported by many of the publications written by prosperity gospel teachers. For instance, in his pamphlet entitled, *How To Write Your Own Ticket With God*, Hagin describes yet another visitation by Jesus who counseled him concerning his sermons following his prayers for guidance. According to Hagin’s account, Jesus said, "You're correct, My Spirit, the Holy Spirit, is endeavoring to get another sermon into your spirit but you failed to pick it up. While I'm here I will do what you ask, I will give you that sermon outline, now get your pencil and paper and write it down.”<sup>63</sup>

### Summary

When high-profile individuals such as Oral Roberts or Kenneth Hagin claim that Jesus has visited them and given them instructions concerning how they and others should live their lives, there is a natural human temptation to listen to what these ministers have to say. After all, how many people actually get to talk to Jesus today? The problem with these accounts, though, is that they are used by the word of faith movement to circumvent what the Bible actually says to promote their own personal agendas which always revolve around money. More troubling still is the impact that these proclamations have on the relationship between God and humankind. By suggesting that people are “little gods,” the word of faith movement teachings elevate people into the “god-class” where they can demand what they will from God because they are on equal

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<sup>62</sup> Forsythe, “Beware the Pretenders,” 5.

<sup>63</sup> MacArthur, “Toxic Television,” 6.

terms with Him. This process also diminishes God's sovereignty over the universe which is clearly spelled out in the Bible. Given the challenge this represents to mainstream Christian dogma, it is disturbing that the word of faith movement has attracted growing numbers of detractors. However it is apparent these heretical views appear to be common characteristics among its practitioners. Taken together, it is clear that Romans 4:17, 3 John 2, Mark 11:24, Psalm 82:2-7 and John 10:33-34 have all been taken out of context by word of faith teachers in ways that are not only contrary to mainstream Christian thought, but they are held heretical by many biblical scholars.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSION

#### **Chapter Introduction**

This thesis has provided a brief consideration of some of the major teachings of the word of faith movement. In order to adequately define those teachings a historical search was made to determine the personalities who founded the movement. This search revealed that the movement originated from the psychology of mind sciences, transcendental meditation and the power of positive confession. These ideas were blended with biblical texts and given a religious platform from which were formulated the word of faith doctrines. Out of this milieu of concepts evolved teachings regarding the creative power of the tongue, the prosperity doctrine, the concept of humans becoming “little gods” through redemption by the blood of Christ and the promise of perfect health to all believers who acquire enough faith.

Examining the theology of these beliefs in Chapter Three led to a conclusion that the paradigms utilized from scripture have not been correctly applied by the word of faith leaders. For example the Abrahamic covenant was a covenant of blessings pronounced on Abraham and his seed. It is true that the church is the new covenant and as such is a recipient of the inheritance of the covenant of promise. However, this new covenant of Christ is not primarily concerned with material possessions but is redemptive in nature. Neither is the new covenant oriented toward the inheritance of a geographical territory (Israel) as was the Abrahamic covenant nor the establishment of a nation as was his. In fact an inordinate obsession with riches, physical well-being and personal exaltation to god-like status is not imbedded in the solid truth of the Bible neither under the Old Testament covenant with Abraham nor with the New Testament covenant

of redemption through Jesus Christ. Prosperity theology in the Christian community is far reaching and far too prominent to ignore. The powerful impact of the movement may be at least partially credited to the use of biblical texts to legitimize its teaching. The unscholarly interpretation of the scriptures by word of faith teachers may not be easily detectable by the average Christian which provides an unchallenged atmosphere for the proclamation of its message. This mandates a thorough and adequate hermeneutical exposition of each biblical text in order to define the true meaning. This was addressed in Chapter Four by exegeting commonly held biblical texts within the word of faith theology. It was shown by ascertaining the actual meaning of these texts that the promoters of the doctrines of the word of faith movement are built upon an inaccurate and flawed interpretation of the Bible. The most effective approach to alleviating the harmful effects of these doctrinal vestiges is by simply exalting and expounding the truth regarding these doctrinal errors.

### **Implications of the Word of Faith Theology**

The primary implication of the word of faith theology has been to warp the promises made by God into some type of celestial casino where everyone is told they can be a winner, but in order to be a winner, a seed offering must be given which will return a thirty, sixty or ninety percent return. Indeed, although prosperity gospel teachings have come true for a select few, the primary beneficiaries have been those who preach the message. The transcript of a YouTube video presentation of Pastor John MacArthur of Grace Community Church in Panorama City, California, a prosperity gospel critic, provides some valuable insights concerning the current impact of this theological movement from a global perspective. According to Pastor MacArthur, the United States is in essence exporting a religious Ponzi scheme to the

rest of the world in the form of prosperity gospel teachings that are being used in the same fashion they have always been used to exploit the most vulnerable who are desperately searching for answers to their multitudinous problems, including most especially material needs.

The implications of this process are severe because the word of faith movement not only exploits many of those it snares in its web of deceit, the spurious nature of its teachings and teachers may prevent those who might otherwise subscribe to Christianity from considering it. In this regard, MacArthur emphasizes,

From the standpoint of the world, the average non-Christian that would turn that on...that is a good reason not to buy into Christianity. That is maybe the best reason. If I was a non-Christian, I would say, 'That is so obviously a scam, that is so obviously phony, why would anybody have anything to do with that? It is so counterproductive to the proclamation of the true gospel.'<sup>1</sup>

The prosperity gospel promises physical, spiritual, and material blessings for the faithful who believe and subscribe to its principles. From this perspective, Christians have the fundamental right to claim what belongs to them while on earth. Prosperity gospel ministers teach their congregations that the material blessings they receive are the result of their faithful prayers but failures are attributed to insufficient faith or an inappropriate lifestyle.<sup>2</sup> The teachings of the prosperity gospel are summarized by Barnes as follows:

The Faith Movement is a *mélange* of elements drawn and recombined anew from a variety of traditions, including Evangelicalism, neo-Pentecostalism, and more important, New Thought metaphysics. Three basic points form the core of the Faith Movement. These are: the principle of knowing who you are in Christ; the practice of positive confession (and positive mental attitudes); and a worldview that emphasizes material prosperity and physical health as the divine right of every Christian.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> MacArthur, "Toxic Television," 7.

<sup>2</sup> Barnes, *Live Long and Prosper*, 199.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 199.

Although compelling in the extreme especially for those who have little to begin with and fewer prospects for the future these teachings are founded on spurious interpretations of biblical guidance that have been taken out of context or otherwise warped beyond recognition to satisfy the needs of prosperity gospel teachers. For example, Barnes points out that,

One of the most interesting and, to some, potentially troubling aspects of Prosperity Gospel [sic] is the way in which the Bible is interpreted. Prosperity proponents are accused of proof-texting with little or no consideration for the varied social, cultural, political, and economic contexts from which passages were originally written.<sup>4</sup>

The implications of the word of faith theology extend far beyond the prosperity gospel ministry itself, and include significant influence on mainstream Christian churches, as well as a flawed view of the reasons for poverty. In this regard, Barnes concludes that,

In addition to accusations of anti-intellectualism, detractors seem to most adamantly object to the perceived minimization of salvation and sin, the tendency to directly or indirectly blame the poor and sick for their predicaments, its seemingly wide appeal among churches outside the Faith movement, and God's suggested role as a 'spiritual Santa Claus' whose primary responsibility is to meet the temporal needs of believers.<sup>5</sup>

Since its founding, the prosperity theology movement has created growing demand for teachers who were worthy of emulation based on their widely publicized material success. This is not surprising given the need for some visible proof that the prosperity gospel message works, and many prosperity gospel teachers have taken the mandate to the extreme. For example, Stephens reports that, "Over the decades, believers have wanted their ministers and revivalists to look the part, to model unimaginable success."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Barnes, *Live Long and Prosper*, 199.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid,

<sup>6</sup> Stephens, "Holy High Rollers," 13.

Besides the high-profile cases of the Grassley investigation, other prosperity gospel teachers have not only adopted an affluent lifestyle, they publicly celebrate it as proof-positive that the prosperity gospel is authentic. As an example, Stephens cites, “At one point, the aptly named Creflo Dollar, a ‘pastorpreneur’ with unequaled charm, assured his congregation, ‘I own two Rolls-Royces and didn’t pay a dime for them. Why? Because while I’m pursuing the Lord, those cars are pursuing me.’ In the eyes of the movement’s critics, this mix of God and mammon is despicable.”<sup>7</sup>

### **Evaluation of the Impact from a Global Perspective**

Although failing to provide the salvation that is freely available to all by preaching the true Gospel, word of faith teachers are also described by many critics as so many hucksters who are bent on using their skewed versions of biblical teaching to line their own pockets. As Pastor MacArthur puts it, “So, you’ve got the charlatans, the frauds, people who literally divest the weak, the poor, the sick, the desperate of their money to make them rich and do it in the name of Jesus.”<sup>8</sup>

Furthermore, even when mainstream Christians reject the teaching of prosperity gospel ministers outright, they may be influenced by the messages they are sending in ways that distort their views about what they should reasonably expect from a relationship with their Creator and the Christian faith. Although precise numbers concerning current membership in word of faith churches are unavailable, studies have shown that about 17 percent of American Christians

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<sup>7</sup> Stephens, “Holy High Rollers,” 14.

<sup>8</sup> MacArthur, “Toxic Television,” 8.

“openly identify with the movement,” and another 66 percent of all Christian believers “are convinced that God, ultimately, wants them to prosper.”<sup>9</sup>

Certainly, this perspective is congruent with mainstream Christian teaching wherein God loves humankind as a father loves his children, but the manner in which this message is packaged by prosperity gospel teachings perverts it into a relationship in which humans are on the same level as God or even superior, and are in a position to make demands on Him for anything they may want which He is obligated to satisfy.

This is a powerfully alluring proposition for anyone, but especially for those individuals who are faced with a bleak future that has little other prospect except to expect a miracle. By exploiting these dire circumstances, prosperity gospel teachers prey on the very people they are claiming to be helping. In this regard, Lear reports that, “The most common seeker of the prosperity message in the United States is older, African American, less educated (associates level degree or less), and evangelical (or born-again).”<sup>10</sup> As noted above, this powerful message is also being exported to the rest of the world, especially the Third World where people are primed and ready for a miracle to alleviate their suffering. For instance, Lear points out that, The prosperity gospel has also become an export of America to the world. This distorted gospel is one of the largest and most tragic exports that America takes to the two-thirds world, especially Africa.”<sup>11</sup>

Some religious authorities consider the export of the word of faith movement to the rest of the world as part of the United States’ ongoing attempts to press other countries into America’s mold even if it is to the detriment of their citizenry. As Barnes points out,

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<sup>9</sup> Lear, “The Bankrupt Theology of the Prosperity Gospel,” 4.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.



“Contemporary prosperity churches and viewpoints are grounded in patriarchy, America’s world dominance, capitalism, and political conservatism that undermine responses to social justice issues.”<sup>12</sup>

### **Effect of the Word of Faith Doctrine on Local Congregations**

Not surprisingly, many adherents of the word of faith movement have experienced less-than-optimal outcomes from their prayers and donations to prosperity gospel teachers to the point where they have become sufficiently disillusioned to abandon the theology. For instance, Barnes reports that, “There is a tendency for supporters to embrace the theology broadly rather than blindly, question expected wealth, and experience frustration, disillusionment, and confusion about how the theology is manifesting in their lives. It was also common for prosperity supporters to ultimately reject the theology.”<sup>13</sup>

In a survey conducted by this writer of 100 senior pastors, 20 of whom responded in time to have their results included in the data analysis, it was determined that more than half (55%) had encountered adverse effects of the prosperity gospel. This survey provides insight that pastors are facing the challenge of confronting and responding to the prosperity gospel message within their own congregations. The main limitation of this survey is that it provides only a small sampling of churches. Additional limitations are the congregations referenced are listed as charismatic, undenominational and classical Pentecostal denominations such as Assembly of God, Church of God, and Pentecostal Holiness. The survey is a cross section of very large congregations to relatively small. A proforma copy of the survey instrument is provided in

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<sup>12</sup> Barnes, *Live Long and Prosper*, 203.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

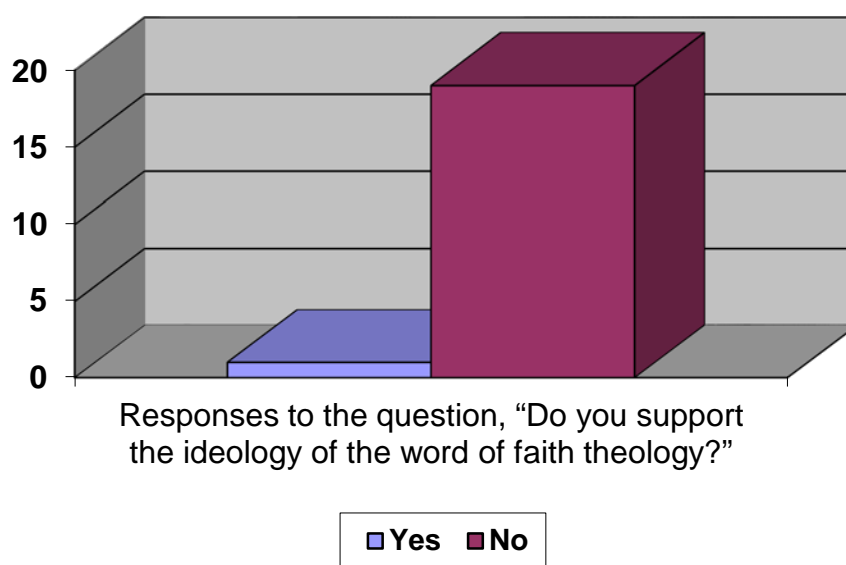
Appendix A. The results of the survey are presented in Tables 1 through 9 and depicted graphically in Figures 5 through 14 below.

As can be seen in Table 1 and Figure 5 below, the overwhelming majority (19 or 95%) of the respondents do not support the ideology of the word of faith theology, and just one respondent (or 5%) responded in the affirmative to this question.

Table 1

*Responses to the question, “Do you support the ideology of the word of faith theology?”*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	1	5.0	5.0	5.0
	No	19	95.0	95.0	100.0
	Total	20	100.0	100.0	



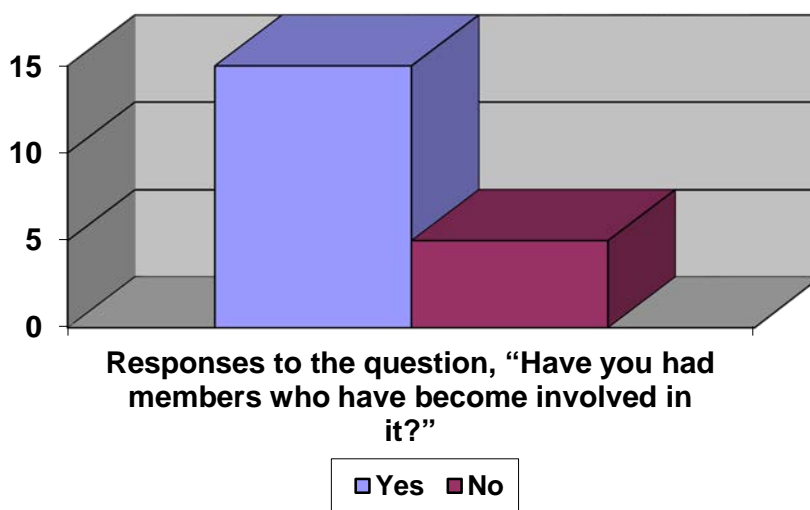
*Figure 5. Responses to the question, “Do you support the ideology of the word of faith theology?”*

Despite the foregoing lack of support from the mainstream Christian clergy, there is clearly interest among local congregations in the word of faith theology. For instance, in response to the question, “Have you had members who have become involved in it?,” fully three-quarters of the respondents responded in the affirmative while the remaining 25 percent of the respondents replied in the negative as shown in Table 2 and Figure 6 below.

Table 2

*Responses to the question, “Have you had members who have become involved in it?”*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	15	75.0	75.0	75.0
	No	5	25.0	25.0	100.0
	Total	20	100.0	100.0	



*Figure 6.* Responses to the question, “Have you had members who have become involved in it?”

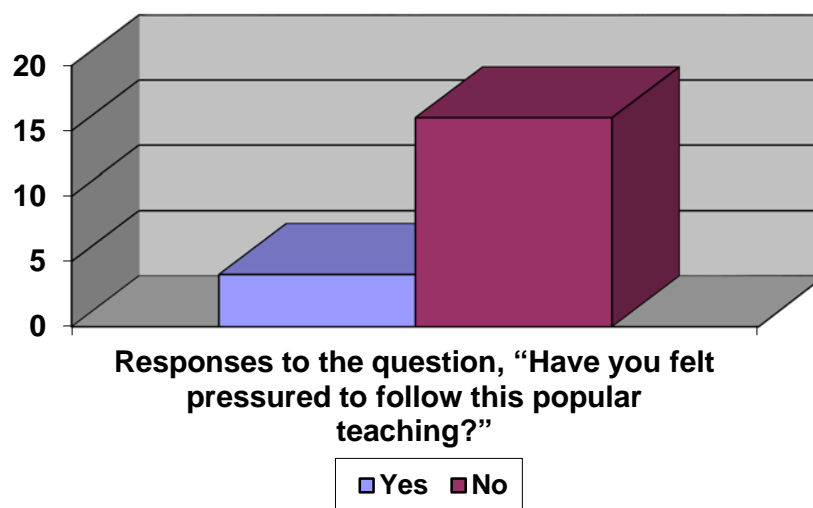
Moreover, one-in-five of the respondents (4 or 20%) reported they had felt pressured to follow the word of faith theology while 16 respondents (or 80%) replied in the negative in

response to the question, “Have you felt pressured to follow this popular teaching?” as shown in Table 3 and depicted graphically in Figure 7 below.

Table 3

*Responses to the question, “Have you felt pressured to follow this popular teaching?”*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	4	20.0	20.0	20.0
	No	16	80.0	80.0	100.0
	Total	20	100.0	100.0	



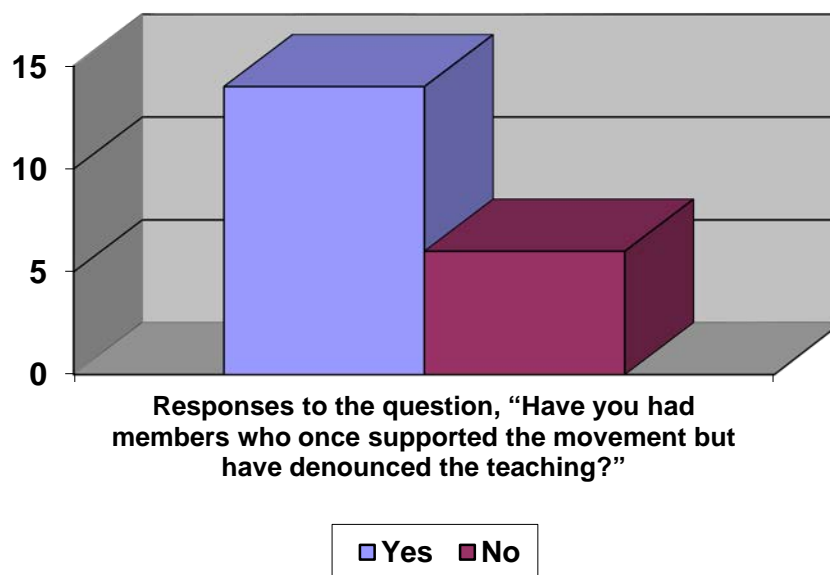
*Figure 8.* Responses to the question, “Have you felt pressured to follow this popular teaching?”

A significant percentage of the respondents also reported that they had members of their congregation who had supported the word of faith theology at some point only to denounce it later. For instance, in response to the question, “Have you had members who once supported the movement but have denounced the teaching?,” 14 respondents (or 70%) replied in the affirmative while six respondents (or 30%) replied in the negative as shown in Table 4 and Figure 9 below.

Table 4

*Responses to the question, “Have you had members who once supported the movement but have denounced the teaching?”*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	14	70.0	70.0	30.0
	No	6	30.0	30.0	100.0
Total		20	100.0	100.0	



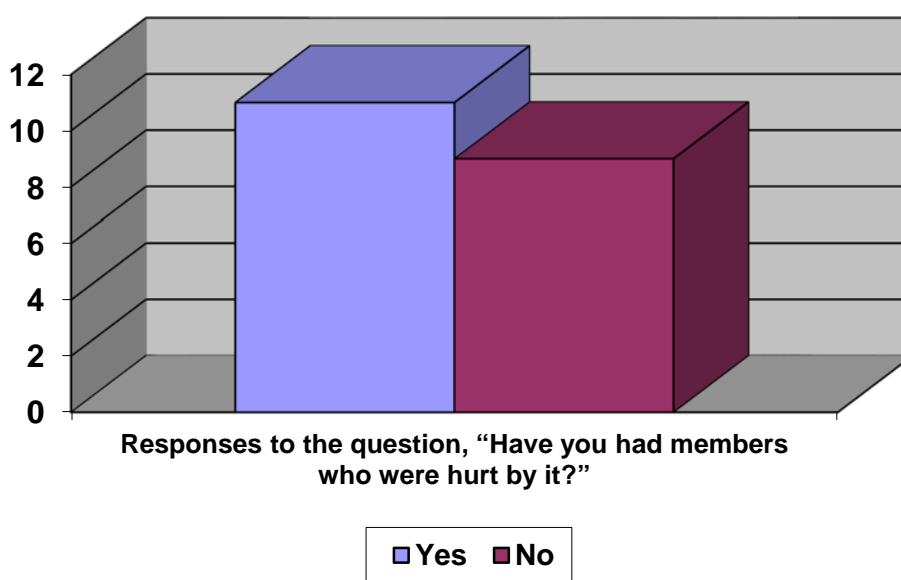
*Figure 9.* Responses to the question, “Have you had members who once supported the movement but have denounced the teaching?”

Of particular note were the responses to the question, “Have you had members who once supported the movement but have denounced the teaching?,” with more than half (11 or 55%) of the respondents replying in the affirmative while nine respondents (or 45%) replied in the negative as shown in Table 5 and Figure 10 below.

Table 5

*Responses to the question, “Have you had members who were hurt by it?”*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	11	55.0	55.0	55.0
	No	9	45.0	45.0	100.0
	Total	20	100.0	100.0	



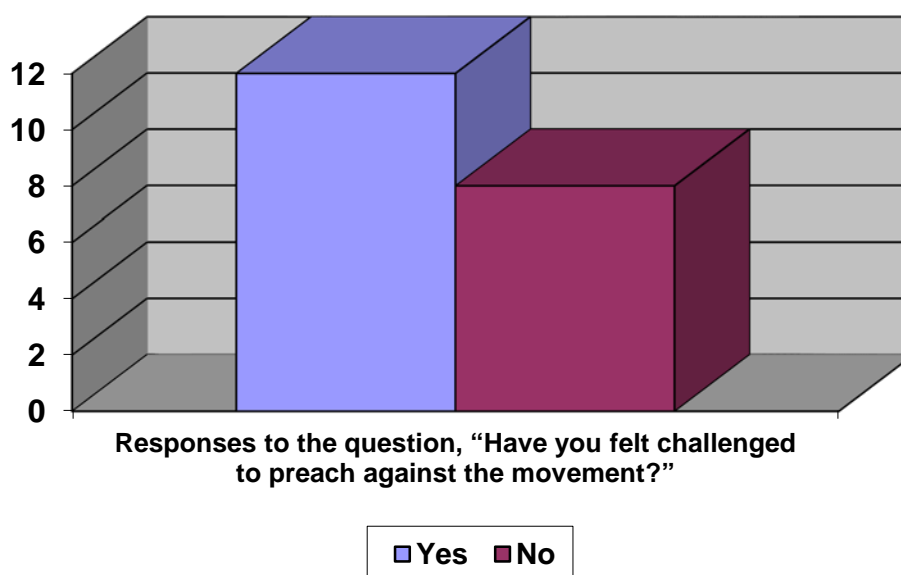
*Figure 10.* Responses to the question, “Have you had members who were hurt by it?”

Not only did more than half of the respondents report they had members of their congregation hurt by the word of faith movement, a majority of the respondents (12 or 60%) replied in the affirmative in response to the question, “Have you felt challenged to preach against the movement?”; eight respondents (or 40%) replied in the negative in response to this question as shown in Table 6 and Figure 11 below.

Table 6

*Responses to the question, "Have you felt challenged to preach against the movement?"*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	12	60.0	60.0	60.0
	No	8	40.0	40.0	100.0
	Total	20	100.0	100.0	



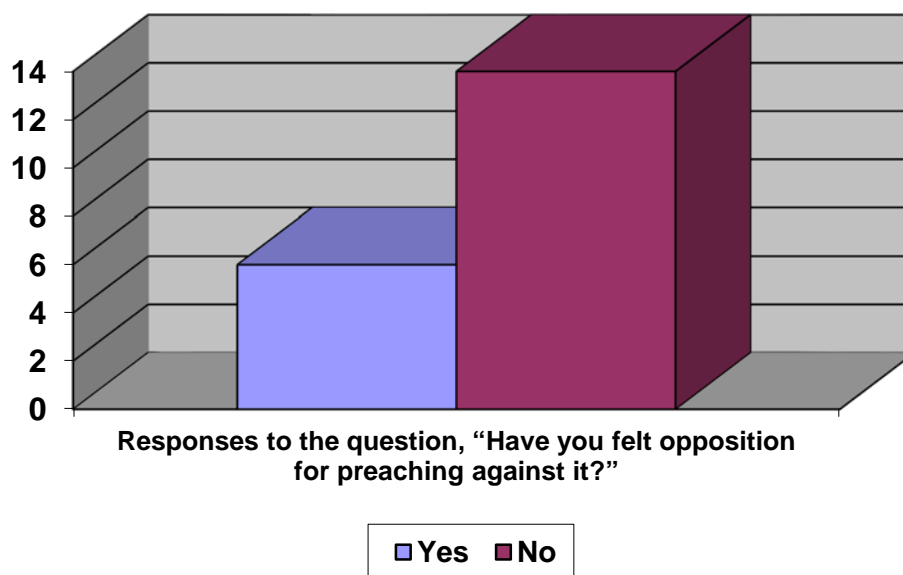
*Figure 11.* Responses to the question, "Have you felt challenged to preach against the movement?"

The responses to the question, "Have you felt opposition for preaching against it?" were likewise revealing in that nearly one-third (6 or 30%) of the respondents replied in the affirmative, while 14 (or 70%) replied in the negative as shown in Table 7 and Figure 12 below.

Table 7

*Responses to the question, “Have you felt opposition for preaching against it?”*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	6	30.0	30.0	30.0
	No	14	70.0	70.0	100.0
Total		20	100.0	100.0	



*Figure 12.* Responses to the question, “Have you felt opposition for preaching against it?”

Just three respondents (or 15%) replied in the affirmative in response to the question, “Have the teachings of the word of faith preachers helped your ministry?,” while 17 respondents (or 85%) replied in the negative as shown in Table 8 and Figure 13 below.



Table 8

Responses to the question, "Have the teachings of the word of faith preachers helped your ministry?"

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	3	15.0	15.0	15.0
	No	17	85.0	85.0	100.0
Total		20	100.0	100.0	

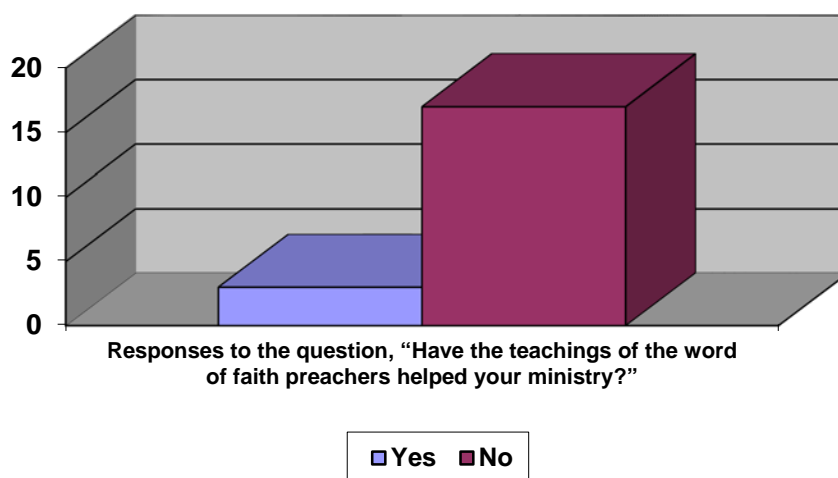


Figure 13. Responses to the question, "Have the teachings of the word of faith preachers helped your ministry?"

Just as many of the respondents believed that the teachings of the word of faith preachers did not help their ministry, many of the respondents believed that these teaching actually hurt their ministries. In response to the question, "Have the teachings of the word of faith preachers hurt your ministry?," 14 respondents (or 70%) replied in the affirmative while just six respondents (or 30%) replied in the negative as shown in Table 9 and Figure 14 below..

Table 9

Responses to the question, “Have the teachings of the word of faith preachers hurt your ministry?”

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1.00	6	30.0	30.0	30.0
	2.00	14	70.0	70.0	100.0
Total		20	100.0	100.0	

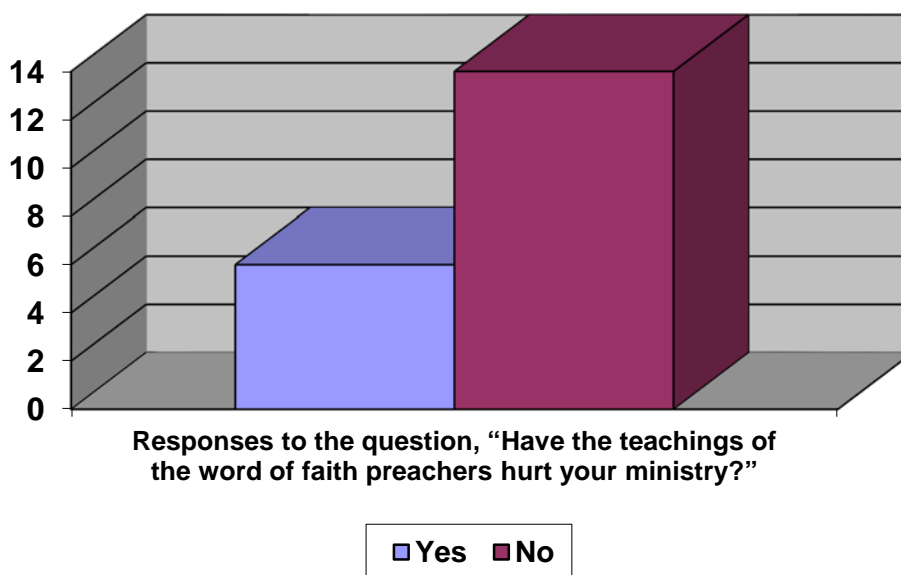


Figure 14. Responses to the question, “Have the teachings of the word of faith preachers hurt your ministry?”

### Constructive Actions for the Local Pastor

Because prosperity gospel ministers tend to misuse or misinterpret scripture to support their teachings and ongoing calls for “seed-faith” contributions, constructive actions for local pastors include explicating these scriptures to explain their true meanings. In addition, local pastors can serve as clearinghouses for accurate information for their parishioners about the word of faith movement and more appropriate ways to satisfy the various needs in their lives, including economic needs, involving more

concrete and positive actions than simply demanding material blessings from God and waiting for them to materialize. It is understandable for Christians to “expect a miracle” in their lives based on the promises contained in the Gospel, but a concentration must be oriented to an emphasis on the spiritual rather than material blessings. Therefore, it is always unreasonable, and perhaps heretical to “demand a miracle” because a miracle is a gift of God and open to His wise discretion whether to give or to withhold for some higher purpose.

### **Resolving the Confusion**

The confusion that exists at present relates to how biblical passages are taken out of context or are misinterpreted by prosperity gospel teachers to bilk unsuspecting parishioners out of their money.

“Sowing a seed” in order to reap a harvest of any type makes perfect sense to many people because that is in fact how nature works but the weakness lies in word of faith ministers who redirect tithes and offerings from the local church into their own ministries and leave the local pastor limited in funds to do effective and more closely monitored ministry. Dissuading faithful Christians from contributing to the church of their choice is a very slippery slope that may lead to dissolution and disappointment in the empty promises made by the word of faith preachers. Confronting this dilemma demands careful exegetical analyses to ensure that any attempt to clarify the confusion is based on legitimate scriptural authority rather than an individual’s personal contempt or dislike of prosperity gospel teachings. After all, 1 Corinthians 9:13-14 (ESV) clearly states: “Do you not know that those who are employed in the temple service get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in the sacrificial offerings? In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel.”

Indeed, the Holy Bible is replete with guidance concerning the need to contribute to the church, including the representative passages cited below:

2 Corinthians 9:7 ESV: Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

Malachi 3:10 ESV: Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need.

Proverbs 11:24 ESV: One gives freely, yet grows all the richer; another withholds what he should give, and only suffers want.

Mark 12:41-44 ESV: And he sat down opposite the treasury and watched the people putting money into the offering box. Many rich people put in large sums. And a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which make a penny. And he called his disciples to him and said to them, “Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the offering box. For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.”

Luke 6:38 ESV: Give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you.”

2 Corinthians 9:6-7 ESV: The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

Proverbs 3:9 ESV: Honor the Lord with your wealth and with the firstfruits of all your produce;

Malachi 3:8-10 ESV: Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing me. But you say, ‘How have we robbed you?’ In your tithes and contributions. You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me, the whole nation of you. Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need.

Proverbs 3:9-10 ESV: Honor the Lord with your wealth and with the firstfruits of all your produce; then your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will be bursting with wine. Psalm 4:5 ESV: Offer right sacrifices, and put your trust in the Lord.

Matthew 6:1-4 ESV: “Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. “Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

Acts 20:35 ESV: In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”

Luke 16:10 ESV: One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much.

Leviticus 27:30 ESV: Every tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land or of the fruit of the trees, is the Lord's; it is holy to the Lord.

Ecclesiastes 5:4-5 ESV: When you vow a vow to God, do not delay paying it, for he has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you vow. It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay.

Numbers 18:28 ESV: So you shall also present a contribution to the Lord from all your tithes, which you receive from the people of Israel. And from it you shall give the Lord's contribution to Aaron the priest.

Luke 21:1-4 ESV: Jesus looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the offering box, and he saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins. And he said, “Truly, I tell you, this

poor widow has put in more than all of them. For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on.”

Matthew 6:21 ESV: For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Philippians 4:19 ESV: And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

Deuteronomy 14:22 ESV: “You shall tithe all the yield of your seed that comes from the field year by year.

Leviticus 27:30-34 ESV: “Every tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land or of the fruit of the trees, is the Lord's; it is holy to the Lord. If a man wishes to redeem some of his tithe, he shall add a fifth to it. And every tithe of herds and flocks, every tenth animal of all that pass under the herdsman's staff, shall be holy to the Lord. One shall not differentiate between good or bad, neither shall he make a substitute for it; and if he does substitute for it, then both it and the substitute shall be holy; it shall not be redeemed.” These are the commandments that the Lord commanded Moses for the people of Israel on Mount Sinai.

Deuteronomy 16:17: Every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the Lord your God that he has given you.

Genesis 28:20-22 ESV: Then Jacob made a vow, saying, “If God will be with me and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear, so that I come again to my father's house in peace, then the Lord shall be my God, and this stone, which I have set up for a pillar, shall be God's house. And of all that you give me I will give a full tenth to you.”

Taken together, these passages and others of a similar nature make it clear that faithful Christians are expected to help support the church and its clergy, but nowhere does it say in the Holy Bible that Christians are obligated to provide their church leaders with a lavish lifestyle in return for the blessings that are already guaranteed by Christ's sacrifices on the cross. Consequently, it is vitally important to educate parishioners concerning the fundamental differences involved in supporting the church and the seed-faith donations solicited by prosperity gospel teachers.

### **Educating the Parishioners**

The results of the survey of Christian ministers clearly showed that a majority of the respondents believed that the word of faith teachings have been harmful to their ministry and parishioners and that a majority of those who have become involved in the movement have gone on to denounce it. Constructive actions for the local pastor therefore relate to the need to educate

Christians about the true meaning of the biblical passages that are used by prosperity gospel teachers in order to help them recognize this distorted Christological view. For instance, according to Mitchell, “Christians praying for financial wealth should consider the words of Jesus from Matthew 19:24: ‘It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.’”<sup>14</sup> This statement is congruent with the call of Jesus for his followers to abandon a lifestyle centered on the accumulation of wealth and pleasure and deny oneself and pursue inward godliness.

### **Finding the Balance**

Although the Christological perspective presented by prosperity gospel teachers is largely founded on spurious interpretations of selected biblical passages, it is important to concede that not everything that is taught nor every person who teaches the doctrines is based on self-promotion and aggrandizement. The concession must be made also that faith works when properly applied with a pure motive, God does provide for the needs of His followers and He does heal the sick, answer prayers and performs miracles, just not in a manner that is packaged by individuals who seek to make a profitable financial transaction from the exercise.

### **Final Thoughts**

Christian leaders should focus on the accurate interpretation and application of the teachings of the Bible. For example the teachings of Jesus were strongly oriented to the poor. From the scriptures a sharp contrast may be drawn with the prosperity theology. The view that

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<sup>14</sup> Corrie Mitchell, “Prosperity Gospel.” *Disqus*. Accessed February 12, 201.

Jesus taught was to give to others not to receive from them. His example was that he was a servant, and that he had no house to live in, and no bed in which to sleep. He instructed his disciples to leave all of the world's treasures and to follow him, taking nothing with them. A demonstration of genuine faith is made by the action advocated by Jesus through instructing the disciples that they should make no provision for their journey but trust God daily for material sustenance. Contrast this with the message espoused by the new gospel of the word of faith movement that encourages followers to make demands upon God for material comforts and abundant delicacies and a sharp dichotomy is obvious. The preponderance of evidence is that Jesus did not offer comfort and ease but invited His followers to take up their cross and follow Him. He warned them of persecution and tribulation and even death. However, the promise was for His continual companionship during times of extreme trials and joy and peace in the midst of it all. These things are the weightier matters and can be counted on in whatever chronological time period or wherever the geographical area happens to be. The true gospel of Jesus Christ has always been to "whosoever will let him come and drink of the water of life freely." This invitation should never be bottled and brokered as merchandise that can only be received by those who can afford to pay a monetary price.

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## APPENDIX A

## Proforma Copy of Survey Instrument

This survey is being sent to successful pastors such as yourself for your valuable input. The purpose of the survey is to assess the impact of the word of faith teachings upon local congregations. Thanks for providing answers to the following questions:

• Do you support the ideology of the word of faith theology?

- Yes
- No

• Have you had members who have become involved in it?

- Yes
- No
- Don't Know

• If yes, how long did they follow this teaching?

- < 1 year
- 1-2 years
- 3-4 years
- 5+ years
- Don't Know

• Have you felt pressured to follow this popular teaching?

- Yes
- No
- Somewhat

• Have you had members who once supported the movement but have denounced the teaching?

- Yes
- No

• Have you had members who were hurt by it?

- Yes
- No

• Have you felt challenged to preach against the movement?

- Yes
- No
- Somewhat

• Have you felt opposition for preaching against it?

- Yes
- No
- Somewhat

• Have the teachings of the word of faith preachers helped your ministry?

Yes

No

• Have the teachings of the word of faith preachers hurt your ministry?

Yes

No

• Finally, do you have an example from your congregation that you would be willing to share with me?

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Please return your completed questionnaire in the postage paid return envelope. Thanks for your participation in this study.

## APPENDIX B

## IRB APPROVAL/WAIVER PAGE

Dear Aaron,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under exemption category 46.101(b)(2), which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:101(b):

(2) Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless:

(i) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and (ii) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

Your IRB-approved, stamped consent form is also attached. This form should be copied and used to gain the consent of or provide information to your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document should be made available without alteration.

Please retain this letter for your records. Also, if you are conducting research as part of the requirements for a master's thesis or doctoral dissertation, this approval letter should be included as an appendix to your completed thesis or dissertation.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any changes to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by submitting a change in protocol form or a new application to the IRB and referencing the above IRB Exemption number.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible changes to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu).

Sincerely,

**Fernando Garzon, Psy.D.**

*Professor, IRB Chair*

**Counseling**

**(434) 592-4054**