

A Rebuttal to the Word of Faith Movement

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**Abstract**

The Word of Faith movement teaches that all believers will experience good health and wealth.

Issues arise, however, when not all believers enjoy health and wealth like they were promised.

The intent of this study is to examine the history of the Word of Faith movement and expose the

falsehoods that are propagated by them. It is the position of this writer that the Word of Faith

movement is grounded in the manipulation of Scripture and perverts the gospel preached by

Jesus and His disciples. As a result, these teachings do not present a message of salvation but one

that leads them to hell.

## **A Rebuttal to the Word of Faith of Movement**

### **Introduction**

The main question I will be seeking to answer is whether the Word of Faith movement manipulates Scripture and alters the person of Christ. If so, what should the response be of evangelicals? I will need to assess their theology to discover if compromises have been made that alter Christ's position, person, or role for humanity. To do this, a study will be conducted on primary sources to evaluate if they have deviated from the Bible and historical Christian teachings. Additionally, a study of the origins of the movement will be looked at to gain a better comprehension of the thinking and teaching of its founder and major proponents. It is my position that the Word of Faith movement has reduced the Jesus of the Bible and perverted His teachings. I will ensure that the reader will be able to understand the origins and tenets of the movement, why their beliefs are in direct contradiction to the Bible, and what Scripture truly teaches about Jesus Christ and His relationship to all of humanity.

### **Statement of Problem**

Today, the Bible has never been more widespread and available to the world. The gospel is being shared in places where it has never reached before. However, with this rise in communication comes the risk of false doctrine being amplified to the masses. Word of Faith leaders are able to share their materialistic message to millions, and Christians who do not have a firm foundation in biblical truth can be easily enticed and pulled in. Christians then begin to believe that God has promised health, wealth, and success to them as long as they have enough faith. The focus shifts from an awaited, eternal reward in heaven to an immediate, temporary reward on earth.

Many people assume that due to the popularity of the movement it must have validity. However, problems arise when the teachings of the Word of Faith movement do not materialize in their followers' lives. They are left financially destitute after they have donated their life savings to a ministry only to find themselves without the promised wealth.<sup>1</sup> Word of Faith leaders will declare that the Scriptures teach that one can claim riches and health at any time. Kenneth Copeland, a popular Word of Faith leader, goes so far as to state that Christians can claim the riches stored up in heaven for us now. As long as members faithfully donate to the ministry and just have enough faith no ill fortune will come their way.

This message is attractive to Americans, hence, the popularity of these leaders, yet it has dangerous consequences on those that follow it. Because of the popularity of the movement and the dire effects it has on its followers, the movement must be addressed by evangelical leaders and local pastors alike to prevent more from going astray. These Word of Faith leaders are nothing more than wolves in sheep's clothing, and pastors must treat them this way.

### **Statement of Methodology**

The methodology of my research will be conducted to answer the question originally proposed. What manipulation has occurred in Scripture that would lead to the movement's view of Christ, His role on earth, and promises to humanity? Like evangelical pastors, the leaders differ slightly in their teachings and variations are present, but the core principles of the Word of Faith movement are all held by each leader. There will be a biblical examination of their doctrines and cited proof texts that are often used. Issues of interpretation that will inevitably arise will be dealt with accordingly.

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<sup>1</sup>Vicky Baker, "The Preachers Getting Rich from Poor Americans," *BBC News*, May 29, 2019. Accessed March 31, 2022. <https://www.bbc.com/news/stories-47675301>.

In addition to the scriptural review, a study of the historical origins of the movement will be completed to better understand the movement and its teachings. Most trace the beginnings of the Word of Faith movement to a singular man. His life will be evaluated along with his teachings. Following the founder, major proponents of the movement and their positions will also be examined in detail.

An analysis of the implications of their teaching on American Christianity will be conducted and properly interpreted biblical truths will be presented to counter the false teachings of the movement. This analysis will provide a basis for Christians to help determine if a teaching is false. The hope of this thesis will be to refute the teaching of the Word of Faith movement through a historical analysis and examination of their doctrines and to provide the truth of Scripture that the movement has perverted.

## **Historical Analysis**

### **Introduction**

The doctrinal positions of the Word of Faith movement in the United States were not formulated by a large group of scholars or ancient councils. Unlike the councils of old that helped close the New Testament Canon such as the councils of Hippo and Carthage during the 390s, the beliefs of this movement are not closed.<sup>2</sup> Its origins can be traced to a select few who formulated the ideas and passed them down like a master would teach an apprentice. Popular figures such as Kenneth Copeland, Frederick K. C. Price and Kenneth Hagin are commonly associated with the movement and considered to be some of its biggest proponents. They

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<sup>2</sup>Mark Nickens, *A Survey of the History of Global Christianity*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2020), 24-29.

propagated the movement's ideas about claiming one's inheritance by praying with positive or faith confessions.<sup>3</sup> Originally, the Word of Faith movement was relatively small but has gradually gained popularity. The movement is no longer limited to the United States but has spread worldwide. According to a 2006 study from the Pew Research Center, 78 percent of Charismatics and Pentecostals in the United States, Latin America, and Asia state that God will give material prosperity to all believers that have enough faith.<sup>4</sup> This movement has become something of a worldwide sensation. Large swaths of people around the world now hold to beliefs about physical prosperity being guaranteed to those who have enough faith. This idea can primarily be found in the ideas teaching of Phineas Quimby of the New Thought movement in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century and later with Kenyon who rose to fame in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Their ideas were then copied and dispersed by a number of followers which led to its global distribution and popularity. The founders of the movements and some of their significant proponents will be examined to better understand the Word of Faith movement.

### **Phineas Parkhurst Quimby and New Thought**

Before the Word of Faith movement reached its current popularity around the world, Phineas Quimby popularized the idea that the origin of sickness and suffering was incorrect thinking. He taught his followers that they could create their own reality by the power of positive affirmation or positive confession. They were taught to visualize or to picture the material wealth and physical health they desired in their minds. After they visualized their physical wants and

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<sup>3</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 (2013): 85–86.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 86.

desires, they were instructed to verbally claim or confess them. The reasoning for this was so that the immaterial images of their mind would then become material realities.<sup>5</sup> New Thought followers were confident that positive thinking itself would have a positive effect on the outside of the mind, usually in physical form.<sup>6</sup> Rhonda Bryne described this process as “Your current thoughts are creating your future life. What you think about the most or focus on the most will appear as your life.”<sup>7</sup>

The similarities between these two movements are extensive. While proponents of the Word of Faith movements have tried to distance themselves from New Thought by substituting “power of mind” with “force of faith,” this is a distinction with no difference.<sup>8</sup> Even New Thought proponents often employed faith when instructing people on how to visualize and claim health and wealth. Warren Felt Evans, a New Thought writer, states that “faith is the most intense form of mental action.”<sup>9</sup> Despite what leaders in the Word of Faith movement claim, significant portions of their beliefs originate from the New Thought movement started by Phineas Quimby. As this historical analysis continues, it will become evident that this will not be the only time leaders of the Word of Faith movement will steal ideas from others and propagate it as if it was their own.

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<sup>5</sup>Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis: 21st Century* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2009), 15.

<sup>6</sup>Ruth A. Tucker, *Another Gospel: Alternative Religions and the New Age Movement* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub. House, 1989), 178.

<sup>7</sup>Rhonda Byrne, *The Secret* (New York, NY: Atria Books/Beyond Works, 2006), 9.

<sup>8</sup>Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis: 21st Century*, 15.

<sup>9</sup>Warren Felt Evans, *Mental Medicine: A Theoretical and Practical Treatise on Medical Psychology* (Boston: Carter & Pettee, 1873), 152.

**Essek William Kenyon**

If one could pinpoint a founder for the Word of Faith movement it would be E. W. Kenyon. Though many would say Kenneth Hagin was responsible for its origins, this would be incorrect. Hagin was the man primarily responsible for the movement's rise in popularity, but Kenyon was the originator. Kenyon was born on April 24, 1867 and started his ministry in a Methodist Church. By the early 1900s, Kenyon had established the Bethel Bible Institute, but had resigned from his position as superintendent due to rising controversy. Then in 1931, Kenyon started one of the first religious broadcasts titled *Kenyon's Church in the Air*. Taped transcripts of these broadcasts became much of what is found in his writings, which has shown to be his legacy.<sup>10</sup> Many popular phrases used by prosperity preachers that lead the Word of Faith movement, like "what I confess, I possess," originated from Kenyon.<sup>11</sup> Much of Kenyon's thought stemmed from his time spent at Emerson College of Oratory, which was rooted New Thought thinking.

Kenyon also had significant contact with Pentecostal circles and their leaders. These connections led him to interact with men such as Kenneth Hagin, F. F. Bosworth, William Branhan, and Aimee Semple McPherson.<sup>12</sup> While tame in comparison to modern-day Word of Faith leaders, Kenyon taught that the "physical death of Jesus did not touch the sin issue at all."<sup>13</sup> Not wanting to get outdone, Kenyon later stated that "the believer is as much an incarnation as

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<sup>10</sup>Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis: 21st Century*, 18.

<sup>11</sup>Essek William Kenyon, *The Hidden Man*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (Lynwood, WA: Kenyon's Gospel Publishing Society, 1970), 98.

<sup>12</sup>Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis: 21st Century*, 18.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, 18.

was Jesus of Nazareth.”<sup>14</sup> E. W. Kenyon is responsible for the formation of the Word of Faith movement and his beliefs would become extremely popular and widely dispersed by Kenneth Hagin in the 1900s.

### **Kenneth Hagin**

Kenneth Hagin, also known as Dad Hagin is known as the father of the modern-day Word of Faith movement. He is credited with spreading Kenyon’s teachings among the Pentecostals. However, much of Hagin’s works are almost identical to that of Kenyon’s. Hagin claims that “the Holy Spirit gave him the same words as Kenyon without his prior knowledge of the sources.”<sup>15</sup> This is quite a claim for Hagin to make. Hagin contends that Kenyon’s influence on his ministry is “minute” and the only influence Kenyon had on him was his teachings on the name of Jesus.<sup>16</sup>

One thing is true: Hagin was much more radical than Kenyon in his teachings. For instance, Hagin once shared a story that involved himself, Jesus, and a demonic monkey. According to Hagin, he was discussing demons with Jesus when a demon monkey suddenly appeared and began screeching “yakety, yack” in a high-pitched and piercing voice. After some time had passed, Hagin told the demon to shut up in the name of Jesus. Jesus then responds by thanking him because He was unable to do anything. In Hagin’s story it was Christ who was unable to stop the demon and Hagin was in control.<sup>17</sup> Hagin also claimed that Jesus came to him

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<sup>14</sup> Essek William Kenyon, *The Father and His Family* (Lynwood, WA: Kenyon’s Gospel Publishing Society, 1964), 118.

<sup>15</sup> Vinson Synan, “The Faith of Kenneth Hagin,” *Charisma & Christian Faith*, 15:11 (June 1990), 68.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>17</sup> Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis: 21st Century*, 20.

in a hotel room in El Paso, Texas where they chatted about how he should be led by an inward witness of the Holy Spirit so that Hagin would no longer require open visions of Christ for guidance in his ministry.<sup>18</sup>

Despite many wild stories like this, Hagin had many followers that would later become famous themselves. Two well-known disciples of his are Kenneth Copeland and Frederick K. C. Price, who would go on to spread Hagin's teachings. In addition to his close disciples, he also had a syndicated radio show that was broadcasted on almost 250 different stations. He founded the Rhema Bible Training Center near Tulsa, Oklahoma, which has produced more than 93,000 graduates as of this year.<sup>19</sup> His magazine, *The Word of Faith*, reaches over 400,000 households, and 47 million copies of their various publications and books have been made. These written works have also been translated into twenty-six different languages. Some have postulated that Hagin's huge popularity is due to his claims about having open visions of Jesus. These experiences, like a personal tour of heaven and hell, and that he had been resurrected three times, deceived people into thinking that his messages really came from God. Hagin would even state that those who opposed him would be killed by God. Similar claims were reiterated by one his followers Kenneth Copeland.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>Dan. R. McConnell, *A Different Gospel: Biblical and Historical Insights into the Word of Faith Movement* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc. 1995), 61-62.

<sup>19</sup>“About RBTC” RBTC, January 21, 2022, <https://www.rbtc.org/about/>.

<sup>20</sup>Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis: 21st Century*, 23.

**Kenneth Copeland**

Kenneth Copeland got his start in ministry by memorizing the sermons of his mentor, Kenneth Hagin. Once he thought he had learned enough from Copeland, he set out to establish his own evangelistic association. In 1973, Copeland began to publish a newsletter titled *Believer's Voice of Victory*. Three years later, Copeland started a radio show with the same title.<sup>21</sup> On March 23, 1979 Copeland claimed that God spoke to him and instructed him to enter the television market with his ministry. By 1981, Copeland had entered the realm of satellite communications and was able to broadcast his messages. He became the first global religious broadcast and was available in over 200 cities in the United States in addition to 20 international countries.<sup>22</sup> Seeking to expand his physical footprint to outside the States, Copeland and his ministry organization began establishing offices in England, South Africa, the Philippines, Hong Kong, Canada, and Australia where they could sell his materials and other works that supported similar ideology.<sup>23</sup>

What makes Copeland's global reach so frightening is the dangerous and heretical doctrines that he spreads. Copeland claims that Adam from the Garden of Eve was the manifestation of God in the flesh.<sup>24</sup> Even more daring than that, Copeland claims that Christ was

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<sup>21</sup>Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis: 21st Century*, 24.

<sup>22</sup>Kenneth Copeland, *Walking in the Realm of the Miraculous* (Fort Worth, TX: Kenneth Copeland Ministries, 1989), 8.

<sup>23</sup>Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis: 21st Century*, 24.

<sup>24</sup>Kenneth Copeland, *Following the Faith of Abraham I* (Forth Worth, TX: Kenneth Copeland Ministries, 1979), audio recording.

conquered on the cross by Satan.<sup>25</sup> After His defeat, Christ went to hell as an “emaciated, poured out, little wormy spirit.”<sup>26</sup> Another belief that Copeland propagated was the idea that “intangible words, imbued with the force of faith, can take on tangible reality.”<sup>27</sup> This allows any believer to have any material prosperity they desire, like a yacht, and gives them the power to heal themselves without even asking God. Perhaps what is most frightening about Copeland’s ideas, is that many of them are very similar to occult practices and beliefs of groups like the Mormons and New Age.<sup>28</sup>

### **Benny Hinn**

In 1990, Benny Hinn claimed that God told him to begin monthly healing crusades. After this message from God, Hinn claims that he received power to drive out devils of sickness and affliction.<sup>29</sup> Since then, Hinn has claimed to have healed people that were blind, deaf, had AIDS, and who were crippled in a wheelchair. When his organization is pressed for verification of these healings, vague and elusive answers are given. In Hinn’s book, *Lord, I Need a Miracle*, he claims that he healed three patients’ different diseases: lupus, colon cancer, and a spinal tumor. The supposed medical documents that support these claims are either incomplete and missing vital information or, in fact, disprove his claims.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>Kenneth Copeland, *Holy Bible: Kenneth Copeland Reference Edition* (Forth Worth, TX: Kenneth Copeland Ministries, 1991), 129.

<sup>26</sup>Kenneth Copeland, *Believer’s Voice of Victory*, Trinity Broadcasting Network, 21 April 1991.

<sup>27</sup>Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis: 21st Century*, 25.

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*, 25-26.

<sup>29</sup>Benny Hinn, *The Anointing* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1992), 98.

<sup>30</sup>Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis: 21st Century*, 28-29.

Instead of miraculous healing, often what is present at Hinn rallies are the uses of suggestion that create placebos for symptoms that are psychosomatic or minor infirmities will be healed. This is why those with minor back problems or with anxiety problems are placed at the front of the line to be healed, while those crippled or with more severe medical issues are kept from the stage.<sup>31</sup> It is an act meant to deceive others and deepen his pockets by stealing from those most desperate. These crusades leave the truly sick wondering why they were not healed. Their usual assumption is that God does not love them or that God has forgotten them. It could be argued that more people leave hurt or sick from his rallies than healed. At most of his rallies people will rush to the stage in an effort to be healed and will stop at nothing to get there. This mad rush usually leads to people getting trampled in the audience. On several other occasions after someone had been “slain in the Spirit,” instead of being caught by a member of Hinn’s organization when they fell, they landed on top of audience members. This actually led to one individual, Ella Peppard, to die from complications when someone landed on her.<sup>32</sup> Hinn claims that his healing powers are a special anointing given to him by God and that his theology is told to him by the Holy Spirit. While under this anointing, Hinn once claimed that women were originally designed to give birth out of their sides.<sup>33</sup> He also states that he regularly visits the graves of Kathryn Kuhlman and Aimee Semple McPherson to gain anointing from their bones.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis: 21st Century*, 29.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 26.

<sup>33</sup>Benny Hinn, *Our Position in Christ #5: An Heir of God* (Orlando, FL: Orlando Christian Center, 1990), audio recording.

<sup>34</sup>Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis: 21st Century*, 29.

Despite these odd claims by Hinn, he has enjoyed relative popularity among the evangelical community, and his books have sold millions of copies. In one of his bestsellers, *Good Morning, Holy Spirit*, Hinn writes that he would often have conversations with the Holy Spirit and that the Spirit longed to fellowship with Him. On one such occasion, the Spirit begged him to spend five more minutes speaking with Him. An audacious claim to say the least. Building on this story, Hinn states that the presence of the Lord was so strong within him that it threw his nearby mother against the wall when he walked out his room.<sup>35</sup>

Hinn also said he received prophesy from God and knew when the Lord would return. He also strangely predicted when Fidel Castro would die and when his regime would lose power in Cuba.<sup>36</sup> He was wrong on both accounts. When skeptics would point out an inconsistency or falsehood in Hinn's claims, they were met with hostility. Similar to Hagin and Copeland, Hinn would commonly threaten his critics and anyone that might challenge or call into question his authority. At one point, Hinn stated that he wished he had a "Holy Spirit machine gun" to blow off the heads of his critics.<sup>37</sup> He also later stated that God's wrath would come down upon the critics and upon their children for opposing him since he was the Lord's anointed.<sup>38</sup> Having no evidence for their doctrine, proponents of the Word of Faith Movement often resort to statements like these in the face of opposition.

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<sup>35</sup>Benny Hinn, *Good Morning, Holy Spirit* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1990), 42-56.

<sup>36</sup>Benny Hinn, "Prophecy for the '90's," (Orlando, FL: Orlando Christian Center, 1990), audio recording.

<sup>37</sup>Randy Frame, "Best-Selling Author Admits Mistakes, Vows Changes" *Christianity Today* 35, no. 12 (1991): 44. ProQuest Central.

<sup>38</sup>Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis: 21st Century*, 32-34.

**Joel Osteen**

In today's society, the popularity of Joel Osteen has passed even that of Benny Hinn. His church in Houston, Texas boasts a weekly attendance of around 47,000, and its services are broadcasted worldwide to over 100 countries. Osteen also is one of the main speakers for a motivational-worship tour that has sold-out events in stadiums like Madison Square Garden.<sup>39</sup> Unfortunately, Osteen is no different than any other Word of Faith leader in the accuracy of his sermons and speeches. Both are riddled with distortions, falsehoods, and fake promises. One example of Osteen's distortions would be his explanation on the biblical story of the paralytical man at the pool of Bethesda (Jn. 5:1-15). Osteen remarks that the man had been crippled, not because of a curse, but from negative thinking about himself. All the man needed to do to heal himself was to change his reality with positive thinking.<sup>40</sup> Another falsehood propagated by Osteen was that Christ did not finish His work of redemption on the cross. Rather, it was required that He descend into Hell, fight with Satan and the demons for the first time in history and rip the keys of death and hell out of his hands.<sup>41</sup> For Osteen, the work of atonement was not settled on the cross, nor was it settled at the battle in hell. Even after the resurrection of Christ, the atonement for man's sins had not been paid. Osteen states that Christ had to "present his own blood in the high court of heaven" as payment for our sins.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>Patrick Rogers and Vickie Bane, "Joel Osteen Counts His Blessings," *People*, 17 December 2007, 96.

<sup>40</sup>Joel Osteen, *Your Best Life Now: 7 Steps to Living at Your Full Potential* (New York, NY: Warner Faith, 2004), 129.

<sup>41</sup>Joel Osteen, Easter service message at Lakewood Church, Sermon, April 23, 2000, transcript formerly online at [http://www.lakewood.cc/sermons/cs\\_002.htm](http://www.lakewood.cc/sermons/cs_002.htm), transcript archived online at [http://web.archive.org/web/20040408215244/http://www.lakewood.cc/sermons/cs\\_002.htm](http://web.archive.org/web/20040408215244/http://www.lakewood.cc/sermons/cs_002.htm), cf. Joel Osteen, Easter service message 2004 on *Discover the Champion in You* program, Trinity Broadcasting Network, April 26, 2004).

<sup>42</sup>*Ibid.*

Not limiting himself to a distorted view of atonement, Osteen also holds to and teaches a distorted view of the sovereignty of God. Osteen argues the power behind the force of faith can overrule the sovereignty of God. He states that Zacharia's negative attitude and disbelief about having a son would have prevented it from happening, even if it was God's will. This is why God had to shut Zacharia's mouth so he could not speak these things into reality.<sup>43</sup> These biblical distortions do not compose all of Osteen's dangerous beliefs, but they do make up some of the worst and are being taught to millions around the world on a daily basis.

### **Frederick K. C. Price**

Frederick Price was another Word of Faith preacher that found his inspiration from Kenneth Hagin. He also mirrors some of the teachings of Benny Hinn in relation to faith healing. Price grew up in a Jehovah Witness family, but after his conversion to Christianity he tried a number of different denominations ranging from Baptists to Missionary Alliance. It was during this time that he was introduced to Kenneth Hagin and his path in the Word of Faith movement began.<sup>44</sup>

Price has said that he does not allow sickness in his home.<sup>45</sup> He believes modern medicine is not necessary and stated that "When you have developed your faith to such an extent that you can stand on the promises of God, then you won't need medicine."<sup>46</sup> Price gained popularity as his ministry continued and led the Crenshaw Christian Center in Los Angeles,

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<sup>43</sup>Joel Osteen, *Discover the Champion in You*, Trinity Broadcasting Network, 3 May 2004.

<sup>44</sup>Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis: 21st Century*, 58.

<sup>45</sup>Frederick K. C. Price, *Is Healing for All?* (Tulsa, OK: Harison House, 1976), 20.

<sup>46</sup>Frederick Price, *Faith, Foolishness, or Presumption?* (Tulsa, OK: Harrison House, 1979), 88.

which had 17,000 members. In addition to the church, Price led a national television ministry and was a common guest on the *Praise the Lord* broadcast by TBN.<sup>47</sup>

With his large platform, Price taught heretical doctrines rooted in a manipulated interpretation of Scripture. Price taught that if a believer were to pray “Thy will be done” then they would be calling God a fool.<sup>48</sup> This teaching is in direct conflict with the words of Christ and raises serious issues about his view on the sovereignty of God. Price also taught the idea that man has dominion over the earth and not God.<sup>49</sup> One of his worst teachings was that Christ died spiritually before the crucifixion and took on the nature of Satan.<sup>50</sup> Continuing on the theme of the crucifixion, Price states that Christ’s death on the cross was not sufficient for atonement of man’s sins. Instead, atonement was only received after Christ suffered in Hell and was separated from God.<sup>51</sup> Like so many of the other significant figures, it is a shame that men with these viewpoints enjoy such a large follower base.

### **Summary**

Several of the Word of Faith movement’s core tenants were taught by these men listed above along with many others. The tenets found their origins in the ideas of New Thought but were not properly established until Kenyon entered the scene. Each leader found their inspiration from a previous leader before them, most of them identifying Hagin as their mentor. Most of these leaders claimed to receive revelation from God himself or would put themselves above or

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<sup>47</sup>Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis: 21st Century*, 59.

<sup>48</sup>Frederick Price, *Ever Increasing Faith*, Trinity Broadcasting Network, 16 November 1990.

<sup>49</sup>Frederick Price, *Ever Increasing Faith*, Trinity Broadcasting Network, 3 May 1992.

<sup>50</sup>Frederick Price, *Identification #3* (Inglewood, CA: Ever Increasing Faith Ministries, 1980), audio recording.

<sup>51</sup>Frederick Price, *Ever Increasing Faith*, Trinity Broadcasting Network, 23 November 1990.

equal to Him. Any opponent to their teachings were viewed as heretics worthy of the wrath of God.

## **Evaluation of Doctrinal Tenets**

### **Introduction**

Now that the history of the Word of Faith movement has been examined, a close evaluation of their central tenets is needed. Since the movement is so widespread, it is crucial that the basis for their beliefs is properly examined to determine their veracity. Many of their beliefs stem from five false ideas: Deification of man, demotion of God, deification of Satan, demotion of Christ, and faith as a force. Each of these areas will be examined along with the faith leaders' interpretation of the Scriptures that led to these conclusions. The goal of this section is to expose the dangerous falsehoods in the Word of Faith teachings.

### **Deification of Man**

Since the beginning of man, Satan has been deceiving the world in the belief that they can be like God. What is most frightening is that many leaders of the Word of Faith movement reiterate the same thing as Satan. Kenneth Hagin writes that man "was created on terms of equality with God, and he could stand in God's presence without any consciousness of inferiority. . . .Man lived in the realm of God. He lived in terms equal with God."<sup>52</sup> Hagin goes on to claim that each believer is even Christ himself.<sup>53</sup> Kenneth Copeland shares a similar opinion when he writes that "God's reason for creating Adam was His desire to reproduce Himself. . . .He was not a little like God. He was not almost like God. He was not subordinate to

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<sup>52</sup>Kenneth E. Hagin, *Zoe: The God-Kind of Life* (Tulsa, OK: Kenneth Hagin Ministries, Inc., 1989), 35-36.

<sup>53</sup>*Ibid.*, 41.

God even.”<sup>54</sup> It is clear that the Word of Faith movement promotes the idea of God and man being equal in divinity, some going as far as to claim that humanity is God Himself.

To support these wild claims, faith leaders will quickly cite John 10:31-39 as their proof text. They jump on the phrase “I said, you are gods” from verse 34 as Jesus is speaking to the Pharisees. From there, they extrapolate that humans are little gods, but this is a serious misinterpretation of the text. If Jesus was indeed teaching that everyone was their own little god, He would be contradicting Himself in previous teachings where He stated that there is only one God. Additionally, the entire Bible would collapse in on itself due to the number of intertext contradictions that would arise. The books of Isaiah and Deuteronomy would provide enough contradiction in themselves. This idea of humanity being gods would also mean that the serpent was correct in the garden when it tempted Eve to eat of the tree so that she would become like God.<sup>55</sup>

In order to properly understand what Jesus is saying in John, one has to understand the text He is quoting in His response. When Jesus answers the Pharisees, He is quoting from Psalm 82. In this Psalm, God can be seen in a divine council or assembly where He is judging other rulers or judges. These rulers and judges were most likely authorities in Israel.<sup>56</sup> As rulers and judges, they were to protect the needy and uphold the rights of the oppressed, but instead they showed partiality to the unjust and wicked. God criticizes them for their wicked actions and reminds them that He granted their position of authority. God punishes these judges to die like

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<sup>54</sup>Kenneth Copeland, *Following the Faith of Abraham I*, audio recording.

<sup>55</sup>Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis: 21st Century*, 135.

<sup>56</sup>J. A. Motyer, “The Psalms,” in *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, ed. D. A. Carson et al., 4th ed. (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 539.

the men they oppressed, so they will understand the true difference between an infinite God and finite man.<sup>57</sup> This passage does not show man being equal to God, rather that God is far above man.

Word of Faith leaders also quote 2 Peter 1:4 to support the deification of man. Copeland states this when teaching on the meaning of the verse: “Now, Peter said by exceeding great and precious promises you become partakers of the divine nature. All right, are we gods? We are a class of gods!”<sup>58</sup> However, if the context is taken into consideration, this interpretation of the text becomes untenable. The following verses reveal that Paul is not speaking of man being or becoming a god, but to the inward transformation that a believer goes through. Their lifestyle and morals will no longer reflect those of the world, but that of Christ.<sup>59</sup>

The deification of man is a dangerous doctrine that the Word of Faith movement propagates. It not only is not found in Scripture, but it deceives the masses into thinking they are gods themselves and equal to God. This doctrine only sends its teachers and deceives its followers into hell.

### **Demotion of God**

When Word of Faith teachers equate God with man, they put God in the image of man.<sup>60</sup> Teachers like Copeland claim to know the physical dimensions of God. According to Copeland, God is around 6’3”’, weighs approximately 200 pounds, and has a hand span of nine inches

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<sup>57</sup>Allen P. Ross, “Psalms,” In *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, edited by J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 854.

<sup>58</sup>Kenneth Copeland, *Praise the Lord*, Trinity Broadcasting Network, 5 February 1986.

<sup>59</sup>Douglas J. Moo, *2 Peter, Jude* (Grand Rapids, MI: HarperCollins Christian Publishing, 1996), 9-10.

<sup>60</sup>Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis: 21st Century*, 135.

across.<sup>61</sup> Copeland bases this on Isaiah 40:12, which states that God marked off the heavens with the span of his hand. Clearly, a literal interpretation should not be taken when reading the passage or one is also left to assume that God is gathering the dust of the earth and weighing mountains in a scale. However, even if a literal reading is to be accepted, one must wonder where Copeland establishes his measurements. Copeland states that he took out a ruler, measured the span of his hand to be eight and three-quarter inches, and then surmised that God's hand must be a quarter of an inch longer. From this, Copeland was able to fill in the rest.<sup>62</sup> Benny Hinn even claims to know what clothes God is wearing on any particular day.<sup>63</sup> Worse than these assertions was a statement by Copeland about God. Copeland had the audacity to state that God is the greatest failure in the Bible.<sup>64</sup>

This distortion of Isaiah misses the entire purpose of the text. Isaiah is writing to show the great distinction between the greatness of God and of the lowliness man.<sup>65</sup> Once again, the Word of Faith leaders isolate a verse out of context and manipulates its meaning to fit their doctrines. It is a very dangerous and foolish thing for one to consider themselves equal to God Almighty.

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<sup>61</sup>Kenneth Copeland, *Spirit, Soul, and Body I* (Fort Worth, TX: Kenneth Copeland Ministries, 1985), audio recording.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid.

<sup>63</sup>Benny Hinn and Jan Crouch, *Praise the Lord*, Trinity Broadcasting Network, 3 October 1991.

<sup>64</sup>Kenneth Copeland, *Praise the Lord: Praise-a-Thon*, Trinity Broadcasting Network, April 1988.

<sup>65</sup>Michael Rydelnik and Michael Vanlaningham, eds. *The Moody Bible Commentary* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2014), 1709.

### **Deification of Satan**

One of the more frightening tenets of the Word of Faith movement is their deification of Satan. Charles Capps writes that when God created the world, He made Adam in charge of the world. When Adam sinned, he gave that authority over to Satan. After the fall, Satan was the ruler of the world, and God was helpless to do anything.<sup>66</sup> This view can be compared to the idea of dualism where two forces are battling for control of the world and there is no clear future winner.<sup>67</sup>

There is no scriptural basis for such a view. God never gave ownership of the world to Adam, and Satan is a created being who is subservient to God. Satan may be the prince of this world, but he is not the leader of it (Jn. 12:31, Dan. 4:17). Scripture is clear that God is the judge of the universe (Psalm 96:13). Any assertion that raises the power of Satan and lowers the power of God so that they are equal is ludicrous. God is infinitely more powerful than Satan and all things in both heaven and earth are under His domain (1 Chr. 29:11, Col. 1:16-17).

### **Demotion of Christ**

The next core tenet of the Word of Faith movement is the demotion of Christ. Benny Hinn supports this tenet when he stated that “Had the Holy Spirit not been with Jesus, He would have sinned...He was called the Son of Man—and as such He was capable of sinning.”<sup>68</sup> Hinn’s statement is a drastic misunderstanding of the title, Son of Man. This title did not suggest that Christ was fully man, quite the opposite. Instead, the title was a claim of divinity and

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<sup>66</sup>Kenneth Copeland, *Substitution and Execution* (Fort Worth, TX: Kenneth Copeland Ministries, 1989), audio recording.

<sup>67</sup>Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis: 21st Century*, 153-154.

<sup>68</sup>Benny Hinn, *Good Morning, Holy Spirit*, 135-136.

showed the deity of Christ (Dan. 7:13-14, Mk. 8:38, 14:62). While it is true that Christ took on human attributes, He did not give up or surrender His divine attributes (Phil. 2:5-8).

Copeland goes a step further and claims that believers are an incarnation of God just as Christ was. He even claims that if man had the knowledge of the Word that Christ did, then man could have died on the cross instead.<sup>69</sup> Word of Faith of leaders having demoted the figure of Christ to that of a normal man and have ignored countless passages, such as Philippians 2, that clearly teach the Christ retained His deity while on earth.

### **Faith as a Force**

The Word of Faith movement's idea about faith is drastically different than the typical understanding found in evangelical Protestantism. Kenneth Copeland defines faith as a force. He writes, "Faith is a power force. It is a tangible force. It is a conductive force."<sup>70</sup> Copeland claims that faith is the mechanism which "makes the laws of the spirit world function."<sup>71</sup> Faith is even considered to be the source of God's power. Without faith, God is powerless to do anything.<sup>72</sup> Copeland states that the force of faith works in two ways. Faith activates God and fear activates Satan.<sup>73</sup>

God is able to activate this force of faith through His words. Words act as vehicles that transport the power of faith. Copeland, describing this process, writes, "Words are spiritual

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<sup>69</sup>Kenneth Copeland, *Salvation and Identification* (Fort Worth, TX: Kenneth Copeland Ministries, 1989), audio recording.

<sup>70</sup>Kenneth Copeland, *The Force of Faith* (Fort Worth, TX: KCP Publications, 1989), 10.

<sup>71</sup>Kenneth Copeland, *The Laws of Prosperity* (Fort Worth, TX: Kenneth Copeland Publications, 1974), 19.

<sup>72</sup>Kenneth Copeland, *Freedom from Fear* (Fort Worth, TX: Kenneth Copeland Ministries, 1980), 11-12.

<sup>73</sup>Kenneth Copeland, *The Force of Faith*. 11.

containers, and the force of faith is released by words.”<sup>74</sup> This idea of faith being a force can be traced back to Kenyon who stated that “Faith-filled words brought the universe into being, and faith-filled words are ruling the universe today.”<sup>75</sup> Kenyon likely borrowed this idea from the metaphysics found in New Thought, which teaches that human can experience material health and wealth through positive thought.

Word of Faith leaders base their faith force theology on Hebrews 11:1, which states that “Faith is the substance.” Proponents interpret substance to mean basic stuff, from which the universe is made. Copeland states that “Faith was the raw material substance that the Spirit of God used to form the substance.”<sup>76</sup> This translation of substance is wildly inaccurate and taken out of context. A better translation of the word for substance would be assurance.<sup>77</sup> Faith is not a tangible object but an assurance of trust between man and God. God is the source and object of a Christian faith, not a substance with inherent power.

### **Summary**

Word of Faith leaders have lowered the position of God and His Son Christ, while elevating the position of man and Satan. Man can now tap into the same power that God possesses. It is through these beliefs that they are able to teach the ideas of promised health and wealth for all who have enough faith or that man has the ability to name and claim anything he desires. The tenets’ basis in Scripture is a manipulation of the text at best. Of course, why would

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<sup>74</sup>Kenneth Copeland, *Forces of the Re-created Human Spirit* (Fort Worth, TX: Kenneth Copeland Ministries, 1982), 15.

<sup>75</sup>E. W. Kenyon, *Two Kinds of Faith*, 14<sup>th</sup> ed. (Lynwood, WA: Kenyon’s Gospel Publishing Society, 1969), 20.

<sup>76</sup>Kenneth Copeland, *Authority of the Believer II* (Fort Worth, TX: Kenneth Copeland Ministries, 1987), audiotope.

<sup>77</sup>Marvin Richardson Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament* (New York, NY: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1887).

someone hold Scripture in high regard if they considered themselves as gods and possible of revelation?

### **Conclusion**

After an analysis of the history of the Word of Faith movement, its major proponents, founders, and the doctrines it teaches, it is clear that this ideology and doctrine is a perversion of the Gospel of Christ. No one who holds to these beliefs can receive salvation because they reject every essential doctrine of the gospel.

First, they believe that Christ himself was not divine and that any man could take His place on the cross. They relegate God down to be equal to that of man and they deify Satan as the ruler of this world. Man is no doubt exalted above all else. These beliefs are in direct contrast to the Gospel presented in the Bible.

The Bible teaches in Romans 5:12 that Adam disobeyed God in the garden and because of his actions, sin and death entered the world. Mankind is now corrupted by a sin nature, separated from God, and is incapable of doing good (Isa. 59:2, Mk. 7:21-23, Rom. 3:10-11, Eph. 2:1, 12-13, 2 Chr. 6:36). According to Romans 3:23 all of humanity stands guilty before God and deserves punishment (Lk. 13:3). Seeing humanity in this state, God in His mercy sought to provide a way of redemption for mankind by sending His Son to die on the cross to act as a substitutionary atonement for humanity's sins (Rom. 5:8, 11, Col. 2:14, 1 Peter 2:24). Christ is then resurrected by the Father three days later and ascends into heaven 40 days after the resurrection (Matt. 28:6, Lk. 24:38-39, Acts 1:3, 2:30-31, Rom. 4:25). Christ now sits at the right hand of the Father, He offers redemption and His righteousness to all those who repent and place their faith in Him as Lord, and He intercedes on the believer's behalf. (Rom. 10:9-10, 8:34, 1 Cor. 1:2, 30, 6:11, 12:3, 2 Cor. 4:5, 5:21, Phil. 2:11, Heb. 7:25, 9:24, 1 Jn. 2:1).

In contrast to the Word of Faith movement's teachings, humanity is totally dependent on the work of God and is incapable to do anything outside of Him (Jn. 15:5). Christ's atonement for mankind's sin was fulfilled on the cross and no battle was necessary to be fought in the depths of hell (Rom. 5:17-20, Heb. 7:27, 10:12, 1 Pet. 2:24). God also remained in complete control and was never once outsmarted by the devil. While there is certainly a battle raging between God and Satan, it is a futile one because the end has already determined. Victory is ensured for God and all those who trust in Him (Gen. 3:15, Rev. 20:10).

A biblical Gospel shows that man is fallen in a sinful state, is lower than God, and fully reliant on Him for redemption. God, the Majesty on High, rules sovereignly overall and is unmatched in power. Satan has no power over God, and his fate of eternal torment in the lake of fire is secured. Jesus Christ is fully God, and He alone was capable to die on the cross for humanity's sin. Faith is not a force to be used by men to gain wealth, but a vehicle through which Christ's righteousness is imparted to the believer.

Additionally, God's focus for His followers is not to experience great health and wealth on earth. In fact, Christ essentially promises the opposite. In Matthew 6, Christ commands His followers to seek the kingdom of God above all things and to store their treasures in heaven rather than on earth. Jesus warns His followers in Matthew 5 that they will be persecuted for their beliefs (Jn. 15:19-20, 2 Tim. 3:11-12). The picture Christ paints is quite different than the one painted by the Word of Faith movement. Christ tells His followers to endure hardship on earth for the furtherance of God's kingdom, but the Word of Faith claims one can have a hardship free life, their best life now, all if they just have faith. Christ says to seek heavenly things, the Word of Faith movement teaches to seek earthly things. The teachings of the Word of

Faith movement are false and are in direct conflict with God's Word. These beliefs will neither bring health or wealth to anyone in this life or the next.

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