Word-Faith Movement

by Clete Hux

Founder/Founding date: As a movement rather than an organized group, there is no founder or founding date, *per se.* The philosophical roots extend to Gnosticism. E.W. Kenyon (1860-1948) was perhaps the earliest modern exponent to blend the movement's eastern mystical and New Age elements with Christian teaching.

Official Publications: None. Two prominent publications are Kenneth Copeland's *"Believer's Voice of Victory"* and Kenneth Hagin's *"The Word of Faith"* magazines. There are scores of books, newsletters, pamphlets by various authors Hagin, Kenyon, Copeland, Capps, Price, etc.

Organizational Structure: Has no key universally acknowledged leader or central headquarters. The teachers of the movement all have their own churches and followings.

Unique Terms: The God-kind of faith; the force of faith; the Anointing; spirit-man; spiritual death of Christ; born-again Jesus; authority of the believer.

Other Names: Word-of-Faith, Positive Confession, Faith-formula, Health & Wealth Gospel.

HISTORY

Born in 1860, E. W. Kenyon is generally recognized as the founding father of the modern Word-Faith Movement. Beginning as a Methodist, he became quite ecumenical, associating with the Baptists. Some of his work even resulted in the founding of a few Primitive Baptist Churches. Late in life, Kenyon moved into Pentecostalism. At the same time, he combined elements of the metaphysical cults, such as Christian Science, New Thought theology, and Unity School of Christianity (D.R. McConnell, *A Different Gospel*, pp. 31-35). "The doctrines of correct thinking and believing accompanied by positive confession, with the result of calling a sickness a symptom (denial of reality supported by a Gnostic dualism) are not found in Christian writings until after New Thought and its offspring had begun to develop them. Therefore, it is not unreasonable to state that the doctrine originated and developed in these cults, and was later absorbed by Christians in their quest to develop a healing ministry" (H. Terris Neuman, *An Analysis of the Sources of the Charismatic Teaching of Positive Confession*, p. 43).

Though obviously not the movement's originator, some have also called Kenneth Hagin the "grand-daddy of the faith teachers" (Sherry Andrews, "Kenneth Hagin ‹ Keeping the Faith," *Charisma*, October 1981, p. 24). In a survey of readers of *Charisma* (a major Charismatic magazine) concerning those ministers that influence them the most, Kenneth Hagin was 3rd, ranked behind only TV evangelist Pat Robertson, and the heir apparent to the Word-Faith movement throne, Kenneth Copeland (Kenneth Hagin, Jr., *Charisma,*"Trend Toward the Faith Movement," August 1985, pp. 67-70).

DOCTRINE

God

Word-Faith teachers claim that God operates by spiritual law and is obliged to obey the faith-filled commands and desires of believers. He not only reveals prosperity teaching supernaturally to the Word-Faith teachers, but personally and verbally confirms their unique interpretations of Scripture (Copeland, *Laws of Prosperity*, pp. 60-62).

They say the Abrahamic Covenant is the basis for commanding God to do His part in the covenant. Robert Tilton says, "we make our own promises to do our part, then we can tell God, on the authority of His word, what we would like Him to do. That's right, you can actually tell God what you would like His part in the Covenant to be" (*God's Miracle Plan for Man,* p. 36). Kenneth Copeland says, "as a believer, you have a right to make commands in the name of Jesus. Each time you stand on the Word, you are commanding God to a certain extent, because it is His Word" (*Our Covenant with God,* p. 32). Copeland goes so far as to say that "God was the lesser party and Abraham was the greater" in the covenant between them (Copeland, *Legal and Vital Aspects of Redemption,* 1985, Audio Tape #01-0403).

The Faith teachers also make God into a big man. Copeland says, "God is...a being that stands somewhere around 6'-2," 6'-3," that weighs somewhere in the neighborhood of a couple of hundred pounds, little better, and has a hand span

of nine inches across" (*Spirit, Soul, and Body,* 1985, Tape #01-0601). Morris Cerillo, in an alleged out-of-body experience, describes God: "Suddenly, in front of this tremendous multitude of people, the glory of God appeared. The form that I saw was about the height of a man 6 feet tall, maybe taller, and twice as broad as a human body, with no distinguishing features such as eyes, nose, or mouth" (*The Miracle Book,* pp. x-xi).

Man

Word-Faith teachers say that not only is God a big man, but man is a little god. Kenneth Hagin has asserted, "man...was created on terms of equality with God, and he could stand in God's presence without any consciousness of inferiority.... He made us the same class of being that He is Himself.... He lived on terms equal with God.... The believer is called Christ, that's who we are; we're Christ" (*Zoe: The God Kind of Life,* pp. 35-36, 41). "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 God even" (Copeland, *Following the Faith of Abraham,* 1989, Tape #01-3001). He also proclaims, "You don't have a God in you ‹ you are one!" (Copeland, *The Force of Love,* 1987, Tape #02-0028). Morris Cerillo says "the whole purpose of God was to reproduce Himself. ...you're not looking at Morris Cerillo, you're looking at God, you're looking at Jesus" (*The End Time Manifestation of the Sons of God,* Audio Tape 1, Sides 1 &;2).

Christ

The deity of Christ is compromised. Kenneth Copeland, in relating what Christ supposedly told him, says, "don't be disturbed when people accuse you of thinking you are God...the more you get to be like Me, the more they are going to think that way of you. They crucified Me for claiming that I was God. But I didn't claim I was God. I just claimed I walked with Him and that He was with Me" (Copeland, "Take Time to Pray," *Believer's Voice of Victory*, #15, 2 February 1987, p. 9). "Jesus was on the earth just a man, not the son of God" (Frederick K.C. Price, Tape #RP 19, May 1993). And Kenneth Hagin says, "You are as

much the incarnation of God as Jesus Christ was" (*The Word of Faith,* December 1980, p. 14).

Atonement

The very important doctrine of the atonement of Christ is distorted. Frequently Word-Faith teachers unduly over-emphasize the spiritual death instead of the physical death of Christ. "Physical death will not remove sins" (Hagin, *The Name of Jesus,* p. 29). In other words, it took the spiritual death of Jesus to atone for sins. "Do you think that the punishment of our sins was to die on the cross? If that was the case, the two thieves could have paid our price. No, the punishment was to go into hell itself and to serve time in hell separated from God" (K. C. Price, *Ever Increasing Faith Messenger,* June 1990, p. 7).

According to Word-Faith teachers, when Adam rebelled, or "committed high treason," he not only betrayed God by turning over to Satan what God had given him, he also took on the nature of Satan. So, to redeem mankind and creation from Satan's legal control, Jesus, as the second Adam, had to die not only physically but spiritually. This may be acceptable among some evangelicals. But where it has led Word-Faith teachers is not. They say Jesus not only bore our sins on Calvary, but also took on the actual nature of Satan himself. "Just as Adam died spiritually, Jesus died spiritually. The spiritual death He suffered caused His physical body to die.... When *Jesus accepted the sin nature of Satan* into His Spirit He cried 'My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?' He was separated from God... He was ushered into the bowels of hell" (Kenneth Copeland, *Classic Redemption,* p. 13; emphasis added). "Spiritual death means having Satan's nature" (Hagin, *The Name of Jesus,* p. 31).

Just a man on earth, and taking on the nature of Satan at the cross, Jesus becomes just a sinner in need of redemption. At the resurrection Jesus is a *born again man from the pit of hell*. "Jesus was born again in the pit of Hell....The Church started when Jesus was born again in the gates of Hell" (Charles Capps, *Authority In Three Worlds,* pp. 212 13).

Other Doctrines

1) Positive Confession: The Theology of the Spoken Word (*Rhematology*), or thought actualization, is commonly known as *positive confession.* It stresses the inherent power of words and thoughts. Each person predestines his own future by what he says verbally and by how well he uses spiritual laws. As such, it is as if we live in a mechanistic universe instead of a personal one (*see,* Kenneth Copeland, *Laws of Prosperity,* p. 15; Charles Capps, *The Tongue A Creative Force,* pp. 117-118; *Releasing the Ability of God,* pp. 98-99, 101-104).

2) The Gospel of Health: Isaiah 53 is used to justify blanket coverage for the physical healing of every Christian who has enough faith. "...it is the plan of our Father God in His great love and His great mercy that no believer should ever be sick, that every believer should live his life full span down here on earth and that every believer should finally just fall asleep in Jesus" (Hagin, *Seven Things You Should Know About Divine Healing,* p. 21). Hagin also denies having a headache for forty-five years, labeling such as "simply symptoms rather than any indication of a headache" (*In the Name of Jesus*, p. 44).

3) The Gospel of Wealth: A central tenet of the prosperity gospel is that God wills the financial prosperity of every Christian. If a believer lives in poverty, he/she is living outside God's intended will. "You must realize that it is God's will for you to prosper" (Copeland, *Laws of Prosperity,* p. 51).

BIBLICAL RESPONSE

1) God is the unique, Sovereign of the Universe (1 Timothy 6:15). God is pure spirit (John 4:24). There is no biblical basis for teaching that God has His own body, as an essential part of His nature or being. This would be more in line with Mormonism than orthodox Christianity.

2) Man is unique from the rest of Creation, but is not Divine. He was created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26, 27; 9:6), but bearing God's image does not make him a "little god." By definition, God is an "uncreated" or self-existent Being. Obviously, humans were created and therefore are not self-existent or divine; only God has a divine nature (Galatians 4:8; Isaiah 1:6-11, 43:10, 44:6; Ezekiel 28:2; Psalms 8:6-8).

3) Christ is Eternal, the Only Begotten Son, and the Only Incarnation of God (John 1:1, 2, 15; 1:14, 18; 3:16; 1 John 4:1). In Him dwelt the fullness of the Godhead bodily (Colossians 2:9). By receiving the limitations of humanity (Philippians 2:6-7) Jesus forwent the exercise of some of His prerogatives as God. But He did not cease to be God. It is also impossible for the natures of God or man (Christ was both on earth) to cease being what they are.

4) The nature of the atonement had to do with Jesus' physical death on the cross being the payment for sins (Hebrews 9:22). Christ said, "It is finished" (John 19:30), which translates *tetelistai* meaning "paid for in full." Payment for our sins took place on the cross (Matt. 26:28; 1 Pet. 2:24; Col. 1:20-22; Heb. 10:10, 12, 14, 19 20). There was nothing more to pay beyond the cross (Heb. 10:18).

5) God is the only One who ever created reality by the power of His Word (Genesis 1:3). He does not have or need "faith." Faith is depending on something outside ourselves. If God depends upon something outside Himself, He is not Supreme and therefore not God. Man, not God, is in need of faith. The faith referenced in Mark 11:22 and Hebrews 11:3 is clearly "the faith which has God as its object," not "the kind of faith that God has."

6) The use of words for Positive Confession ‹ One may help or hurt another by words of encouragement or condemnation, by telling the truth or misleading, etc. But to treat words as if they were some "star wars" type weapon by which reality is manipulated or altered is not biblical, but occultic.

RESOURCES

A Different Gospel (Updated Edition) D.R. McConnell. Warns of the movement's cultic nature in its doctrine of healing and its understanding of the atonement, and demonstrates how far the movement's doctrine of prosperity is from Scripture's true teaching. Chapter end-notes, Bibliography, 195 pages, softcover. **$8.**

Christianity in Crisis, Hank Hanegraaff. Documents the antibiblical doctrines of the Word-Faith Movement and shows their systematic subversion of the historic Christian faith. Appendices, Notes, Bibliography, Scripture and Subject indexes, 447 pages, hardcover. **$17**