

Understanding the Teaching of Word of Faith (Positive Confession) and Prosperity Gospel

By Tom Agnew
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What is “Word
Faith” theology?

Word of Faith (also known as *Word-Faith* or simply *Faith*), is a family of Christian churches as well as a teaching movement kindred to many Pentecostal and charismatic churches and individuals worldwide. The basic doctrine preached is that of salvation through Jesus Christ and what that “salvation” entails. It is based on Jesus of Nazareth’s teachings concerning the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Heaven and the state man can receive through the atonement and sacrifice of Jesus Christ. This state of new being or creation (found in the biblical passages 2 Corinthians 5:17 and Galatians 6:15) can be received only through faith in the Word of God.

It diverges from traditional Christian denominations in that it emphasizes speaking, stating, or confessing verses found in the Bible, called the Word of God. The belief is that if one believes the Word of God and confesses it then the believer shall receive what they confessed. This act of believing and speaking is described by Jesus of Nazareth in Mark 11:22 and 23. The term *word of faith* itself is derived from the biblical passage Romans 10:8 which speak of “*the word of faith that we preach.*”

Who founded
“Word Faith”
teaching?

One of the first proponents of word of faith was E. W. Kenyon (1867-1948). A New England Bible teacher, schoolmaster, and prolific writer, Kenyon authored eighteen books that are used still today by many who call themselves Word of Faith. Traditional Pentecostalism taught the idea of the power of God in the present day (healing, miracles, etc.) but the manifestation of these things was unpredictable and as “the Lord Willed”. At the core of Kenyon's teachings was the concept of the Old and New Testaments as blood covenants. A blood covenant is a contract that binds two parties together as one “blood”, or family, and pledges them to the mutual interest and prosperity of one another. Chapter 17:1 of the Book of Genesis reads: “And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect. And I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly.” One can observe this vow to prosper in the 28th chapter of Deuteronomy where the “Blessings of the covenant” are listed; they include protection from violence, sickness, poverty etc. Israel would of course in turn pledge itself to the interests and service of God. (God sought through Israel's obedience to reach all nations of the Earth Genesis 12:3) A blood covenant was symbolized by a “covenant cut” and the spilling of blood: “This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; Every man child among you shall be circumcised” (Genesis 17:10). The supernatural was thus no longer limited to the kind of unpredictable and random manifestations “of the spirit” that had been seen in older Pentecostalism, but was now guaranteed in any instance in which it was necessary to fulfill God's “covenant promises” to his people. Many believe that Kenyon was heavily influenced by “New Thought”

What is “New Thought” and what is its relation to “Word Faith.”

What are the basic teachings and how do they diverge from mainstream Christian thought?

teaching.

Kenneth Hagin (1917-2003), of Tulsa, Oklahoma, was heavily influenced by Kenyon’s writings. Hagin has been referred to as the “father” of the modern word of faith movement. He elaborated on Kenyon’s theology of confession, preaching a four-part formula for receiving God’s promises: “Say it; do it; receive it; tell it.” Many Bible preachers and teachers have been influenced either directly or indirectly by Kenneth "Papa" Hagin and his "revelation". The most recognized include Kenneth Copeland, Creflo Dollar, Joyce Meyer, Jerry Savelle, Bill Winston, Joel Osteen, Charles Nieman and Hobart Freeman.

The **New Thought Movement** or **New Thought** is a spiritual movement which developed in the United States during the late 19th century and emphasizes metaphysical beliefs. It consists of a loosely allied group of religious denominations, secular membership organizations, authors, philosophers, and individuals who share a set of metaphysical beliefs concerning the effects of positive thinking, the law of attraction, healing, life force, creative visualization and personal power. It promotes the ideas that God is ubiquitous, spirit is the totality of real things, true human selfhood is divine, divine thought is a force for good, all sickness originates in the mind, and 'right thinking' has a healing effect.

The three major, but distinct, religious denominations within the American New Thought movement are Unity Church, Religious Science and the Church of Divine Science. Mary Baker Eddy, founder of the “Christian Science” church should be included in this list. Kenneth Hagin once said that all Mary Baker Eddy lacked was Jesus.

Though Word Faith has much of its foundation in Pentacostalism, this movement can be found in many denominations across the mainstream Christianity. This is largely due to the influence and notoriety of leaders like Creflo Dollar, Kenneth Copeland, Joyce Meyer and Joel Osteen. It must be said that just because believers find themselves in doctrinal error for reasons of ignorance or sincere misguidance does not necessitate we believe that all adherents to Word Faith/Prosperity Gospel are not genuine believers.

With that said, we must come to grips with some disturbing concerns with Word Faith teaching. At the heart of their teaching lie two basic convictions. First, the belief that we have access to the inexhaustible will of God and second that faith is the force by which we speak into the existence God’s will for our life. Both of these foundational convictions diverge sharply with normative Christian teaching regarding God’s will and Biblical faith. We will examine both of these convictions as well as other misinterpretations of Word Faith beliefs.

The Will of God:

At the core of Word Faith theology is a belief that we know exactly what God wants at any given time. Proponents act as if the whole counsel of God could be (and is) revealed to them. In their minds, God has explained to them everything that He “thought, planned or willed.”

This seems to fly in the face of verses like Isaiah 55:8, 9 and Romans 11:33-35 which basically state we don’t “possess the mind of God or His ways” nor do we understand “how unsearchable are His judgments.” What about Acts 1 where

Jesus answers the disciples saying "It is not for you to know...but you shall be my witnesses. This is not to say we are not privy to God's will but certainly not to all the details of it.

Word Faith adherents error in their belief by asserting that God's will is that we "by faith" claim His will. In reality, God's will often seems foreign to us and even confusing. Word Faith teachers say that confusion is simply a lack of faith on our part.

Faith as Force:

If God's will, then, is available to us without exception, then faith is the vehicle to claiming God's will for our lives. Kenneth Copeland in his book *The Force of Faith* states that "Faith is a power force. It is a tangible force. It is a conductive force" and "The force of faith is released by words. Faith-filled words put the law of the Spirit of life into operation". Thus, what is produced is "Word of Faith."

The problem with this is that it departs from what the Bible says faith really is.

Faith is trusting in the promises of God. Faith is synonymous with 'being sure':

"Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see" (Hebrews 11:1). We exercise faith when we trust in the promises of God.

The difference is that one view sees man as sovereign and God as the "divine bellhop" while the other sees God working according to counsel of "His" will. 1 John 5:14 says we ask in "accordance with His will." God is securely in the driver's seat.

Prosperity and Healing:

As noted above, Kenneth Hagin once said that all that was missing from Christian Science is Jesus. In other words, Word Faith is an attempt to "Christianize" New Thought or Positive Confession teaching." What is produced is a belief that man is the author of his own destiny and he wills God to do what he thinks is best. If we lack in financial and material wealth, we have lingering sin and faith is subsequently lacking in our life. The same is true of disease and sickness. They over realize texts such as "we have not because we ask not."

Little god's and Jesus Dying Spiritually:

Many Word Of Faith teachers have sought to emphasize the full significance of the believer's status as sons of God (through Christ) by using phrases such as "little gods" to describe themselves, a practice that has garnered some criticism from some other segments of the Christian world. Kenneth Hagin wrote that God "made us in the same class of being that He is Himself," and that the believer is "called Christ" because "that's who we are, we're Christ!" According to Hagin, by being "born again", the believer becomes "as much an incarnation as Jesus of Nazareth". Kenneth Copeland says Adam was "not a little like God ... not almost like God ...", and has told believers that "You don't have a God in you. You are one." Based primarily on the book of Psalms 82:6, which says "I have said, Ye are gods and all of you, children of the Most High"; this was also corroborated by Jesus making reference to this scripture in John 10:34. A common theme in Word-Faith preaching is that God created man as "an exact duplication of God's kind." (Hebrews 1:3, John 14:12, etc).

Man, then, is created in "God class" with potential to exercise what they refer to as

Concerns and questions for “Word Faith” adherents

the “God-kind of faith” thus becoming sovereign beings over their own life. Of course, man sinned and forfeited this right. Thus Jesus became a man and died spiritually (took on the nature of Satan) went to hell and was born again. He rose again with God’s nature and sent the Holy Spirit so that the “incarnation” could be duplicated in believers. Thus we should be successful in virtually every area of life now. To be in debt, be sick or to have a spouse leave you simply means you have not actualized you godhood and sin still remains.

- Seems to individualize your faith and diminish the communal while also diminishing the centrality of God.
- Seems to accentuate a narcissistic view of life which is testified as the root of our sin nature. Why would God feed our narcissism if that is what is at the root of our problem. (Judges 21:25)
- Gospel is redefined as man regaining his potential rather than man regaining his relationship and right standing with God.
- Sin is redefined as mankind lacking his potential rather than being inwardly corrupted by sin.
- God is redefined as the Great Actualizer of our dreams/desires rather than a Holy, Righteous, and Sovereign God.
- Why do “Word Faith” preachers/adherents die or grow older?
- If we are indeed “little gods” are we not on a collision course for another battle with God rather than inheriting peace with God in eternity.
- “Little gods” theology is reminiscent of “new light/Mormon” thought.