

“Word of Faith” Series by Justin Peters

Following is a series of analyses by correspondent Justin Peters. These special articles were first printed in the Baptist Record each week from September 25, 2003, to October 16, 2003.

Analysis: Word of Faith crosses heresy line

First in a series (originally printed 9/25/03)

“Satan conquered Jesus on the cross.” “He died spiritually! ...Jesus Christ understood that spiritual death is union with the satanic nature.” “Man was created on terms of equality with God, and he could stand in God’s presence without any consciousness of inferiority.” “He [God] doesn’t even draw a distinction between Himself and us. ...I have His name. I’m one with Him...I am a little god! Critics, be gone!”

Shocked? You may have just read the above four quotes from four separate individuals and are wondering, “What blasphemy is this? Who teaches such heresy? Mormons? Jehovah’s Witnesses?” You would be correct in discerning such statements as heretical but, unfortunately, incorrect in assuming that they come from groups considered outside of orthodox Christianity; they come from within.

More commonly known as the Health and Wealth, Name It and Claim It, or Prosperity gospel, the Word of Faith (WOF) movement comprises the majority – though not all – of what is seen on cable Christian television. WOF doctrine is beamed to hundreds of countries around the world via Christian networks such as TBN and Daystar, and preached in thousands of churches across the United States.

Much of WOF doctrine is in line with orthodox Christianity. However, the error is sufficient and egregious enough to persuade many, myself included, to conclude that the Health and Wealth gospel is indeed a different gospel (Gal. 1:6-9).

The WOF movement compromises the non-negotiable fundamentals of the faith. The origins of the WOF movement can be traced directly to the metaphysical cults such as Unity School of Christianity, Religious Science, Christian Science, and New Thought. Though the father of the modern WOF movement is often considered to be Kenneth Hagin (whose son can be seen preaching today on TBN), as he is referred to by Charisma magazine, this dubious honor actually goes to one Esseck W. Kenyon (1867-1948), whose works were extensively plagiarized by Hagin.

Kenyon was heavily influenced by the metaphysical cults which flourished at Emerson College of Oratory where he attended. Kenyon, in turn, was influenced by Phineas P. Quimby (1802-1866), a student of occultism, hypnosis, and parapsychology and the father of New Thought. Knowing the roots of a theological movement or system is critical in understanding its teachings and practical implications.

What follows is a very brief listing of some of the doctrines of the WOF movement:

- **Positive confession** – The belief that what is spoken can be brought into literal existence. Believers may simply speak the things which they desire of God and He is obligated to give it to them; hence the label “Name It and Claim It” gospel. If this sounds eerily like God’s act of creation in Gen. 1 and 2, it is.
- **Little gods doctrine** – The belief that man was created to be an exact duplicate of God. Believers, then, are little gods on the earth.
- **Spiritual death of Jesus** – The belief that Christ’s physical death was insufficient to atone for sin. He also had to die spiritually. Of course, if Jesus died spiritually, then He ceased being God and if He ceased being God even for an instant, He never was God to begin with.

- **Revelation knowledge** – The belief that God dispenses to certain believers, apart from the Scriptures, secret knowledge of Himself. This is a modern day version of the ancient heresy of Gnosticism against which the New Testament repeatedly warns.
- **Health and wealth** – The belief that all believers have the right to walk in perfect, divine health and prosper financially. This stems from the erroneous view that sickness was paid for by Christ’s spiritual atonement in hell and that prosperity is a cosmic law ordained by God respectively.

Heresy is never promoted in a manner which exposes its darkness for all to see. Rather, its poison is wrapped in familiar Christian language to make it more palatable. The WOF movement has craftily packaged its counterfeit gospel to look like the real thing. It is making alarming inroads into all Christian churches, including Southern Baptist churches. Many honest, sincere, born-again Christians are being deceived and hurt.

Analysis: Hinn, others shun sound doctrine

Second in series (originally printed 10/2/03)

If you do not know him by name, you would almost certainly know him by sight. Toufik Benedictus “Benny” Hinn is one of the most widely recognized individuals in Christian television today.

A self-proclaimed “healing evangelist,” Hinn has achieved almost superstar status. His daily television show, *This Is Your Day*, can be seen in 190 countries and his monthly miracle crusades are almost always attended by overflow crowds. Tens of millions worldwide believe Hinn to be one of God’s greatest spokesmen.

Undoubtedly, Hinn’s teachings on physical healing are for what he is best known. In short, Hinn teaches that it is *always* God’s will for the believer to walk in perfect divine health. Says Hinn, “He promises to heal all – every one, any, any whatsoever, everything – all our diseases.” This is an exceedingly reckless and unbiblical assertion.

It is a matter of biblical record that not all of God’s servants walked in perfect divine health; i.e. Job, Epaphroditus, Trophimus, Timothy, and the Apostle Paul all suffered physical ailments. If an afflicted believer prays for healing but does not receive it, then whose fault is it?

By definition it cannot be God’s. The fault, then, according to Hinn’s theology, lies squarely at the feet of the one who is sick. Says Hinn, “If you do not receive your miracle, it’s not God’s fault. You say, ‘Well whose fault is it?’ You figure that one out yourself.” Exactly.

Hinn knows that not everyone is healed. In fact, his ministry is notoriously silent when asked for documented proofs of healings. Therefore he has adopted the standard Word of Faith (WOF) excuses that the chronically ill believer must not have enough faith, sin is present in his life, he has not given enough money (have you ever heard a preacher ask you to “sow a seed” so you can “reap a harvest?”), or he is not even saved.

This is not an exaggeration. At a 2001 Miracle Crusade in Nevada, Hinn told the audience, “Healing should *never* be separate from salvation.” (emphasis mine.) The cruelty of this is hard to imagine. Now the sick person has to struggle not only with his malady, but also his own perceived spiritual deficiencies. Through no fault of his own he is cast into the deep valley of doubting his very salvation.

At his Miracle Crusades, Hinn “slays” people in the Spirit (though this practice is completely without biblical precedent) as if he is some anointed dispenser of the third Person of the Trinity, and he claims that thousands are healed. Are the people that claim to be healed really healed? The vast majority are not.

Most of what is seen on the stage of a Hinn crusade is resultant of very high states of emotion. In a closed environment with dimmed lights, rhythmic music, and a highly charismatic leader dressed in gleaming white on stage, the energy is almost palpable. With adrenaline rushing, some begin to convince themselves that they feel better and, for a while, they do.

However, when the show is over and a new day dawns, the symptoms almost always reappear.

Notice that those who get on stage suffer from something that cannot be readily seen. If God is truly healing the sick through Benny Hinn, where are the Down's Syndrome children, the quadriplegics, the amputees?

I myself have a moderate case of Cerebral Palsy. As a teenager I went to see a faith healer and fully expected to walk away whole. I did not. That incident began my interest in the WOF movement and all these so-called faith healers and led me to recently write my Master's thesis on Benny Hinn and his theology.

This series of articles is not intended as a personal attack but rather a call for discernment. Recall the words of Jesus: "For there shall arise false Christs and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders." (Matt. 24:24).

I close with words of encouragement. For those of you that suffer physically, pray that God will heal you. If you have enough faith to be saved, you certainly have enough faith to be healed.

Know, though, that it is not *always* God's will for us to be healed. If healing does not come, God's "peace that transcends all human understanding" (Phil. 4:7) and His "strength made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor. 12:9) most certainly will.

Analysis: False prophets abound in WOF

Third in a series (originally printed 10/9/03)

I believe the Word of Faith (WOF) movement is home to many false prophets. Both the Old and New Testaments are replete with warnings about false prophets and, on at least two occasions, the Apostle Paul called out by name men who were teaching false doctrine (1 Tim. 1:18-20; 2 Tim. 2:16-18). There is, therefore, biblical precedent for calling by name purveyors of spiritual error. Such action should not be undertaken lightly, however, so the names that follow are included only after great study and careful analysis:

- **Kenneth Hagin.** Recently passed away, he is considered the father of the modern WOF movement. Hagin claimed that his faith teachings came to him by divine revelation, but they were actually the product of his extensive plagiarizing of Essek W. Kenyon. Hagin's son, Kenneth Jr., carries on his father's work as pastor of Rhema Bible Church and head of its school in Tulsa, Ok. Boasting of at least eight personal visits from Christ, Hagin, as did his father, blurs the crisp line between Creator and created as in, "You are as much the incarnation of God as Jesus Christ was. The believer is as much an incarnation as was Jesus of Nazareth."
- **Kenneth Copeland.** Along with his wife Gloria, the Copelands are considered to be two of the movement's more intellectual leaders. Students of Hagin Sr., the Copelands have built a multi-million dollar "Christian" media empire. Kenneth Copeland is known for his deification of man. According to Copeland, the Holy Spirit personally told him, "A born again man [Jesus] defeated Satan. You are the very copy of that one." Incredulous, Copeland then asked the Holy Spirit, "Well, now, you don't mean that *I* could have done the same thing?" (emphasis original) Replied the Holy Spirit, "Oh yeah, if you'd had the knowledge of the Word of God that He did. 'Cause you're a reborn man too." This, sadly, just scratches the surface with Copeland.

- **Jesse Duplantis.** With little doubt, this self-labeled Cajun preacher is the most entertaining of the WOF leaders. He is well known for his comedic style, prosperity teachings, and personal visits from Christ. (Regarding the latter, do you see a pattern developing?) In his Voice of the Covenant magazine Duplantis claims, “The very first thing on Jesus’ agenda was to get rid of poverty.” In his video Close Encounters of the God Kind, Duplantis relates how one day he was ushered into Heaven itself. There King David told Jesse that he regretted writing some of his Psalms (what does this imply about biblical inerrancy?) and then upon seeing Jesus, Jesse noted that He “was taller than I thought He would be.” Safely back on earth, one day Jesse sensed that Jesus was sad over something. After being asked what was wrong by the concerned Duplantis, the Alpha and Omega told him, “I *need* you, boy.” (emphasis original)
- **Creflo Dollar.** This rather aptly named preacher is pastor of World Changers Church International in Atlanta, and is prominently featured on Trinity Broadcasting Network. He preaches the prosperity gospel quite convincingly. He confidently asserts that Jesus wore designer clothes and that that prosperity can be ours provided that we “sow a seed” into his ministry. Even more disturbing, though, is Dollar’s outright denial of the deity of Christ: “If Jesus came as God, then why did God have to anoint Him? *Jesus came as a man*, that’s why it was legal to anoint Him.” (emphasis original)

Space does not permit me to go into detail on all of the WOF leaders. Others to watch include Paul and Jan Crouch, Marilyn Hickey, Paul Cain, John Avanzini, Joyce Meyer, Mike Murdock, Rod Parsely, and R.W. Shambach.

Be wary also of preachers who share their pulpit with these people. Most preachers are very protective of their pulpits and rightly so; whom a preacher invites to fill his pulpit speaks to what that preacher believes.

Again – please understand, gentle reader, that this is not a personal attack on anyone. This is a call for discernment. Though I wish that this call was not necessary, both the present reality and the Word of God (Matt. 24:11; 2 Cor. 11:13f; 2 Pet. 2:1) indicate that it is.

Analysis: Scripture exposes false prophets

Fourth and final in a series (originally printed 10/16/03)

Both the Old and New Testaments are replete with warnings of false prophets. The following is intended to provide biblical criteria for discerning false prophets and teachers. If a preacher engages in any of the following behaviors, be very wary of him or her:

- **Repeated immoral, unbiblical behavior.** A false prophet may be detected by examining his moral character. If a prophet habitually displays character incongruent with that of God, then the former cannot speak for the latter. In Jeremiah 23:14, God speaks of prophets that “commit adultery and live a lie.” It is important to note that it is spiritual adultery, not marital, that is in view. Evangelist Benny Hinn, for example, has a habitual problem with the truth. He has been caught in numerous lies about his own life and ministry. He has threatened not only his critics, but also their innocent children. He claims to have been visited by Elijah and the late Kathryn Kuhlman (a Word of Faith evangelist to whom he often refers for inspiration), and he reports to get “an anointing” from visiting the grave of Aimee Semple McPherson, founder of the Foursquare Gospel movement – evidence that Hinn has delved into the biblically forbidden realm of necromancy (Deut. 18:10-11; Lev. 20:27; Jer. 14:14).
- **Prophesying under a false god.** If a prophet worships or prophesies in the name of a god other than Yahweh, then he or she is a false prophet (Jer. 2:8). Though the Word of Faith (WOF) preachers will not do this *explicitly*, they come very close. Hinn once related to his audience that he learned spiritual truths regarding positive confession not from God’s Word but from a witch.

Evangelist Creflo Dollar's Jesus, who came not as God but only as a man whom God anointed, is not the Jesus of the Bible.

- **False prophecies and visions.** One of the most recognized tests for a false prophet is whether or not his prophecies come to pass (Deut. 18:21-22). At his church on Dec. 31, 1989, Hinn went into a trance-like stupor during which God supposedly spoke directly through him to enlighten the congregation on some of the major events of the coming decade. Hinn prophesied that Fidel Castro would die in office, the U.S. East Coast would be ravaged by earthquakes, and that by "'94 or '95, *no later than that*, God will destroy the homosexual community of America with fire." Many of the WOF leaders are also known for relating false visions and dreams but claim for them divine origins. The Bible does not smile upon such as these (Jer. 23:25-32).
- **Revelation Knowledge.** This is the belief that God imparts to a select few extra-biblical knowledge of Himself and various other spiritual truths. The doctrine of Revelation Knowledge assumes a spirit/matter dualism in which the spiritual and physical realms are forever separate. Therefore, rational thought is of no value in spiritual matters. Hinn, under the authority of Revelation Knowledge, has taught of a nine-member Trinity, that women were to give birth out of their sides, and that Adam could fly to the moon. One can see how rational thought might be a hindrance to the WOF teachers. Was it not Christ Himself that taught us to love God with all of our heart, soul, and mind (Matt. 22:37)?

Approach with caution preachers who claim to have regular visits from the supernatural, claim to have a special "anointing," claim that it is always God's will for you to be healed, claim that God will bless you when you "sow a seed" into their ministries (rather than to your local church), or try to send you an anointed "point of contact" such as a handkerchief, prayer cloth, vial of oil, etc.

Watch also for those preachers who publicly speak in tongues with no interpreter or who engage in "slaying in the Spirit." Lastly, remember that someone's apparent miracle-working abilities are not necessarily from God (Matt. 24:24).

Finally, brothers and sisters, I leave you with this Scripture passage: "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world." (1 John 4:1)

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