

The Word of Faith Movement

by Sebastian R. Fama

The Word of Faith Movement, sometimes referred to as the Positive Confession Movement or the Prosperity Gospel, has been making inroads into mainline Christianity. Although it primarily affects Protestant churches, it has managed to influence some Catholics. Faith teachers include Kenneth Hagin, Benny Hinn, Oral Roberts, Kenneth and Gloria Copeland, Robert Tilton, Paul and Jan Crouch, John Avanzini, Paul Billheimer, Charles Capps, Morris Cerullo, David Cho, Hobart Freeman, Norvel Hayes, Marilyn Hickey, T. L. Osborn, Frederick Price, and Jerry Savelle.

Faith teachers are not all the same. Some wander farther from the truth than others. However, they have a lot in common. For instance, they all teach that faith is a force. They also teach that fear is a force. Faith activates God and fear activates Satan. Words are the containers of faith or fear. Whatever is said with the mouth creates reality. If you speak words of faith, God *must* act on your behalf. If you speak negatively God *cannot* act on your behalf and Satan is given license to work against you. Consequently, Faith teachers claim there is no reason for a believer to be sick. Kenneth Hagin declares: "I believe that it is the plan of God our Father that no believer should ever be sick...It is not — I state boldly — it is not the will of God my Father that we should suffer with cancer and other dread diseases which bring pain and anguish. No! It is God's will that we be healed" (*Healing: The Father's Provision, Word of Faith*, August 1977, page 9).

If there isn't any reason to be sick, surely there isn't any reason to take medicine. Frederick Price speaks of medicine as a crutch for the immature believer. He states: "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." (*Faith Foolishness*, page 88).

The Faith teachers look to Isaiah 53:5 to support their claims: "**But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities;** upon Him was the chastisement that made us whole, **and with His stripes we were healed.**" The beginning of the verse sets the context: "**He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities.**" The healing spoken of here is spiritual not physical healing. This is made abundantly clear in 1 Peter 2:24: "He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, **that we might die to sin** and live to righteousness. **By His wounds you have been healed.**"

During His ministry Jesus did heal the sick. But Scripture nowhere claims that this would always be the case. In fact, we find evidence to the contrary. When confronted by the Pharisees on His associating with sinners, Jesus said: "**Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.**" (Matthew 9:12). If Jesus came to abolish the need for physicians, He surely would not have used them to illustrate a point and risk misleading His followers. Sirach 38:1-4 is more explicit: "**Honor the physician** with the honor due him...**The Lord created medicines** from the earth and **a sensible man will not despise them.**"

Perhaps the greatest example in the New Testament is that of Paul the apostle. Certainly, Paul was a man of faith. And yet he was afflicted with a physical ailment. He writes of it in 2 Corinthians 12:7-9: "And to keep me from being too elated by the abundance of revelations, **a thorn was given me in the flesh**, a messenger of Satan, to harass me, to keep me from being too elated. **Three times I besought the Lord** about this, that it should leave me; **but He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.'**"

No one knows for sure what Paul's thorn in the flesh was. But many scholars believe that it was an eye ailment. The Greek word rendered as thorn in 2 Corinthians 12:7 is skolops (σκόλοψ), which means withered at the front. It is derived from two other words, skelos (σκέλος), meaning to parch and optanomai (ὀπτάνομαι), meaning to gaze.

When someone in the movement does get sick they simply deny that they are sick. They claim that what appears to be an ailment is actually just a symptom put on them by the devil. This they claim is done in order to fool them into believing that they are sick when they are not. The danger here is obvious. Ignoring symptoms can lead to greater problems — sometimes, even death.

Larry and Lucky Parker paid a high price for their dedication to the Faith teachers. In their book *We Let Our Son Die*, they tell how, in accordance with the teachings of the Word of Faith Movement, they withheld insulin from their diabetic son. He lapsed into a coma and died.

A recent news report revealed the following: "A Benny Hinn crusade ... became a tragedy for four people – including a baby and a young child – who died while awaiting a miracle healing from Hinn. All had been hospitalized but had left the hospital to attend the crusade" (*Religious News Service*, May 8, 2000). Unfortunately, these are not the only examples.

The Faith teachers themselves are not immune to sickness. Kenneth Hagin has suffered at least four cardiovascular crises including one full-scale heart stoppage. Paul Crouch also suffers from heart problems. Fred Price's wife has been stricken with cancer and has thanked her doctors for radiation and chemotherapy. And yet they continue to teach falsely.

The same logic applied to health is applied to wealth. Jerry Savelle claims that you can speak your world into existence (*Framing Your World with the Word of God, Part 2*). Marilyn Hickey shows us how this is done. She actually said the following:

What do you need? Start creating it. Start speaking about it. Start speaking it into being. Speak to your billfold. Say, "You big thick billfold full of money." Speak to your checkbook. Say, "You, checkbook, you. You've never been so prosperous since I owned you. You're just jammed full of money" (*Claim Your Miracles*).

The Faith teachers' obsession with wealth runs counter to the teachings of Scripture. Paul tells Timothy that "**The love of money is the root of all evils; it is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith**" (1 Timothy 6:10). Jesus Himself warns us about such attachments. He said: "**Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth**, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, **but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven**, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. **For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also**" (Matthew 6:19-21).

Faith teachers use their bizarre theology to prey on people in need. Robert Tilton claims God wants you to flourish financially and physically. But you need faith. To prove your faith, you need to make a vow of faith. A vow of faith is usually a large donation to Robert Tilton's ministry.

Some Faith teachers claim equality with God. Kenneth Hagin says: "Man...was created on terms of equality with God, he could stand in God's presence without any consciousness of inferiority...He made us the same class of being that He is Himself" (*Zoe: The God-Kind of Life*). Morris Cerullo is a bit more direct. He once proclaimed: "You're not looking at Morris Cerullo; you're looking at God" (*The End Time Manifestation of the Sons of God*, tape 1). Benny Hinn, John Avanzini, Kenneth Copeland, and Charles Capps have all made similar claims.

Some Faith teachers don't deal very well with criticism. In 1992, Benny Hinn threatened the Christian Research Institutes staff members and their families with the following statement:

You're attacking me on the radio every night – you'll pay, and your children will. Hear this from the lips of God's servant. You are in danger, Repent! Or God Almighty will move His hand. Touch not my Anointed...

Millions have heard the false gospel of the Faith teachers. How many of them have rejected Christianity thinking it to be nothing more than a con game?