

"I will set a Plumbline among my people..." Amos 7:8



The Plumbline

Assessing Current Teachings, Issues and Events with Scripture

Word-Faith Teaching About The Cross

Diminishing Christ and Exalting Man

The Word-Faith Movement, sometimes referred to as "the health-wealth" gospel, has been a part of Charismatic/Pentecostal scenery since the ministry of Kenneth Hagin some decades in the past. Hagin has passed away, but before his departure he successfully planted a movement. There now exists a large stable of Word-Faith idealoges and practitioners. The unofficially recognized successor is Kenneth Copeland, who tells of having Hagin laying hands laid upon him. But there are many more second generation operatives, including:

Jessie Duplantis, Joyce Meyer, Jerry Savelle, Creflo Dollar, Joel Osteen, Charles Capps, Fred Price and many more.

When Hagin and others first came upon the scene, many were confused about the source of Word-Faith teachings and what kind of biblical interpretation supported these new teachings. Now after many decades the mystery is now over. Hagin's source for his teaching is primarily E.W. Kenyon and secondarily the salvation history scheme of the Latter-Rain movement of 40's and 50's. It also has been established that Hagin actually plagiarized much from Kenyon and suggested some of Kenyon's teachings were "revelation knowledge" from the Lord.

"E.W Kenyon was educated at the Emerson School of Oratory in Boston. He spent five years there, from 1890 to 1895... Emerson school of Oratory was much more than a school of oratory. It was a major center of various strains of metaphysics, especially of the "New Thought" brand – a close relative of Christian Science. Charles Wesley Emerson and his wife later joined the Church of Christ Scientist. The main purpose of Kenyon's writing, according to Kenyon himself was to "restore" to the church the supernatural healing power that the Mind Science cults (New Thought etc) exhibited, which in Kenyon's view had been usurped unfairly... Kenyon's writings are the true source of Hagin's supposedly "revelation knowledge." ...The faith of the faith teachers is not a gift from God nor implicit trust in Christ, but a force one must develop through auto suggestion (positive continuous confession) and use it to get what ever you want. God no longer heals in accordance with His will and purposes but your faith heals you in accordance with a spiritual law.

In the spiritual realm, God has set into motion certain laws. It doesn't take any intervention of God to make them work. Hagin blended Kenyon's thought with Latter-Rain restoration teaching of end time revelation. This conflation produced the Word-Faith version of "revelation knowledge." Hagin with a Pentecostal Latter-Rain foundation gave this amalgam a biblical vocabulary. This ideological merger has given Word-Faith a little different flavor than traditional Latter-Rain teaching. They rarely teach restoration of apostles and prophets as do Latter-Rain practitioners. Rather, they simply practice "revelation knowledge" with little emphasis on the restoration of apostles and prophets as in the Latter -Rain paradigm. "In Hagin's book entitled "I Believe in Miracles," Hagin claims he was given eight "visions of Jesus sometimes in 3-D Technicolor with stereo sound. Hagin calls such a vision and "open vision." (Did Hagin coin this often used term?). Jesus purportedly gave to Hagin a four-step formula that would work for anyone who used it, even unbelievers. This formula God put into the universe as a law. Faith is a force that God does not need to give. But this is Deism. Deism

asserts that God created the universe and then left it run on its own laws. Deism is often recruited by Mind Science Cults and Occultists.” (Oral Roberts thesis, unknown author).

The key to success is knowing the laws and working them. Consequently Hagin successfully fused spiritual laws and metaphysics with the continuing revelation of the Latter-Rain restored prophets. It is because of this mix-blooded theology that Word-Faithers are indeed Charismatic, but more preoccupied with their own teachings and superstars. It appears to this writer that most Word-Faith churches and people do not naturally make common cause and do not often fellowship with other Pentecostal/Charismatic churches and ministries. They don't seem to be ecumenical even with other first cousin ministries. It appears they keep a certain distance from other relatives in the Latter-Rain ancestry. Consequently, they don't get much press and they appear to like it that way. Joyce Meyer has wide exposure but she doesn't speak often about Word-Faith topics directly, choosing rather practical Christian teaching. There is no doubt she belongs to the Word-Faith fraternity. In a booklet “The Most Important Decision You Will Ever Make” she clearly espoused the “born-again Jesus” teaching (p. 36), a Word-Faith specialty. But in a later printing, the “born-again Jesus” teaching was removed. This quasi seclusion of Word-Faith groups tends to enable them to more or less escape review and analysis.

In this issue of Plumblin I want to give special attention to Word-Faith teaching regarding the atoning death of Christ. The Word-Faith positive/negative confession practices are indeed serious error. But we have come to know their pitch and it usually only hurts their own. But their teaching on the death of Jesus is a false teaching of a much greater degree. The biblical teaching of the atonement is more or less up for grabs in many evangelical circles. In a recent Plumblin attention was drawn to the denial of the substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus. But for some decades now, Word-Faith teachers have in their own little corner been teaching an even more egregious view of the cross than the more recent attacks in the evangelical world. In the Word-Faith movement, this teaching is called “Identification” teaching. Only a few commentators have exposed “Identification” over the years referring to this as the “Born-Again Jesus” teaching.

Word-Faith Teaching concerning the Cross

Word-Faith teaching of the cross can only be understood against the backdrop of their teaching regarding the nature of God and the nature of man.

Richard J. Vincent in his article “An Examination of the Word Faith Movement” (www.biblebb.com/fo/es/WRDFAITH.HTM) gives us the inner logic of Word-Faith teaching on Jesus' death.

“Copeland teaches that “God is a being that stands somewhere around 6'2”, 6'3” (tape # 01-0601) intimating the God has a body (ala Mormonism)...After the faith teachers belittle God to slightly more and an exalted man, they, then proceed to exalt man to the status of God...Copeland teaches: “He, Adam, was not a little like God, he was not almost like God, He was not even subordinate to God.” (tape # 01-3001). Copeland even states that “Adam is God manifested in the flesh”, (tape # 01 3001) a title that can only be truly applied to Christ Jesus alone...The faith teachers claim that when Adam fell in the garden he forfeited the nature of God and took on the nature of Satan. This error is but a link in the chain that connects the faith teachers exalting of man and the belittling of God. You see, salvation for the faith teachers is not the removal of sin through the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. Salvation for the faith teachers is not the forgiveness of sins and the restoring of a right relationship between God and man. Salvation for the faith teachers is instead the removal of the nature of Satan from man and restoring the nature of God to man.

How is the restoring of the nature of God in man to come about? The answer that the faith teachers give is that Jesus had to take on the nature of Satan on the cross. In fact, the whole sacrifice of Christ on the cross takes a completely different emphasis and meaning for the faith teachers.

You must follow the steps of this teaching very carefully for it is but the doorway into their heretical teaching of the cross and the atonement. [The steps of this teaching are in bold letters below.]

1) On the cross Jesus took upon Himself the nature of satan. The bible says that Jesus is God the Son, God manifest in the flesh. Jesus therefore possesses the attributes of deity such as omnipotence, omniscience, eternalness, immutability, and etc. Though in His incarnation, He chose not to exercise all of His attributes, He still retained them... God does not change and neither does Jesus. "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, today and forever" (Heb. 13:8). But the faith teachers begin their error by claiming that the holy, undefiled, unchangeable Son of God became evil to the core taking upon Himself the nature of satan... Our holy God does not become unholy.

2) Jesus died spiritually. Again the unchanging God-man did not die spiritually. 1 Peter 3:18 states that "Jesus was put to death in the flesh but made alive in the Spirit." Jesus did not need to die spiritually to gain our salvation. The offering of His body was enough. Colossians 1:13 states "He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death", ... Was Jesus lying when He cried upon the cross, "It is finished" (John 19:30). Was there yet more to be done to secure our salvation? That comforting cry from the lips of our blessed Lord can be nothing but the bedrock of our salvation and our salvation was completely bought and paid for at this most climactic moment of all history!

3) Jesus descended into hell a mortal man. ...Jesus did not suffer in hell... There was need for Him to do anything more for our salvation. Satan had already been defeated and conquered (Col 2:14-15). Also, Jesus was not, nor ever will be, a mere mortal human being. To be a mere mortal, He would have to stop being God and that is one thing that is against God's nature and attributes.

4) Jesus was born-again in hell. Jesus had no need to be born-again. Jesus was not a lost and hell-bound sinner who needed regeneration. He was the Almighty, Eternal and Holy Son of God. The faith teachers are willing to drag Jesus to the lowest depths of hell in order that their teaching will have some consistency. This idea that Jesus was born-again is the crucial link for the faith teachers that enables them to cry out, "I am a little god."

5) Jesus defeated the devil by being born-again in Hell. We now have Jesus, a mere [sinful,demoniac] man, suffering in hell. Jesus then decides to be born-again. He defeats the devil and becomes the first-born among many brethren. Now, here is where the scripture twisting becomes ludicrous. Copeland states that nowhere in the bible after the book of Acts is Jesus called the unique and only Son of God. He then twists Romans 8:29 to mean that Jesus is first born-again man. This first reborn man, Jesus, has set the pattern for a new race to come. And according to the faith teachers, we are that new race to come. We are equal to Jesus for we are born -again just as He was. Do you see what has happened here? The faith teachers have so suppressed the deity of Jesus that they have, in essence, denied it. Copeland goes the farthest in this revelation he supposedly received from Jesus. "Don't be disturbed when people accuse you of thinking you're God. The more you get to be like Me, the more they're 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 in me. Hallelujah! That's what we are doing." (Voice of Victory, Vol. 15, No. 2, 2/87).

Why is it so important for the faith teachers to ignore such explicit passages as "It is finished," etc? Why must they have Jesus dying spiritually as well as physically, entering hell as a mortal man... and being born-again to defeat the devil? The reason is that the faith teachers have a diminished view of Jesus. When Jesus is downplayed as nothing more than an anointed man, it brings the faith teachers up to the level of Jesus. In fact both Kenneth Copeland and Fred Price have publicly stated that if it was just the physical death of Jesus on the cross that saves us, then anyone could have done it. Kenneth Copeland says, "And the whole NT calls Him the first born...The word "born" began to ring in my spirit; it just began to roll around; born, born. I never had let Him go through that in my own thinking... And while I was laying there thinking about these things, the Spirit of God spoke to me. And He said, "Son, realize this: Now follow Me in this, don't let your tradition trip you up."

He said, "Think this way: A twice born man whipped and defeated satan. The first-born of many brethren defeated him." And I threw my bible down and I said, "What?" He said, "a born-again man defeated satan. The first-born of many brethren defeated him." He said, "You are the very same image and the very copy of that one." I said, "You don't mean – you couldn't mean, that I could have done the same thing?" He said, "Oh, yeah, if you'd had the knowledge of the Word of God that He did, you could have done the same thing, 'you're a reborn man too.'" (What happened from the Cross to the Throne" tape # 02-0017). No mention is made of the sinlessness of Christ. No reverence is shown toward the unique virgin birth of Christ. See the depths to which Word-Faith teachers have desecrated our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ could pay for our sins because He was sinless, being uniquely born of a virgin, and thus not sharing in the sin nature of Adam and his descendants. A fact to which neither Copeland nor anyone can likewise boast.

...The gospel message is no more "turn to the cross of Jesus, ye wretched sinners, and plead for God's forgiveness. Find rest for your sin and guilt beneath the blessed cross of the great and mighty Savior." Instead the faith teachers gospel message is, "You shall be like God"! The original lie of the devil is now the gospel message and is broadcast around the world for all to hear!... Kenneth Hagin states: "You are as much the incarnation of God as Jesus Christ was..." ("Word of Faith, Dec. 1980, p. 14). Then again Benny Hinn: "Are you ready for some real revelation knowledge...you are a god on earth running around." ("Our position in Christ" tape #AO31190-1)... Kenneth Copeland: "I say this with all respect so that it will not upset you too bad, but I say it anyway, when I read in the bible where He [Jesus] says, 'I am,' I just smile and say, 'Yes, I am too!'" ("Believers Voice of Victory" broadcast on TBN, 7/8/87). Paul Crouch: "Do you know what else that is settled then tonight? This hue and cry and controversy that has been spawned by the devil to try to bring dissension within the body of Christ that we are gods - I am a little god. I have His name. I am one with Him. I'm in covenant relation. I am a little god. Critics be gone!" (Praise the Lord broadcast on TBN 7/7/86).

Am I just theologically splitting hairs here? If this were a matter of when and how to baptize, or how many times a year should the the Lord's Supper be observed, or whether the rapture was post, mid, or pretrib, then I could rightfully be accused of that. Yet this is not a minor issue. At stake here is the very character of our God and Savior Jesus Christ and the great salvation that He has given us. If you have the wrong Jesus, you have the wrong salvation and it should be clear from the evidence presented above that the Jesus of Word-Faith teaching is a far cry from the Jesus of the Bible. When Shirley MacClaine chants over and over on national TV, "I am God, I am God" we evangelicals go into an uproar. Yet when those who claim to be in our ranks say "I am a little god, we don't even flinch..."

Stated most simply, the error of the faith movement is that they exalt man and decrease God. They exalt man to God status and reduce God to man's status. They are aware that what they are teaching is unorthodox and controversial and to say the least, yet they have no wish to change their tune.. a little leaven leavens the whole lump." [Richard J. Vincent]

I suspect that in some occasions this "identification" teaching of the cross does not always filter down to every Word-Faith person in the pews. I personally recall someone who was confronted by a friend with this born-again Jesus teaching. She then asked a leading world faith leader who happened to be visiting regarding this. This Word-Faith spokesman told him that anyone who does not accept this identification teaching is not spiritually mature. This person then left that congregation. There is a simple question that will enable anyone to know if a Word-Faith Christian espouses the "identification" message. Simply ask: "Did Jesus secure our salvation on the cross."