

Faith as traditionally understood

The apostle Paul informed the Corinthian church, "if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile" (1 Cor. 15:17).¹ Without a resurrection, the faith (*pistis*) of these believers, like any misinformed faith, would have been worthless.² The efficacy of faith is, without exception, tied to that in which it is invested. A dead savior is not a worthy object of faith.

The Bible knows nothing of a faith that rests on one's own ability to believe or in impersonal forces. As Gresham Machen states, "faith is regarded as being always reposed in persons."³ Throughout the Bible it is presupposed that faith is properly placed in God alone. In fact, it has been argued that true faith is not placed even in the promises of God. W. E. Vine explains, "The object of Abraham's 'faith' was not God's promise (that was the occasion of its exercise); his 'faith' rested on God Himself. . . ."⁴

The Bible's eminent chapter on faith (Hebrews 11) is properly understood not so much as

¹ All Scripture quotations are taken from the New International Version unless otherwise indicated.

² The primary definition of the Greek *pistis* is a "firm persuasion". It is used in Scripture to refer to trust (e.g., 1 Cor. 2:5), trustworthiness (e.g., Rom. 3:3), the contents of belief (e.g., 1 Tim. 6:10), an assurance (e.g., Acts 17:31), or a pledge of fidelity (1 Tim. 5:12). W. E. Vine, Merrill F. Unger, and William White Jr., *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985), 222.

³ Gresham J. Machen, *What is Faith?*, (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1991), 46.

⁴ W. E. Vine, Merrill F. Unger, and William White Jr., *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985), 222. This was Warfield's argument with which Gordon Clark has taken exception. Gordon H. Clark, *Faith and Saving Faith* (Jefferson, MD: The Trinity Foundation, 1983), 79-83. Clark evidently prefers to restrict faith primarily to belief in propositions. But certainly it does not diminish a promise to say that such is never greater than the person behind it. The revealer has some bearing on the value of revelation.

a tribute to great men and women of faith as it is a tribute to their common possession: a God who is altogether worthy of faith and who, now fully revealed in Christ (c.f. 1:2-3), is deserving of double allegiance. The historical context of the letter must be appreciated: Jewish recipients who were persecuted and evidently wavering in their trust and commitment to Christ and an author who is encouraging them to endure, assuring them repeatedly that Christ is a worthy object of faith. In the previous chapter, the readers are exhorted to "draw near to God" in "full assurance of faith" (v. 22), to retain their confidence (v. 35), and to believe and not "shrink back" (v. 39). In light of the context that precedes it and its own introduction, the focus of chapter 11 should not be regarded as not man's ability to believe but rather God's trustworthiness as demonstrated to generations of now-vindicated believers. Fitting that the author should follow up with the command to "fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith." Clearly, any view of faith that confuses objects or fails to exalt the Creator alone and acknowledge his sovereignty is one that falls well short of the true, biblical definition.

Additionally, the Bible precludes the belief that faith itself alters the nature of reality. When faith appears to produce results it is not because impersonal reality took notice and became responsive, for it is incapable of doing so. One who believes faith contains some magical quality or that faith of the misplaced sort can produce the desired effect will search the Bible in vain for anything but proof of the contrary.⁵

The Faith Movement's doctrine of faith

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See: Num. 14:39-45; I Kings 20:23-29; Isa. 42:17; Luke 12:16-21

In recent decades, a challenge to the traditional biblical understanding of faith has emerged and enjoyed wide acceptance even within the Christian community. This view of faith has been advanced by a growing movement commonly known as the Word of Faith. As will be shown, the Word of Faith movement rejects the simplicity of the biblical doctrine of faith and substitutes a complex, unbiblical, and logically unsatisfying teaching. The proponents of "faith theology" (hereafter, FT) typically adhere to the following tenets:

1. Faith is a force

According to Charles Capps, "God is a faith God. God released his faith in words."⁶ Kenneth Copeland postulates, "faith is God's source of power."⁷ It is also a force that can be built up in individual people⁸ and is particularly strong in the presence of "mass faith."⁹ Faith teachers point to Heb. 11:3 as proof that faith is a force- one that God himself used to create the Universe for it says, "By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command."¹⁰

One might conclude based on God's dependence on the force of faith that believers should

⁶ Charles Capps, *The Tongue, A Creative Force* (Tulsa, OK: Harrison House, 1995), 155.

⁷ Kenneth Copeland, *Freedom from Fear* (Fort Worth: Kenneth Copeland Ministries, 1980), 11-12.

⁸ Frederick K. C. Price, *Building on a Firm Foundation* (Los Angeles: Faith One Publishing, 1998), 31.

⁹ Kenneth E. Hagin, *How to Turn Your Faith Loose* (Tulsa, OK: Kenneth Hagin Ministries, 1999), 67.

¹⁰ Hank Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1997), 91.

place their trust not in God, but in faith itself. Indeed, such a conclusion follows logically. Hagin prescribes for believers the mantra "faith in my faith."¹¹

2. God cannot work without faith

If faith is the creative force in the Universe it follows that God cannot do anything without faith. Capps asserts that a failure on man's part to believe will put an immediate stop on God's ability.¹² It is therefore faith alone that influences circumstances, and not God independent of man's faith. That is why it is futile to pray for someone who lacks faith.¹³

Hagin offers Mark 6:5-6 as evidence that God is powerless in the absence of faith: Jesus could do no mighty work in Nazareth! Not that He *would* not. He *could not!* . . . The Bible says it was because of the people's unbelief.¹⁴ Whether it is man's faith or God's own, for God to accomplish anything according to the Faith Movement, faith must be present.

3. Vocally affirming something (a.k.a., *confessing*) creates a reality, either good or bad

"[T]he things you are confessing," advises Charles Capps, "eventually become part of

¹¹ Kenneth E. Hagin, *Having Faith in Your Faith* (Tulsa, OK: Kenneth Hagin Ministries, 1988), 5.

¹² Capps, *The Tongue, A Creative Force*, 90.

¹³ Kenneth E. Hagin, *Right and Wrong Thinking* (Tulsa, OK: Kenneth Hagin Ministries, 2003), 55.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 58. Emphasis in the original

you."¹⁵ This is why one must start "speaking to" situations in his or her life. Marilyn Hickey instructs, "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.'"¹⁶

Hagin straightforwardly declares, "Faith's confessions create reality."¹⁷ The phrase "the God who . . . calls things that are not as though they were" in Rom. 4:17, is confirmation that "God is a faith God and He operates on the principle of faith."¹⁸ An implication is that since God creates new realities by calling them into existence with his faith confessions, Christians can and should do likewise.

According to Hagin, Jesus appeared to him and gave him the secret on "How to write your own ticket with God." The first of four steps is to "say it". As proof, Jesus pointed Hagin to Mark 5:28: "For SHE SAID, if I may touch but his clothes, I shall be whole."¹⁹ Once the confession is made it is imperative to "hold fast" to it as Heb. 4:14 commands.²⁰

¹⁵ Charles Capps, *God's Creative Power for Healing* (Tulsa, OK: Harrison House, 1991), 20.

¹⁶ Marilyn Hickey, *Claim Your Miracles* (Denver: Marilyn Hickey Ministries, n.d.), audiotape #186, side 2; quoted in Hank Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1997), 351.

¹⁷ Hagin, *How to Turn Your Faith Loose*, 54.

¹⁸ Kenneth E. Hagin, *The Real Faith* (Tulsa, OK: Kenneth Hagin Ministries, 2000), 62.

¹⁹ Kenneth E. Hagin, *Exceedingly Growing Faith* (Tulsa, OK: Kenneth Hagin Ministries, 1994), 76-78. Emphasis in original.

²⁰ Hagin, *Right and Wrong Thinking*, 51, 69.

What is more, faith principles and confession work for everyone, not just Christians. Kenneth Copeland admits that these principles "get somewhat results" for New Age practitioners because it is a spiritual law.²¹ Capps reports that the wicked prosper because they are confessing and believing in prosperity. He adds, "They have learned the power of words. Many of them don't know what makes it work, they just know it works, and they practice it (spiritual law)."²² This principle of creating realities with words works for undesired realities as well as desired. If one makes a negative confession he will also have what he says. Herein lies the danger of doubt-filled words. Hagin calls attention to the ten faithless spies, "[They] said, 'We can't do it.' They believed they could not; therefore, they could not."²³

Making the wrong types of confessions will leave a person in bondage, as Prov. 6:2 warns, "Thou art snared with the words of thy mouth."²⁴ The reason Adam lived 900 years is because Satan had not yet "programmed his language into the human race." Today, people utter such things as "I'm just dying to do that" and "That just tickled me to death."²⁵ The results, unfortunately, are that they have what they say.

²¹ Kenneth Copeland, *Believer's Voice of Victory* program on TBN (28 March 1991); quoted in Hank Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1997), 82.

²² Capps, *The Tongue, A Creative Force*, 166.

²³ Hagin, *Right and Wrong Thinking*, 36-37.

²⁴ Capps, *The Tongue, A Creative Force*, 151.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 104.

4. The believer can have anything he or she wants

The fact that it sounds too good to be true does not dissuade faith teachers from insisting that there are no limits on what a person can have if he or she practices the principles of faith.²⁶

Jesus reportedly informed Hagin personally, "If anybody, anywhere, will take these four steps or put these four principles into operation, he will *always* receive *whatever* he wants from Me or from God the Father."²⁷ Faith teachers frequently cite Mark 11:22-24:

"Have faith in God," Jesus answered. "I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.

Hagin concludes, "[The Bible] teaches that if you *believe* with your heart and *say* it with your mouth, you shall have whatever you say."²⁸ Hagin claims that this has worked for him personally, having gotten what he has prayed for on every occasion for 45 years without a single exception²⁹. Literally, the believer can have anything he or she wants. As Hagin is fond of saying,

²⁶ Those who accept the teachings of the Word of Faith movement need not be ashamed indulging in excesses because "It is [God's] greatest desire that [his] people create a better life by the spoken Word." Capps, *The Tongue, A Creative Force*, 161.

²⁷ Hagin, *Exceedingly Growing Faith*, 76. Emphasis added.

²⁸ Hagin, *How to Turn Your Faith Loose*, 27.

²⁹ Kenneth E. Hagin, *The Name of Jesus* (Tulsa, OK: Kenneth Hagin Ministries, 1981), 16.

"You can write your own ticket with God."³⁰

An evaluation of the major "faith" tenets

1. Faith is *not* a force

The use of Heb. 11:3 as an argument for the force of faith is unwarranted. Such an interpretation is at odds with the grammatical construction of the text. Furthermore, throughout the entire chapter, those exercising faith are *humans*. "By faith" they acted, spoke, thought, and lived. Philip Hughes comments on the phrase in vs. 3: "In the biblical purview faith and revelation belong together, and revelation inevitably involves, on the part of the recipient, the activity of the intellectual faculty: by faith *we understand*."³¹

If it were true that God's power comes from the force of faith one implication is that God is no more powerful than his creatures; he just has a stronger faith. Everyone, including God, would have to play by the same rules and tap into the same force of faith. To most Christians, this is a repugnant notion, but not to Kenneth Hagin who remarks, "[Man] could stand in God's presence without any consciousness of inferiority. . . . He made us the same class of being that He is Himself."³² At such a point when one comprehends the Word of Faith belief that faith is a force

³⁰ Hagin, *Exceedingly Growing Faith*, 77.

³¹ Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1977), 442.

³² Kenneth E. Hagin, *Zoe: The God-Kind of Life* (Tulsa, OK: Kenneth Hagin Ministries, Inc., 1989), 35-36, 41; quoted in Hank Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1997) 108.

it becomes possible to conceive how faith teachers can arrive at such a diminutive deity.³³

Hagin's claim that one should place faith in his own faith is destructive to genuine faith and entirely unbiblical. A faith that is grounded in faith is no better than a faith grounded in delusion. The Bible never presents faith as having power in and of itself. It is never directly effectual and it is only indirectly effectual so far as it trusts the One in whom actual power does reside.

2. Faith is not necessary for God to work

The Bible gives no evidence whatsoever that God is powerless when faith is absent. To the contrary, God proclaims, "I am God, and there is none like me. . . . I say: My purpose will stand, *and I will do all that I please.*" (Isa. 46:9b-10).³⁴

But what should be made of Mark 6:5 where Jesus, according to Hagin, literally did not have the ability to do any miracles in his hometown? Wessel explains, "It was not, of course, that he did not have the power to do more miracles than he did at Nazareth. The inability was related to the moral situation. In the climate of unbelief he chose not to exercise his miraculous power."³⁵

³³ Hagin is not an isolated voice. Rather, he represents the mainstream of Faith Theology in asserting that God is not superior to man. Kenneth Copeland, John Avanzini, Morris Cerullo, and Charles Capps are among those who have also gone on record with similar statements. Hank Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1997), 108-09. It is difficult to imagine how anyone who claims to recognize biblical authority can overlook the distinction between Creator and creation. The story of Herod's demise in Acts 12 should serve as a solemn warning of how serious an offense it is to blur the distinction between God and man. Faith teachers would also do well to review chapters 38-42 of Job to gain a clearer picture of just who it is with whom they claim to have equality.

³⁴ Emphasis added.

³⁵ Walter W. Wessel, *NIV Bible Commentary*, ed. Kenneth L. Barker and John Kohlenberger III (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994) 158.

It is no different than someone who "cannot" cheat on his taxes. Of course, such a statement is not interpreted to mean that he does not have the ability. Rather, he will not bring himself to do it because it violates his moral convictions. Jesus did not do miracles to entertain, nor to win approval. On principle, he steadfastly refused (cf. Mark 8:11-12; Luke 23:8-9).³⁶

As Geisler and Rhodes have pointed out, if God cannot accomplish anything in the absence of faith there is no possibility for the resurrection of the dead. The dead, after all, cannot have faith.³⁷ There would be no explanation for the dead who have already been raised such as Lazarus and Eutychus. Also, how is it that John the Baptist was conceived since Zechariah clearly doubted (Luke 1:18-20)? The Bible plainly teaches that anything that is logically possible is possible for God to do, with or without faith (cf. Matt. 19:26).

3. Vocal confessions do not create realities

Hagin's interpretation of Rom. 4:17 errs on at least two counts. First, it is mistaken to believe that God was making a faith confession when he called "things that are not as though they were." An omnipotent God is more than capable of performing miracles in silence. And an omniscient God knows the future. God's attributes are the only explanation needed for his calling things that are not as though they were. Second, it is wrong to assume that the power by which

³⁶ Erickson holds, "[The fact] that Jesus 'marveled because of their unbelief'. . . suggests that the people of Nazareth simply did not bring their needy ones to him for healing." Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1994), 405.

³⁷ Norman L. Geisler and Ron Rhodes, *When Cultists Ask: A Popular Handbook on Cultic Misinterpretations* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1997) 137.

Abraham became the father of many nations had anything to do with the act of "calling things that are not." The text does not say this. Promises have no power in themselves. When promises made become promises broken it would not occur to most people to blame the promise. No one assumes that a promise has the means to follow up with action. The credit or blame falls on the promise maker.

If common sense is not enough, the context should be more than adequate in this case. Within the same verse Paul points out that it is God, not a verbal pronouncement, "who gives life to the dead." The verses that follow indicate Abraham knew this and trusted in God "being fully persuaded that *God* had power to do what he had promised."³⁸

Upon examination, Mark 5:28 turns out to be an equally unconvincing proof text for positive confession. The text *does* read: "For she said, If I may touch but his clothes, I shall be whole."³⁹ But this is not offered as the *cause* of her healing. Rather, it reveals her motive for approaching Jesus. If Hagin is correct and the account attempts to teach that "saying it" is an essential component of the faith process and a prerequisite for receiving, it is a curious thing that Luke chooses to omit it from his account. If, instead, these passages fall into the category of historical narrative it is not curious at all.

There is a danger in taking a description from a narrative account and treating it like a prescription from a didactic text. It is quite possible that the woman did not literally verbalize anything at all. Perhaps she said it to herself in her mind (cf. Luke 12:17-19). The NIV seems to

³⁸ Emphasis added

³⁹ King James Version

agree that such was the case, using *thought* instead of *said*.

Hagin's application of Heb. 4:14 to faith confessions is likewise indefensible. The writer of Hebrews is imploring his readers--many of whom were tempted to renounce their allegiance to Christ--to "hold fast" to their profession *of him* in the midst of persecution. Hagin's notion of positive confessions, one may safely assume, was the last thing on the mind of the writer of Hebrews. Such an idea is entirely foreign to the immediate context and to that of the letter in general.

Although positive faith confessions are said to work for everyone, one person for whom they failed miserably was the rich man in Jesus' parable recorded in Luke 12:16-20. He appeared to do everything right. He confessed that he would not have enough storage space for the abundance of blessings that he would enjoy. He confessed that he would live in prosperous luxury for many years. Apparently, the story teller was unfamiliar with the principles of faith and positive confession because, in the end, God overruled the man's faith confession and issued chilling words of condemnation. The Bible records numerous other positive confessions that turned out to be utterly futile.⁴⁰

In at least one place, the Bible does give explicit teaching on positive faith confessions; it prohibits them:

Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that." (James

⁴⁰ Examples include: Gen. 27:41; 1 Sam. 18:10-11; 1 Kings 20:23; Ps. 10:6,11,13; Isa. 14:13-15; Ezek. 28:2-9; 35:10-14; Zeph. 2:15; Rev. 3:17

4:13-15).⁴¹

What James says is wrong is evidently right in Capps' view. Even the wicked are said to have used this technique to their advantage. But if the wicked prosper it is not, as Capps claims, because they have learned the power of words and are confessing prosperity.⁴² Rather, it is because the nature of a fallen world is such that wicked people can and often do prosper for a season regardless of what words they use. It is because "[God] causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous." (Matt 5:45).

To demonstrate that a faithless (i.e., negative) confession will work against someone, Hagin cites the story of the ten spies who came back and reported to Moses and the Israelites at Kadesh that the Canaanites were too strong for them, "[They] said, 'We can't do it.' They believed they could not; therefore, they could not."⁴³ However, the account does not reveal it was their words that defeated them. While Hagin takes God out of the story, the actual text has God determining the fate of Israel. God judged the spies for "spreading a bad report" (Num. 14:36-37) and the people for believing the spies over God.

A closer look at the story shows that it actually refutes Faith Theology. When the Israelites realized their sin they presumptively went out to face the Canaanites. So great was their faith that they advanced against them without the aid of Moses or the ark of the covenant (vs.

⁴¹ Faith teacher, Benny Hinn, in contradiction to this passage and in no uncertain terms advises that Christians should not concern themselves with any will but their own lest their faith be destroyed. Benny Hinn, *Rise and Be Healed!* (Orlando: Celebration Publishers, 1991), 47-48.

⁴² Capps, *The Tongue, A Creative Force*, 166.

⁴³ Hagin, *Right and Wrong Thinking*, 36-37.

44). It is easy to imagine them proclaiming as they marched up to the hill country, "We shall conquer." Despite their faith (and presumed confessions), the Amalekites defeated them handily.

Among the most absurd of all the faith teachings is the claim that making negative confessions and using figures of speech such as "I'm just dying to do that" will bring about a literal manifestation.⁴⁴ The proof text is almost always Prov. 6:2: Thou art snared by the words of thy mouth.⁴⁵

Strange interpretations are perhaps more justified when the context is ambiguous. In this case, the context could not be any clearer. This is simply, as R. N. Whybray explains, "A warning against standing surety, that is, giving a pledge or guarantee of someone else's honesty or solvency."⁴⁶ In fact, verbal statements are not even necessary to violate the principle in this passage since most legal matters are now established in writing. This verse is about people holding people accountable to a specific commitment regarding finances. Even in the broadest possible application it has nothing whatsoever to contribute to the question of uttering "negative confessions." If a basic goal in exegesis is to discover the author's intention it seems lost on faith teachers.

What has also apparently escaped the notice of faith teachers is the fact that this particular doctrine contradicts other "faith" teachings. Is faith necessary or not? Only a few pages away in the same book Capps advises, "You see there is more to it than just saying it. The words must

⁴⁴ Capps, *The Tongue, A Creative Force*, 104.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 151. Hagin, *Exceedingly Growing Faith*, 78.

⁴⁶ R. N. Whybray, *The Book of Proverbs* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 38.

originate from the inner man where spiritual power is released through words."⁴⁷ But when someone says, "I'm just dying to do that" it is doubtful that such a statement is springing out in faith from deep within. If someone can die from saying something they do not mean and do not have the faith to believe it appears that words produce results without the aid of faith. Capps' conviction that casual and insincere comments will result in heavy consequences should lead him to conclude that faith is superfluous.

No one would suggest that it is either wise or edifying to go about life in a negative manner. To do so would be discouraging to others and would violate the command in 1 Thes. 5:16 to be joyful always. But regarding the faith teaching on this subject, negative confessions simply do not have the effect faith teachers claim. In fact, the Bible records numerous accounts of people who sincerely made negative confessions that did not come back on them: Abraham and Sarah (Gen. 17:17; 18:12-13 respectively), Jacob (Gen. 32:11), Naomi (Ruth 1:20-21), David (1 Sam. 27:1), Naaman (2 Kings 5:11), Isaiah (Isa. 6:5), and Paul (Rom. 9:2-3) to name some.

Power derives from God alone, not from anyone's faith confessions, either positive or negative. Confession may very well change one's perception of reality but upon actual reality it has no influence. It amounts to little more than self-hypnosis.

4. There are limits to what believers can have

This particular tenet of FT is subject to logical (as well as biblical) tests.⁴⁸ The doctrine

⁴⁷ Capps, *The Tongue, A Creative Force*, 106.

⁴⁸ While it is true that theology is sometimes *beyond* logic, it is wrong to conclude that theological truths are ever *contrary* to logic or illogical.

that any Christian can have anything he or she wants fails the test. It may be ambitious but it is not illogical to claim sole ownership of Earth's moon. Nor is it illogical for any number of people to claim sole ownership of Earth's moon. What is illogical is the notion that more than one person can be in sole possession of it. If four "faith" adherents of equal faith all claim eternal sole ownership of the moon, at least three are bound to be disappointed.

Mark 11:22-24 is one of the most often-quoted passages among faith teachers attempting to give biblical support to their doctrines on faith. First, faith teachers resist the standard translation of verse 22, preferring the phrase *have the God-kind of faith* as proof that God exercises faith.⁴⁹ It is may be enough to note that no one outside of the "faith" community has found any justification for this rendering. McConnell quotes C. E. B. Cranfield as saying that the faith translation, "is surely a monstrosity of exegesis."⁵⁰ McConnell adds, "In the NT, *pistis* (faith) is frequently followed by a genitive construction, and is always translated as an objective genitive: "Have faith *in* God."⁵¹ Certainly, the burden of proof is on those who deviate from the standard and accepted translation. Yet, the claim that this verse should be translated in the subjective genitive is one the faith teachers have not bothered to defend.

The second section of this passage is interpreted to mean that literally whatever a person

⁴⁹ Hagin, *How to Turn Your Faith Loose*, 27; Capps, *The Tongue, A Creative Force*, 21, 154.

⁵⁰ D. R. McConnell, *A Different Gospel: A Historical and Biblical Analysis of the Modern Faith Movement* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1988) 145.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

wants is available to him if he possesses faith. Hagin summarizes the Faith understanding of verses 23-24: "If you believe it in your heart and say it with your mouth, it will work."⁵²

To assume that Jesus was speaking literally in this case is to do the very thing that Jesus scolded his disciples for on other occasions where non-literal language is used (e.g., Matt. 16:6-9). Jesus routinely employs figures of speech, including hyperbole, to stress important points (e.g., Mark 10:25). Surely, this is how the passage must be interpreted if the Scriptures are to remain in harmony. Jesus reveals in Matt. 6:10 and Mark 14:36 that one's will must be in subordination to the will of God. In John 14:13-14 Jesus places upon all requests the condition of asking in his name. In other words, all requests must be consistent with his nature and purposes. Someone can believe it in his heart and say it with his mouth but if the "it" is inconsistent with Jesus' nature, such as genocide for example, Jesus is under no obligation to cooperate with the request. In John 15:7 Jesus adds another condition, "If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you."

Unfortunately, faith teachers do not abide by the important hermeneutic rule that scripture must interpret scripture. In view of the big picture, the reader of Mark 11:23-24 is left with two options: 1. Jesus was speaking hyperbolically and did not mean the statement literally, or; 2. The Bible contradicts itself with Mark 11:23-24 teaching that there are no conditions on requests and other passages teaching that there are.⁵³

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Hagin, *The Real Faith*, 22.

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A third possibility may exist if Jesus was, in the context of destruction, speaking prophetically of the judgment upon Mt. Zion. Witherington finds merit in Hooker's belief that the sea is symbolic here of a place of destruction (cf. Mark 9:42). "The idea of faith expressed here is of a basic trust or confidence in God's power to accomplish whatever his will is." Ben Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2001), 318.

Faith teachers routinely make flattering statements on the Word of God.⁵⁴ These, combined with aggressive proof-texting, could lead one to believe that they hold it in the highest esteem. In reality, faith teachers have made Scripture the servant of their theology. A pattern of brazen eisogesis and disregard for context exposes their contempt for the written Word. The question arises, "If somewhere in the Bible there is actual evidence for the principles espoused and taught by faith teachers why do they resort to proving their case with verses that, upon examination, are clearly not advocating FT?"

The New Testament writers and Faith Theology

In truth, the Bible consistently opposes FT. A study of Paul's epistles, for instance, will show that Paul did not believe in the faith message. In 2 Cor. 11:23-30 Paul is not embarrassed to reveal that he had been in prison, flogged and exposed to death, on five occasions given "forty lashes minus one," beaten with rods, stoned, shipwrecked three times, on the run from enemies of all kinds and in various places, betrayed by friends, lacking sleep, deprived of food and water, cold and naked, and constantly of troubled mind. He concludes, "If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness." What can be known of Paul's life does not reflect that of a man who used faith and positive confession to create realities and control his circumstances, rather, one who in the midst of severe trials possessed genuine faith in God. Paul did not think to

⁵⁴ For example, Charles Capps remarks, ". . . the only thing that Jesus used against the devil was the spoken word. He spoke the written Word. It is written. Oh, thank God it is still written today. . . God's Word is the only true knowledge. It will make you stable even in the storms of life." Oddly, since all words are believed to come to pass in Capps' system, God's Word enjoys no advantage over that of humans. Capps, *The Tongue, A Creative Force*, 118, 20.

command the thorn in his flesh to be gone. Instead, as he says, "Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me." (2 Cor. 12:8). God's answer was no and Paul accepted it. The "faith" message is one that Paul neither taught, nor lived.

Neither does the faith message have an advocate in the apostle Peter. Time after time in his first letter, Peter returns to the theme of suffering and, like Paul, treats the subject as though suffering is not only an inevitability for the Christian, but a blessing (1 Pet. 1:6-9; 2:18-21; 3:13-17; 4:1, 12-19; 5:9).

The apostle John obviously did not believe the faith message because he taught that there are conditions on prayer requests, stating, ". . . if we ask anything *according to his will*, he hears us" (1 John 5:14).⁵⁵ Nor did James, who instructs his readers that they will not receive from God when they ask for the wrong reasons (4:3). Anathema to the faith message are the words of James: The brother in humble circumstances ought to take pride in his high position (1:9). Indeed, were the principles of FT employed such a brother should be expected to speak words of faith to his situation and create for himself a more abundant situation.

Finally, Jesus himself opposes the faith message. When one examines the prayers of faith teachers it soon becomes apparent that something is conspicuously absent: faith teachers normally do not make requests of God. Rather, they simply announce what they think *they* are doing.⁵⁶

Common are phrases such as "I claim," "I have," "I bind," "I release," and "I declare."

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Emphasis added

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For example, Capps once prayed, "I say in the name of Jesus the baby will live and not die. I say in the name of Jesus that healing power flows to that baby. . . ." Capps, *The Tongue, A Creative Force*, 140.

Kenneth Hagin reports that he quit requesting things of God when God informed Hagin that the authority belonged him.⁵⁷ He changed his requests to orders. After one such "prayer" he explains, "I gave the order. I didn't keep saying it or praying it. When a king gives an order, he knows it's going to be carried out."⁵⁸

A careful look at the prayer of the King of kings in John 17 reveals an entirely different approach to that of Hagin. Jesus made at least seven requests: 1. "glorify your Son" (v. 1); 2. "protect [the disciples]" (v. 11); 3. "[make them] one as we are one" (v. 11); 4. "sanctify them" (v. 17); 5. "[cause all future believers to] be one" (v. 21); 6. "[cause all future believers to] be in us" (v. 21); 7. "[let them] be with me where I am" (v. 24). Phrases such as "I claim" or "I have" were not a normal part of Jesus' prayer vocabulary. Rather, he makes genuine requests to the Father (c.f. Matt. 26:39). The faith teachers have adopted a method of prayer that would have been unfamiliar to Jesus.

The origin of Faith Theology

The fact that the Bible and FT do not square raises the question, "What is the real source

⁵⁷ Kenneth E. Hagin, *The Believer's Authority* (Tulsa, OK: Kenneth Hagin Ministries, 2004), 22.

⁵⁸ Elsewhere, Hagin recounts an occasion on which he learned that God has no authority. He reports that during a personal visit with Jesus a demon appeared and interrupted the conversation crying, "Yakety-yak, yakety-yak, yakety-yak." Hagin then ordered the demon to be gone at which point Jesus said to Hagin, "If you hadn't done something about that, I couldn't have." Four times Jesus emphatically insisted he was completely powerless against the demon unless Hagin intervened. Hagin, *The Believer's Authority*, 30. This bizarre account is demonstrably false because the Word of God says that "angels, authorities, and powers [are] in submission" to the true Jesus (1 Pet. 3:22).

of Faith Theology?" It is practically unanimous among faith teachers that Kenneth Hagin is the father of the Faith Movement. Hagin claims to have received the doctrines on which FT is built by way of visions and direct revelation from God.⁵⁹ However, it has been shown that the Faith Movement's doctrines on faith are incompatible with the Bible's teaching. This casts serious doubt on Hagin's claim that he received his teachings from God.

D.R. McConnell, a former graduate assistant at Oral Roberts University, contends that Hagin's doctrines came neither from Scripture, nor revelation, but directly from the teachings of Essek William Kenyon. Hagin denies this but what is undeniable is that Hagin has "plagiarized Kenyon both repeatedly and extensively."⁶⁰ In fact, McConnell documents whole paragraphs that have been lifted nearly word for word from eight of Kenyon's works which, in each case, were published well prior to Hagin's corresponding publications.⁶¹ From this and additional evidence, McConnell concludes, "[Hagin] plagiarized the majority of his teachings from E. W. Kenyon. . . . [T]hrough the person of Kenneth Hagin, E. W. Kenyon's teachings are the foundation of the entire Faith movement."⁶²

That Kenyon (and not Hagin) is the father of the Faith Movement is not disturbing in itself. But understanding just who Kenyon was, who influenced him, and what he believed gives

⁵⁹ Hagin, *Exceedingly Growing Faith*, 73-86; *How to Turn Your Faith Loose*, 26, 37, 57.

⁶⁰ D. R. McConnell, *A Different Gospel: A Historical and Biblical Analysis of the Modern Faith Movement*, 7.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 8-12.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 13.

rise to serious concerns about the foundation of FT.

Born in 1867, Kenyon is known to have had significant exposure to metaphysical and transcendental religious groups by the latter part of the century. He attended the Emerson College of Oratory, "an institution that was absolutely inundated with metaphysical, cultic ideas and practices." The man after whom the school was named, Charles Wesley Emerson, was an admirer of the famous transcendentalist, Ralph Waldo Emerson. The former held to and taught New Thought, converting finally to Christian Science in 1903. It is no coincidence that Ralph Waldo Trine, who would later become one of the most famous defenders of New Thought metaphysics, also attended Emerson's school. Trine was both a student and a teacher when Kenyon enrolled at Emerson in 1892.⁶³

Given his background, it is not surprising to learn that Kenyon's close acquaintances testify to the influence of cultic ideas on Kenyon's teachings. John Kennington, a disciple of Kenyon and eventual critic, is at least one person to whom Kenyon admitted not only that his teachings were similar to those of Christian Science but that "he freely drew the water of his thinking from this well." Ern Baxter, another friend of Kenyon, corroborates Kenyon's dependence on Mary Baker Eddy, the founder of Christian Science.⁶⁴

63 *Ibid.*, 32-37, 41.

64 *Ibid.*, 25.

Conclusion

There can be no doubt that New Thought in general and Christian Science teachings in particular exercised strong influence on the Faith Movement in the early stages and continue to do so to this day. It is only expected that faith teachers such as Charles Capps and Kenneth Hagin would make disclaimers on the conspicuous parallels between their theology and that of Christian Science. Capps states, ". . .sometimes when I start teaching on this some will say it sounds like *Christian Science*. . . It's *not Christian Science*. I like what Brother Kenneth Hagin says, 'It's *CHRISTIAN SENSE*'!"⁶⁵ In spite of the denials, similarities in doctrine and practice do exist and they are neither incidental nor trivial.

One trait that is essential both to New Thought and FT is the depersonalizing of spirituality. No room exists in metaphysical religions for a relationship with God. Adherents relate to the Infinite only insofar as they understand and utilize spiritual laws.⁶⁶ The word *God* does not represent a personal being who, though transcendent, has condescended to relate with his creation as a father to his children.

While it would be untrue to charge the Faith Movement with denying the availability of a personal relationship with God, its teachings on faith have, in fact, resulted in a depersonalized spirituality. For example, meaningful relationships encourage honest expression. But since

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Capps, *The Tongue, A Creative Force*, 25. Emphasis in original.

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Mary Baker Eddy writes, "This faith relies upon an understood Principle. This Principle makes whole the diseased. . . . When, on the strength of these instructions, you are able to banish a severe malady, the cure shows that you understand this teaching, and therefore you receive the blessing of Truth." Online version of *Science and Health*, available from http://www.mbeinstitute.org/SAH/SAH_XIV.html), accessed 28 June 2004.

honest expression may include a negative faith confession, one must never hint to God of his worries or doubts.⁶⁷ And God, like a computer into which a code is entered only one time, should never have to hear the same prayer twice.⁶⁸ Faith would have it no other way.

Capps even portrays Jesus as playing the role of cosmic goalie, batting down prayers before they can reach the Father if the prayer that is offered is not in compliance with the strict verbal formulas of positive confession.⁶⁹ Capps' god fails to measure up even to the standards of a caring human father.

In McConnell's words, "Since the law of faith is impersonal, just like the law of gravity, it works regardless of who the person is or where he or she stands with Christ."⁷⁰ In the end, what will bring success and happiness is not a relationship with a loving Creator. Rather, it is coming to terms with Hagin's four steps to receiving anything the believer wants. It is building up the faith muscle. It is understanding the spiritual laws and formulas for implementing those laws.

This is why some have branded Faith Theology a "charismatic humanism."⁷¹ It is a

⁶⁷ Hagin, *Right and Wrong Thinking*, 61.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 49, 65.

⁶⁹ Capps justifies this teaching with an atrocious paraphrase of Matt. 10:32-33: If you confess my Word before men, I'll confess what you say before the Father. You will get an audience before the Father. . . What you pray that agrees with the Word, I'll see to it that it gets to the Father. . . . Capps, *The Tongue, A Creative Force*, 101.

⁷⁰ D. R. McConnell, *A Different Gospel: A Historical and Biblical Analysis of the Modern Faith Movement*, 136.

⁷¹ Ibid., 146.

theological system that brings all the loneliness of deism. The believer, simply put, is on his own—a latchkey child in a faith universe. The humble believer who could generate not but a small amount of faith would approach God with what little he has only to hear Him say, "Sorry, I can't help you."

Faith ultimately worships. A misplaced faith is therefore an idolatrous faith. On the grounds that Faith Theology has been shown to be unbiblical, logically incoherent, and idolatrous it should be discarded.

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