THE PROMISE OF HEALTH AND WEALTH

A Presbyterian minister (along with many others) received a letter from the **Kenneth Copeland** organisation in which it was explained he would be rewarded many times over with prosperity from the Lord if he contributed some money to the Lord's work (meaning the Kenneth Copeland organisation). The minister wrote back to the organisation, urging them to put their own teaching into practice by donating some money to his (Presbyterian) ministry. Needless to say, the minister did not receive any financial support.

This letter, urging people to donate money to the Lord's work with the promise that God will financially give back hundreds of times over what they have given "to the Lord" is not an isolated incident. The promise of health and wealth from the Lord to all who are faithful to him, and especially those who donate large amounts of their money to Him (particularly through organisations that promote the above view) is, or at least was firmly entrenched in some sections of the Pentecostal movement. History is a good teacher, and it is beginning to teach many people that the promise of health and wealth comes from various leaders - usually beneficiaries of the doctrine; it does not come from the Lord.

Before we look at what Scripture says about the subject, we will first examine where the promise of health and wealth teaching came from.

Father of the Faith Movement

The founding father of the faith movement is commonly held to be **Kenneth Erwin Hagin** (1917-2003) he was termed by *Charisma* magazine as 'the granddaddy of the Faith teachers,' and 'the father of the Faith Movement.' Kenneth Hagin's teachings on faith, healing, and prosperity have been foundational for almost every major ministry of the Faith movement. Hagin's position as the prime leader of the faith movement was overtaken by the younger and more energetic Kenneth Copeland (1937 -) in the 1980s. Copeland became a disciple of Hagin in the 1960s and picked up the teaching.¹ Copeland has spread the 'positive confession' teaching further through his organisation from the USA to as far afield as Australia and beyond.

One person who is not happy about the credit for the teaching which is promoted in the faith movement going to Hagin and Copeland is Ruth Kenyon Houseworth, daughter of E. Kenyon. She is annoyed that the ideas of her father have been pilfered from his eighteen books.

Kenyon who died in 1948 published his first book in 1916. His daughter makes the point that he was teaching the views in his book years before its publication. He quite clearly precedes Hagin. He was seventy years old when Hagin was licensed as an A.O.G. (Assembly Of God) minister. John Kennington, pastor of Emmanuel Temple in Portland, Oregon, a man who occasionally ministered with Kenyon says this of Kenyon's role in the Faith movement:

"Today Kenyon's ideas are in the ascendancy. Via the electronic church or in the printed page I readily recognise not only Kenyon's concepts, but at times I recognise pure plagiarism, for I can almost tell you book, chapter, and page where the material is coming from. Kenyon has become the 'father' of the so-called 'faith' movement."

Kennington claims that plagiarism (stealing) of Kenyon's writings is a fairly common occurrence in the charismatic movement. Dan McConnell in his book, "The Promise of Health and Wealth" has documented five pages of evidence that Hagin has plagiarised from Kenyon. Hagin has never confessed that his teachings come from Kenyon. ³

Kenyon and the Cults

Kenyon maintained a strong connection with the cults. He had an admiration of the teachings of Christian Science. Kennington says, "I can remember him saying, 'All that Christian Science lacks is the blood of Jesus Christ.'" He admitted that a lot of his ideas came from Christian Science. Kennington concludes that Kenyon's theology, and that of the modern Faith movement is nothing more than a 'Pentecostal Christian Science.'

Kenyon was impressed by the growth of some of the cults, especially Christian Science and New Thought. He therefore decided to examine them and bring what teaching he thought best from these movements into the Church to help it along. Kenyon says of this growth, "We cannot ignore the amazing growth of Christian Science, Unity, New Thought and Spiritism....This is libel upon the modern church - it is not only libel but a challenge." ⁴ Kenyon - perhaps in ignorance - sacrificed truth in the quest for growth. This is bound to be an error which will be repeated in some Churches again.

The Emphasis on Correct Thinking

The faith movement which sprang up from the teachings of Kenyon emphasises correct thinking. H. Neuman says of the Faith movements emphasis on correct thinking and believing accompanied by a positive confession:

"An extremely important point needs to be made here: the doctrines of correct thinking and believing, accompanied by positive confession, with the result of calling a sickness a symptom (denial of reality supported by a Gnostic dualism) are not found in Christian writings until after New Thought and its offsprings had begun to develop them. Therefore, it is not unreasonable to state that the doctrine originated and developed in these cults and was later absorbed by Christians in their quest to develop a healing ministry." ⁵

Kenyon established a Bible college to promote his teachings. Around 1900, John and Susan Marble donated their farm and buildings to Kenyon for the establishment of **Bethel Bible Institute**. The school opened, faltered, and then reopened around 1904. From 1900 to 1923, Bethel Bible Institute was supported solely by Kenyon's evangelistic work.

Kenyon's Educational and Religious Background

Kenyon stayed in the city of Boston in the early 1890s. His presence in Boston afforded him a wide range of exposure to various metaphysical, Unitarian, and transcendental religious groups. There is ample evidence that not only was he exposed to such groups, but that he also participated in some of them as well.

Kenyon admitted to attending regularly the services of **Minor J. Savage**, one of the outstanding ministers and authors of the **Unitarian Church**. Savage was the author of the Unitarian catechism. By evangelical standards, Unitarian teaching is heretical, it denies the trinity, the deity of Jesus Christ, his substitutionary atonement, the fall and depravity of human-kind, and eternal punishment.

Unitarianism was not the only heretical group with which Kenyon associated himself while he was at Boston, in 1892 Kenyon enrolled in the **Emerson College of Oratory**, an institution that was inundated with metaphysical, cultic ideas and practices. His enrolment at Emerson betrayed a continued involvement with Christian Science and New Thought.

Emerson drew his thinking from various cultic groups including New Thought and New England Unitarianism, but more importantly for the discussion here, he held to a quasi-Darwinian view of the religious evolution of humanity which ended in **man becoming a god**. Emerson joined Christian Science in 1903 and remained involved until his death in 1908.

New Thought

New Thought was the brainchild of Phineas P. Quimby (1802-66). The *Encyclopedia Britannica* says about New Thought:

"In 1916 the International New Thought Alliance (formed 1914) agreed upon a purpose that embraces some central ideas of most groups:

To teach the Infinitude of the Supreme One; the Divinity of Man and his Infinite Possibilities through the creative power of constructive thinking and obedience to the voice of the indwelling Presence which is our source of Inspiration, Power, Health and Prosperity." 6

Quimby developed his concepts of mental and spiritual healing and health based on the view that **illness is a matter of the mind**. Quimby's influence may be seen in the writings of Mary Baker Eddy and in the development of Christian Science (which she founded).

The Encyclopedia Britannica further states about New Thought. "In 1917, at the St. Louis (Missouri) Congress, the alliance adopted a 'Declaration of Principles.' ... This purpose and these principles emphasise the immanence of God, the divine nature of man, the spiritual character of the universe, and the fact that sin, human disorders, and human disease are basically matters of incorrect thinking. Moreover, according to New Thought, man can live in oneness with God in love, truth, peace, health, and plenty ...

New Thought leaders ... have increasingly stressed material prosperity as one result of New Thought." ⁷

The World Book Encyclopedia says regarding "New Thought"

"Supporters of New Thought believe that the human mind is superior to all material conditions and circumstances. ... a person can solve any problem by properly applying mental force." 8

New Thought can be summarised as "a system of cultic belief that taught that true reality is spiritual, that the spiritual is the cause of all physical effects, and that the human mind through positive mental attitude and **positive** confession has the power to create its own reality: either health and wealth, or sickness and poverty." ⁹

Kenvon Impressed with Growth in Cults

Kenyon indicted the church for its failure to execute a supernatural healing ministry. Around 1927, he wrote, "We cannot ignore the amazing growth of Christian Science, Unity, New Thought and Spiritism ... their strongest appeal is the supernatural element of their so-called religions - the testimonies of healing are their strongest asset. We cannot close our eyes to the fact that in many of our cities in the Pacific Coast, Mrs. Eddy has a stronger following today and a larger attendance at her churches than have the old line denominations; and the larger percentage of her followers have at one time been worshippers in the denominations they have left them because they believe that they are receiving more help from Mrs Eddy's teaching than from the preachers. They will tell you how they are healed and how they were helped in their spiritual life by this strange cult. This is libel upon the modern church - it is not only libel but a challenge." 10

Kenyon believed people were willing to accept the extremism of the cults "in order that they might get a little touch of the supernatural God" 11

Kenyon made many references to the cults in his writings, we are able to conclude that he did so in order to help the Church compete with the cults. He wanted to bring supernaturalism into the Church to give it a more competitive edge.

Healings Are Not the Evidence of Truth

McConnell makes the point that "Results can never be the criterion by which the truth of an idea is proven. If it were the case, Charismatics would have to admit that Mary Baker Eddy is a prophetess and that Christian Science is true gospel. Likewise, the numerous healings and miracles occurring in the Faith movement are not necessarily signs from God that the gospel of the faith movement is the gospel of the New Testament. Charismatics who naively assume that healings vindicate truth are overlooking the fact that almost every major religion and cult the world has ever known has produced healings. For every god there is a religion, and in every religion there are healings." 12

The "New Catholic Encyclopedia" says this of Pope Pius X (pontificate from 1903-1914) "After long investigations

(1923-1946), the approval of the required miracles, and the ritual formalities, Pius X was beatified (June 3, 1951) and canonized (May 29, 1954), Since then his cult has continued to spread across the world." ¹³ Please note that miracles which pass the test are required for the above promotion.

Hagin and "Positive Confession"

Hagin says he was healed through believing and confessing he was healed. He did this for eight months, even though he still had symptoms of his illness. He got up, moved around and gained his strength. He passed this 'positive confession' teaching on to others.

Hagin's Threat

"'In his sixth vision of Jesus in 1959, the Lord told Hagin, 'The judgment must begin in the house of God, and if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the sinner and the ungodly appear. If the church won't accept this ministry, then they wouldn't accept His Word and He can't help them.' Moreover, if a church refused to accept Hagin's ministry, God 'would remove their candlestick.' ... 'There will be ministers who don't accept it and will fall dead in the pulpit." ¹⁴ Hagin is certainly correct in believing there will be ministers who will not accept his ministry.

Australia

Hagin's teaching has spread to Pentecostal Churches around the world, and became for a time, widely accepted in Australia. I had a debate with three Pentecostals on the subject in the late 1970's. They were of the firm belief that the way to gain healing from the Lord was to:

- 1. Believe in faith that they were healed even though the symptoms were still present.
- 2. Confess to everyone that they were healed.
- 3. Do not allow any negative beliefs or statements about the healing.

When I pointed out the obvious; that a person is not healed if the symptoms are still present, I was informed that it was wrong to think like that because any doubt, even when the symptoms were present, would jeopardise the healing process.

Around that time a friend related to me that he saw a young man limp down to the front of a church for the second time for healing. When the young man was questioned by my friend about going forward for healing for the second time, he insisted that he was healed the first time. He was simply going forward the second time to seek a blessing upon his 'healed' foot.

False Teaching Brings Death

The erroneous teaching of the faith movement has had its tragic consequences.

The highest record for death and tragedy goes to **Hobart Freeman**, pastor of Faith Assembly, Wilmot, Indiana. Estimates of the number of preventable deaths associated with his Church are as high as 90. The number of deaths in the USA caused by Freeman's teaching on healing is not

known.

In accordance with his own beliefs, Freeman refused medical treatment for an ulcerated leg, which, in the weeks preceding his death, forced him to preach sitting down. Complications set in and Freeman eventually developed bronchopneumonia. He continued to shun medical treatment with the consequence that on 08 December 1984, Freeman died of congestive heart failure, a victim of his own teaching.

Swaggart

On 19th August 1980, the General Presbytery of the Assemblies of God in the USA issued an official statement showing some of the errors of the Faith movement titled, 'The Believer and Positive Confession.' It is a carefully worded document that does not make any confessions regarding the failure of the leadership to correct the error that had been allowed to spread throughout the denomination for many years.

Swaggart admitted that 'I too have been guilty of preaching some of the errors of the Faith movement'. Two years after the official statement from the General Assembly, Swaggart published a booklet titled "Hyper-Faith: A New Gnosticism?"

Denying the Mind

Kenyon taught that in order to walk in Revelation Knowledge, the believer must often deny Sense Knowledge. "Kenyon's strongly anti-intellectual bias is readily apparent in Hagin, who teaches that 'one almost has to by-pass the brain and operate from the inner man (the heart or spirit) to really get into the things of God." ¹⁵

This rejection of the intellect has the effect of discouraging Bible study which requires the use of the mind. The Bible encourages the use of the brain in the study of Scripture to come to a correct understanding and practice. In one passage we learn that "... the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true." (Acts 17:11).

The Nature of Man

Kenyon is in error regarding the nature of man. He teaches that man 'is in God's class of being.' By this, he means that man and God possess a common nature: both are spirit beings. Kenneth Hagin goes so far as to say that 'man is not a physical being. Man is spirit.' The only difference in nature between man and God is of degree, not of kind. Hagin says, 'we live in a body, but we are spirit beings.' ¹⁶

Kenneth Hagin continues to teach Kenyon's doctrine of human deification. Hagin says 'there is a real incarnation in the new birth!' In the new birth, God imparts 'His very nature, substance, and being to our human spirits'. Hence Hagin maintains that 'every born again man is an incarnation' and that 'the believer is as much an incarnation as Jesus of Nazareth.' Hagin is not speaking metaphorically when he says, 'That's who we are; we're Christ!' 17

Hagin also says, "In fact, in the Epistles, the Church is

called Christ. The Church has not yet realized that we are Christ. When we do, we'll start doing the work we're supposed to do." 18

Hagin is clearly wrong on the above points. The Bible states that Christ is the head of the Church and that the Church is to submit to him (Eph. 5:23-24), see also 3:21. Christ is supreme over the whole of creation (Colossians 1:15-18).

Hagin believes that through identification with Christ in the new birth, man becomes an incarnation of God. No wonder Hagin gets a bit swell-headed, *Reformation Today* reports this about Hagin, "Hagin tells of an alleged conversation he had with God that was periodically interrupted by Satan. Hagin asked God to silence the devil, but God said he couldn't. So Hagin commanded Satan to be quite. 'Jesus looked at me,' Hagin says, and said, 'If you hadn't done anything about that, I couldn't have.'" ¹⁹

Hagin is not alone in this distorted view about the nature of man, Kenneth Copeland says, "'You need to realise that you are not a spiritual schizophrenic - half-God and half-Satan - you are all God. When I read in the Bible where he (Jesus) says, 'I am', I (Kenneth Copeland) say, 'Yes, I Am too.'" ²⁰

Another example from the same book reveals that Paul Crouch has resisted frequent attempts at correction, "I am a little God... Critics be gone!" he says (p. 119).

New Thought teaches that once a man recognises that he is a spirit being in union with the Christ-Spirit, he is **transformed into a god**. According to Trine, 'in the degree that we open ourselves to this divine inflow are we changed from mere men into God men.'

Those who present the above error to the Christian community are unwittingly presenting the same temptation that was put to Eve by the devil, that is the temptation to be God-like. Regarding the tree that God had forbidden Adam and Eve to eat from, the devil said, "You will not surely die,' the serpent said to the woman. 'For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." (Gen. 3:5).

Christians need to be aware that some doctrines are the teachings of demons and that they should therefore be avoided. The Bible gives the warning "... that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons." (1 Timothy 4:1).

The effect of Hagin's teaching is that Christians are drawn away from a faith in God to a faith in themselves with their newly acquired god-like status. The self glorification includes having faith in your own faith. Hagin says, "Did you ever stop to think about having faith in your own faith?" This doctrine also has cultic origins. True faith is directed to God; to Jesus Christ and to his work, not to other men or to self.

Faith in the Name

Kenyon teaches that 'when we pray in Jesus' Name we are taking the place of the absent Christ; we are using his name, his authority, to carry out his will on earth.'

However, God is actually the one who is in control. He says to those who have wrong motives, "When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures." (James 4:3).

The Denial of Reality

According to Kenyon, 'Faith declares that you are healed while the pain is wracking your body.'

The notion that a believer should never acknowledge or talk about symptoms of illness is also cultic. Because Christian Science rejects the reality of the physical body altogether, Mary Baker Eddy likewise denied physical symptoms. She considered them an 'illusion' and 'error' that can be overcome by the power of thought.

According to Mary Baker Eddy the way to cure the patient is to make the disease unreal to him. In other words, the person who is ill must be shown that he cannot trust what his physical senses are telling him about his symptoms.

The truth is the very opposite, those in the medical profession analyse symptoms - often by questioning the patient - because the technique is a very reliable method of determining what the disease is and monitoring any treatment given.

Some Pentecostals have developed beliefs about the power of the mind and 'positive confession' which go beyond simply healing the body of its ills. One man who is highly respected in some Pentecostal circles says, believers should never die before age seventy. For example, Price comments, "Your minimum days should be 70 years, that's just the bare minimum. You ought to live to be at least 120 years of age... and you shouldn't go out with sickness and disease then." ²²

Healing in the Atonement Doctrine

Some Pentecostals make the claim that our healing has been paid for in the atonement. Therefore, even during our earthly existence, we should not know sickness, or at least we should be able to claim almost immediate healing.

A passage which is often quoted in support of this view says, "...By his wounds you have been healed." (1 Peter 2:24). What those who have this belief fail to do is quote the whole passage which says, "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sin and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls." (2:24-25). When quoted in full it can be seen to be referring to spiritual healing, not physical. Many other passages of scripture refer to spiritual healing, e.g. Hosea 14:4, Jeremiah 3:22.

Another passage often misquoted is, "He took up our infirmities and carried our diseases." (Matt. 8:17). Again, those who quote this passage, fail to quote it in full in its proper context. The passage in its proper context says, "When evening came, many who were demon-possessed were brought to him, and he drove out the spirits with a word and healed all the sick. This was to fulfil what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: 'He took up our infirmities and carried our diseases.'" (8:16-17). Quite clearly, this passage refers to a ministry which Christ carried out while

ministering upon the earth nearly 2,000 years ago. It is not a promise that Christ will always heal Christians when they get sick.

God Does Not Always Choose to Heal

While we are urged to bring all of our requests to God, he is not bound to answer them in the way in which we would like. **David Watson** was a Pentecostal pastor who was loved by Christians who knew him. When he became very sick, much prayer went up from Christians around the world on his behalf. Some so called 'prophets' even gave him the assurance that 'this sickness is not unto death'. However; to the surprise of many, David Watson died.

David Wilkerson is well-known because of his book, "The Cross and the Switchblade". Many have come to Christ and have been delivered from addiction to heroin through his ministry, but David confesses in his book "Beyond the Cross and the Switchblade" that he has suffered from ulcers, and his father - who was a Pentecostal preacher - died from this illness. His wife Gwen, had a prolonged bout with cancer. She was cured after two operations, the second operation was a radical hysterectomy ²³ These troubles have served to strengthen their faith; not weaken it, because God has given them sufficient strength in the midst of their weaknesses.

Biblical Examples

Many of the saints mentioned in Scripture experienced sickness. **King David** became very sick in his old age (1 Kings 1:1). **Elisha**, through whom God had worked many miracles died from sickness (2 Kings 13:14). It did not mean that he had lost favour with God. God still worked miraculously through him, even in the midst of his sickness, see 13:14-19. Also, after he had died, God worked through him. "Once, while some Israelites were burying a man, suddenly they saw a band of raiders; so they threw the man's body into Elisha's tomb. When the body touched Elisha's bones, the man came to life and stood up on his feet." (2 Kings 13:21).

The apostle **Paul** at one stage had a powerful healing ministry. "God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured and the evil spirits left them." (Acts 19:11-12).

The apostle **Paul** also knew sickness; in his letter to the Galatians he said, "...my sickness was a trial to you..." (Gal. 4:14). God worked through Paul on one occasion to heal a person who had been a cripple from birth (Acts 14:8-10). Toward the end of Paul's ministry on earth when a powerful healing ministry was not necessary, God did not heal through him. He said to Timothy, "...I left **Trophimus** sick in Miletus." (2 Timothy 4:20). He also told the Philippians of the sickness of his good friend **Epaphroditus**, "Indeed he was ill, and almost died. But God had mercy on him..." (Philippians 2:27). His advice to **Timothy** on one occasion was, "Stop drinking only water, and use a little wine because of your stomach and your frequent illnesses." (1 Timothy 5:23).

Paul at one time asked that a "thorn in my flesh" be

taken away (2 Cor. 12:7-8). However, God's reply to him was, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (12:9).

Kurt Kosh in his book, "Between Christ and Satan", relates several instances where people have received healing through demonic powers. When they later put their faith in Christ, the sicknesses from which they had been healed, returned. Satan knows that people can benefit from suffering, therefore he is at times willing to heal, particularly if he can win some allegiance to himself in the process.

From this we learn that Christians should pray for relief from suffering; however, if relief is not given, then we need to recognise that suffering is part of God's mysterious plan for that life. "...suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope." (Romans 5:3-4).

Signs and Miracles Do Not Validate A Teaching

William Branham is an example of the fallacy that signs and miracles validate one's teaching. He was one of the greatest evangelists of the post-World War II healing revival. "Branham worked astounding miracles of healing in his crusades. To this day his gifts of supernatural knowledge of those to whom he ministered remains unparalleled, even among modern healing evangelists. Despite all of his gifts, however, Branham's doctrine was always marginal at best, and towards the end of his ministry, it became outright heretical. He denied the doctrine of the Trinity, teaching instead the 'Jesus only' doctrine. He taught that he was the prophet Elijah, whose ministry would result in the return of Jesus." ²⁵

Branham even set a date for the return of Christ, he said, "I sincerely believe and maintain as a private student of the Word, along with Divine inspiration that 1977 ought to terminate the world system and usher in the millennium." ²⁶ Please note that he even claimed 'Divine inspiration' for the 1977 date.

Another example of a healer developing unorthodox views is that of **George Jeffreys** who belonged to the Elim Church until his resignation in 1939 in order to lead another group in which he could more fully promote British Israelitism. Jeffreys was arguably Britain's most successful evangelist of the 1920s and 1930s. Nelson J. Parr, first secretary of the Assemblies of God believed British Israelitism destroyed Jeffreys. "His theories about the longlost tribes of Israel,' Parr said, 'became more important to him than the Gospel'" ²⁷ Jeffreys did not enjoy good health. He was a diabetic; a well-kept secret of the healer for many years.

Conclusion

Because a ministry is large and spectacular, it does not mean that it is correct in its doctrine and practice. Many who joined the Christian Science cult could claim that the cult was helpful to them, but the help can only be superficial. Truth is very important, so much so that many have suffered greatly for it. Christians today need to value the truth, and be prepared to suffer in order to preserve it.

"Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." (John 8:32).

Any teaching which elevates man at the expense of God's true position is particularly dangerous because it has the effect of leaving the holder to this position with a god who is not worthy of worship. Man is not, and never will be a god.

"This is what the Lord says - Israel's King and Redeemer, the Lord Almighty: I am the first and I am the last; apart from me there is no God." (Isaiah 44:6).

"... This is what the Sovereign Lord says: 'In the pride of your heart you say, 'I am a god; I sit on the throne of a god in the heart of the seas.' But you are a man and not a god, though you think you are as wise as a god." (Ezekiel 28:2).

"And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God." (Revelation 21:3).

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David Holden

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