

# Beware the Pretenders

By Pastor David C. Forsyth

False teachers are nothing new in the history of the Church. Wherever the truth of God is preached, it doesn't take long before the enemy responds by sowing the seeds of false doctrine. In the closing chapter of Paul's epistle to the Romans we find the following warning "*Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them. For such men are slaves, not of our Lord Christ but of their own appetites; and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting.*" (Ro. 16:17-18 - NASB) Paul's warning remains appropriate even today as the Church is being assaulted by the destructive error of the Word Faith Movement.

The Word Faith Movement is also known as "Positive Confession" or "Name it and Claim it" theology, which at its core teaches that our words, spoken in faith, have the power to change our circumstances. This theology is nothing more or less than shamanism, borrowed not from primitive tribal people, but from the metaphysical cults of the 19th century. In the hands of its modern promoters, the Word Faith Movement has become a clear and present danger to the church. In the following section we will expose some of the spokesmen for this movement, and outline their deviant and unbiblical theology.

## The Root Of the Problem

The origins of the modern Word Faith Movement lie in the work and writings of **E.W. Kenyon** (1867-1948). Kenyon was influenced at an early age by the metaphysical cults such as Christian Science, whose gnostic ideas permeated much of his thinking.<sup>1</sup> In his early 20's Kenyon pastored several churches in New England before founding Bethel Bible Institute where he served as president for over 25 years.<sup>2</sup> In 1923 he moved to Los Angeles and founded Figueroa Independent Baptist Church and became a pioneer in the early years of radio evangelism. His most enduring legacy is his 16 books, which have had a dramatic influence on the main spokesmen for the Word Faith Movement.

The list of false teachings that Kenyon held and promoted is too long to detail here, but includes such ideas as "special" or "revelation knowledge," which is the idea that God communicates directly to your spirit by bypassing the mind.<sup>3</sup> Kenyon further taught that believers should not die, but should wear out and fall asleep, and that those who had entered into

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<sup>1</sup> Moriarty, Michael, G., *The New Charismatics*, Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 1992, pg. 78-80.

<sup>2</sup> Burgess, Stanley M., & McGee, Gary B., Editors, *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 1988, pg. 517.

<sup>3</sup> Moriarty, pg. 264

the “spirit-realm,” via direct contact with God were in fact “supermen.”<sup>4</sup> These ideas have been picked up by modern Word Faith teachers and either plagiarized directly or modified slightly to suit their needs.<sup>5</sup>

The “father” of the modern Word Faith Movement is **Kenneth Hagin** (1917-2003). Born a premature child, and plagued by numerous health problems, Hagin reportedly “received the Holy Ghost” in 1933 after a close brush with death in which he relates that he “witnessed the horrors of hell” three times.<sup>6</sup> Finally, in 1934, Hagin received a vision containing the Scripture passage Mark 11:23-24. It was because of this vision, and the supporting Scripture passage, that he built his theology of the “Faith Principle.”<sup>7</sup> The “Faith Principle” can be summarized as **“believe it in your heart, say it with your mouth, and you will have whatsoever you confess.”**

Hagin is notorious for receiving “visions” which give guidance to his ministry. One of his frequently recounted visions recalls a time when he and Jesus were talking together and were confronted by a “demon monkey.” In the vision, Jesus was unable to control the monkey, but Hagin rescued the moment by rebuking the demon in Jesus’ name.<sup>8</sup> As this vision unfolded, he was given new insights into spiritual warfare including an explanation as to why Jesus had been unable to deal with the “demon monkey.” Weird, bizarre, and heretical visions like these are the hallmarks of Hagin’s ministry; however his direct teaching on Christians becoming “little gods” is one of his worst. This teaching, picked up by Hagin’s protégé **Kenneth Copeland**, is based upon a misapplication of Jn. 10:33-34 and 2 Pet. 1:4, whereby Copeland has declared that all believers are part of a “god class.”<sup>9</sup> (See further:<http://christianfallacies.com/RefutationOfBrighamYoung.pdf>).

According to Copeland, this “god class” began with Adam, who was not subordinate to God until he “bowed the knee to Satan,” which caused him to fall below “god class.” When a person becomes a believer they regain their god status, to the point where Copeland even equates himself with the “I Am.”<sup>10</sup> This false and heretical doctrine is a direct outgrowth of Kenyon’s “supermen” teaching.

The false teaching does not end with Hagin and Copeland however, since Hagin’s Rhema Bible Training Center, founded in 1974, has turned out over 10,000 graduates.<sup>11</sup> In addition, because of his popularity, Hagin has spawned numerous copycats including people such as Robert Tilton, Charles Capps, and Frederick Price. It is even reported by Hagin’s own

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<sup>4</sup> Moriarty, pages 330-36.

<sup>5</sup> Moriarty, pg. 81-82.

<sup>6</sup> Burgess & McGee, pg. 345.

<sup>7</sup> Moriarty, pages 82-84.

<sup>8</sup> Hanegraaff, Hank, *Christianity in Crisis*, Harvest House: Eugene OR, 1993, pg. 333.

<sup>9</sup> MacArthur, John F., *Charismatic Chaos*, Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 1992, pg. 271.

<sup>10</sup> MacArthur, pg. 272

<sup>11</sup> Burgess & McGee, pg. 345.

son that some of these men have preached his father's sermons almost verbatim from his tapes.<sup>12</sup>

## **Danger On the Horizon**

The significant level of Biblical ignorance, coupled with the rising tide of experientialism, which is rampant in the Western Church, threatens to sweep multitudes of nominal believers away in a tsunami of relativism. When you couple this uncritical and undiscerning attitude with the tremendous greed present at the turn of the millennium, it is understandable why the Word Faith Movement is so popular.

Although we do not believe that the majority of the members of Word Faith churches are false believers, we do believe many of their leaders knowingly distort the Scriptures for their own personal gain. This is evidenced by the fact that when the Movement and its leaders are subjected to the yardstick of Biblical truth they frequently react in violent and angry outbursts which demonstrate the condition of their hearts.<sup>13</sup>

As we reflect on this dangerous movement it seems appropriate to remember the words of the Apostle Paul, when he wrote to his disciple Timothy so many years ago, *"But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God; holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; and avoid such men as these."* (2 Tim. 3:1-5 – NASB)

We trust that this short study has been profitable for you and contributes to your obedient walk of faith. *Psalms 119:105*

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For further study we recommend the following:

1. Christianity in Crisis – Hank Hanegraaff
2. Charismatic Chaos – John MacArthur
3. The Agony of Deceit – Michael Horton Ed.
4. A Different Gospel: A Historical and Biblical Analysis of the Modern Faith Movement – D.R. McConnell
5. The New Charismatics – Michael Moriarty

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<sup>12</sup> Hanegraaff, pg. 333.

<sup>13</sup> Hanegraaff, pages 336-37.