

Introduction

The Health and Wealth movement is often called the “Word of Faith” movement. Their claims about faith are usually directed at financial prosperity, physical health and positive confession. What I intend to show you by this sermon is that what the Health and Wealth preachers present is faith alright, but it is a mis-directed faith. Here is an example;

Did you ever stop to think about having faith in your own faith?

Evidently God had faith in His faith, because He spoke words of faith and they came to pass. ... In other words, *having faith in your words is having faith in your faith.*

That's what you've got to learn to do to get things from God:

Have faith in your faith.

— **Kenneth Hagin**, *Having Faith in Your Faith.*

Faith in your words, faith in your faith? Now most of you will be able to see that these statements are wrong but do you know why they are wrong? Remember what I said last week about false teaching emphasizing one truth to the exclusion of another – this is an example of a truth about faith being emphasised to the extent that it replaces the sovereignty of God.

All faith is subsumed under the overarching biblical doctrine of the sovereignty of God. The Creator is the Lord of the universe, not a cosmic "servant or genie" at the beck and call of His creation. It is not our faith that sits on the throne, but our sovereign God

(**I Chron. 29:10-12**).

There are many ways one could tackle this issue. In this sermon I will look at a definition of faith. What it is and what it is not. Then we will look at the Health and Wealth view of faith as a formula. Finally I will deal briefly with the “positive confession” teaching and see whether it fits in the scheme of things.

What is Biblical Faith?

How do we define the faith that is taught in the Bible? It certainly is one of the major themes. There is no Hebrew noun for “faith” in the Old Testament, only verbs that have been translated with “faith” to indicate the concept. Remember that Judaism is primarily a “doing” faith. The concept “faith” is named with other words. In the Old Testament faith is described as the “fear of God” יִרָאָה *yirah* (Gen. 20:11; Ps. 111:10; Eccl. 12:13; Mal. 4:2), and in terms of trust אָמַן *aman* (2 Chron. 20:20; Ps. 4:5; Isa. 26:4), and obedience שָׁמַע *shama* (Ex. 19:5; 1 Sam. 15:22, Jer. 7:23). Faithful, faithfulness and steadiness are expressed by the Hebrew word אֱמוּנָה *emunah* which appears 49 times in the Hebrew Scriptures. It first appears in an event which describes this aspect of faith. The Children of Israel are in the wilderness of Sinai when, according to Deut. 25:17-18, the frail and weak stragglers are attacked by the Amalekites. Moses organizes his forces and they go to war against Amalek, the great enemy of the Jewish people. Exodus 17 tells us that Moses stood and watched the battle and raised his hands all day long until the Israelites won a key battle. It says that, with the help of Joshua and Hur who supported his arms, his hands remained steady (*emunah*) until sunset. In this sense the word means “steadfast.” The word *emunah* is also used to describe God’s faithfulness: Know therefore that the LORD your God is God; he is the faithful (*emunah*) God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commands. (Deuteronomy 7:9) Just because the Old Testament does not have a word equivalent to the English noun, “*faith*,” does not mean the idea of faith is unimportant for the Old Testament. Habakkuk 2:4b “But the righteous will live by his faith” was considered by many rabbis – the Apostle Paul included - as the centre and summary of Torah. God prepared the way for His people in mercy and grace, then He called them to obedience. To accept the responsibilities of

God's covenant was to trust His word, that He alone was God, and to commit one's life to His promises for the present and future. That is biblical faith.

In the New Testament the Greek word *pistis* is translated faith is used in a number of ways, but primarily with the meaning "trust" or "confidence" in God. This basic meaning is particularly evident in the Synoptic Gospels. Mark 1:15 introduces and summarizes the Gospel with Jesus' charge to his hearers to "repent, and believe the Good News." (The word usually translated "believe" in this verse is the verb form of "faith" for which there is no English equivalent.

Outside the Gospels faith is related to the key *concepts* of what it means to live as a Christian: the ground of salvation (Eph. 2:8-10), sanctification (Acts 26:18), purification (Acts 15:9), justification (Rom 4:5; 5:1; Gal. 3:24), adoption as children of God (Gal. 3:26). Each of these comes *by faith*. There are a few minor variations where faith is described in one form as fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22) and in another form as a gift (1 Cor 12:9) , but these do not detract from the main themes already mentioned.

So now we can define faith according to its Biblical use:

1. Faith means having confidence and trust – belief which is demonstrated in perseverance, a "steadiness" which endures and is not reliant on circumstances.
2. Faith means having confidence and trust in someone – God. Faith has a focus and the Biblical focus for faith is God Himself.
3. Faith is not blind faith. It is not a 'leap in the dark' which a person must take without knowledge or thought it is based on evidence.
4. Faith is trust in the God of the Bible whom we believe to be trustworthy. In this aspect it emphasises the relational.
5. Faith means entrusting your life to this trustworthy God – Abraham
6. Faith always operates in the context of doubt – if you do not have the option of doubt you cannot exercise faith
7. Faith means learning to see things from God's perspective – the Centurion

"In Christianity the value of faith depends upon the object towards which the faith is directed. So it looks outward to the God who is there, and to the Christ who in history died upon the cross once for all, finished the work of atonement, and on the third day rose again in space and in time. This makes Christian faith open to discussion and verification."

Francis Schaeffer

What you believe about faith tells me the kind of God in whom you believe. ... You cannot escape it: The kind of God on whom you have risked everything comes shining through when you tell me what you believe about faith.

If you believe in a God who answers prayer only according to the *amount* of faith a person has, you have to deal with my question: How much faith does it take? Does it take a pound? A gallon? An ounce? ...

Once more: What you believe about faith reveals the kind of God in whom you believe.

— Arnold Prater,

If Arnold Prater's thesis is correct, and I think it is, what a movement teaches about faith reveals the kind of God which that movement is attempting to serve (or has serving the movement).

What the Health and Wealth Movement teaches about Faith.

Lets look again at what Kenneth Hagin says about faith;

Did you ever stop to think about having faith in your own faith?
Evidently God had faith in His faith, because He spoke words of faith and they came to pass. ... In other words, *having faith in your words is having faith in your faith.*
That's what you've got to learn to do to get things from God:
Have faith in your faith.

— **Kenneth Hagin**, *Having Faith in Your Faith.*

Both Francis Shaeffer and Arnold Prater point out that what you believe about faith has a great deal to do with what you believe about God. As we look at the biblical description of faith there is no hint of having faith in your faith. Look, for instance, at the examples of healing in Jesus' ministry. Where people focusing on their faith or on Jesus for their healing? They exercised faith, and their faith resulted in healing, but it was Jesus not their faith who gave them the healing. He was the object of their faith – not their faith. So why does Kenneth Hagin say you should have faith in your faith? He says it because he has made two fundamental mistakes. He has reduced faith to a formula and He has reduced God the slave of your faith.

What kind of God is it that needs faith in his faith? Any god who has to "have faith in his own faith" is not the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is really no god at all. He (it?) is the impersonal "force" of the metaphysical cults. This force is the slavish puppet of anybody who knows the "formulas" and "spiritual laws" of how to control him (it?). If, for instance, the Faith cosmology teaches that God *must* obey these spiritual laws and cannot do otherwise, it has destroyed his *sovereignty*, his right of self-determination and self-rule in the universe. The Bible clearly teaches the absolute sovereignty of God's will. "Our God is in the heavens; He does whatever he pleases" (Ps. 115:3). No man can force God's hand with formulas, and there are no spiritual laws apart from his will (e.g., Dan. 4:34-35). In the universe, God "works all things after the counsel of His will" (Eph. 1:11).

Faith as a Formula

Several of its critics have characterized the conception of faith in the Faith movement as a "formula." Words such as "formula," "law," "steps," and "principles" do appear quite often in Faith literature, which lends credence to this characterization.

For example, Kenneth Hagin claims that Jesus appeared to him in a vision and said, "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 God the Father." With these "steps," Jesus said to Hagin, "You can write your own ticket with God." The four steps that Jesus gave to Hagin were: "

- (1) Say it,
- (2) Do it,
- (3) Receive it,
- (4) Tell it."

Why would the Faith movement want a formula – and by the way maybe we should ask ourselves the same question. Why would we want to turn faith into a formula?

The formulaic nature of Faith theology is based upon its world view. The world was created by God speaking the Word and calling into being everything that is. The Faith theology claims that "God is a faith God" because he had faith that his words would bring forth creation *ex nihilo* ("out of nothing"). As a result, it is a Word creation. The Word is what holds the creation together and maintains its operation. Essek Kenyon taught that "*faith-filled words brought the universe into being, and faith-filled words are ruling that universe today.*"² Following Kenyon's lead, Kenneth Hagin claimed that through the discovery of the "spiritual laws" established by God to run the universe, the believer can put these laws to "work" for his own use.

Do you see how mechanistic this view of the world and the universe is?

Personally, I see a parallel in the Garden of Eden. The first humans thought that they had worked out how their world was operated. They had cracked the system! All it would take was to eat the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and they would be like God. "No more blue-collar, tending the garden work for us", they said. "Management here we come!"

Kenneth Hagin continues this "Eden principle"

In the spiritual realm God has set into motion certain laws, just as He set laws in the natural realm. Those laws in the natural realm work, don't they? Just as you get into contact with those natural laws or *put them into practice they work for you*. Over in the spiritual realm the same thing is true. I have come to the conclusion that the law of faith is spiritual law, that God has put this law into motion, and that as surely as you come into contact with it, it will work for you.

According to Kenneth Hagin it even works if you are not a Christian!

Thus, anybody, Christian or non-Christian, can plug into this universal law of faith and get "results." "It used to bother me, when I'd see unsaved people getting results. Then it dawned on me what the sinners were doing: they were cooperating with the law of God—the law of faith."

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.

To get these "results," the Faith teachers often recommend "*little formulas*" to follow for whatever a person needs from God.

Fred Price, for instance, teaches that **Rom. 10:10** is a "*formula*".

That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.

He teaches and that anybody "could put anything in there [the formula] you want— healing, your needs met, new job, car, home, whatever you need." Formulas such as these will, for anybody who uses them, place the resources of the world, heaven, and the universe at one's disposal.

Hold on a minute! Paul wrote this so-called formula, didn't he? Well if it was this powerful formula why didn't he use it. A key for the prison door, a chariot to escape those who attacked him, a life boat when he was ship wrecked, favour from his persecutors. The answer is of course that it is not a formula and was never intended to be used as such.

Faith as Positive Confession

Now we all like to be around positive people. They tend to be easier to deal with and not as easily discouraged. Positive people tend to "always look on the bright side of life..." as the song goes. The teaching of faith as positive confession goes much further than this.

Positive confession is, undoubtedly, the most distinctive doctrine of the "Health and Wealth movement. "What I confess, I possess" or "Name it and claim it "

Confession is commonly defined in Faith theology as "affirming something we believe . . . testifying to something we know... witnessing for a truth that we have embraced."

As Hagin puts it, "What we believe is a result of our thinking. If we think wrong we will believe wrong. ... If we believe wrong, our confession will be wrong. Positive mental attitude (PMA) is the fount from which all positive confession flows.

Now we can see how one error about faith leads to another error about confession.

The concept of positive confession fits well into the worldview of Faith theology. Positive confession is the spiritual shove that sets into motion the "spiritual laws" that govern the universe." Kenyon claims, "A spiritual law that few of us realize, is that our confession rules us." A "right" or "wrong" confession is the determining factor in one's harmony with these

universal spiritual laws. In a universe ruled by rigid spiritual law, neutrality is impossible. A negative confession can cause as much evil as a positive confession can create good. In the Faith theology, "what you say is what you get," whether good or bad. No wonder you have to have faith in your faith!

Faith as Creative Power

Based on his view that the universe is "ruled by words," Kenyon advocates "creative faith" by which the believer can use God's formula for creation—"Let there be"—to create his own reality. Charles Capps expands Kenyon's concept of "creative faith" to the point that man, not God, is the only creator left in the universe. Through "creative faith," man becomes not only a god. He becomes a creator.

The Force of Faith

As the result of his book *The Force of Faith*, Kenneth Copeland has made popular the term "faith-force." Although the basic formula that confession brings possession is the same, the unique aspect of faith-force is its definition that Faith is a power force. It is a conductive force. It will move things. Faith will change things. Faith will change the human body. It will change the human heart. Faith will change circumstances.... The force of faith is released by words. Faith-filled words put the law of the Spirit of life into operation. Copeland teaches that since "God is a faith being" and since man is "a faith being," man has the faith "to operate in the same way" that God operates. As a believer grows in his faith-force, he possesses more power and can move bigger obstacles in the spirit realm. With faith and patience, "the power twins," a believer can receive whatever his faith-force is powerful enough and patient enough to believe for.

Now here is a problem. If it is about the amount of faith-force I possess that will move bigger obstacles why does the Scripture say different.

Jesus replied, "Because you have so little faith. I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you." (Matt 17:20)

The Apostle Paul said, "...and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing." (1 Cor 13:2)

So which is it? All faith or faith the size of a mustard seed? Is the amount of faith the issue?

Faith in the Name

In his book *The Wonderful Name of Jesus*, Kenyon states that God has given the church his "power of attorney" in the name of Jesus: "it is legally ours." Before he ascended, Jesus left his name to the church. When the believer uses Jesus' name, God *must* respond favorably, because all authority is in that 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." The name of Jesus is the believer's *carte blanche* with God. It confers unconditional authority upon the believer.

The Faith theology's teaching on Jesus' name violates one of God's primary commandments. In the Decalogue, Yahweh told the people of Israel, "You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name." (Ex. 20:7; cf., Lev. 19:12; Deut. 5:11). The intent of the third commandment is far broader than a mere prohibition of cursing or profanity; it also prohibits and threatens to punish any attempt to use the divine name to manipulate or control Yahweh.

Faith and the Authority of the Believer

Because all authority is in the name of the Jesus and that name is now the "legal" possession of the church, believers have all the authority of Jesus. According to the Faith theology, "when Christ ascended, he transferred his authority to the church." Christ can no longer work on earth apart from the church. If the church fails to exercise its authority in a particular situation, God's hands are tied and nothing more can be done.

The Faith teacher's concept of the "God-kind of faith" and "The Authority of the Believer" illustrates well the man-centered nature of the Faith theology. This concept is based on their erroneous translation of Mk. 11:22 as a subjective genitive: "Have the faith *of* God." One prominent NT scholar has written that such a translation "is surely a monstrosity of exegesis." In the NT, *pistis* (faith) is frequently followed by a genitive construction, and is always translated as an objective genitive: "Have faith *in* God." Jesus was not conferring godhood upon men who have faith. He was exhorting men to have faith *in* God, that is, in his person, his character, and his saving deeds.

Conclusion

I want to leave you with two Scriptures, both of which in their own right, are both considered being summaries of the Hebrew Scriptures.

Micah 6:8

He has told you, O man, what is good;
And what does the LORD require of you
But to do justice, to love kindness,
And to walk humbly with your God?

Habakkuk 2:4

But the righteous will live by his faith.

In these Scriptures the biblical concept of faith is encapsulated. Not as power- filled humans who call the shots with God but those whose will is bowed before their Maker and who seek to serve Him with their lives. This is the faith that saves.