

The Health, Wealth and Prosperity Movement

Written by D Napier

Wednesday, 31 August 2016 15:51

All Quotes in italics are taken from 'Health and Wealth' by Andrew Brandon (1987), published by Kingsway Publishers.

Every so often rumours of new ideas on the religious scene come to our notice. But, what do we do about them? There is no point in saying "I won't fall for that one" when so many of us do!

For example, nearly **60%** of all American Christians have 'fallen for' the movement that boasts of health, wealth and prosperity for those who ask for it. Now, as with many other ideas that start in the USA, this 'movement' has filtered through to the UK and today many are very serious about it.

This is a pity, for those who this writer has talked to generally uphold all the major teachings of scripture. Although the matters raised by the movement are secondary to salvation, its thinking can affect life and witness. It can also place more emphasis on riches than on salvation itself. Some argue that it does not matter *how* people become Christians, but coming to the Lord expecting money, perpetual health, healing when health has broken, and personal interviews with Christ Himself, has many drawbacks!

Andrew Brandon's first experience of this movement was when he met one well-meaning Christian who ***"placed a bulk of glossy magazines into my hand with the comment 'for your edification, brother'."*** One article offered the following advice:

"lay your hand on this page (under which was a life-size picture of a hand) and then write your prayer request on the palm. Return this with your monetary donation to 'Hotline to Heaven' and our team of specially trained intercessors will pray for you. If your request and gift are among the first fifty to arrive, we'll send you an olive-wood figurine of a Jerusalem beggar." (P. 10)

Other gifts were also offered in exchange for money. Now it does not take the average person long to discover how deplorable this is. Whilst this writer will take a sympathetic view of misinformed people, some of the movement's proponents are abusive toward others:

"Kenneth Hagin, one of the leading prosperity teachers, refers to his antagonists as 'stupid' while the disagreement of well-qualified theologians is attributed to their 'peanut-brain'. 'Hoodwinked by the Devil' the Church refuses to accept the prosperity message, and in so doing, jeopardises her chance of effective evangelism. Only when the Church is wealthy, it is argued, can she truly fulfil the commission to make disciples of all nations... this contention runs counter to all the evidence of Church history and recent Church growth research." (P.13)

"The poor Christians of the first generation became the educated middle-class Christians of the next. When this happens, Church growth slows significantly. Prosperity and affluence tend to lead to atrophy rather than give impetus to growth." (P.14)

(As you read this article ask yourself why all the great preachers and Christians of the past never mentioned this teaching. Or, would they ever call people 'stupid' and 'peanut-brain' because they did not join the bandwagon?)

The main thrust of this teaching seems to be: *whatever* you say is what *will* happen. As in all stories there is the 'good' and the 'bad' (or 'positive' and 'negative' confession).

Negative Confession

"Whilst talking to a (car) mechanic - 'I admire you' I said to the DIY mechanic... 'I'm no good at mechanics myself.'

My words shook him. 'That's negative confession' he cried, 'you must never say that again. You can do all things through Christ Who gives you strength'. " (P.16)

Wow! Think of the fun you could have in life by never using 'negative confession'! You could go for any interview you like, regardless of the job or qualifications required and get it, because you can do *all* things through Christ! If you would like to try your hand at brain surgery, just say you can do it. Go on!

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This is just one of many instances in which scripture is misquoted. This seems to be a pastime of health and wealth followers. God *does* help us, but He also expects us to work at it too. So, to become a good mechanic you will need many years training and experience on all kinds of vehicles. The same applies to any skilled job or profession. Merely

saying

"I am a good mechanic" when not qualified with skills does

not

enable you to tear off your shirt and shout "This is a job for SuperMechanic!"

Positive Confession

Shortly after his meeting with the mechanic, Andrew Brandon

"Heard a sermon on positive confession. The teaching content was reduced to a simple rhyme... 'see it dry, see it wet, what you say is what you get.' " (P.17)

What, then, went wrong ***"when (Elijah) asked God to take his life (1 Kings 19:4). God didn't - his (Elijah's) words were powerless."* (P.28)**

Surely his negative confession should have cost him his life?

"Positive confession is the magic door to a make-believe world. Negative words are evil spells that bring disaster, but positive words are good magic that bring about the desired results. The similarity between this teaching and witchcraft is striking." (P.30)

This is more apparent when we consider Kenneth Hagin's 'personal encounters' with Jesus. It is too naive to say we must not doubt the word of the man. This writer would! It is convenient to have visions to support your ideas, as when Hagin was

"Instructed (by Jesus) to teach positive confession. There is no evidence in scripture to support such a notion." (P.41)

"Prosperity teaching subscribes to a novel and highly original concept of faith... Hagin is adamant that there can be no faith without confession: confession is the trigger that releases the force of faith." (P.33)

We are here assuming that 'confession' does not have to be audible. If it must be, then there are millions who cannot confess because they are dumb! Surely this teaching is not so cruel as to make people confess audibly? But, if you can confess inaudibly, the confession is through the mind. If this is true, then it must be extremely difficult to control our thoughts so that we do not inadvertently confess something negatively. We could go further and ask what happens to semi- or sub-conscious thoughts that are negative? How do mentally handicapped or mentally ill people manage with confessing? How would some even get to know about the teaching, if their minds cannot take in everyday instructions, let alone new religious concepts?

In this light it is a terrible thing for Hobart Freeman to say that medicine is a **"sign of unbelief"** (P.38). Are doctors and other medical staff making a lot of money out of people's disbelief? If positive confession really worked then a vast number of doctors, nurses, etc., would be out of a job, because all Christian patients would confess their way out of hospital (or not into them in the first place)!

So, before we continue it can be seen that the main idea in this teaching is 'whatever you say is what you receive'. The two main areas we can now examine are health and wealth. Before we do so, ask yourself once again why this teaching has been missing until now. If the teaching is true, then even major illnesses and death could be avoided.

Health

It should be stressed that Andrew Brandon's

"intention... is not to join forces with those who reject the ministry of healing, but to expose some of the unscriptural ideas that could bring discredit on this valuable and compassionate ministry. An over-emphasis on any aspect of the truth is unscriptural and dangerous. In my view, prosperity teaching is guilty of an over-emphasis on healing and a dubious theology which has already resulted in a number of deaths. A theology that kills cannot be of God." (P.47)

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Some examples of these dangers are reported in Brandon's book and they are extremely disturbing. One case is where a man was dying of an heart attack and his wife refused the help of a doctor, because she believed he would be healed if she asked God in a positive way to heal him. The man died. So, what happened to her positive confession? As the teaching claims:

" 'No Christian ever living in victory should be sick. Divine health was a covenant right of every child of God, and to acknowledge sickness was considered to be negative confession and therefore of the Devil'... but people keep dying, the teaching is a lie." (P.48)

As the author rightly says:

"Such stories are never printed in books on prosperity teaching. Instead, they contain glorious and triumphalistic accounts of sick and crippled people who, on receiving the message of health and prosperity, are instantaneously healed, but they never mention the pain and guilt of those for whom the theology does not work." (P.47)

It is appropriate at this point to insert a quote by Kenneth Copeland (another prosperity teacher), published in the Calvary Contender (Nov. 1st., 1987):

" 'WHAT KEN COPELAND WOULD DO IF HE HAD AIDS'

The moment I woke up in the morning, before I did anything else, I'd take Communion. I'd say 'I take Jesus' pure blood shed for me'. Then I'd (rebuke) the devil... Then, all day long, I'd thank God for my healing... Then, in the afternoon, I'd praise God and receive Communion again. Why? To remind myself that the blood of Jesus is in my veins... That night before bed, I'd receive Communion again. And I'd say 'Well, I'm going to bed tonight with the taste of His blood and His body in my mouth'... If I woke up in the night, I'd reach over and get my Bible and read all the healing scriptures again... (and) praise myself back to sleep. (... By the way, this will work to rid your body of any sickness if ANYONE will do it). Is God responsible for AIDS? No!... The news is going to get out that God is healing people of AIDS." (Voice of Victory, Oct. 1987)

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(Are readers as repulsed as I am by Copeland's view of Communion in this quote? The rest of the quote is the very sad testimony of a deluded man. Ed.)

Copeland says:

"You can absolutely believe God for anything in the world and get it." (The Discerner, Nov. 1987)

Charismatics who believe and use these unscriptural, magical formulae are deceiving others and are themselves being deceived. Be warned, be wise and beware!

Why, then, doesn't this cure-all teaching always work? Could it be that the time it *does* work is when it is the will of God

anyway

for that person?

(Note: there can be no other healing, for *everything* is predetermined by God. Ed.).

If the teaching is as simple as 'ask for healing and you will get it', how can it possibly fail? And how could we differentiate between the results of confession and the normal course of events (even deadly cancers can disappear of their own accord)? These questions do not detract from God's true healings.

And as for men being resurrected from the dead - how does that fit in with the scriptural statement that man dies but once and after that, receives a new body? The case of Lazarus cannot be cited: Jesus Christ is Lord and God and He can do whatever He wishes. (*Ed See article on Lazarus' resurrection*).

Also of interest here is the *time* of such occurrences. That is, how long *after* the supposed 'death' does the 'resurrection' take place? If it is only moments or hours, or even a few days, it could be that these people were not really dead in the first place. No - the medical evidence is lacking, as is credibility.

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If some think such talk is silly, ask yourself *why* you think it is so. Think carefully... *wherever* we go between death and heaven (Christ told the thief that he and the thief would go to 'Paradise' - which is NOT heaven), we know that it has to be a divine place. Thus, if people are being resurrected, they are being recalled from a divinely-ordained state, ON DEMAND. This, and Copeland's repulsive ideas on Communion, are identical to both spiritualistic and Roman Catholic teachings.

Without wishing to mock such teachers: have they ever attempted to 'resurrect' someone who has been crushed flat by a steam-roller? Or, one who has been decapitated? Or, burned beyond recognition? Or, has suffered some other irreversible change? If they have not - then the whole thing is suspect (as it is, anyway).

Let us ignore these severe cases. What about people who have not died, but who are nevertheless very ill. How far can they take 'positive confession'? For example, what if they had medical proof that an unborn child was deformed or had some terrible disease? Can it be healed within the womb? Or, if a person's face has been eaten away by cancer, can the flesh be returned to normal? And how long after the illness or injury can healing take place? What about, say, a man who lost his leg during the Second World War... can he have a new leg just by asking for it? After all, according to the theory time holds no meaning, for it is God who heals.

The reader must forgive my scepticism, but every time I have been in a meeting where healing is supposed to be taking place, I have never witnessed another leg growing where one has been taken away or has never existed. Nor have I seen a deformity healed back to normal. In other words, where proof could not be debated, there is no proof!

The only 'healings' I have witnessed are those that could not be argued against - back-aches, poor eyesight made a little better, something vague and internal, etc. Like many others, I have *heard* of miraculous healings, but they seem to be rare. But, why should they be rare if health teaching is correct? (My own mother was miraculously healed of one chronic, medically-attested condition, but she was *not* healed of another. Therefore, the existence of God's healing is not questioned. Here we are discussing the man-made *theory* of healing-on-demand).

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Some prosperity teachers go too far in their ideas. Thus, Kenneth Copeland equates all sickness with sin. In his book, 'Our Covenant with God', he writes:

"You need to fight the temptation to be sick just as you would fight the temptation to lie or to steal. Satan will tempt you with the sickness, but you don't have to give in. You can resist him with the word of God as Jesus did."

"For those who are sick, deformed or mentally handicapped this message has little comfort." (P.51)

If the teaching were true, then every Christian in the world could be healed if *they* wanted to be healed (rather than if

God

wants them to be healed). And if we take the theory to its logical conclusion, we can demand that our future children be born perfect or, that we should not die at all.

It seems to this writer that the proponents of this teaching spend all their time on it and on nothing else - a dangerous imbalance. Even if the teaching is true, it must not supersede other doctrinal issues. It is an error to emphasise one doctrinal claim over another.

"To attribute all sickness to Satan is a simple and convenient solution to the problem of suffering, but it is within this frame that prosperity teaching places its picture of reality."

Unfortunately the picture bears little resemblance to the true nature of things. A highly complex problem is reduced to a simple formula: sickness is from the devil; health is from God." (P.54)

One of the problems with the teachers and followers of this movement is that they think they know their scripture when, in fact, they are consistently misquoting the Bible. A major example is noted by Andrew Brandon:

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"Prosperity teaching frequently refers to the phrase 'By His wounds we are healed' (Isaiah 53:5; 1 Peter 2:24) as an indication that perfect health is part of the Believer's inheritance in Jesus." (P.58)

But

"This verse is very much misquoted - the context determines that we interpret this metaphorically." (P.10)

(Something not mentioned in the book, but which I have heard from other 'health' sources connected with this teaching, is that the 39 stripes Christ is supposed to have received represent 39 categories of illness. Therefore, His suffering and death 'cover' all categories of illness! I find this so theologically interesting, that I will not mention it again!).

The tale continues...

"Healing belongs to us... By confessing that we are healed through the death of Jesus healing will be manifest in our bodies. The symptoms of our sickness must be ignored, and confession of perfect health must be maintained. Any symptom that contradicts the confession of perfect health is of Satan." (P.59)

Easy, isn't it? But...

"The scriptures do not promise perfect health. Nowhere in the New Testament are we told that health is an automatic right of the child of God." (P.60)

Returning to what Copeland said about sickness, Brandon says:

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"If sickness was a sin our hospitals would be prisons. Consequently, to postulate that Christ died to atone for our sicknesses is theological nonsense." (P.62)

This writer heard someone (who claimed to have the power to heal) say that he did not believe he could heal everybody; rather, the Holy Spirit guides him in deciding who should be healed. This is confirmed by Brandon who says:

"Jesus definitely heals today, but both scripture and human experience show that He doesn't heal everyone." (P.65)

Even Kathryn Kuhlman a 'healing evangelist', towards the end of her life, said this of healing:

"Twenty years ago I believed that... it was God's will for everybody without exception, to be healed... Now I see that we can't demand or command that God do anything. In general, I definitely believe that it's God's will to heal. But I can't say absolutely what is or is not His will in a particular case. There are some things I've learned just not to touch." (P.67)

(Note: Kathryn Kuhlman had a notorious reputation and her name has been linked with occult techniques. Yet she agrees with Brandon on this matter).

A final word on this topic, although it is not exhausted:

"To reduce healing to the simple formula 'faith equals healing' is to do incalculable damage to those who never recover from sickness or disablement." (P.68)

Wealth

In this section sufficient will be given to show that the concept of wealth is just as misconstrued as that of the concept of health.

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It is easy to see why many people become interested in this kind of movement, when wealth is offered on a plate; it is even easier than entering a State lottery! Imagine someone is in a desperate financial position, or, wants to benefit from extra income. Or, he wants sufficient to pay his bills. He would jump at the chance to try out the ideas put forward by this movement.

"The rich young ruler was told to go and sell all that he possessed and give the proceeds to the poor (Mark 10:21), and Jesus' own disciples were sent on their first missionary journey with the instruction: 'Do not take along any gold or silver or copper in your belts, take no bag for the journey, or extra tunic, or sandals or a staff, for the worker is worthy of his keep.' (Matthew 10:9-10) "

How does this scripture fit into what has been discussed? Quite easily. If we are doing something that is in God's will, then He will make sure we have sufficient to carry out the task appointed. So, whether we talk of a visiting preacher being given a meal by a church member or, a cash gift of many thousands, there is no difference - God will supply if it is in His will.

Of course, as often happens, there are man-made events that are nothing to do with God's will. Thus, big campaigns could be funded by people with vested interests who have no real interest in God's word. Yet, they 'believe' it is God's will to give the money. The leaders of the campaign also 'believe' (because they want to) that the campaign is of God and that the funds provided are proof of this. This fact is magnified by those American 'evangelists' who own several Rolls Royce cars, mansions and massive bank balances. I find it hard to see God's will in the midst of such glamour.

Thus, when Christians (who we all know) talk of how much they have got, where they have been on one of their many exotic holidays and how much they have in the bank, it is not unreasonable to say that they owe their prosperity to God's will, even though this is dubious. I have heard whole prosperous churches claim that their comfort is given by God's will... yet their spirits are dead.

All this is due to the human factor - where we can either do what is *actually* God's will or, we do things because we

hink

they are God's will. For example: A young man believes it is God's will to become a doctor, so

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he goes through college. He is successful in every examination but a month before he is due to qualify, 'something' tells him to pack it all in and to go and drive for a Christian organisation, transporting food parcels to India. An extreme example? No - a real one, known to me.

It would seem 'natural' to complete the training, which had taken many years and a lot of money. His parents, too, had sacrificed a lot to put him through college. What about India? Well 'maybe some day'... and this, I suspect, would be the reaction of most Christians to a call of God that appears to contradict their own wills. *(Ed. To be honest it could be an easy-way-out to a student who has not done enough work on his course, a way to get out nobly before he fails! Or, the assumption it was God's will is true!).*

What we are saying is this: 'Surely God would not take a man through all that training and then, a month before qualifying, tell him to drop everything to drive a van to India?' But, why not? Just because we 'believe' we are right, does not prove it is God's will. Just because everything is 'going right' and everything 'slots into place', it is not proof that it is necessarily God's will. Quite often it is not. Many of the disciples dropped everything - business, profession, etc., and followed Jesus immediately. So, why can't we do the same?

Today's Christians find it hard, if not impossible, to believe that God might want us to do what we ourselves do not expect. But, He can do or want anything He wishes! Often, unbelieving Christians pass the buck and say "Oh, God must mean this for someone else!" when God wants them to do something they don't want to do.

It is very simple to engineer things to fit into our own ideas, and then to claim it is God's will (self-fulfilling prophecy). We cannot accept that maybe God *wants* us to retain a disability or an illness. He may *want* us to live near the poverty line. He may *want* us to work in an intolerable situation.

Who are we to turn to God and say "But I don't want to live in poverty anymore! I want money and a better lifestyle!"? What utter arrogance to demand that God, Creator and King of kings, should bow down to our personal whims! Paul was content to be in whatever state he was in. God did not take away the 'thorn in his flesh', but He gave Paul times of relative wealth and comfort amidst times of poverty and hardship. Paul was content whatever happened. So, why should Christians today expect preferential treatment? (It is also true to say that Christians who

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live like Paul often have their human problems alleviated unexpectedly by God, probably *because* they do not make demands on Him).

"The theology of wealth can be reduced to a simple formula: serve God and become rich; disobey God and become poor. Prosperity teaching has (also) made the mistake of confusing the Old and the New covenants. The blessings listed in Deuteronomy 28 - health, wealth, victory in war, fertility – are all considered part of the Christian's inheritance in Christ. But this teaching ignores the fact that the Old covenant has been abrogated and replaced by the New covenant. The contrast between them both can be clearly seen here:

The Old Covenant

The New Covenant

Law

Grace

Canaan

Heaven

Material Prosperity*

Spiritual blessings

Self-effort

Holy Spirit

Temporary priesthood

Eternal High Priest

Sacrifices

One sacrifice

Annual forgiveness

Everlasting forgiveness

Tabernacle/Temple

Jesus Christ" (P.82)

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* What does the Bible say about building up treasures in heaven rather than on earth? Biblical teaching on 'wealth' mainly (but not always) refers to *spiritual* wealth. How can a Believer feel comfortable having earthly wealth when there are so many Believers in poverty and in need? Even when a Believer has earthly wealth (and there is nothing wrong with that), his wealth is of God and for God. It is not his to use as he wishes and only for his own benefit. If the teachings of this movement involved the helping of others with one's own (God's!) wealth, then perhaps it could be more acceptable.

"In all the passages of the New Testament relating to the New covenant, wealth is never mentioned... surely if wealth was a part of the New covenant it would have been mentioned. The 'God wants you to be wealthy' theology is a modern addition to the Gospel." (P.84)

But, (in yet another personal interview with Jesus!) Kenneth Hagin says he was told by Jesus that:

"If my children will listen to me, I will make them wealthy." (P.84)

Doesn't it sound rather strange that the Jesus we all know of, Who did not collect wealth for Himself or seek high living standards, should suddenly change His mind about wealth? There is something terribly wrong when we rely on dubious 'personal encounters' rather than on proven scripture. The Bible as we have it today (directly and indirectly) contains everything we need in order to live on this earth, in any society, in any era. So why accept an alien theology not found in scripture?

"Wherever the believer's riches are mentioned they are always spiritual (Ephesians 1:7,18; 2:7; 3:8,16; Colossians 1:27, 2:2; 3:16; Hebrews 11:26). One exception is found in Philippians 4:19 where Paul assures the Church that God will provide their needs 'according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus'. It must be emphasised that the Lord does not promise wealth, but the provision of the needs of His children." (P.85)

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I am sure that the Christians who live in former Communist and similar countries would NOT agree with 'wealth' teaching, despite their many hardships and trials.

"To be a disciple of Christ in a number of communist countries necessitates the abandoning of hope of immediate prosperity and advance in career. To be a Christian is to be poor. The suggestion that poverty is the consequence of ignorance and unbelief is to insult both Christ and His suffering people." (P.87)

Another thing that seems to be missing from this new theology is sacrifice:

"In the theology of Paul, sacrifice and giving are inextricably linked. In fact, it is the sacrificial principle that Paul is illustrating when he refers to Jesus becoming poorer to make us rich. The Bible promises to reward the generosity of the Believer, but not necessarily in financial terms." (P.89)

Yet, how many Christians give in order to receive? What a terrible witness.

"Research into church growth has unearthed a very interesting fact. The most rapidly growing churches are those where the congregations have learned to give sacrificially - they are often blessed with converts rather than money." (P.100)

If Christians were given a choice - more money or more converts - I am not sure which way they would choose, such is today's love of money! Another interesting fact is that the average Christian in the UK (1987 figures) gives about £1.50 a week to the work of God... not much of a sacrifice, is it? British churches have an unenviable reputation for not giving much:

"So before we remove the splinter from the eyes of the prosperity teachers let us make sure that we have removed the beam from our own eye." (P.100)

One of the ways in which Kenneth Hagin is wrong is

"in his teaching that God only answers 'yes' to our prayers. Yet how can he explain Paul's prayer being denied three times (2 Corinthians 12:8-10)? He also says that God is legally bound to answer prayer - Man cannot hold God to ransom!" (P.111)

Kenneth Copeland is also wrong, by confusing the Abrahamic covenant with the Old covenant, but this is too big a matter to be dealt with here... it is mentioned to underpin the fact that health and wealth teachers insist on misinterpreting scripture.

As an aside, the 'vision' of Kenneth Hagin mentioned in his book 'I Believe in Visions', is unscriptural in context and is therefore dubious. In this meeting, Christ is supposed to have said that He had *delegated all His authority* to the Church and so He was therefore *unable* to intervene in any matter. This is deception (P.130). The thinking Christian can surely see that

"The Jesus of prosperity teaching is another Jesus. He bears little resemblance to the Jesus of the New Testament." (P.131)

God can and does intervene anytime, anywhere, as often as He wishes. We dare not presume otherwise.

Andrew Brandon has identified seven reasons for the popularity of this new theology (Pp 133 - 139):

1. An Absence of Biblical Teaching. Certain church denominations will like this aspect of Health and Wealth teaching, as they already tend to have a less substantial view of Bible teaching. Emphasis is put on the 'help' of the Holy Spirit - don't prepare for sermons because the Lord will fill you with words, etc. (I have heard some of these 'sermons'... they would be laughable if they were not supposed to be the teaching of God through a man called to do so).

Emphasis is put on 'whooping up' the congregation with the monotonous repetition of choruses and so on. I would like to see what these folk would do if they had just a studied sermon and a

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hymn or two... would they *still* 'bubble with joy'?

2. The Love of Novelty. In the light of this teaching, all other experiences and teachings are considered to be old fashioned and invalid.

An Overemphasis on Signs and Wonders. But Jesus gave a severe warning to those who make signs and wonders the basis for their assessment of a preacher's ministry:

"Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, I never knew you. Away from me you evil-doers." (Matthew 7:22-23)

The disturbing fact emerging from these words is that it is possible to be part of the signs and wonders roadshow, cast out demons, heal the sick and perform miracles, but not be a Christian.

4. Hero Worship. For example, Kenneth Hagin *desires* to be a prophet (and supports his desire by claiming to personally see Jesus, etc.).

5. Insecurity. It is a nice comfort to be promised health, wealth and prosperity when everything appears to be against you. The devil acts in a similar fashion by catching us at our weakest points at our weakest moments.

6. Triumphalism. There is a tendency in some churches to emphasise the exaltation of Jesus and to neglect His humiliation, suffering and death... such an imbalance can lead to triumphalism. 'Authority', 'Triumph', 'Victory' and 'Reign' become key words in their vocabulary. The more costly aspects of the Christian life, such as discipleship, discipline, obedience and suffering, are forgotten... In such an atmosphere prosperity teaching can easily take root and flourish.

7. A Subtle Appeal to Covetousness. The 'gospel of prosperity' is perfectly adapted to the

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Western world. To be healthy and to accumulate possessions is supposed to be evidence of the 'blessing of God'. The underlying assumption, even if denied, is all too obvious: the rich are rich because of God's favour and the poor are poor because of sin and unbelief. This is cold comfort for the Christians of Ethiopia and similar countries who have been ruined by prolonged internal wars and consequent famine and disease or, for Believers suffering in communist countries. Prosperity theology insults the poor and the persecuted.

Respond, or Not?

What should be our response to all this? There are two possible responses the Church can have to prosperity teaching. The first is peaceful co-existence and the second, exclusion.

Peaceful Co-Existence

"This approach is usually adopted by a leadership who are either theologically uninformed or who believe we can derive benefit from all aspects of 'Christian' teaching, even those which are heretical and dangerous." (P.140)

(In other words, a 'softly-softly, don't rock the boat or status-quo' approach!)

Exclusion

The author (Brandon) and this writer agree with this approach and would mention that a minister who took this action

"spared the church from a severe period of turmoil and disunity"

"Paul didn't take the soft approach when confronted by false teaching. To argue and divide over peripheral doctrinal issues is not to be encouraged, but to exercise discipline when the cardinal truths of the Gospel are challenged is imperative... Failure to discipline as a leader is an abuse of one's calling. He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it (Titus 1:9). " (P.141)

Is it a Cult?

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"This is difficult to answer. Unlike modern cults, it has no outstanding leader but a diversified fellowship... The most influential teachers in the movement, however, have a theology which bears all the characteristics of a cult. Much of its teaching is based on visions, revelations and first-hand encounters with Christ." (P.142)

The main points of this teaching are as follows (Pp 143-144):

- 1. A New Theology of Creation:** God created the world out of faith.
- 2. A New Theology of Man:** Man was created to govern the earth by positive confession. He has been given the lease of earth for 6,000 years.
- 3. A New Theology of Original Sin:** The original sin of both Satan and Adam is related to negative confession. The tongue is responsible for much of the chaos and evil on earth.
- 4. A New Theology of the Sovereignty of God:** God was excluded from earth by Man's disobedience. Only a human being has the legal right to govern earth. God can govern the planet only with the co-operation of Man.
- 5. A New Theology of the Abrahamic Covenant:** God was permitted to return to earth through Abraham's obedience and co-operation.
- 6. A New Christology:** Christ emptied Himself of His divine power in order to become Man. This view is called 'Kenotic Christology'.
- 7. A New Theology of Atonement:** Christ received a Satanic, evil nature and died spiritually. His blood has little significance because he redeemed the world in hell. After three days as Satan's prisoner, Jesus was 'born again' and ascended to the Father. Healing, wealth and long life are guaranteed in the atonement.

The Health, Wealth and Prosperity Movement

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8. A New Theology of Salvation: There can be no faith without confession. Justification is not by faith alone but by faith and words. Faith is considered to be a force rather than a dynamic attitude of trust and commitment. Human circumstances are not controlled by a sovereign God but through positive confession.

9. A New Eschatology: (The theology of the Last Days)... 6,000 years will elapse before the return of Christ.

So, is this teaching a cult? The list above shows some of the major discrepancies. The movement certainly contains the seeds of major heresies. This writer would certainly refer to it as a cult.

"To adopt a 'head in the sand' approach to the question and hope it will go away is irresponsible. It is the duty of informed leadership to make a decision." (P.144)

So - what will YOU, as a Christian, do about it? What about you who are pastors and preachers? Do not ignore it, for it will not go away.

(2016 note: This movement is still with us and far worse).

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