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Toxic Television: A Biblical Answer to the Prosperity Gospel, Part 1
Scripture: Selected Scriptures
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PHIL: Hi, I'm Phil Johnson, Executive Director of Grace To You and I'm in the studio today with John MacArthur, our pastor. And, John, we want to talk today about a series of articles you've been writing that we posted on the Grace To You blog. It's a critique of the current state of religious television and it's shaping up to be extended expose of charlatans and faith healers who right now are all over the religious networks on television.

Let me just read to you, this is the opening sentence you wrote in the first article on the subject. You said, "Somebody needs to say this plainly. The faith healers and health and wealth preachers who dominate religious television are shameless frauds."

Tell us what happened recently to get you so exercised about this subject and then I want to go through some of the things you've written and get you to elaborate for us even more.

JOHN: Well, Phil, as you know, back in the end of the summer I faced a surgery to replace my right knee, so I went into surgery. There were some complications that have now been resolved, but it kept me sort of flat on my back and I was months like that, several months, and going through therapy but unable to do my normal duties. So while I was stuck very often watching television, I often couldn't get into a configuration where I could read a book and take notes, which I like to do, so I wound up watching Christian television and I was continually horrified. And my anger over what I was seeing escalated day after day, after day and eventually I had more pain in my brain than I had in my knee. And it was that kind of pain that caused me to come to you and say, "Look, this is going on every day and maybe we didn't know this, maybe we didn't understand this but it is absolutely everywhere on Christian television. I guess the common name for this is The Prosperity Gospel. It's the...the sale's pitch is, "You give me your money...me the evangelist, me the preacher...and you'll get rich." And the truth is, you give him your money and you'll get poor and he'll get really rich. And it's a Ponzi scheme and I saw it everywhere and no critique of it, no analysis of it, no evaluation, no exposure, to expose of it at all. It's as if it's benign when in fact it's toxic and deadly. And even from the standpoint of the world, the average non-Christian that would turn that on...that is a good reason not to buy into Christianity. That is maybe the best reason.

If I was a non-Christian, I would say, "That is so obviously a scam, that is so obviously phony, why would anybody have anything to do with that? It is so counterproductive to the proclamation of the true gospel.

So, you've got the charlatans, the frauds, people who literally divest the weak, the poor, the sick, the desperate of their money to make them rich and do it in the name of Jesus.

PHIL: So it not only corrupts the gospel, it inoculates people against the true gospel.

JOHN: Well I think it offends them. I think people must conclude...look, the only Christianity people know who aren't Christians is what's out there and they're not likely to go to a church and make an evaluation there. But if they did, they might go to a church and who knows what they would experience and they would walk out and say, "Well, that's one church, I bet other churches are different.

But if you turn on Christian television and you're looking, let's say, at three networks and they all have fifteen of these phony evangelists, you're going to say, "They're all like this."

PHIL: And that's no exaggeration. We get, I think, six or seven religious networks on the service I subscribe to and at least four of them are filled with prosperity preachers, one of them is a Mormon channel and another is a Roman Catholic channel. Finding the gospel in that mix is very difficult.

JOHN: You know, and if you did find the gospel in the mix, you would think that even that had a corrupt ulterior motive, that there was a hook in there somewhere...

PHIL: Yeah.

JOHN: Because everything else is so blatant.

PHIL: Yeah. Now let me back up because you said that nobody is making a critique of this and the fact is, there are critiques out there and you wrote one of the best twenty years ago in Charismatic Chaos.

JOHN: Yeah, that's a book. But what I meant by that is, on the air...

PHIL: Yeah.

JOHN: Nobody critiques the stuff that's on the same station. Whoever manages the station, and very often these Christian stations feature a lot of their time with the station owner and the station mogul sitting there and promoting the station and telling the listeners about the station. They don't critique it and they don't allow another broadcaster to dismantle that. They're not going to do that. They're not going to...if you're a channel that Benny Hinn is on, do you think they're going to play the tape when you send them the tape that tells the truth about Benny Hinn? They're not going to play that. So that's what I mean by that. In that environment, nobody is allowed to critique it, nobody will step up and do

that.

PHIL: But, my point is partly that this has been as concern of yours and a consistent message of yours for years. The first John MacArthur book I ever read, probably about 35 years ago, was your book The Charismatics, which I thought was so crisp and straightforward and it included a critique of the prosperity gospel.

JOHN: You know, 35 years ago, I didn't know as much as I know now, but any Christian who knew anything that was in the Bible would know that the Charismatic Movement was not a biblical movement. And at the very outset, I could see the potential of this, that's why I wrote The Charismatics, I could see where this was going to go. If evangelicals ever let them in, if we ever threw the door open and fully embraced the Charismatic Movement, I could see that it would devastate the evangelical church.

And here's the reason. It is so errant biblically, it is so off biblically, it so misrepresents the Bible, it's so experienced based, it is so weak theologically, it is so unbiblical theologically that the only basis on which evangelicalism could embrace it would be to make true faithful biblical interpretation and sound doctrine the non-issue. And that is exactly what has happened.

Once evangelicalism opened up its doors and engulfed the Charismatic Movement, they could no longer make sound doctrine accurate biblical interpretation the byword of evangelicalism because it would blow them right back out again. And they demanded to be loved and accepted as brothers in Christ.

And, Phil, when I wrote those recent blogs that we put on, Paul Crouch, who owns the Trinity Network which is the biggest of all Christian networks, wrote me a letter and basically said, "How can you treat your Christian brother like this? Where is the unity? How can you do this? I'm just a brother out there trying to serve the Lord just like you." That has been the hue and cry since the very beginning.

PHIL: I saw that letter and he also included, this shocked me more than the letter itself, he included letters of endorsement from men who you would think know better.

JOHN: Yeah. You know, I told you at the time that they have enough...they have enough affirmation from important evangelical people, they feed on that. They hang on that. He didn't even want to deal with it biblically. It wasn't even an attempt to deal with it biblically. There never has been. There can't be. They don't deal with things that way. They just call into question your love and your interest in the unity of the church and the unity of Christ. And literally, this has caused the Evangelical Movement to set doctrine aside, they literally have changed the nature of evangelicalism by being included. You can't bring up doctrine or you're going to have a fight.

PHIL: Yeah.

Let me press you a little bit on one point. You mentioned the Charismatic Movement and the dangers of Charismatic theology and it's true that all of the major prosperity gospel preachers are also Charismatics. And yet, at the same time, this is a bigger issue than just Charismatic theology. Some of the best critiques of prosperity gospel heresy have come from Charismatic sources. But why is it that this...this heresy, really, it's rank heresy, the prosperity gospel, first of all, tell us why it's heresy and then explain to us why is this so often found in connection with Charismatic teaching.

JOHN: The answer to that question comes from the words written by the Apostle Paul. The Apostle Paul described false teachers as doing...when he's writing to Timothy...is doing what they do for money. They make merchandise of you. That's what false teachers do. They've always done it. They make merchandise out of you, they turn you into a commodity to make them rich. In the words of Peter, "Don't ever minister for filthy lucre." The Bible points...and I'm talking Old Testament, and New Testament, the Bible points out in all cases of false teachers that they are not driven by love for God, they're not driven by the knowledge of God. They're not driven by the Spirit of God. They're driven by money. They want to be rich. So why do they develop a prosperity gospel? Not because they found it in the Bible, but because it makes them rich. There's so much money pouring in to these people because people will pay anything for healing, they're desperate. They'll pay anything for healing, even if you can't heal...even if you can't heal.

These people are so devious and so corrupt that they will become rich taking money from desperate people who think they're going to be healed. Do you think they believe they're healers? They don't believe that. Oral Roberts claims to have raised dead people. Do you think he really believes he raised dead people? You think Benny Hinn believes he can raise dead people? He knows he can't do that. It's a scam from beginning to end.

PHIL: If he knows that and makes the claim, then he's lying.

JOHN: Yeah. I don't think these people are Christians. I think they're false Christians who have found a way to become rich, and that was the issue with the Trinity Broadcasting Network, or any other network that features these people. You know, you have provided the location, the platform for all these false teachers. It's parallel to me to the situation in the temple in the ministry of Jesus, what Jesus said about the religious leaders of Israel was the most scathing language that ever came out of His mouth. He blistered them up one side and down the other side. And then He went into the temple and made a whip and just wreaked havoc there and said, "You've turned My Father's house, a house of prayer, into..what?..a den of...what?....

PHIL: Thieves.

JOHN: Thieves, that's what they are. They steal money. And, you know, I've taught on the widow who gave the two mites and, you know, that's how wicked that system was. There's a little widow, she's got two tiny pennies left and she thinks she can buy a blessing. So she dumps her two pennies, that's all she had, to go home and die. And immediately after...now we use that as an illustration of Christian giving. That is not an illustration of Christian giving, that's an illustration of a desperate woman being deceived by a false religious system. She dumps her coins in there and goes home to die. She had to be thinking, "Maybe God will provide something, I've given all my money." And it was at that moment that Jesus said, "Not one stone will be left upon another." Not only did He clean the inside of that thing with a whip, but He was going to bring it down to the ground and not two stones would be stacked on each other.

Any kind of religious system operation that functions like that, I think is ripe for the judgment of God.

PHIL: Now I was also going to ask you about Jude and 2 Peter, 2 Peter 2 and Jude are almost parallel passages.

JOHN: They are.

PHIL: Peter and Jude are describing false teachers and so much of that sounds exactly like it description of the prosperity preachers, including the emphasis on greed.

JOHN: Oh, it's all through there. And they're very parallel. One is in the future tense, the verbs are in the future tense and the other is in the present tense. One is saying, "They're coming, they're coming." And the other is saying, "They're here, they're here, they're here." But what marks them is that insatiable greed. So it is the worst kind of materialism and it prostitutes the intent of the gospel.

Another way to look at it is to say that the gospel doesn't promise people what they already want in their fallen flesh. What do you think the average guy on the street wants? If you just walk up to, you know, the man on the street and you say, "What do you want? I mean, give me really what you want."

"Well, I want health."

Oh, okay.

"I want success. I want wealth. I want to enjoy my life. I want this, I want that, I want a new house, I want a nice car, I want, want, want."

That's what the unregenerate person wants, that's not what the gospel offers. The gospel is not intended to give the unregenerate what they want. What the unregenerate want is really irrelevant to

the gospel. What the gospel promises to give you is what an unregenerate person doesn't want, deliverance from sin, holiness, the promise of heaven, godly friends, a worshiping life. People don't want that.

So what have they done? They've invented a gospel that gives people what they want and makes them rich at the same time.

PHIL: Humph. Actually promises people what they want but then doesn't deliver, right?

JOHN: No, can't deliver.

PHIL: Yeah.

JOHN: It's a Ponzi scheme.

PHIL: Yeah, you made that comparison, by the way, in your first article in this series at the Blog. That was an article entitled "A Colossal Fraud." People can look that up in the blog archives. But you made this point there, that it's basically a Ponzi scheme and it is a fraud that really is of greater magnitude than the fraud that brought down Wall Street a couple of years ago.

JOHN: Yeah, I think it's far worse than Bernie Madoff, what a perfect name, Bernie Made off with everybody's money. But, you know, those people had a lot of money and they had enough money to give to Bernie. What's worse about the other thing...I think there's more money involved in the fraud on Christian television than even Madoff if you added it all up through the years. But what makes this so much worse is, Bernie Madoff played on the rich. These guys play on the poor and the sick and the destitute and the desperate.

There was one guy on one night and I had to shake myself to see if I was really hearing what I was hearing, he said, "For the next two weeks there's a special movement of God and if you send me your money, your children will be saved but the offer's only good for two weeks."

PHIL: Wow!

JOHN: You know, people can easily be tricked by that, especially if they're desperate enough. And then if they read some letters from people who...whether the letters are real or not, you know...gain something from this. They watch the healing lines and they see people fall over and they make the conclusion, "Wow, must be the power of God." So they're drawn in. It's a very seductive thing.

PHIL: That's one of the questions I wanted to ask you. How do you account for the persistence of this fraud? If you just look back over the past 30 years, some of the biggest scandals in American life have involved these televangelists who have fallen, Ted Haggard, Jimmy Swaggart, Jim Bakker, and

you could go on and on. Some of them have been exposed by investigative reports as just frauds, people who lie deliberately in order to bilk people out of their money, and yet the industry is bigger than it's ever been. How do you account for that?

JOHN: You want to know why I think the thing perpetuates itself? Because Satan hasn't died. The counterfeit religion, he's disguised as an angel of light and his ministers are disguised as angels of light, Paul says. As long as there's Satan, there's going to be false religion. The thing that saddens me is that the church, quote/unquote, the evangelical church has accepted it. Who's rising up to say anything about it? Who's openly condemning it?

When I started writing those blogs and you've been a tremendous help in those, my goal was to say to the world, "This is not Christianity, this is not Christianity, this is a fraud."

I think the world knows that but they don't hear Christians say that. They wouldn't expect Christians to say that. They think we're in collusion with each other. If you just put it all together, people in America would think that Christians are people who are in this wacky prosperity gospel and are rabidly right wing politically. And that's how they would define us. There's nothing about the cross of Christ, the resurrection of Christ and the glorious gospel of grace, and there's nothing about humility and sacrifice and unselfishness. And so my hope was that we could stir up some action and that the world would pick it up.

I need to say this to the church, but I think even more so in the defense of true Christianity and the true gospel, it needs to be said to the world. So I'm going to take every opportunity that the Lord gives me, openly and publicly, to condemn this. I will take whatever platform comes and I'm ready to openly condemn this and to say this is not true Christianity, these are not Christian people. This is a satanic fraud and deception.

And, you know, it's the simple old story. Satan is a deceiver. And wherever you see a counterfeit, you know there's something of value or the counterfeit has no point. But you just have to get pass the counterfeit to the real thing, and that, to me, has been the saddest part of the Evangelical Movement today, it's unwillingness to unmask the deceivers in the midst.

PHIL: Yeah, that, I think, is one of the central and strongest points you've made in your Blog posts that it's really a mystery why it's so difficult to mobilize Bible believing Christians to stand up and say, "This is a fraud." In fact, I'm sure a lot of well meaning, genuine Christians actually give money to support this kind of stuff.

JOHN: Well sure they do. And then you've got pastors who shouldn't be pastors. They obviously don't know what the Bible teaches about these things. They don't examine the scriptures, or if they do, they don't have the conviction and the courage to speak up against it because they don't want to

be seen as unloving. They don't want to ruffle anybody's feathers.

And think about...think about the nature of the church. The market-driven, emerging, whatever you want to call it, church does not want to offend anyone, right?

PHIL: Right.

JOHN: I mean anyone. They don't want to offend anybody. So you're not going to go to your average seeker-friendly church and hear an expose of the phonies in the Prosperity Gospel. You're not going to hear that. You're not going to hear any sound doctrine either, so the people who are in the church aren't going to have the criteria to evaluate those kinds of things. And if the pastors don't rise up against this stuff, why should the people?

PHIL: It seems like the activist pastors are involved with other things...protesting abortions and so on.

JOHN: Oh yeah.
PHIL: Okay, back to Peter and Jude. Peter and Jude both talked about the greed that drives false teachers. The other thing that both of them speak about is the fleshliness of false religion. How often false religion goes hand in hand with the most gross kinds of immorality. And you see that same trend in televangelism, don't you?

JOHN: You absolutely do. First of all, they have nothing to restrain the flesh. There is no power in the flesh to restrain itself, right? Self-reformation, trying to be a good person does not work. It ultimately turns you into a greater devil. So there's nothing in the fallen person's heart, soul, mind that can defeat the flesh. Okay? So he's going to have to battle with the flesh. But why are you going to battle with the flesh if you are living this cushy plush indulgent life? You're indulging...you've crossed the Rubicon of true reformation, even if you're a non-believer when you said I'm going to divest all these destitute people of their money to make myself rich. I mean, you're so evil at that point that, you know, fornication or adultery or pornography or whatever other kind of corruption isn't some kind of far cry. But that's not an issue with them because that's not part of the deal...sanctification, holiness, it's not part of the deal. It's not what they preach, it's not what they lived, they haven't propagated it. They don't make it an issue. And you've got unregenerate teachers and pastors and unregenerate people coming together. That's not an environment in which holiness is going to flourish.

So you've got to come to terms with it, you've got to live with it. And, I mean, look at Tiger Woods. There's a classic illustration of a guy who wanted to appear moral but was so corrupt that when they finally discovered it, they can't even find the bottom of this hole that he lived. And, you know, all I could think about was false teachers. That's how they live.

This is nothing new, nothing shocking. What is shocking is the acceptance of this in the greater evangelical community. If we would draw the curtain on this, if evangelical leaders who know better would rise up and take a stand against this, you know, we could distance our self from it. You're not going to end it because that's how evil people are going to function. But we could rescue the true church out of this chaos.

PHIL: In your early article, you talked about the energy Evangelical Movement has put into making manifestos and declarations about social issues and things like that and how comparatively we've been silent on this issue of false teaching. What do you think the long-term effect of that is going to be on the Evangelical Movement?

JOHN: It's just going to continue to spell confusion, chaos in the face of the world. I think, as I've said, the big issue is the world, the non-converted people look at the media presentation of Christianity and they have to conclude that it is a scam. It's nothing short of criminal kind of conduct. I mean, that would be...if I were an unbeliever, I would just turn on television and if I were to watch say Benny Hinn and whoever comes after him, Robert Tilton or whoever else, Kenneth Hagan, Kenneth Copeland, on and on, I would say, "Who would believe this? Who would believe this guy could heal people? Who would believe he could sit in a studio and say there's somebody out there, you know, with a broken right arm, you're going to be healed? There's somebody out there with a tumor in your chest, you're going to be healed?" when he made the tape three months ago. Who's he talking to? Who would believe that?

And do I think they believe that? No. You know, when Benny Hinn claims to have raised dead people, do I think he really believes he raises dead people? He knows he doesn't raise dead people. Go to the hospital, go to the morgue, go to the next funeral. You want to be a hero, go to a funeral, raise the dead person.

So I think the biggest fallout of this is the tragic misrepresentation of Christianity that is out there in the world. The second great tragedy is the utter lack of understanding of sound doctrine in the church. If you have to accept this, then doctrine can't be an issue. If we're going to allow for this and embrace this and say these are great people, wonderful people, doctrine can't be an issue. And if doctrine isn't an issue, then you've got an immature uneducated, undiscerning church. And what happens with them? They can't discern, they're going to die of a thousand heresies.

PHIL: You know, among the side effects of the prosperity gospel, I think one of the worst, as you've pointed out, is that it focuses people on material prosperity and earthly success, physical health, things like that which are all earthly and temporal issues. And Scripture commands us not to focus on things like that but to set our affections on heavenly things.

Why don't you wrap this up for us, John, by giving us the biblical gospel in a nutshell and talk about how a true understanding of the gospel would focus our minds on things above?

JOHN: You know, I think those that are listening to this discussion probably understand the biblical gospel, but let's start where the biblical gospel starts. It doesn't offer health. It doesn't offer wealth. It doesn't offer success. It doesn't offer a better marriage. It doesn't promise you're going to get bumped up a few notches in your job. It doesn't promise you you're going to hit more home runs and straighten out your slice. The gospel doesn't promise any of these things. What the gospel promises is deliverance, salvation, rescue from the consequence of sin which is eternal damnation in hell. The gospel is not about rescuing you from an undesirable condition in life. It's not about...as I heard one prosperity preacher say, "If you send me your money, the Lord has told me you're going to find a perfect partner to marry."

This is ridiculous. The gospel is not about providing any material blessing or any material benefit, except that the Lord will provide what you need. My God shall supply all your needs according to His riches by Christ Jesus. It doesn't promise any more than that. And maybe what you need most is persecution and suffering and those kinds of things, they are there as well.

But what the gospel does promise is that you will be rescued permanently forever from the consequence of your sin which is eternal punishment in hell, the judgment of God. And as a temporary benefit, you will in this life be loved and cared for and provided for and granted peace and grace and mercy and joy and blessed fellowship in the church as a part of the gift of salvation. That's really the short-term benefit. The short-term benefit in this life are all the wonderful things that we enjoy...love, grace, peace, well the fruit of the Spirit, love, joy, peace, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance, all those things. All the benefits of being in the church, all the benefits of being led by the Spirit of God of having answered prayer, of having protection and guidance and all of that in this life. That's the short-term benefit of salvation. But the real benefit, the long-term benefit is eternal glory and the escape from eternal judgment.

And the way to this is not by sending your money to anybody, it is by repenting of your sin and embracing Jesus Christ as Lord and understanding that He died on the cross as a substitute in your place to pay the penalty for your sin and rose again as affirmation from God that He had accomplished that substitutionary work. That's the true gospel.

PHIL: Well thank you for that, John. And all of that serves as an excellent introduction for two hard-hitting messages you taught a while back that are very timely for what's happening these days. We're calling this two-part series Toxic Television: A Biblical Answer to the Prosperity Gospel.

And to our listeners, I know you're going to benefit from this. This is an in-depth, biblical analysis and critique of the issues John and I have just been discussing. It's going to give you biblical truth and, I think, help arm you to recognize and refute the outrageous practices that are going on in the name of Christ. And with that said, here's John MacArthur with Toxic Television: A Biblical Answer to the Prosperity Gospel.

The subject is the health, wealth, and prosperity gospel. We can title this message with a question; does God promise health and wealth?

One of the most unusual legacies of World War II has been what are known as the cargo cults of the South Pacific, anybody who lives in Australia or New Zealand knows about them. Many Aboriginal Island people ranging from northern Australia to Indonesia were first exposed to modern civilization through the allied armed forces during World War II.

The American military, in particular, often used these remote islands in the South Pacific as sites for temporary landing strips and supply depots. Some of you will even remember, and some of you will remember your history books and be reminded of the fact that we were all over the South Pacific on remote little islands with our landing strips and our supply depots so that we could keep our men in the air particularly. And so when Americans and other allies came to these little islands and met these Aboriginal Island people they came bringing cargo. They flew in there, created these airstrips so they could fly larger equipment in there, and then they brought in huge warehouses full of cargo and they left as quickly as they came when the war ended. The tribal people had absolutely no opportunity to learn the ways of civilization, but for a brief moment they saw high technology up close. Cargo planes would swoop in from the sky, they would land, they would unload their payload and then takeoff.

And natives who lived in the bush all of a sudden saw cigarette lighters that produced fire instantly and they believed it to be miraculous. They saw large machines come in and push trees down. They went all the way from not even having a wheel or a cart to seeing a Jeep, modern weaponry, refrigerators, radios, talking boxes, power tools, and many varieties of food in all kinds of cans and jars. They were fascinated by all of that and many of those tribal people concluded that the white men were gods. When the war was over and the troops were gone tribesmen built shrines to the cargo gods. Their tabernacles were perfect replicas of cargo planes, control towers and airplane hangers; they made them out of bamboo and woven material. These structures looked remarkably like the control towers and the plane hangers and the planes themselves, but they were really nonfunctional; all they were was shrines or temples to the cargo gods.

On some of those remote islands today the cargo cults still thrive. Some have personified all Americans in one deity and they call that deity Tom Navy. They pray for holy cargo from every airplane that flies over. They venerate religious relics like Zippo lighters, cameras, eyeglasses, ballpoint pens, nuts and bolts, and so on. As civilization has begun to penetrate some of these

cultures their fascination for cargo has not diminished. In fact, missionaries that have been sent to these areas where cargo cults have flourished receive a warm reception at first because the cargo cultist's view their arrival as the second coming of the cargo god, but they're looking for cargo not Gospel, and missionaries say they find it very difficult to penetrate the materialism that is the essence of the cargo cults.

The Charismatic movement has spawned its own variety of cargo cult. It is called the word faith movement; known otherwise as the faith Movement, known as the faith formula, known as the word of faith, hyperfaith, positive confession, name it and claim it, health, wealth, and prosperity teaching, all of those titles.

This subdivision of the Charismatic movement, listen, is easily as superstitious and materialistic as the cargo cults of the South Pacific. The Leaders of this word faith movement promise each believer financial prosperity and perfect health; anything less, they argue, is not God's will. And there are many people who chime in with this. The tentacles of this kind of theology has reached out far and wide. They have sought mainstream acceptance and they have managed to build relationships with people, who because of those relationships will not speak the truth against them, and so the thing flourishes like a wildfire. Of course it appeals to people because it demands nothing but faith; it doesn't demand holiness, it doesn't demand devotion or dedication, it only demands faith and it promises that if you have enough you'll get rich and healthy, that's a popular message.

I suppose we could say that virtually every false religion ever spawned by man worships a god whose function it is to deliver some kind of cargo, that is, human religion invariably invents gods for utilitarian reasons. They invent gods that give them what they want. They invent deities to serve them rather than the other way around. The word faith theology has turned Christianity into a system that is no different from the lowest human religions. It is a form of voodoo where God can be coerced, cajoled, manipulated, controlled, and exploited for the Christian's own ends.

I received a mailing sent out by one rather extreme word faith teacher named David Eppley. A brochure was included with a bar of prayer blessed soap, "We are going to wash away all bad luck, sickness, misfortunes, and evil. Yes, even that evil person you want out of your life. Jesus helped a man wash blindness from his eyes; I want to help you concerning hexes, vexes, home problems, love, happiness, and joy," the brochure said.

Inside the brochure were testimonies from people who had been blessed by that ministry. "Door opens to new job," said one. "An $80,000 dream comes true," said another. "Couldn't use my hand for 12 years," said another. Also inside was a personal letter from the pastor closing with a full page of instruction on how to use the soap. If you used it right it would bring you healing and money. "Now after you wash the poverty from your hands take out the largest bill or check you have. That $100, $50, or $20 bill, hold it in your clean hands and say, 'In Jesus' name I dedicate this gift to God's work

and expect a miracle return of money,'" and of course, your largest bill or check must be sent to David Eppley.

The last paragraph said, "Through this gift of discernment, I see someone sending a $25 offering and God is showing me a large check coming to them in the next short while I mean large; it looks like over $1,000. I know this sounds strange but you know me well enough to know that I have to obey God when He speaks." I'll be here waiting for your answer.

Frankly, that sounds more like Black Magic. Certainly a more outrageous example than most, but still it reflects a style that is typical of nearly all word faith ministries. If it was just plain hucksterism that would be bad enough. What corrupts so devastatingly is to tie this kind of con game into Christ.

Word faith teachers have corrupted the heart of New Testament Christianity. They have moved the believers' focus off sound doctrine, worship, service, sacrifice, and ministry; and they've shifted it instead to promised physical, financial, and material blessings. Those blessings are the cargo that God is supposed to deliver to those who know and follow the word faith formula.

Word faith writings, there are myriad of these, you can't even keep up with them. I got a new one this week that somebody sent me to try to help me to see the truth. It's a thick book and it's all about all of these word faith teachers. It has all their pictures on the front. There's almost no end to the proliferation of literature, but there - many trees are dying in this operation to be used for pulp and paper. Word faith articles carry titles like, "How to Write Your Own Ticket with God," "Godliness is Profitable," "The Laws of Prosperity," "God's Creative Power Will Work for You," "Releasing the Ability of God Through Prayer," "God's Formula for Success and Prosperity," "God's Master Key to Prosperity," and "Living in Divine Prosperity," and so it goes.

In word faith religion the believer uses God, whereas, the truth of Biblical Christianity is God uses the believer. Word faith theology sees the Holy Spirit as a power to be put to use for whatever the believer wants. The Bible teaches, however, that the Holy Spirit is a person who enables the believer to do whatever God wants. It is absolutely the opposite of Scripture. Many word faith teachers claim that Jesus was Born Again so that we might become little gods. Scripture, however, teaches that Jesus is God and it is we who must be born again.

Frankly, I have little or no tolerance for these deceptions, these corruptions of Scriptures and false claims of the word faith movement. I have absolutely no constraints on me to speak to this issue because I believe I am literally bound by my obligation as one called to minister the truth of God to so speak, because this defies everything I understand to be true about Scripture.

The movement closely resembles some of the destructive greed sects that ravaged the early church. Paul and other Apostles were not accommodating to or conciliatory with the false teachers who

propagated ideas like that in their day. They identified them as dangerous false teachers and urged Christians to avoid them. Paul warned Timothy, for example, about "Men of depraved mind and deprived of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain." This isn't anything new; Paul was dealing with those who thought godliness was a ticket for money.

Paul further said to Timothy, "But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith, and pierced themselves with many a pang but flee from these things."

These cults are generated; know this, out of a love for money. They develop a religion to accommodate their lust. Jude wrote of the greed mongers of his day, "Woe to them, for they have gone the way of Cain, and for pay they have rushed headlong into the error of Balaam, and perished in the rebellion of Korah. These men are those who are hidden reefs in your love feasts when they feast with you without fear, caring for themselves, clouds without water carried along by wind, autumn trees without fruit, doubly dead, uprooted, wild waves of the sea casting up their own shame like foam, wandering stars, for whom the black darkness has been reserved forever. They are grumblers, finding fault, following after their own lusts, they speak arrogantly, flattering people for the sake of gaining an advantage."

There is nothing I could say that would be as strong as that, and that's out of God's Word. Peter wrote, "But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves and many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned and in their greed they will exploit you with false words."

Peter went on to say, "Their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep. For speaking out arrogant words of vanity they entice by sensuality, that is, they entice you by the things you lust for, and they entice those who barely escape from the ones who live in error, promising them freedom while they themselves are slaves of corruption, for by what a man is overcome, by this he is enslaved."

You show me a person who preaches the money gospel, the money Message, the wealth message; I'll show you a person who has been corrupted by the love of money, that's what Peter's saying. Paul said covetousness is idolatry and Paul forbade the Ephesians to be partakers with anyone who brought either a message of immorality or a message of covetousness, Ephesians 5:5-7.

Now the question is how closely do modern word faith teachers resemble the greedy false teachers that the Apostles described? Is it fair to write the movement off as heretical? As sub-Christian? Well, I want us to look at that, and let's find out. In some ways I hesitate to label the word faith movement as

a cult only because its boundaries are as yet, somewhat hazy. Many sincere Christians hover around the periphery of the word faith teaching. It isn't a sort of bordered, identifiable cult, it's somewhat amorphous and it floats in an almost undefined way and bumps in and out of all kinds of groups of Christians, and so while on the one hand we can't say that everybody that it touches is cultic, all of the elements within it are cultic.

It has a distorted Christology that is a warped view of Christ. It has a distorted view of man, an exalted view of man. It has a theology built on human works. It has a process of sanctification that justifies greed. It has a belief that new revelation from within the group is unlocking secrets that have been hidden from the church for years. It believes that extra biblical human writings are inspired and authoritative, and it has an exclusivity that compels its adherents to shun any and every criticism of the movement. In fact, as you know, Benny Hinn said if anybody criticizes him he wants to get a Holy Ghost machine gun and blow their head off.

Without some exacting corrections in the movement's doctrinal foundations it will become a clearly identifiable cult, if it is not already so. It certainly is the closest thing on earth to the greed cults of the New Testament era which the apostles bluntly labeled heresy. Now I know that is a serious verdict, but I think there's ample evidence to bear it out. At almost every turn the word faith movement has tainted, twisted, garbled, misunderstood, corrupted, or obliterated the crucial doctrines of Christian faith. Let me help you with that by looking at some of them.

First of all, the word faith movement has the wrong god, it has the wrong god. I believe that it is fair to say that the god of the word faith movement is not the God of the Bible. Word faith teaching, in effect, listen to this, sets the individual believer, are you ready for this, above God, and turns God into Santa Claus, or a genie, or a valet who is there to do whatever the Christian tells Him. See, these word faith teachers are their own supreme authority.

Kenneth Hagan, who is patriarchal in this movement, wrote this booklet called, "How To Write Your Own Ticket With God." He tells about seeing a vision of Jesus and he says to Him, "Dear Lord, I have two sermons I preach concerning the woman who touched Your clothes and was healed when You were on earth. I received both of these sermons by inspiration." I am quoting him. Later on he quotes what Jesus told him in reply, Jesus said, "You're correct, My Spirit, the Holy Spirit, is endeavored to get another sermon into your spirit but you failed to pick it up. While I'm here I will do what you ask, I will give you that sermon outline, now get your pencil and paper and write it down.
That's what Jesus said to him, he says. Hagan claims to have received numerous visions as well as eight personal visitations from Jesus. Hagan has written, "The Lord Himself taught me about prosperity. I never read about it in a book, I got it directly from heaven." That claim is a lie, outright; I'll show you why a little later. You see they believe or they want every body else to believe that God is giving this information to them. Do you understand beloved that if you do not have a closed cannon, and if Scripture did not end with the Book of Revelation, if you believe that God is still giving

revelation there is no way to stop the flood.

Everybody is claiming God speaks to them. Fortunately, for the word faith people, God is telling them exactly what they want Him to say. They've created God in the image that they want Him to be. For example, they have no concept of God as sovereign. Scripture says in Psalm 103:19, "The Lord has established His throne in the heavens; and His sovereignty rules over all." What that simply means is, God's in charge of everybody and everything. God is the blessed and only sovereign, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, 1 Timothy 6:15, yet in the volumes of word faith material that I have read, I have not found one reference to the sovereignty of God, not one. The reason is clear; they don't believe He's sovereign.

Jesus, according to word faith teaching, has no authority on earth; it is all delegated to the church. Kenneth Hagan says this in his book entitled, "The Authority of the Believer," which by the way, has long sections which were taken verbatim from other books written by other people and he says he got them from God; it's just not true, but he says Jesus has no authority, He delegated it all to the church; we're in charge of God and we're in charge of Jesus.

Furthermore, word faith theology teaches that God is bound by spiritual laws that govern health and prosperity. God is bound by some laws, some principles. If we say the right words, or if we have the right faith, God is forced to respond however we determine. Robert Tilton claims that God has already committed to take His part in a covenant relationship with us. We can make whatever commitment or promise to Him we want, says Tilton, "Then we can tell God, on the authority of His Word, what we would like Him to do. That's right; you can actually tell God what you would like His part in the covenant to be."

In the word faith system God is not Lord of all, He can't work unless we release Him to work, He is dependent on human instruments, He is dependent on human faith, and above all, He has to act in response to human words to get His work done. Charles Capps has written, "It is in your power to release the ability of God." In other words, "God is stuck until we speak His orders," on the other hand, according to Charles Capps, "Fear activates the devil." If you succumb to fear, even doubting a little, he says, "You've moved God out of it. You have stopped God's ability immediately." Maybe it was just about to come into manifestation, but now you have established Satan's word in the earth, "That it is not getting any better, it is getting worse. You have established his word."

What he is saying is, if you have fear, you release the devil to work, if you have faith, you release God to work. So if you're afraid of Satan, you've bottled God and set Satan loose, my you're a powerful person. According to Charles Capps, in his book, "The Tongue A Creative Force," God has turned over His sovereignty, including, listen to this, His creative authority, to people.

Capps has written, "The Lord came unto me saying," just that's frightening and this is a quote, this is the Lord speaking to Charles Capps, "If men would believe me, long prayers are not necessary. Just speaking the Word will bring you what you desire. My creative power is given to man in word form. I have ceased for a time, from My work and have given man the book of My creative power. For it to be effective man must speak it in faith Jesus spoke it when He was on earth and as it worked then, so it shall work now, but it must be spoken by the body. Man must rise up and have dominion over the power of evil by My words. It is my greatest desire that My people create a better life by the spoken word, for My word has not lost its power just because it has been spoken once. It is still equally as powerful today as when I said, 'Let there be light,' but for My word to be effective, men must speak it and that creative power will come forth performing that which is spoken in faith."

In other words, what he is stating is this; you have the ability, if you have enough faith, to create with your words. You want money? Create it with your faith filled words. You want healing? Create it with your faith filled words. And then on the other hand, why pray at all if your words have so much creative force? Why pray? What's there to ask for? You really come up with a denial that you need to seek anything from God; after all, God has given the sovereignty to you, He's yielded up His creative power to you, it's not His word anymore, it was His word the first time, it's your word now. Speak it into existence, you don't need Him, you're sovereign.

Another of their teachers, Norville Hayes, says it is better to talk to your checkbook, talk to your disease, or talk to whatever predicament you're in than to turn to God in prayer. I'm quoting, "You aren't supposed to talk to Jesus about it, you're supposed to talk directly to the mountain in Jesus' Name, whatever the mountain is in your life. Stop talking to Jesus about it, stop talking to anybody else about it, speak to the mountain itself in Jesus' Name. Don't say, "Oh God, help me, remove this sickness from me," say, "Flu, I'm not going to let you come into my body. Go from me in the name of Jesus. Nose, I tell you, stop running. Cough, I tell you to leave in Jesus' name." Say, "Cancer, you can't kill me, I will never die of cancer in Jesus' name." I'm quoting him further, "Do you have a financial mountain in your life? Start talking to your money. Tell your checkbook to line up with God's word. Talk to your business, command customers to come into your business and spend their money there. Talk to the mountain."

You laugh at this, and I understand that, but there are a lot of people who don't laugh at this, they're believing this. Norville Hayes has several publications and one of them titled "Putting Your Angels to Work," which indicates that you're not only sovereign over this world but you're sovereign over the angelic world as well. Hayes also teaches that believers can exercise dominion over the angels, "Since angels are ministering spirits sent to minister to and for Christians," he reasons, "We can learn how to put them into action on our behalf. We believers ought to be keeping those angelic creatures busy. We ought to have them working for us all of the time."

So I think it's fair to say that word faith theology denies the sovereignty of God, removes the need to pray to God for any relief from burdens or needs and gives the Christian himself both dominion and creative power. In my judgment it is human pride at its ugliest. Worse, it is idolatry and the new idol is self, and God is dethroned. To follow this wrong God concept a little further, the word faith movement teaches that when you become a Christian you become part of a race of little gods. Kenneth Copeland has explicitly stated what many word faith teachers more subtly imply.

This is what Kenneth Copeland writes, "He imparted in you, when you were born again," Peter said it just as plain he said; "We are partakers of the divine nature. That nature is life eternal in absolute perfection, and that was imparted, injected into your spiritman and you have that imparted into you by God just the same as you imparted into your child the nature of humanity. That child wasn't born a whale, he was born a human, isn't that true? Well now, you don't have a human do you? You are one. And you don't have a god in you, you are one."

Copeland teaches that Adam was created in the god class; that is, Adam was a reproduction of God. Listen to what he says, "He was not subordinate to God, Adam was walking as a god. What he said went, what he did counted, and when he bowed his knee to Satan and put Satan up above him then there wasn't anything God could do about it because a god had placed Satan there. Adam, remember, was created in the god class, but when he committed high treason he fell below the god class."

On the cross, according to Copeland, Jesus won the right for believers to be born again back into the god class. Adam was created, not subordinate to God, but as a god, he lost it, and in Christ we are taken back to the god class. In saying that, Copeland believes that Jesus, "Won healing, He won deliverance; He won financial prosperity, mental prosperity, physical prosperity, family prosperity. He said He'd meet my needs according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus, and I'm walking around and saying, 'yes, my needs are met according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.' Glory to God, I'm covenanting to the need meter, I'm covenanting to the I AM, Hallelujah, and I say this with all respect so that it don't upset you too bad, but I say it anyway; when I read in the Bible where He says I am I just smile and say yes, I am too."

That is so blasphemous it ought to make every true child of God cringe, yet it is typical of word faith teaching. For any human being to call himself the I am, Yahweh, the eternal saving sovereign God is blasphemy. In the face of criticism for some of his statements about the deity of the believer, Copeland appeared with Paul and Jan Crouch on Trinity Broadcasting Network's program "Praise the Lord!" and he was there to defend his teaching.

This is the following conversation that ensued, Paul Crouch said; God doesn't even draw a distinction between Himself and us. Kenneth Copeland said, never, never, you never can do that in a covenant relationship. Paul Crouch, do you know what else that has settled then tonight? This hue and cry and

controversy that has been spawned by the devil to try and bring dissension within the Body of Christ that we are gods, I am a little god. Kenneth Copeland, yes, yes. Jan Crouch, absolutely, He gave us His name. Kenneth Copeland, the reason we are. Paul Crouch, I have His name, I'm one with Him, I'm in covenant relations, I am a little god, critics be gone. Kenneth Copeland, you are anything that He is. Paul Crouch, yes.

Paul Crouch, head and on air host of Trinity Broadcasting Network and therefore one of the most powerful influential people in the religious broadcasting today, has reaffirmed repeatedly his commitment to the little gods doctrine of word faith, quoting him,
"That new creation that comes in new birth is created in His image. It is joined then with Jesus Christ. Is that correct? So in that sense, I saw this many years ago, whatever that union is that unites Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, He says, 'Father, I want them to be one with Me, even as You and I are one in us,' so apparently what He does He opens up that union of the very Godhead and brings us into it."

We become part of the Trinity in that view. Other word faith teachers have reiterated the heresy. Charles Capps writes, "I have heard people say, those who confess God's Word and say the promises of God over and over are just trying to act like God." Yes, that's exactly what we are trying to do, act as God would in a similar situation. What did He do? He spoke the thing desired.

Earl Paulk, another of them wrote, "Until we comprehend that we are little gods and we begin to act like little gods, we cannot manifest the Kingdom of God." Robert Tilton also calls the believer, "A god kind of creature designed to be as a god in this world."

Benny Hinn adds, "The new creation is created after God in righteousness and true holiness. The new man is after God, like God, godlike, complete in Jesus Christ. The new creation is just like God. May I say it like this, 'You are a little god on earth running around.'"

And then Hinn responded to criticism of such teaching this way, he said, "Now are you ready for some real revelation knowledge? Ok, now watch this. He laid aside His divine form so one day I would be clothed on earth with the divine form. Kenneth Hagan has a teaching; a lot of people have problems with it, yet it is absolute truth. Kenneth Copeland has a teaching, many Christians have put holes in it, but it's divine truth. Hagan and Copeland say, "You are god, you are gods." "Oh, I can't be God! Hold it!" Let's bring balance to this teaching. The balance is being taught by Hagan; it's those who repeat him that mess it up. The balance is being taught by Copeland, who's my dear friend, but it's those who repeat what he says that are messing it up. You see there brother, when Jesus was on earth, the Bible says "He first disrobed Himself of the divine form. He, the limitless God, became a man that we men may become as He is."

You'll notice in this that they land on the verses that indicate that we enter in and participate in some of the things that are true about God, but they take it to the extreme where we become God. We do

participate in the love of God, don't we? In the righteousness of God, and enjoy the grace of God, but are not God. Hagan says, "If we ever wake up and realize who we are we'll start doing the work that we're supposed to do, because the church hasn't realized yet that they are Christ, that's who they are, they are Christ."

Now we're not only God, we're Christ. Thus, have the word faith teachers agreed to depose God and put us in His place. From that basic error flow all the fallacies. Why do they teach that health and prosperity are every Christian's divine right? Because we're God, we deserve it. Right? If I'm God I deserve prosperity. Why do they teach that a believer's words have creative and determinative force? Because in their system we're God, and God could speak things into creation, and we're God so we can speak them into creation. They have bought Satan's original lie. The serpent said to the woman, "You surely shall not die, for God knows that in the day you eat from this fruit, your eyes will be opened and you will be like God." That was a lie. Man will never be like God. We will be a glorified man, not God. The idea that man can be like God is and always has been the satanic lie. It was the very lie - listen to this, brought the devil himself down. He said, "I will be like God."

Two proof texts are often used by the word faith teachers to support their teaching. In Psalm, you need to listen to this; this is their case here, in Psalm 82:6 God says to the rulers of earth, "You are gods and all of you are sons of the Most High." They quote that all of the time, Psalm 82:6, you might want to turn to it, and we'll close with just a look at the two texts they use. Psalm 82:6, God says to the rulers of earth, "You are gods; and all of you are sons of the Most High," and so they say, "See, God says we're gods!"

A simple reading of the Psalm however, says something very, very, different than that. If you look at the Psalm it will reveal to you that those words were spoken to ungodly rulers, who were on the brink of judgment, ungodly rulers on the brink of judgment. Look at verse 7, they never want to read verse 7, "Nevertheless, you will die like men; and fall like any one of the princes. Arise, O God, judge the earth." What is this? There's a note of irony. God looks at these rulers and they have been rendering unjust judgments.

Back in verse 2 they have been judging unjustly, they have been showing partiality to the wicked. They have been, rather, doing injustice than justice and he says, "Look, in your own eyes you think you're gods, but you're going to die like," what? "Men." How could you ever rip that sixth verse out of that context and make it an affirmation that a Christian has become a god? Far from confirming their godhood, God is condemning them for thinking they were gods.

Word faith teachers will immediately turn to their other favorite proof text, John 10:33-34. Guess what? This is where Jesus quotes Psalm 82:6, so if you understand Psalm 82:6 you don't have a problem understanding John 10. The Jews answered Him, "For a good work we do not stone you, but for blasphemy and because you being a man make yourself out to be God." Then Jesus answered

them, "Has it not been written in your law, I said you are gods." Don't fail to notice Jesus' purpose for choosing that verse. It would have been a very familiar one to the Scribes and Pharisees. They would have understood that that verse was an condemnation of wicked rulers, and Jesus is simply echoing the irony of the original Psalm.

Walter Martin wrote an excellent comment on this, he said, "Jesus mocks the people as if to say, 'You all think you're gods yourselves. What's one more god among you?'" Oh, the irony. You're going to stone me for claiming to be God, you're all claiming the same thing, what's one more god? The sarcasm.

Walter Martin says, "Irony is used to provoke us, not to inform us. It is not a basis for building a theology." Further he says, "It is also pertinent to an understanding of John 10 that we remember that Satan is called the 'ruler of this world' by no less an authority than the Lord Jesus Christ, and Paul reinforces this by calling the 'god of this age.' We can make a god out of anything money, power, status, position, sex, patriotism, family, or as in Lucifer's case, an angel. We can be our own god; but to call something deity or to worship it, or to treat it as divine is quite another thing, then it's being by nature and in essence deity. Jesus is not calling them 'God' in the true sense; He is saying you have made a god out of yourselves just like the people in Psalm 82 who felt the blast of God's judgment. God said to the rebellious Israelites in Isaiah 29:16, 'You turn things around.' Shall the potter be considered equal with the clay,'" Does the clay think it is equal to the potter? According to the word faith movement what's the answer? Yes, if not superior. They have the wrong god.

Let’s bow in prayer:

Father, even as we talk about these things we are thrown almost into disbelief, not because we're not used to error but we're not used to error being received by people who say they belong to the truth. We are shocked that so many Christians who would affirm their belief in the truth will identify with the terrible heresies of this movement. We feel like Evangelical Christianity has become absolutely undefinable, it is so amorphous it has no boundaries, it is inexplicable. We almost feel like we have to pull out of the whole thing and start all over again. Lord, so many are confused, so many led astray, we just pray that somehow Your truth will reach them and that they will worship You as the sovereign God and not turn You into their valet, but fall on their face in Your presence and plead for the privilege to suffer if need be for Your sake, sickness, poverty, or death, if You so will. That like the Apostle Paul they would rejoice to suffer, they would be thankful for persecutions, distresses, deprivation, if it's Your will because You are sovereign.

Father, help us to know that we are at best men and no more. Men who have been touched with the transforming grace of Christ. Men in whom the Holy Spirit lives, but we are men and no more, redeemed men and as men we must be humbled before God. We grieve Father, that You have been so dishonored, so humiliated that such a terrible reproach has come on Your Holy Name from those

who teach and believe such foolish things, and we ask that You would be exalted and bring a halt to this degrading teaching for the Savior's sake we ask, Amen.

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