

HAS GOD PROMISED HEALTH AND WEALTH TO CHRISTIANS?

1 Timothy 6:6-10

We've dealt with some difficult subjects the last several messages. Though they're controversial, they are areas in which we must take our stand. I am trying to deal with these issues in a scholarly manner, and from a heart of love.

Although we never want to deliberately offend anyone if at all possible, if we do offend someone, we want them to be offended by our position, not our disposition. "Don't kill the messenger!" I'm just delivering the mail.

Today, I going to mention some names, some of which you surely know. I do this not as a personal attack against them, because I'm sure they are some good, and sincere people. Rather, I do it to protect our church from false doctrine...a task which is very difficult to do without using direct quotes from sermons and books of those we will mention.

Name some cults for me: (mormon/jw's/moonies/etc.) Ever heard of the Cargo cult? This scarcely known cult thrives among the Aboriginal island peoples of the south pacific. Let me tell about you one of the most unusual legacies of WWII:

During WWII, the peoples of the south pacific islands were first exposed to modern civilization thru the allied forces which landed there. The American military would often use these islands as temporary landing strips. White men, bearing precious cargo would often land, just long enough to unload the cargo, and then leave as quickly as they came. These huge cargo planes would swoop down, leave their payload, and then take off again. For the first time, the natives were exposed to such things as cigarette lighters which could produce fire instantly, machines which could push back an entire forest in a matter of hours, making room for a landing strip, Jeeps that could travel at speeds they never imagined, modern weaponry, radios, refrigerators, power tools...these natives were so fascinated with this cargo, that they concluded the men who brought the cargo must be gods!

With the end of the war, the military abandoned the airbases and stopped dropping cargo. In response, charismatic individuals developed cults among remote Melanesian populations that promised to bestow on their followers deliveries of food, arms, Jeeps, etc. The cult leaders explained that the cargo would be gifts from their own ancestors, or other sources, as had occurred with the outsider armies. In attempts to get cargo to fall by parachute or land in planes or ships again, islanders imitated the same practices they had seen the soldiers, sailors, and airmen use. Cult behaviors usually involved mimicking the day to day activities and dress styles of US soldiers, such as performing parade ground drills with wooden or salvaged rifles.¹ The islanders carved headphones from wood and wore them while sitting in fabricated control towers.

They waved the landing signals while standing on the runways. They lit signal fires and torches to light up runways and lighthouses.

They built life-size replicas of airplanes out of straw and cut new military-style landing strips out of the jungle, hoping to attract more airplanes. These tribesmen built shrines to their “cargo gods”. Incredible! Their shrines were perfect replicas of cargo planes and hangars, all made of bamboo!

The cult members thought that the foreigners had some special connection to the gods and ancestors of the natives, who were the only beings powerful enough to produce such riches

There are still members of the cargo cult in existence today, in some of the more remote of those islands. Today’s cargo cult has personified all Americans into one god, and on the island of Tanna they call their god “Tom Navy”. And every day they pray to Tom Navy, to send more cargo. They especially like ball point pens, lighters, cameras, and nuts and bolts.

Modern day missionaries have been sent to the cargo cults, and at first they received a warm welcome...and they were viewed as somewhat of a 2nd coming, of the cargo gods. But when they realized that these missionaries were coming with another gospel, and not more cargo, they utterly rejected them. The missionaries will tell you that it is nigh unto impossible to break thru the materialism and the greed, which is the very basis of their religion.

There is another group of people in America today, preaching and teaching in the name of Jesus Christ, but I believe they are just as superstitious and materialistic as the cargo cults of the south pacific. **They preach the health and wealth prosperity gospel, instead of “deny yourself, take up your cross daily, and follow Jesus.”**

I am not saying that all their leaders aren’t saved, and I’m not categorically calling the entire word and faith movement, as it is called, a cult. I’m sure there are many good and sincere people involved in this movement, who have simply been led astray by false theology. Unfortunately, many of them used to sit in churches like this one.

Churches which helped bring them to Christ.

Yes, the majority of the people who end up in the word and faith movement are wooed from churches like this one. That’s all the more reason to preach a little prevention!

Remember now, every religion that has ever been started by a man, worshipped a god whose function was to “deliver the cargo.” They are religions in which God exists to serve man, rather than the other way around, as the Bible teaches.

Here’s a list of titles of books their leaders have written:

“How to write your own ticket with God” “Godliness is profitable” “God’s creative power will work for you” “Releasing the ability of God” “God’s formula for success for you!” **They could all be titled: “How to get God to deliver the cargo”.**

In this religion, people use God. **My Bible says God uses people.**

This movement produces greed, materialism and covetousness in the hearts of many of God’s people. Regrettably, many of their leaders live in a lifestyle of luxury at the expense of their followers, and I have heard them justify it themselves saying, **I preach prosperity...I have to practice it!**

I have very little tolerance for this movement, but just as I’m about to feel guilty about my lack of patience with them, I remember that the Apostle Paul had less tolerance than me...

in I Timothy 6 He said, be careful of men who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. (What was the book title? Oh yeah, “Godliness is Profitable”.)

⁶ Now godliness with contentment is great gain. ⁷ For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. ⁸ And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. ⁹ But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. ¹⁰ For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.”

¹¹ But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness. ¹² Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

I believe the prosperity gospel has 4 big problems:

1. A wrong perception of God
2. A wrong perception of believers
3. A wrong perception of Jesus
4. A wrong perception of Biblical faith

Many Christians like to believe that this movement is fundamentally OK, just off on some tangents, but they’ve at least got the basics down, at least they preach the gospel! I’ve heard people say things like that...but here’s some fundamentals that form a cracked foundation for the entire movement:

1. Wrong perception of God

The god of this movement is not the God of the Bible. For it teaches that the believer is at least equal with God, and God is relegated to playing the role of a heavenly genie, a cosmic Santa Claus, just a big bel-hop. Because of their misconception of God, it has led to a misconception of the believer.

2. Wrong perception of the believer

The disciples of this movement are taught unequivocally to act like little gods.

Kenneth Copeland said, "Adam was created in the God class, he was not subordinate to God, even 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 above him, there wasn't anything God could do about it because a God (Adam) had placed Satan there. Adam remember, was created in the God class, and when he committed high treason, he fell below the God class."

According to Copeland, when Jesus died on the cross, He won the right for believers to once again be born again into the God class. Now the reason that you are guaranteed healing and prosperity is because you deserve it, you are a little God.

"He said He'd meet my needs, according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus" so far so good, right, he then continues to praise the Lord for meeting his needs, then continues... "and I say this with all respect, so I don't upset you too bad" (look out, sounds like he knows he's getting ready to come out with something unorthodox) "but I say it anyway, when I read the Bible where God says I Am, I just smile and say, Yes, I Am, Too!"

Ladies and Gentlemen, that is outright blasphemy. It is humanism, and I hope you cringed when you heard it! The Christian world did get upset by it, and in the face of all the criticism, Copeland went on TBN's Praise the Lord hour to defend his position. Here's the conversation that ensued...

Paul Crouch "God doesn't even draw a distinction between Himself and us."

Copeland "never, never...you never do that in a covenant relationship"

PC "do you know what else that settles tonight? This cry that this controversy, which has been spawned by the devil to try to bring dissention within the body of Christ, that we are Gods. I am a little God!" (so if you even question that, you're trying to bring dissention, you're spawned by the devil!)

Copeland "yes, yes,!"

Jan Crouch, "absolutely, He gave us His name"

PC "I have His name, I'm one of Him, I'm in covenant relations, I am a little God, critics be gone"

Copeland "you're anything that He is!"

PC “yes”

Paul Crouch reaffirmed his little God theory when he said on national TV, “that new creation that comes at the new birth is created in His image...and somehow the Father opens up the Godhead to let me in, it is now Father, Son, Holy Spirit, and me!”

Benny Hinn affirms this theory, “are you ready for some real revelation knowledge? (notice, it’s not biblical knowledge, it’s revelation knowledge...all the more reason to preach against extra-biblical revelation, for what it does is takes immature Christians who don’t know any better, and breaks down their defenses... “are you gonna argue with a man God talks to?”)

He continues, “He laid aside His divine form, so one day on earth I would be clothed with the divine form. Kenneth Hagan has a teaching, and a lot of people have problems with it. Kenneth Copeland has a teaching, and many Christians poke holes in it. They say, you are gods, you are gods, and people say, Oh, I can’t be God, hold it, let’s add balance to this teaching. When Jesus was on earth, the Bible says that first He disrobed himself of the divine form (we’ll deal with that in a minute). He became a man, that we may become as He is.”

No wonder they teach that we are entitled to health and wealth, because we are Gods!

They’ve bought into the original lie, listen to Gen. 3 ⁴ Then the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. ⁵ For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

Not only do they have a wrong perception of God, and thus, a wrong perception of the believer, but they have a wrong perception of

3. Jesus Christ

This movement says that Jesus gave up His deity when He came to earth. They twist and garble Phil. 2:7, “but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, *and* coming in the likeness of men.”

For 2000 years conservative Christianity has understood the teaching of that verse to be that Jesus laid aside His glory, not His deity. That He laid aside the privileges of His deity, not His deity altogether. Suddenly, this movement has reduced Jesus to nothing more than a spirit filled man.

K. Copeland wrote in “Believer’s Voice of Victory” magazine: “Why didn’t Jesus openly proclaim Himself as God during His 33 years on earth? For one single reason: He didn’t come to earth as God, He came as a man”

Remember, this movement preys upon the ignorant. These folks are not well-versed in the Bible at all...they shout Amen! to everything they hear preached, even that quote that Jesus didn't claim to be God.

Have they never read the gospels?

Jn. 8:56-58 "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw *it* and was glad." ⁵⁷ Then the Jews said to Him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?" ⁵⁸ Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM."

Copeland continued, "most Christians mistakenly believe that Jesus was able to work wonders and perform miracles and live above sin, because He had some divine powers that we don't have...thus they never really aspire to live like He lived. They don't realize that when Jesus came to earth, He voluntarily gave up that advantage...living His life not as God, but as a man. He had no innate, supernatural powers, no ability to perform miracles, until He was anointed by the Holy Spirit, as recorded in LK. 3:22. He ministered as a man filled with the Holy Spirit."

You see what he's trying to do? Put you and Jesus on the same level...thus you're entitled to whatever you want, esp. if you'll give him a percentage!

Folks, the Bible clearly teaches that when Jesus walked this earth, he was 100% God/100% Man, as much God, as if He'd not been man, as much man, as if He'd not been God. That's the miracle of the incarnation.

They not only say Jesus was just a spirit-filled man, they also teach that He was literally dragged into Hell for 3 days following His death on the cross. (explain)
What was Jesus' next to last statement on the cross (it is finished)
Where did Jesus tell the repentant thief He'd see him later that day (paradise)

Then they teach that while in Hell, Jesus had to be born again.

K. Copeland, "Jesus was the first man to ever be born from sin to righteousness...He was the pattern of a new race of men to come, glory to God, and you know what He did, the very first thing that this man did was to be re-born in hell. Jesus was the first person to ever be born again."

Hagan, "why did He have to be born again, because His spirit was estranged from God."

They not only elevate man to be God, but they even drag Jesus down to being just a man, evidently a sin laden man, who had to be born again. And ignorant people continue to heap to themselves teachers, who will say what they want to hear!

Wrong perception of God/themselves/Jesus, and finally

4. Wrong perception of Biblical faith (how a person is saved)

They promote superstition, not faith. Their faith is not submissive trust in the promises of God.

By their own definition, their faith is a law...much like the law of gravity. (Word and faith movement) The very name implies faith is more a matter of what we say, not what we trust in. It reduces faith to mere superstition. **“Believe it in your heart, say it with your mouth.”**

“you can have what you say” That’s why it’s **called name it and claim it**, or blab it and grab it. You can have what you want...health, wealth.

My Bible says that faith comes by the Word of God, not my words. True Biblical faith is faith in God and in HIS Word, not faith in myself, and my words.

Now, in order to bolster this mindset, they ridicule those who would pray according to God’s will, saying it’s just a cop out, in case it doesn’t happen.

Fred Price said, “Jesus said, according to your faith be it unto you, not according to God’s will” he’s poking fun of us.

Hagan said praying according to God’s will is not taught in the Bible, “it is unscriptural to pray, if it’s God’s will”

Has he read his Bible? Listen to what Scripture has to say about praying “according to God’s will.”

I John 5:14 “Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.”

James 4:13-16 ¹³ Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit”; ¹⁴ whereas you do not know what *will happen* tomorrow. For what *is* your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. ¹⁵ Instead you *ought* to say, “If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that.” ¹⁶ But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.”

In closing, what has this movement produced?

False doctrine, with sinners who are Gods, and God a man, who had to be born again,

and faith into superstition, and trust in MY words, more than in God's Word. It puts us on plane with God, and tells us not to pray to God asking for anything, but rather telling God how it's gonna be.

It promotes all kinds of crazy methods of proving your faith, so God will fly in the cargo.

Richard Roberts, "sow a seed on your MasterCard, Visa, or American Express...and then expect God to open the windows of heaven and pour you out a blessing." Go into debt on faith...and expect God to bless your presumption...I mean, faith!

Out of one side of their mouths the get-rich preachers say that the purpose of their ministry is to help people get out of debt, and help people prosper so they can give large sums of money to the spreading of the gospel. But out of the other side of their mouths they teach that we can have whatever material possessions we want, like a luxury home or a Rolls Royce.

Oral Roberts once mailed out bags of holy water from the river of life fountain at his university. To demonstrate how to use the holy water, he poured out a bag of it onto his wallet on TV.

Robert Tilton said, "being poor is a sin, when God promises prosperity...new house, new car, that's chicken feed. That's nothing compared to what God wants to do for you."

This movement has produced materialism, like the cargo cults, an attitude of "what's in it for me?" "what can God do for me today"

Luke 12:15 ¹⁵ And He said to them, "Take heed and beware of covetousness, ^[a] for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses."

Let's have a balance.

Prov. 30:7-9 ⁷ Two *things* I request of You (Deprive me not before I die): ⁸ Remove falsehood and lies far from me; Give me neither poverty nor riches—Feed me with the food allotted to me; ⁹ Lest I be full and deny *You*, And say, "Who is the Lord?" Or lest I be poor and steal, And profane the name of my God."

God's richest blessings could never fit into a wallet, or a safe deposit box. I feel like the richest man in the world!