

Kenneth Copeland's "Name It, Claim It" Heresy

How effective is "Religious" Television in spreading the Gospel? Is the "electronic church" a hindrance or a boost? Christian television ministries exist within the context of North American culture. Since TV is mainly for entertainment and for profits and not prophets The Gospel preached via this medium is often truncated to suit the audience. If a program depends solely on free will offerings by the audience, the content will be much more "crowd pleasing" than a broadcast supported by a church or a parachurch organization. Television also creates preachers with a devout and unquestioning audience. Independent TV "preachers" have even become "stars" and "celebrities." One such "star" is Kenneth Copeland (b.1937), who has been dubbed by *Time magazine* as "The exponent of the Faith message."

Background of Copeland

Kenneth Copeland grew up in West Texas. In 1962 he and his wife, Gloria, were converted to Christianity. In 1967 they moved from Fort Worth, Texas to Tulsa, Oklahoma, where Kenneth entered Oral Roberts University (ORU) to train for the ministry. He was hired by Roberts as a pilot for his crusade flights across the United States. While working for Roberts's crusades, he had his first opportunity to see and participate in the ministry of healing. Although Kenneth was enthusiastic about Oral Robert's ministry, he was even more impressed by independent Pentecostal teacher Kenneth Hagin and began to attend his seminars. He looks upon him as his "father in the faith." He also memorized Hagin's messages. Hagin Jr. writes that people got started because of his dad's ministry. "They'll even admit it. They have preached his sermons almost verbatim. Ken Copeland did"

After Kenneth dropped out of ORU, he returned to Fort Worth and founded the Kenneth Copeland Ministries, Inc. He and wife began holding meetings in Fort Worth and their work spread rapidly. In 1973 the Copelands started a periodical, *Believer's Voice of Victory*. By the mid-1980s, approximately 700,000 people were receiving it. They have also written a few books and circulated numerous tapes of their meetings, teaching sessions, and music. In 1976, in response to what they believed was God's command given in prayer, they began a radio ministry. They also began a television production. Copeland says that God "spoke" to him March 23, 1979, and gave him "a broadcasting ...commission" to expand into television. From there he advanced into the high-tech world of satellite communications. With offices in England, the Philippines, Australia, Canada, and Hong Kong, Copeland's organization can be truly regarded today as international in scope.

Kenneth Ernest Hagin Sr. (b.1919)

The Copelands were strongly influenced by Hagin, who was first a Baptist and later a pastor of the Assemblies of God. He held this position for ten years. He claims that in 1943 he had a special anointing by God to teach. In 1947 he gave up his pastorate and became a travelling evangelist. He claims that for fourteen years he had a series of eight visions of Jesus Christ. When Jesus appeared to him in 1950, Hagin says he was given a

special anointing to minister to the sick. Jesus told him that when he prayed for the sick, at times spiritual fire would jump from one of his hands to the other. This would be a sign that the person was possessed of a demon that needed exorcising.

In 1962 Hagin formed the Kenneth E. Hagin Evangelistic Association, now known as the Kenneth Hagin Ministries, Inc. and subsequently dropped his affiliation with the Assemblies of God. Hagin went on the radio with the "Faith Seminar of the Air," and began *The Word of Faith magazine* (1968). Beginning in the late 1970s, Hagin became one of the most vocal proponents of what became known as "faith" teaching. It centres on the idea that if Christians will, when praying for something, believe in their heart that they will receive it, and will confess the same with their mouth, God will give it to them. This teaching has been reduced to the popular phrase, "Name It, Claim It." In 1974 Hagin founded the Rhema Bible Training Center. Kenneth Copeland is one of its graduates. Hagin and his colleagues frequently have been referred to as the Positive Faith Movement. In 1980, the Assemblies of God passed an official statement denouncing this movement.

Hagin's theology may be best described as a unique blend of evangelical and charismatic theology, biblical literalism, and the teachings of New Thought/Christian Science as taught by E.W. Kenyon.

Essek William Kenyon (1867-1948)

Kenyon is the real father of the modern-day Faith movement. He was the founder of Bethel Bible Institute, an independent evangelist, and a prolific writer. He was not well known during his lifetime, though the Oneness Pentecostals widely used his book, *The Wonderful Name of Jesus*. Only in the 1980s did he gain wide notoriety through his influence on a number of Pentecostal ministers. Many of the phrases popularized by Hagin and the Copelands, such as "What I confess, I possess" were originally coined by him. The views espoused by Kenyon can be traced to his exposure to the metaphysical ideas he picked up while attending Emerson College of Oratory in Boston, a spawning ground for New Thought ideas. The major tenets of New Thought Movement are healing, prosperity, wealth, and happiness.

Copeland's Theology

Kenneth has a weird view of God. He believes that He is a being who "stands somewhere around 6'-2", 6'-3", that weighs somewhere in the neighborhood of a couple hundred pounds, or little better, [and] has a [hand] span of nine inches across." He bases this nonsense on Isaiah 40:12, which says that God "meted out heaven with the span." But this verse cannot be interpreted literally. The minute God is assigned physical qualities such as height and weight, He is not the God of the Scriptures. Jesus Himself said that God is Spirit (John 4:24).

Kenneth declares that God's reason for creating Adam was to reproduce Himself. Humans live on terms equal with God. They are even called little gods. Kenneth says, "You don't have a God in you. You are one."

Kenneth's view of the atonement is different from the one revealed in Scripture. He believes that Jesus became a sign of Satan when He was hanging on the cross. He also argues that our Lord's crucifixion was only the beginning of the work of redemption. He had to complete the work of redemption in hell. But how can anyone miss what the Lord said to the thief on the cross? Jesus did not say, "Today you will be with me in hell." He said, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43).

Angels play an important role in the theology of the Copelands. They claim that humans can command angels to their bidding. When they use the Word of God in the name of Jesus, the angels are even obligated to follow their command. Gloria writes, "Your last words either put the angels to work or force them to step back, bow their heads, and fold their hands. Your angels are waiting for you to give them words to bring to pass." On what do the Copelands' base their belief?

Faith in Faith.

The Copelands teach people to have faith in faith. Faith for them is a force. Kenneth declares, "Faith is a power force...it is this force of faith which makes the laws of the spirit world function." He even makes the amazing claim that "God cannot do anything for you apart from faith" because "faith is God's source of power." Without the force of faith, God has no power at all toward you." Faith activates God. Fear activates Satan. Kenneth argues that God is obligated to meet the believer's needs because of His Word. He claims that if you don't put God's Word to use, you are on the same level as the man who does not know that salvation is for him. This "name it, claim it" theology promises believers not only improved health but considerable wealth if they pray with necessary faith.

Healing

The Copelands have no room for suffering in their theology. Kenneth boasts that the rise of medical cost has not affected him and his wife: "We have learned to receive our healing from God." Gloria says that she heard through Kenneth Hagin that Jesus bore our sicknesses and carried our diseases and that by His stripes we are healed. Gloria and her husband declared that they didn't wait to get sick to believe God for healing. She states, "We decided to walk in divine health because we were healed 2,000 years ago when Jesus paid the price." Gloria even claims that believers don't have to be sick anymore. "Getting healed when you are sick is great," she says, "but staying healed - walking in divine health - is much greater." Satan is called the cause of illness. Gloria writes, "To walk in divine health you begin with a decision to no longer allow Satan to put sickness on you." The believer can create his own health. Kenneth says that it is up to the believer to decide whether or not you want to be healed. This is cruelty beyond comprehension. In the Copelands' view, when a believer continues to suffer he has only himself to blame.

Prosperity

Not only health but also wealth is the "divine right" of the believer. God's will is prosperity. Gloria states, "The Word of God simply reveals that lack and poverty are not in line with God's will for the obedient." Poverty is under the curse of the law. Since Jesus did not only

bear the curse of sickness but also the curse of poverty on the cross, there is no reason for the believer to live in poverty of any kind. Gloria says, "You can believe for divine prosperity just as you believe for divine health. You should refuse lack just as quickly as you refuse sickness." Kenneth argues, "You can have whatever you say." Decide on the amount of money you need. The believer is even told not to cheat himself. He must tell God how much he wants and he will get it since "God is not a skinflint. He is a giver." Gloria claims that God's success formula has never failed to produce. According to her, she and Kenneth have used their "name it, claim it," formula to receive healing, airplanes, houses, office buildings, equipment, clothes, food, and boats. The Copelands are also firm believers in the hundred-fold return, which has been a great source of income. They base it on Mark 10:29-30. Gloria says that the first thing the Lord made me to realize was how great the hundred-fold return really is. "You give \$1 for the Gospel's sake and \$100 belongs to you; give \$10 and receive \$1,000; give \$1,000 and receive \$100,000." This teaching is not Biblical, it is obscene. When I reviewed Gloria's book, *God's Will is Prosperity* (1978), we were still serving as missionaries in the Philippines. The members of our churches and mission stations were dirt poor by the standards of the world, but many of them lived close to the Lord and were rich in spirit. They lacked money but not faith.

Evaluation

The Copelands pander to the grass materialism of our consumer society. They affirm the idea that "God's kids" can acquire wealth without work and dollars without discipline. They focus people's hearts on the temporal and not the eternal. The Copelands have been criticized even by their own fellow charismatics as preaching and teaching materialism, and for "laying guilt trips" on their followers. If a believer is supposedly healed and later loses his healing, he is blamed for his own negative confession. It lets the Copelands off the hook every time. They are cultists who present "a different gospel-which is really no gospel at all" (Gal. 1: 6,7). They reduce the gospel of grace to a message of greed and works. Their view of faith is warped. In Scripture faith is never presented as a tool to manipulate God for our own selfish ends. In 1 Corinthians 13 the apostle Paul assigns primacy to love as the greatest of faith, hope, and love. (cf. John 13: 34-35). The Triune God must be the object of our faith and never of our ego wishes or selfish wants. Furthermore, faith does not always secure everything from God, but it does get from God everything He wants us to have. There is a fundamental difference. A key to the Copelands' views is their abuse of Scripture. Their whole theology is based on a biased selection of biblical passages, without due regard to their context. They also claim that the Holy Spirit has given them special illumination and then proceed to read their bias and peculiar views into the Scriptures.

Kenneth Copeland does not take criticism lightly. To dispute any of his teachings or practices is not distinguished from questioning God Himself. Kenneth. In his taped message Why All Not Healed, he has audacity to say that several people who criticized the ministry of Hagin and his own are "dead right today in an early grave because of it, and there's more than one of them got cancer." He also declared that those who do not accept his teaching have fallen for "a lie straight from the pit of hell!"

Conclusion

Should we be surprised by false teachers on radio and television such as the Copelands? According to the Bible, believers should be aware that false teachers will arise among the Christian fold (Acts 20:29; 2 Peter 2:1). This makes it imperative for us to test all things by Scripture as the Bereans did when they examined even the words of the apostle Paul (Acts 17:11). Especially in our post-Christian culture we must heed Scripture's repeated warning to stand on guard against false teachings (cf. Rom. 16: 17f.; 1 Tim. 1: 3f.).

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