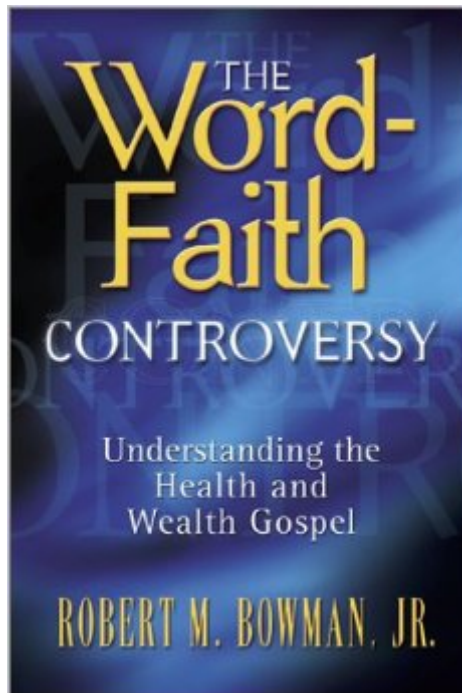


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The Word-Faith Controversy: Understanding The Health And Wealth Gospel



Synopsis

Is it God's will that believers be healthy, wealthy, and wise? Wise, definitely, but Robert M. Bowman questions those who teach a message of bodily health and financial prosperity through faith. In this balanced book, Bowman examines the word of faith movement by revealing the origins, teachers, and errors of this distortion of Christian doctrine. The faith healing and prosperity gospel aspects of the movement are what appeal to some and turn off others, causing a confusing and sometimes heated controversy. But the word of faith movement is, Bowman insists, "neither soundly orthodox nor thoroughly heretical." Using the Bible as his touchstone, Bowman helps readers sort through the controversy and distinguish acceptable Pentecostal teachings from distorted offshoots. He guides believers curious about the role of faith in healing and prosperity, and encourages charismatics to pursue a rich, mature, biblically sound Pentecostalism.

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Customer Reviews

This is the best critical analysis of the Word of Faith (or Word-Faith) movement to date. Bowman, a non-charismatic, shows an acute awareness of the pertinent issues and seems familiar with not only the primary literature and tapes of the Word-Faith proponents but also its critics and counter-critics (e.g., Bruno, DeArteaga, & Spencer). Contrary to the primary critics of the movement such as Hanegraaff, McConnell and Hunt, Bowman feels that the movement has its roots in the evangelical faith-cure movement of the late nineteenth century, not the metaphysical cults (New Thought, Christian Science, etc.). Nonetheless, he does qualify this by stating that "the possibility exists that

the evangelical faith-cure movement and early Pentecostalism were also influenced in some respects by meta-physical thought" (pg. 82), although he leaves this possibility relatively unexplored in the book. Interestingly, contemporary New Thought authors Anderson & Whitehouse, in their book "New Thought: A Practical American Spirituality" (1995), also note the similar interest in healing between their movement and the evangelical faith-cure movement and, like Bowman (but unlike some critics), recognize the differences in world views (pantheism vs. Christian theism). It is also worth noting that they state that most of the leaders of the major New Thought groups existing today came from Traditional Christian backgrounds which didn't meet their needs, especially for healing. Apparently both movements expanded their interests to include not only physical health but also overall well-being and success (including wealth). From the evangelical faith-cure movement came the 20th century's Pentecostal & Charismatic movements, which included a revival of supernatural charismatic gifts, including speaking in other tongues (unknown languages) by the Holy Spirit. Bowman considers E. W. Kenyon to be the grandfather, not father, of the Word-Faith (W-F) movement because he considers it to be essentially a Pentecostal movement since the W-F movement's primary "father", Kenneth Hagin, was Pentecostal, unlike Kenyon (but he also considers William Branham and Oral Roberts to be contributing "fathers" to the W-F movement in various ways). He also thinks that Hagin contributed certain doctrines to the movement that Kenyon didn't teach. Bowman thinks the W-F movement is an extreme Pentecostalism, or a Pentecostalism "at it's worst". One must keep in mind, however, that there are various definitions of what constitutes "Pentecostal" and "Charismatic". Technically, the former is applied strictly to those who believe that speaking in other tongues is the sole "initial evidence" of the Baptism in the Holy Spirit. In other words, if one doesn't speak in tongues, then one HASN'T been baptized in the Holy Spirit. This is the position of classical Pentecostal denominations such as the Assemblies of God (A/G), the largest Pentecostal denomination in the world. Those who reject this position but still believe that speaking in tongues is for today, along with the other charismatic gifts of the Spirit, are generally categorized as "Charismatic". Kenneth Hagin was once affiliated with the A/G, but left the denomination to become independent or non-denominational. Although Hagin is a classical Pentecostal, I personally don't think that the "initial evidence" position of Hagin is integral to the W-F movement & its theology. There are many in the W-F movement that are Charismatic, not Pentecostal. Bowman occasionally uses a broader definition of "Pentecostal" than the more technical definition related to the "initial evidence" position which he considers a "hard-line view" (pg. 62), rejected by such men as F. F. Bosworth, author of "Christ the Healer". Bowman considers the W-F views on healing and prosperity to be the least problematic aspects of their theology (pg.

11), but I tend to think that their distinctive theology was formulated to reinforce the movement's views on healing and prosperity. The doctrines of healing and prosperity as available in this life through "faith" are the "positive" motivating force of the movement regardless of the distinctive aberrant theology just as they are the thrust of the New Thought movement with its "positive" message regardless of its pantheism and/or panentheism. It is not surprising that the New Thought authors noted above consider Norman Vincent Peale and Robert Schuller as promoters of some of New Thought's ideas on positive/possibility thinking although neither Peale nor Schuller is a pantheist or even a Pentecostal or Charismatic.

Robert Bowman indicates that this book is the "culmination of about fifteen years of research, study, and dialogue." It shows. 'The Word-Faith Controversy' is a well-researched book that provides the reader with a balanced approach to the Word-Faith debate. I consider this to be the most significant critique of the Word-Faith movement published to-date. As in his other books, Robert Bowman Jr demonstrates his ability to present all sides of a complex issue with great clarity - as well as with gentleness and respect. In the process, he carefully documents why he considers the Word-Faith movement to be "neither soundly orthodox nor thoroughly heretical." Bowman also evaluates books that denounce the Word-Faith movement - books that have become standard works of reference on which many Christians have based their own views regarding the controversy. They include, for example, D.R. McConnell's "A Different Gospel," and Hank Hanegraaff's "Christianity in Crisis." If you have read these books on the Word-Faith movement, I highly recommend you read Bowman's book as well. (As the Bible says, "The first to present his case seems right, till another comes forward and questions him." - Proverbs 18:17 NIV) Because of Bowman's gentle, reasoned, and well-documented approach, I feel as comfortable sharing this book with friends in the Word-Faith movement as I do recommending it to the movement's critics. Highly recommended!

Dr. Robert Bowman is one of the best Christian apologetic researchers around. His books always contain numerous sources of information on whatever topic he addresses whether it is Mormonism or in this case the health and wealth gospel or more properly, the Word-Faith Movement. In this book, Dr. Bowman tackles the issues of the Word-Faith movement from their false teachings to many of their claims such as positive confession or hyper-prosperity. He does so in grace. I found Dr. Bowman's book not to be a negative attack on Word-Faith teachers but a biblical examination of the facts. I think we all should agree that no man is above the watchful eye of the inerrant Word of God (Hebrews 4:12-13). We should all submit fully our lives and doctrines to the test of Scripture

(John 8:31-32; Acts 2:42; 1 Timothy 4:16; Titus 2:1; 2 Peter 1:16-21). Whether you are a pastor in the Word-Faith Movement, a Christian seeking to understand the Word-Faith Movement, or simply someone curious about this movement within Christianity, I would urge you to get this great book.

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