

Is the Word of Faith Movement Really From God?

What is the Word of Faith movement, and is it from God?

If you listen to the critics, you will think that this movement is the worst thing that could happen to Christianity. But this article is going to show how this movement is not only of God but absolutely necessary in God's end-time plan.

When you look at all the Christian denominations in the world, you begin to wonder which is the right one. Well, the truth is, most of them have a lot of good, yet I believe God is wanting to do something better than simply build a bunch of denominations.

In order to understand this controversial movement, we have to go back to the Bible and see God's plan for the Church.

Jesus spoke to Peter and said, "And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it" (Matt. 16:18). If you listen to a few negative folks, you'll get the impression that the Church is going to be a defeated, beaten-down, rotten, sin-filled group of hypocritical people. But Jesus said that the gates of hell will not overcome it. Jesus is coming back for a glorious, victorious Church.

How is the Lord going to accomplish this task of making the Church an overcomer? By using people. Yes, by using people just like you and me.

Notice carefully that the Lord is speaking to Simon. He changes his name to Peter, which means a "little rock," and declares that He is going to build his church on this rock. Many wonder if Jesus was building His church on Peter. Yes and no.

Ephesians chapter 2 verse 20 says that the Church is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets. Peter is definitely one of the people who are part of the foundation; however, all the apostles, including many prophets, are considered the foundation of the Church as well.

Do you remember what the New Jerusalem will look like? John saw the Holy City with 12 foundations, and on them were the names of the 12 apostles. So, Peter was a rock on which the Lord was going to build His Church; yet, Peter declares in his writings, "As you come to him [Jesus], the living also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house ..." (1 Pet. 2:4-5).

Peter testifies that Jesus is the Stone, the Corner Stone to be exact, and that we are living stones that the Lord is putting in place, such as a mason places brick upon brick, until the building is finished. The Lord has been in a building project for the last nineteen hundred-plus years. The Lord is not interested in doing a quick work but rather a quality job.

Now understand this: Each part of the building is essential for the completion of the whole. There can be no missing parts. Not only is this so, but every part adds something that is missing. This is where the Word of Faith movement comes in.

The Word of Faith movement adds to the Church what has been missing for the last several centuries, primarily the teaching that the believer can receive answers to every prayer that is based on God's Word, as long as he has enough faith and that there is nothing in his life that could be hindering his prayer. This is a revolutionary thought to most of Christendom.

Let me explain how the Word of Faith movement got here.

The early church began with a burst of power and glory. They

were invincible. Every believer acted as priests of the Lord and fervently preached the truth. They did such a wonderful job that their critics accused them of turning the world upside down.

The early church fathers continued living in the same spirit of the apostles after the apostles died. But little by little, through the centuries, Christians abandoned the faith and dynamic lifestyle of their predecessors. They entangled themselves in silly controversies, which split the unity of Christians. One group built their headquarters in Constantinople; they became the eastern church. And the other group had their headquarters in Rome and called themselves Roman Catholics. These churches have never reunited.

Since most of us have our roots in the West, we have been influenced by the western branch of Christianity called the Roman Catholic Church. I want to focus on this part of the Church.

During the dark ages, the Catholic Church had a monopoly over most of Christendom, and she used her power in terrible ways. This church deserted the ways of Christ and His teachings. They put fear in the hearts of the peasants by making them seek the church for forgiveness. They promised an easy salvation to those who would purchase indulgences. They exalted Mary nearly to the same position as Christ. They offered prayers to her as well as to many of the saints. In summary, they rejected most of the clear teachings of the Bible.

This branch of Christianity needed reformation, and God intended to bring it to her. For almost the last 500 years, God has brought to western Christianity six major restorational movements: 1) the reform, 2) the evangelical, 3) the holiness, 4) the pentecostal, 5) the charismatic, 6) and the word of faith. Each movement has been used of God to restore to the Church truths and practices that were lost by

the Roman church.

In 1517, a German monk named Martin Luther, who discovered from the Bible that salvation was not earned, but that it was a free gift to all those who believed proclaimed a loud and clear message: "The just shall live by faith." This doctrine that the just shall live by faith is the most basic doctrine of the New Testament. We could not preach anything else without this truth. True Christians everywhere believe that salvation is a free gift to those who truly believe.

This monk brought in the first restorational truth to the Church. This movement took on his name. His followers were called "Lutherans." His following, though, was mainly in Germany. Others followed his same doctrine and beliefs in other countries, and they were called different names. In Scotland, the reformers were called Presbyterians; in England they were called Anglicans (or Episcopalians). Basically these three denominations believe the same things.

Although the reform movement embraced the all-important way of salvation, there were still some old Catholic ways and doctrines to which they continued to cling. They still believed that the Church should use the state to persecute dissenters, and they also practiced infant baptism. These practices and beliefs were clearly not biblical.

So within these denominations, in about the 1600's, men arose to confront the reformed movement just as the reformers had confronted the Catholic church. They began by first insisting that all believers who were baptized as infants be rebaptized. They did this because many Lutherans, Presbyterians and Anglicans had never experienced the new birth; they were erroneously told that they were Christians because they had been baptized as babies. Many experienced true salvation through the efforts of evangelicals. It was the evangelicals' rebaptizing efforts that caused the critics to call them "baptists."

The baptists also demanded separation between church and state. They believed that everyone should be able to worship God according to their own consciences without the intrusion of the government. They won—although at a huge cost. Many lost their lives for standing up against the reformed churches, just as many reformers had lost their lives for standing up against the Catholic church. The baptists were correct in their beliefs concerning adult baptism and freedom of worship. Today, almost all Christians believe these things. God had restored adult baptism and freedom of worship for Christians.

In time, even the baptists began to experience a need for reformation. The shortcoming of the baptists was a lack of holiness. The baptists had so emphasized that salvation was by grace alone, not by works, that many of them refused to “work out their salvation with fear and trembling,” as Paul admonished believers in Phil. 2:12. They reasoned, as many do today, “Since salvation is by grace, through faith alone, there is no real need to do good works.” Many baptists were living ungodly lives because of the Calvinistic teachings about election and the perseverance of the saints. These teachings, in essence, gave people a license to practice immorality—or at least gave them freedom to live undisciplined lives. Even today, some Baptists have a terrible reputation of hypocrisy—that they teach one thing but live another way.

As you can see, there needed to be another restoration, and this one would emphasize holiness. John Wesley would be the main leader in this next restorational move. His movement was later called Methodism—termed after his disciplined, methodological approach to holy living.

Today, we need Wesley’s message as never before. There is a great need for holiness in American churches. John Wesley and others taught the past restorational truths, but they also emphasized the need to live disciplined Christian lives. They rejected much of the Calvinistic ideas of the past. They laid stress upon personal works without neglecting salvation by

grace. Like the other restorational leaders of the past, they too were persecuted, mocked and criticized. But today, many Christians acknowledge a real need to discipline their lives. Many Christians no longer take the grace of God in vain. They work out their salvation with fear and trembling.

Many in the holiness camp saw that there still were things lacking in their lives—primarily power. They lived separated from the world, but they lacked supernatural power.

So in 1901, some Bible students in Topeka, Kansas, began to study the subject of the Holy Spirit. They quickly discovered that they lacked the Bible experience of being filled with the Holy Spirit. They began to seek God for this experience, and God graciously met their faith. He filled them with the Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking in other tongues.

One man who got filled, left the school and began preaching this new-found experience in Los Angeles, California, in a small cottage on 312 Azusa Street. He was the first black man to lead a restorational movement. His name: William Seymour.

Today, millions of people claim to adhere to the pentecostal experience of being filled with the Spirit with the evidence of speaking in tongues. This truth is firmly established in the Bible.

Since the pentecostal movement came out of the holiness movement, there were some errors that permeated the pentecostal movement. The main error had to do with “who could receive the Holy Spirit?”. Most pentecostal leaders believed that a candidate for the Holy Spirit had to first sanctify himself and live holy for a period of time before he could receive the Holy Spirit. This rule was of course unscriptural.

The Bible plainly shares accounts of people receiving the Holy Spirit right when they were saved. They did not have to tarry and sanctify themselves to qualify for the Spirit. They could receive this gift immediately upon praying for the experience.

Hence, the charismatic movement took off.

The charismatic movement was led by many people—the most popular being Chuck Smith, who founded the Calvary Chapels. He began baptizing hippies and praying for God to fill them with the Holy Spirit. And sure enough, God did.

God was pouring out his Spirit on all people, including long-hair, pot-smoking, barefooted hippies. This made the old-time pentecostals upset. They couldn't believe that these people were receiving the Holy Spirit without first cutting their hair, throwing away their dope, and dressing modestly. But God was filling them with the Spirit despite their objections. The pentecostals criticized Chuck Smith and many of the charismatics, including the Catholic charismatics. But time showed that the charismatic movement was here to stay.

This brings us to the current move of God: the word of faith. This movement is an extension of the charismatic movement. It is bringing to Spirit-filled Christians everywhere the message of uncompromising faith—that believers can receive answers to their prayers, including healing, so long as they exercise sufficient faith.

The charismatic movement experienced dramatic healings, but most people were not taught that they could be healed on their own faith and that they didn't need to be healed at a great miracle service like those of Kathryn Kuhlman. The word of faith ministers have shown the power of faith and that God will bless the believers in every way, including materially, if they will live according to the Word. This is revolutionary to many Christians.

Because it is the current move of God, we should expect it to be criticized more than any other movement. And this is the case.

I am not surprised at all when we are criticized. We should

expect it. After all, every past restorational movement was criticized by the religious establishment: the Catholics persecuted the Lutherans, the Lutherans judged the baptists, the baptists ridiculed the holiness people, the holiness community criticized the charismatics. And today, many charismatics unfairly accuse the word of faith ministers of heresy.

The heresy hunters are still here. When will they learn from the past and quit criticizing what God has begun?

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