

Faith in a Box

Hyper Faith Movement/Word of Faith/Name it Claim it

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There are some interesting movements that have been around now for a while. These movements have been called by several different names such as the Word of Faith movement, Name It Claim It, and generally, the hyper-faith movements. I have never been comfortable with these people, who are usually on television programs and show up in popular piety often. Their message is very appealing to Christians because of its simple approach to faith. I must admit it would be very nice if what these people say would always be true, but often such is not the case.

I will not judge these ministries and ministers as individuals, but I will comment on their overall statements and propositions. I have had a hard time nailing down exactly why I feel so uncomfortable with what I have seen from these movements, and I'm sure they have a response to my problems with them. But I still feel that clarity in my lack of support for such movements would suffice to show my general position. This does not deal with specific cases but speaks of this hyper-faith movement in its earmarked or hallmarked characteristics.

First, these statements, such as "Believe that you're healed even though you can't see it," "If you speak it into existence, God has to do it for you," and other such blanket faith statements are too simple! They undermine the biblical principle of faith, which I will discuss in a future front page

article. In the Bible, these statements cannot be found. In fact, the idea that when someone has a disease it is their fault or someone else's fault is actually challenged by Jesus in John 9:1-7. The disciples ask Jesus who sinned, this man born blind or his parents. Notice the presupposition in the question here? It's an either-or question, and it only has two possible outcomes, but Jesus replies with the third option: neither! The disciples' presupposition was part of a faulty Jewish philosophy that when someone was born sick, blame must be placed on the sins of the parents or the sick person because sin had to have occurred somewhere in that person's history for this to happen to that person.

But Jesus surprises them by not supporting such a simple view of the correlation between sickness and sin. In fact, He claims that this man was born blind so that the works of God could be displayed in Him, so that God would receive the glory for his healing and his life. He is not blaming God for this man's being born blind, but He is saying that his healing will show forth God's glory. I believe that this is a key principle that we may not always understand, which makes faith more complicated than these hyper-faith teachers would like. Circumstances will be as they are so that God gets the most glory out of that person's life and situation!

Another example from the Gospels comes in the recounting of the four friends who tore off a roof to get to Jesus for their paralyzed friend in Mark 2:1-12. These are the four men who bring a paralytic to Jesus and Jesus uses the man's healing to explain His divinity in that He can both heal and save! One of these months, I'll do an article on the connection between salvation, deliverance, and healing. But notice before Jesus gets to the point that He can heal and save at the same time what he says.

Many hyper-faith teachers will tell you that if you are prayed for and don't get healed, you don't have enough faith. This is essentially telling a Christian that they have faith to be saved from their sins but not faith to be healed! How ironic and upsetting and laughable (if people did not think that this was an accurate assessment of their faith)! We must notice that such statements and evaluations can destroy a Christian's faith! Is that what ministers should be doing? But look at whose faith saves this paralytic! Look at Mark 2:5. "When Jesus saw THEIR faith. Whose faith moved Jesus to heal this man? The faith of the four friends, not the paralytics! The pronoun clearly is plural and refers to the friends.

Faith for healing and anything in life is not just up to the individual, but also those who are involved in praying for the individual at the very least. This recounting of the four friends tells us something very important about faith: it's not just up to the individual, but to those who minister to the individual! The ministers and people who pray for the sick must have faith also! See also James 5:14-16 where the elders must pray and must be righteous prayer warriors to see effective healing. Why can it not be that the faith-healer, these televangelists and hyper-faith simpletons have not enough faith

to pray for the sick! Far be it from us to ask about their faith level! According to them, it's always the faith level of the entire room of believers or the individual being prayed for, but I've never heard a faith-healer or faith teacher evaluate their own faith. That's not genuine or authentic spirituality being practiced.

Now do not hear what I'm not saying in this example. I'm not saying that the individual's faith is not important at all. It is essential and extremely important that the person coming to God must believe and trust in faith that God can and will do what the person asks! Jesus said it was indeed His will to heal and numerous times asked individuals what they wanted Him to do for them so that He could see their faith. It cuts both ways in the Bible, but not with these hyper-faith teachers. When what you teach does not resemble the Bible, it is not biblical or Christian teaching, period. Our theological framework must equate to the biblical framework. If it does not, we have long explanations to explain all of the inconsistencies between our theology and biblical reality.

Second, to go along with the idea that these statements and doctrines are too simplistic, the teachers of these doctrines fail to see the biblical paradigm "Already But Not Yet." For so long, and partly because of Modernity's effect on Theology, we have had this propensity for a long time to explain everything in the Bible exactly and completely. It's part of our Western worldview and way of operating and thinking. We are so detailed oriented that we must know everything, and if we can't know everything, than it's not true. But the paradigm of the Bible flows in a pattern of Already But Not Yet. Countless times we see references to salvation both right now, at

the moment of your belief in Christ, and in the eschaton, the end of time. How can this be? Which is it?

It is both. You see, we live between the ages, between the age of Christ's sacrifice that fulfills all of the prophecies and types of the Old Testament, that provides for your salvation, healing, etc. This is the cosmic answer to the cosmic curse! But not everything has its complete reign here on earth right now! There are still wicked people in the world, and that's not something that will still be here when Christ completely reigns. There is still sickness and death and sin, which will no longer be here when Christ reigns. But those things, sickness and sin and the problems of our world, have found their answer in Christ, and will someday stop groaning for His arrival (Rom 8:20-25). But until then, we live in this tension between completely fulfilled, and the shadow of complete fulfillment. So God works through this time period between the ages little by little. We cannot understand all the complexities of this age, but we can trust that God is doing everything for our benefit.

Third, the people who listen to and believe these types of doctrines are in great distress. How would you feel if someone told you that you really don't actually have the kind of faith that empowers belief and God's power in your life? I'd feel horrible, and that's how these people feel. They feel like God has rejected them when these faith-healers tell them their faith is lacking. It causes them to despair and evaluate themselves and feel that they are incompetent Christians, then the Christian life becomes impossible to live out, so they slip away. Christian ministry does not discourage! It encourages! Personally, as a legally blind believer, I must deal with the

question of my own faith in God. The story of the blind man in John 9 is close to my heart. Jesus told them that it was for God's glory that this man was healed. I think there is an important principle here.

This principle just mentioned presents my final issue with these hyper-faith movements in that they lack a doctrine of the Mystery of God. Why do we have to have an answer for everything? What's wrong with a little mystery? Would knowing every single thing make you a believer? No! It would make life boring and unlivable, not to mention God would no longer be infinite! There is room left in the bible and biblical theology for the mystery of tension between two choices, such as the sovereignty of God versus human free will. If the Bible doesn't answer a question, there is a reason. Do you believe that God is always good in everything He does? Then why must everything be explained and answered. Just know that God's working on your side for your benefit always! This takes true faith, true trust! To believe that although we can't have all the answers, God is always good is truly trust. We trust not in what is a mystery, but what we know of God's divine character in times where we do not know all things. It is our nature to be finite. We can't know everything. That is the mystery the hyper-faith movement takes away when it answers the reasons why healings don't happen every time someone is prayed for.

As I said in the beginning of this month's article, these are a few of my own convictions concerning hyper-faith and hyper-healing movements which seem to pop up and rule the popular piety scene through revival-type settings and everyday "Christian" television programs. Soon I will write an article on biblical faith and how faith in the stupendously unseen can be

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properly incorporated into a healthy doctrine of biblical faith. It is unwise and unhelpful to criticize without offering a solution or a different view, so I will present this view in an article next month on Biblical Faith.