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Word of Faith



Individual Topics - Steve Gregg

In his discussion, Steve Gregg examines the Word of Faith teaching, a charismatic Pentecostal belief system that emphasizes positive confession and faith for healing and prosperity. The belief that a law of faith governs the universe and that individuals can create their own reality through positive confessions is not based on scripture, and can be harmful when individuals are led to believe that sickness is caused by lack of faith. Gregg advocates for a focus on a genuine relationship with Jesus and spiritual growth, rather than material gain.

Transcript

Faith teaching is, you may or may not be familiar with that title of that kind of teaching. You might have heard of the health and wealth gospel, or sometimes it's called the name it and claim it, usually not by those who hold it, but sometimes the critics have to call it name it, claim it, or blab it and grab it, or different things like that. They, this view is a view that is popular in Charismatic and Pentecostal circles, and of course a lot of Christian TV, the Christian TV networks are largely controlled by Word of Faith people.

And although you'll find people on Christian TV who don't hold those views, those views are pretty dominant in the Christian TV. And when I travel overseas, like to Africa and places like that, there's lots of Christian TV, there's lots of Christian stations, but they're all Word of Faith oriented. Now what is Word of Faith teaching? The Word of Faith teaching is the idea that the law of faith, as they call it, governs the universe, it even governs God.

That there is a law above all things through which the universe operates, and through which God operates. And it is this, that you can have whatever you say, that you activate by a positive confession, reality. You pretty much create your own worlds.

The word of faith teachers, one of the ones that I first became aware of back in the early 70s was Kenneth Hagen, usually regarded to be the father of the movement. He actually plagiarized a lot of material, and I say plagiarized because he took word for word in his books from this other author named E.W. Kenyon, who had studied in Massachusetts at a

college that produced a lot of mind science cults. Now E.W. Kenyon was a professing Christian, but he adopted this idea that there are powers that you can activate.

Now, anyone who's familiar with the occult knows that this is more akin to the occult than it is to anything in the Bible. And this is one of the concerns I have for it. But the idea is there is a law of faith.

They would say it's like the law of gravity in the sense that you simply need to adjust to it. You need to live according to it. It's there, it permeates everything.

And they say that God created the world and universe through the law of faith. He was aware of the law of faith, and therefore by speaking positive words, let there be light, let dry land appear, and so forth, God therefore used this law to create. In other words, God himself is subject to the law of faith on this view, which that one statement alone makes it not a Christian viewpoint, that God is subject to anything above himself is frankly heretical.

Now, the view connects with Christianity on points of healing and on points of prosperity. It's sometimes called the prosperity doctrine because the teaching is this, that God doesn't want anybody to be sick or poor. And if you are sick or poor, you are to say the least living below your privileges.

And to say the worst is you're displeasing to God because you're sick and he doesn't want you sick and because you're poor. And it doesn't glorify him for his children to be sick and poor. They say, and therefore we have something of an obligation to activate the law of faith for our healing and for our prosperity.

Now, they connect this with the work of Jesus. They say, if you read the Old Testament, Deuteronomy 28, for example, you'll find that God told Israel that they would be cursed with a number of curses if they were disobedient to him. And the curse of the law, they say, is poverty, sickness, and death.

Now, I don't know how they get those three out of that passage. There certainly is reference to death. There's poverty and even sickness, but there's a lot of other things too, drought and things like that are mentioned.

It's kind of an artificial breakdown of the curses that God said would come upon Israel if they broke the law. They say, well, it comes down neatly to two things, poverty, sickness, and death. That's the curse of the law.

And they would turn our attention to Galatians chapter three, and says in verse 10, for as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse. For it is written, cursed is everyone that does not continue in all the things which are written in the book of the law, but that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident for the just shall live by faith. Yet the law is not of faith, but the man who lives in them shall live by them.

The verse 13, Galatians 3, 13, Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us. Now, when they say Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, they say the curse of the law is poverty, sickness, and death. Notice there's no mention there of him being redeemed from sin.

The curse of the law, as far as they're concerned, are physical conditions in this life, sickness, poverty, death. I'm not sure how they work with the death thing because frankly, they know that Christians die. And Kenneth Hagin himself said he believes that Christians, of course, die, but they're not supposed to die sick.

They're supposed to just wear out if the Lord carries and die in their sleep because sickness is not the will of God. Now, this whole idea is simply not connected to scripture in any exegetical way. The curse of the law that Paul refers to he actually quotes it.

Cursed is everyone who does not continue in everything that's written in this law. And the blessing, which he then contrasts it with in Galatians 3, is the blessing of Abraham, which is justification by faith. So Paul's not talking about poverty or sickness or physical conditions.

He's talking about our relationship with God. We are alienated from God by our disobedience and we are reunited with God through faith when we're justified, and that's the blessing of Abraham, Paul says. If you read Galatians 3, I'm not gonna exegete it because we wanna talk about different tendrils of this teaching.

But the idea then is that Jesus purchased by his death our wealth and our wellness. And that if we do not experience these things, we are as much failing to take advantage of what Christ has done for us as if we would choose to remain in our sins. Now, they would not equate sickness and poverty with sin.

They're not usually that blatant. However, anyone who goes to a church that teaches this doctrine is going to get that impression. There was a man named Hobart Freeman, one of the Word of Faith teachers in a previous generation who pastored a church where it is said over 90 people in his church died unnecessarily because they had sicknesses that could have been treated by doctors, but they were confessing that they were healed, which is what the Word of Faith tells you to confess.

And they wouldn't go to a doctor because they felt like if I go to the doctor, that's admitting I don't have faith. And therefore, even though the doctrine doesn't teach you that being sick is the same as being sinful, it is kind of. If you don't have the faith to be healed, then whatever's not a faith is sin.

So, I mean, in a sense, you're guilty of sin and displeasing God if you're poor or if you're sick. Now, this is the opposite of what the Bible teaches. I mean, Jesus said, blessed are the poor.

Yours is the kingdom of heaven. Yours is the kingdom of God. It says in James, has not God chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom that God has promised to those who love him? As far as sickness is concerned, we'll have to look at that a little more carefully because the Bible, there's a nuanced teaching about sickness and healing and so forth that we have to consider.

But what I want to say about the word of faith teaching is that it is closer to witchcraft in its essence than it is close to anything in Christianity because it acknowledges supernatural power being available for our use, for our advantage, to be healed, to prosper, whatever. Now, Christianity also is, of course, no stranger to supernatural power. Jesus rose from the dead.

Jesus worked miracles. Even in the Old Testament, prophets worked miracles. The apostles worked miracles.

That the supernatural realm exists is no strange thing to the Christian. But there's a world of difference between saying the supernatural is available according to the will of God, according to his own sovereign choice to exercise the supernatural when he chooses to do so, on the one hand, and on the other hand, say it's ours to grab, it's ours to manipulate, it's ours to exploit for whatever we would like. And that is exactly what the word of faith teaches.

And that's what the occult is. I mean, the occult is there's supernatural something out there, either supernatural knowledge or supernatural power, witchcraft, clairvoyance, you know, divination, all these forms of the occult. They assume that there's additional power and knowledge available to man that we can't access through our natural means.

And so you get the wing of bat and the eye of newt and you say this particular chant or you do this kind of thing, and then you exploit these powers from the other side, or you get the revelations from the other side. And so in other words, in the occult, man is the practitioner. Man is in control if he just knows the secrets.

If he knows the secret procedures, he can exploit and use supernatural powers. That makes man be in charge of things. And you can have what you want if you have learned the secret of the word of faith, they say.

The word of faith is that if you speak words of faith by the very positive confessions you make, you are drawing upon that law of faith that's out there and it will do whatever you are fully convinced it will do. They commonly say you can have whatever you say. Now, where do they get that? Well, you know, Jesus did say something which taken without any context of the rest of scripture is an encouragement to their view on this matter, especially about, well, they would use it about healing, but also about prosperity.

In Mark chapter 11 and in verse 24, Mark 11, 24, Jesus said, "Therefore I say to you,

whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them and you will have them." Whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive it and you'll have it. Now, this is not a standalone statement about prayer in scripture. And by the way, when you study out what the Bible says about prayer, you'll find that it often says things like, "Just ask anything in Jesus' name and it'll be done.

Just ask anything in faith and it'll happen." But the thing is, there's a holistic teaching about prayer as part of a component of a relationship with God, a relationship which presupposes our submission to his will. Jesus prayed, "Father, if it's your will, let this cup pass from me." James said, "You should not boast about tomorrow. You should say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that." The whole teaching of scripture is that man in proper relationship with God is submitted to the will of God and is more concerned that the will of God be done than one's own will.

In fact, Jesus said, "When you pray, say, "Your kingdom come, your will be done. "On earth as it is in heaven." This is the whole phenomenon of prayer is part of a relationship with the God who is our father and we're the children. He's the king and we're the subjects.

He's the master, we're the servants. We're here to do his will. He's not there to jump when we snap our fingers.

Our wish is not his command and that's where the word of faith sees things wrongly. It is true. Jesus did say faith is something that must be present when we pray.

It also says in 1 John 5, verse 14, that we must pray according to the will of God. Not all the passages of prayer mentioned that fact, but it's a given when you understand the holistic teaching of prayer as a part of relationship with God. You pray according to his will, you pray in faith, you pray in the name of Jesus, you pray with good motives.

James said, you ask not because you have not, but you ask and receive not, because you ask amidst that you may consume it on your lusts. There's lots of things that can make prayers not be appropriate and you can't just take one verse and say this verse is the whole verse on prayer. Just whatever you ask, believe you receive it and you'll have it.

Well, if the Bible only had one verse on prayer, then we'd be kind of stuck with that understanding, but we do have a holistic teaching from God, from Jesus and the apostles about prayer that has to be taken seriously. Now, God has not simply given us access to supernatural power that if we just do the right thing, say the right words, it'll happen. There is supernatural element in the universe, that element is God.

Well, there's another supernatural element too, the devil. The devil is supernatural and God's supernatural, but the devil of course is infinitely inferior in power to God, because he's a creation of God. But he does supernatural things too and that's why the occult

exists, because the devil will gladly lead people into deception by accommodating them with occult supernatural phenomena.

There are real occult phenomena, but they are forbidden of Christians, because again, they put man in the place of God. In the Bible, it's God who decides when he will speak, it is God who decides when he will do a miracle. Sometimes the word of faith, you say, God always wants people to be healed and they say that we can prove it, Jesus healed everybody.

Jesus never said no to anybody who wanted to be healed, really? Why were so many people still sick when he left, when he ascended to heaven, why were there so many sick people in Israel that the apostles still were working with and healing and so forth? Why is it that when one of his best friends, Lazarus was sick and his sister sent a request for him to come and do something about it, but Jesus didn't do anything, he let him die. He didn't heal him. Now, some might say, yeah, but that's a special case, he raised him from the dead.

Raising from the dead is not a special case, Jesus is gonna raise everybody from the dead. Amen. God may want me to die sick, because he's gonna raise me from the dead later.

The point is that he did allow Lazarus to die when in fact, Jesus was requested to come and heal him by his best friends. God heals when he has, when that's gonna glorify him more than some other alternative. The Bible's teaching on prayer is that we offer our, by faith, in God's faithfulness, in God's goodness, we offer our requests to God.

And if it's according to his will, then he does it. If it's not, then his answer is, I have a better idea. Thanks for asking, but I have a better idea than you have.

Just stand by and see the salvation of your God. Now, when you put man in charge, you have not yet arrived at Christianity. Jesus said, if anyone wants to follow me, the first thing you do is deny yourself and take up your cross and follow Jesus.

So it's not about me getting what I want. And yet these word of faith churches, I mean, they make it all about that. You can have what you say, you can have what you want, but you can't.

And anyone only has to try it to see. I ran a Bible school in Oregon for 16 years in which there were some people who had this view, I taught against it, but they had gotten it somewhere else before they arrived and people get pretty stubborn about what they, when they're into this, because it's a very, it's a very appealing to somebody who really, frankly, craves power. You know, it's basically, it's very attractive to someone who would like to feel like the power of God is in my hands.

I can get what I want. I can be the master of the universe. You know, one of those

masters of the universe.

And this poor lady, she was, well, I'll tell you, many of you heard about the Benghazi tragedy and about Ty Woods, Tyrone Woods was one of the, he was the team leader of the Navy SEALs and he got killed in Benghazi. His dad was a student in my school, as was his younger brother, 16 years later. Ty Woods, I never knew Ty Woods, but his dad went through my school and 16 years later, his younger son went.

But Charlie Woods, the father of that Navy SEAL, was married to a woman named Ellen at the time they were in our school and she was diagnosed with terminal cancer. But she came out of some kind of a word of faith background and she was continually confessing. She was healed, I'm healed, I'm healed, I'm healed.

Now, by the way, in word of faith, you don't say, I'm going to be healed. They say, you have been healed. You believe that you receive it and you should have it.

You don't believe that you're going to receive it. You believe that you have it and you have it. This is partly based on a misunderstanding of the statement, by his stripes we are healed, which I'll say something about in a moment because it's an important verse for the word of faith people and for every Christian, but in a different way.

But this woman was confessing, I'm healed, I'm healed, I'm healed, which is what word of faith people faithfully say right up until the point that they died. And she did die, she died of cancer, confessing she was healed. So I guess you don't always get what you say.

But interestingly, I knew another woman, her name was Janie, and she lived in Santa Cruz when I had a school there. And she was dying of cancer, a young lady, I would assume in her 30s. Had some young children, a good husband, happy marriage, they were Baptists.

And she was given up with cancer. The doctors told her she was terminal. So she was bedridden about the time we heard about her.

Some of the students I went to their house, we were told about them because they went to a church across the street from our school, and we went to pray for her. And she said, don't pray for me to get well. She says, God has told me I'm gonna die of cancer.

And he's even told me the date. And she told us the date, which I don't remember off the top of my head, but there was a particular date she said this, God told me I'm gonna die and I'm ready to go see Jesus. She could leave her family behind, but she's just loved the Lord.

She just wanted to go see Jesus and she was happy about it. And she felt the Lord spoke to her. And we visited her several times, she kept saying the same thing, Lord told me I'm gonna die on such and such a date.

Well, what actually happened was that date came and her husband took her to the hospital and there wasn't any cancer in her. She was totally healed of her cancer. And I later saw her, like five years later, I went to visit her husband and her, and they had started a ministry and outreach to Catholics because they had a Catholic background before they're Baptist.

And she was going strong, no cancer had come back. She said she was gonna die that day, but that day she was healed completely and apparently long-term. I don't know if she's alive today, that was back in the 80s that all this happened.

But the point here is Ellen, one of my students, said she was healed and died while she was saying she was healed. Janie said she was gonna die and was healed when she said she was gonna die. I mean, it's just a fact, you do not get what you say.

And it seems to me like the Word of Faith teaching wouldn't have these huge, huge churches if people would just notice that it doesn't work because it isn't true. Now, the Word of Faith teaching is connected, well, it sometimes is in the same circles with what we call Pentecostals and Charismatics. But actually, genuine Pentecostal or Charismatic belief shouldn't find any kind of overlap with the Word of Faith.

Because Charismatic belief is a belief that there's such a thing as gifts of healing. Okay, Paul said in 1 Corinthians 12, to one who's given the gift of the Word of Faith, or he's a Word of Knowledge, excuse me, to another Word of Wisdom, to another faith, to another the working of miracles, to another healings, to another tongues, to another interpretation, and so forth. Paul lists these different gifts.

One of the gifts is gifts of healings and working miracles. Well, most of the miracles, not all, but most of the miracles in the Bible were healings. And so Paul said that some people have gifts to work miracles.

Some people have gifts to do healings. Okay, fine, Paul had that gift apparently, and so did the apostles, and actually Stephen and Philip in the Bible seemed to have those gifts, but not everyone did. And therefore, Charismatic teaching is there is such a thing as supernatural healing.

And God has even gifted some people, the apostles particularly, with the ability to work miracles and healings like that, just like Jesus did. Are there people that give today? Maybe, I don't know. Unfortunately, the ones who advertise themselves as such often are proven to be cheats and liars and heretics.

But the truth is you do hear of stories, credible stories, especially from the mission field and so forth, and even Janie, my friend, who got healed of cancer. She wasn't, no one laid hands on her as far as I know, but God does heal. There are healings.

And the Charismatic teaching is that there are gifts, including healings, but that's the

opposite of saying everybody can just heal themselves if they just know the formula. Anyone can tap into the supernatural law of faith and get whatever they want. That's not the same thing as that God has given to one a gift of healing people, to another, a gift of prophesying, another has a gift of teaching or something else.

I'm a Charismatic in the sense that I believe in the gifts of the Spirit. I'm embarrassed by most things that go on in Charismatic circles, and Janie wanted me to also mention something called the NAR, New Apostolic Reformation. It has some overlap with both Charismatic and with Word of Faith.

The NAR is, if you haven't heard of it, its one of its main centers is in Bethel, California. I'm sorry, Redding, California, Bethel Church in Redding, California. And Bill Johnson is the pastor there, and there's some other pretty well-known guys there, Todd White, a lot of miracles supposedly go on there in that church.

I have to admit, I haven't been there, and I think I should before I speak very much about it, but the reports that come back from that church concern me, because they have a school of supernatural ministry. Now, when someone has a school of supernatural ministry, that means you bring people in who don't apparently do supernatural things, and you teach them how to do supernatural things. Now, any supernatural thing that can be taught is not a biblical miracle.

God does biblical miracles. He does them through people, prophets, apostles, and others. He's given gifts to, He does them, but He doesn't teach it at a school.

He anoints them with His Holy Spirit and the power to do whatever it is He has a gift for them to do. But to take somebody and say, let me teach you how to do healings, let me teach you how to prophesy, let me teach you how to do supernatural things, that's not healthy, because it's basically saying, this can be learned by anyone, just enroll in our school. That's not really mainstream charismatic teaching, because charismatic teaching is simply the teaching that the gifts of the Holy Spirit that are found in the Bible are found in the church, but that's not the gifts of the Spirit, that's learning magic, I'm afraid.

I mean, that's what it sounds like to me. And some of the things they have done up at Bethel, and this is a worldwide movement, if you haven't heard of it, I'm not sure where you've been, but the truth is that I'm hearing about it all the time, what's going on up at Reading, California, in Bethel. But I have to be careful about this, because some of the things that they've done that are weird are things they may not be doing anymore.

I received a phone call from a friend who knew more about the group than I do, because he'd been there, and he said that, well, some of these things that people say they do, they did, in fact, do, but they don't do them anymore, they've stopped doing them. One of them is called grave-sucking, where if somebody really wants to have a powerful anointing, you find the grave of somebody who had a powerful anointing. Benny Hinn

once said that he had done this at the grave of Catherine Kuhlman.

He felt like he had the mantle of Catherine Kuhlman, she was a strange kind of a healing evangelist kind of person in her day, and she had been dead for a long time, and Benny Hinn, as a young man, apparently went to her grave and absorbed her spirit and her anointing. I don't think he laid down on it, but at one time, Bethel was actually recommending people to lay down on the graves of people who were anointed and suck up the spirit out of their, what, the spirit's in the dead corpse? I mean, this sounds so occultic to me, it makes my, the hairs on my arms stand up, it's weird stuff. Now, I've heard that Bethel doesn't do that anymore.

I've heard they did, I've heard they don't. The fact is, they once did, and this means that they are, the movement has some of the same problems that are concerns of mine in the Word of Faith movement in general, and they do believe the Word of Faith doctrines there, too. But what we find here is that many people, when they become aware, I'll give you a little testimony myself.

I was a Baptist, I grew up a Baptist. Didn't know a thing about the gifts of the Spirit, never heard of them. Well, I did hear of them once.

I remember once when I was a kid, we were driving down the street toward church, my dad was driving, because I was a little kid, and we passed several churches along the way to ours, and I said, Dad, what's the difference with these churches? He said, I think they mostly agree with us on most things, and I said, what about this one here, this Assembly of God church? How are they any different than us? They're just like a block away from our church, Baptist church. And he said, well, I don't know. He says, I think their doctrines are pretty similar to ours, except they believe in speaking in tongues.

I said, well, what's speaking in tongues? He said, I don't know, and that was the end of the conversation. That's the only time I heard of any of the gifts of the Spirit as a child or as a Baptist. But when my family moved from Covina, from first Baptist moved to Orange County in 1970, I started going to Calvary Chapel, Costa Mesa, at the beginning of the Jesus movement, Lonnie Frisbee was preaching there.

If you don't know who he is, just as well for now, but I liked Lonnie, by the way, he did have some scandals in his life later on, sad, tragic. But when I went to Calvary Chapel, Lonnie laid hands on me, and I was, I believe, baptized in the Spirit. As I read the Bible, I saw there is such a thing as the baptism, there is such a thing as, you know, gifts of the Spirit.

But I was determined that I wouldn't take anything to be true about the gifts of the Spirit that I couldn't find taught in Scripture. And that's where the charismatic movement has gone off the rails in many cases. They are glad to accept almost anything sensational, almost anything supernatural seeming, without concern about whether it's in the

Scripture.

At Bethel in Renning and other churches that follow their lead, they sometimes have attested to gold dust falling or appearing on their shoulders or on their Bibles during the service. And I don't think anyone has taken this to an actual assayer to see if this is real gold or if it's just glitter. But, and by the way, not all that glitters is gold or gold dust.

But the truth is that at least one church was caught where the janitor, somebody was putting glitter in the air conditioning system to make this happen. They also said that feathers come down, which they assumed to be the feathers of angel wings. Although the Bible doesn't speak of angels having wings or feathers, yet feathers are coming down from the roof, from the ceiling and landing on, oh, the angels must be here.

I can hear the sound of angel wings. These weird things. Whenever I hear people getting into this stuff, I think, what's wrong with Jesus? I mean, is he that boring that you have to get into such nonsensical, weird stuff? I mean, who could be bored with Jesus? I've been in the ministry for 49 years, since 1970.

I've been a teacher. I've been following Jesus since I was a child. I got saved, as far as I know, when I was about four and I never, never walked away from Jesus.

And I've always been a Christian. And I've never seen, I've never had any temptation to add anything to Jesus in my life. Jesus is enough.

But when you find people going after the gold dust and the feathers and the grave sucking and those kinds of things, you think, you know, I think you might need to find Jesus because if you knew Jesus, all this stuff would seem so boring and ridiculous and meaningless. But it's people searching for something dynamic, something spectacular. And frankly, the word of faith draws people to that because the idea, and by the way, even if you're not looking for the spectacular, anyone who's sick would like to be well.

Anyone who's really poor would like to have more. And therefore, the doctrine of the word of faith is very attractive to them. Now, I mentioned I was gonna say something about that by his stripes we're healed.

I'd like you to look with me at Isaiah chapter 53. This is a verse, more than any other, that is the basis of the word of faith teaching that Jesus bought our healing, that he redeemed us from, of course, the curse of the law, which included sickness, which means that as he redeemed us from our sins and sickness, we should have freedom from sin and freedom from sickness equally easily. I mean, both things, you know, they're taken care of by Jesus in the atonement.

This is very commonly taught. And even outside the word of faith teaching, some people misunderstand this verse. I think it's good to look at it.

Isaiah 53 is what we're talking about here. Verse five, it says, "'But he was wounded for our transgressions. 'He was bruised for our iniquities.

"The chastisement for our peace was upon him, "and with his stripes we are healed." Now, there's reference to Jesus' wounds, to his being bruised, to his being chastised, and to his stripes. And it says at the end, by his stripes, we are healed. Now, the word of faith teaching would say, just as Jesus on the cross paid for our sins at the whipping post, where the stripes were laid on, he paid for our sicknesses, with his stripes, we're healed.

And so, this becomes like the whole support for the idea that God doesn't want anyone sick any more than he wants anyone sinful. He redeemed us from sickness as well as from sin, and from poverty, too. That's another line of reasoning, which is not any better.

This one, however, is a challenge, because almost all Christians see this and say, by his stripes, we're healed. Does that mean he purchased our healing? Well, it depends on what you mean by healing. First of all, in Isaiah and Jeremiah and Hosea, these three prophets, they speak about Israel being sick and needing healing.

But they're not talking about organic sicknesses of individual Jews who need to get healed like a doctor would make. It's rather, in the opening chapter of Isaiah, chapter one, it says, the whole nation is like a man who's sick from head to the sole of his foot, from the crown of his head to the sole of his foot. He's full of putrefying sores.

No one has poured oil into them. No one has bandaged them. No one has attended to them.

He's talking about the nation as a sickly man without anyone who can help him. Now, he describes, as you read the chapter, he's talking about the fact that Israel has come under God's discipline for their idolatry, and that he has struck them, basically, by Assyrian attacks that have left them torn up. I mean, the nation got torn up by the Assyrians.

And they're like a man who's like the story of the Good Samaritan, the man who's beaten at the side of the road and no one is helping him. That's what the nation is like. Now, as you read through Isaiah, you find various references to persons being sought after to be a healer of the nation.

And we come to the Messiah in Isaiah 53, and it says, well, by his stripes we are healed. Now, we are the nation of Israel, or the people of God, collectively. And what is it that's being healed? Well, the problem they had was that they were on bad terms with God.

They were under God's discipline. They were alienated from God. Well, that's what needed to be healed.

And if you'll look at the passage itself I just read, it says, he was wounded for our

transgressions. He was bruised for our iniquities. The chastisement for our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we're healed.

Now, just a very quick lesson in Hebrew poetry, which you might already know. If you don't, you can learn it very quickly. Hebrew poetry's main feature is parallelism, that the same thing is said twice two different ways that somehow has an aesthetic appeal to the Hebrew ear.

Just like rhyme, when we have poetry, you know, rhyme appeals to us. Our ear sounds pretty, it sounds different than prose. In the Hebrew poetry, repetition of the same thought is what characterizes it as something other than mere prose.

Now, everything Isaiah wrote here is in poetry. And he says, he was bruised for our transgressions, he was wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities. Okay, bruised and wounded, parallel.

Iniquities, transgressions, parallel. Saying the same thing twice. He was wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities.

Second two lines also parallel each other. The chastisement. Now, what is chastisement? Generally speaking, when a child or a disobedient slave was chastised, they were stricken on the back.

They didn't paddle them on the bottom, they gave them stripes. That's pretty severe, but I mean, I'm not here to justify it, I'm just saying that's what was familiar. Someone who received chastisement received stripes.

It says, the chastisement for our peace was upon him, and with his stripes, we are healed. What is that healing? It's our peace with God. We were alienated from God, and by him being punished in our place, that we received that peace with God.

We're healed. Not physically healed of sicknesses, the sickness of alienation from God. Now, both Jeremiah and Hosea repeatedly use the expression, God says, I will heal their backslidings, which is saying the same thing.

Our backslidings are our alienation from God. God will heal that. He uses the word for healing, same as the word for healing is sickness, but it's used metaphorically.

Now, the interesting thing is that this verse is used in the New Testament once. It's quoted once, only once, which means we have one chance in the New Testament to figure out how the apostles understood this passage, and that's in 1 Peter 2. And in 1 Peter 2, speaking of Jesus and borrowing lavishly from images of Isaiah 53, Peter says in verse 23, when he was reviled, he did not revile in return. When he suffered, he did not threaten.

He committed himself to him who judges righteously, who himself bore our sins in his own body on the tree, not our sicknesses, by the way, but our sins, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness by whose stripes you were healed. Now, he's not done there. He quotes from Isaiah 53, five, by whose stripes you were healed, but he explains, four, you were like sheep going astray, but now you've returned to the shepherd and bishop of your soul.

You've been healed by his stripes. What is that healing? Well, you were sheep going astray, now you're returned. You're reconciled with God.

That's the healing. The relationship has been healed. When you read Isaiah 53, it's all about absolving from sin.

Our iniquities. He was wounded for our iniquities, bruised for our transgressions. Our peace was accomplished through his chastisement, our healing of that relationship, that equates with the peace with God, is through his stripes.

So there's nothing there that is saying Jesus died so that we might be healed. Now, you might say, well, Steve, do you believe that God heals sickness? Of course I do, but not whenever we want him to, obviously. We'd want him to every time.

Anyone who's paying attention notices he doesn't do it every time, not even for those who are doing the magic, not even for those who are saying I'm healed, and when they're not. By the way, the Bible does not tell us to make positive confessions. Persons in the word of faith movement are afraid to say they are sick because that's a negative confession.

If you are sick, you must confess that you are well. That's a positive confession, and you will have what you say. Well, how long do you have to wait? You know, you keep saying until you die, then, well, when are you gonna get it? The truth is they are afraid to tell the truth, and the fact that some people are sick is the truth.

Now, by the way, if they say, if you say to them, well, I confess that I'm well, I've done what you told me to do, I still am sick, I still can't get out of bed, I still got this terrible cough and fever, you know what they say? They say, that's the devil deceiving you. The devil is giving you symptoms so that you will not believe that you are well. You are well, you need to hold on to that by faith, that you are healed, and don't believe the lie of the devil, and the lie of the devil is the symptoms.

You may be healed by Jesus, but you may still have to suffer symptoms because the devil is deceiving you. I think, well, if I still have to suffer the symptoms, what do I want to be healed of? Is there any advantage to me to be healed if I still have to live with the symptoms? I've never heard of Jesus healing anyone in the Bible, and they still walked away with their symptoms. He healed the blind man, the guy's still stumbling around

looking for someone to lead him away.

I'm healed, I'm healed. Well, then how come he can't see? Oh, that's the devil trying to deceive me into thinking I'm not healed. This is all tricks, this is word tricks.

It's, you know, when people have a doctrine that's a lie, and they get caught in the lie, they have to make up more lies to explain why their first lie isn't supposed to be mistaken for a lie. The teaching is heresy. The teaching puts man in God's position.

The Bible teaches, Paul said he left Trophimus sick in Miletum, he said that in 2 Timothy. I left Trophimus sick. Trophimus, his co-worker.

Well, don't say he's sick, Paul, that's a bad confession. You should have said he had the deception from the enemy of symptoms when I left him, but he was healed, of course, as we all are. We're all healed.

Timothy had problems with his stomach, you know, and Paul didn't say, just confess that you're healed, he said, take a little wine for that. Don't just drink water anymore, put a little wine with it for your frequent stomach problems. Well, Timothy had frequent stomach problems.

How about Paul? He had a thorn in his flesh. Now, by the way, the word of faith, people say the thorn in the flesh was not a sickness, because, of course, Paul would never be sick, but it was a sickness. Paul referred to it in 2 Corinthians 12 as an infirmity, which is, by the way, a sickness or a physical weakness, and he twice refers to it as an infirmity in that passage.

More than that, in Galatians, he said to the Galatians, you know that because of physical infirmity, I preached to you at the beginning, and my infirmity that was in my flesh you did not despise, but you received me as an angel of God or as Christ himself. I bear you witness that if you could have done it, you would have plucked out your own eyes and given them to me, he said. He's talking about a physical infirmity he had.

Paul doesn't shrink back and say, now, I'm kind of embarrassed to tell you I was sick, because I know we're not supposed to be sick, and I know it means I have little faith and so forth, but Paul just talked about being sick or his friends being sick, like you and I would talk about our friends being sick. It's a reality. Being sick, having trials, being poor at times, these are things that people go through.

We learn to trust God in those trials, and there's many other things we gain through trials, the Bible says, but the point is the word of faith has no room for trials in the will of God. God doesn't want you to have trials. He wants you to liberate yourself from trials with a word.

It doesn't work, and by the way, I'll close with this, because this is, you might say, well, is

this just kind of a quirky little doctrine that doesn't have any ramifications, except people are, you know, they're mistaken about it. It is a very important thing. The word of faith teaches that the death and flogging of Jesus purchased our forgiveness of sin and our healing from sickness.

Both, they say, are part of the atonement. Both are paid for by Christ. Now, suppose I am a person who comes to Christ, confess my sins, I follow Christ, I'm baptized and so forth, and yet I'm sick.

What then? How can I believe that I'm saved if my salvation depends on the same thing that my healing does, and I don't have my healing? If the same faith in the same act of God is supposed to procure for me both forgiveness of sins and healing of sicknesses, and I know I don't have the healing of sickness, because I can tell, then why would I believe what's invisible to me, that I'm forgiven my sins? Now, the word of faith people, they try to distance themselves from this idea. They say, no, just because you're sick doesn't mean you're not saved. But what it does mean, apparently, is that you don't have enough faith to procure the benefits of the atonement.

If Christ atoned for your sicknesses and purchased your healing, and all you need is faith to get it, and that's also all you need to do to get forgiven of your sins. Now, I can't see the forgiveness of my sins, but I can certainly see whether I'm healed or not. Well, then, if I'm not healed, isn't that a way of saying I don't have the kind of faith to procure for myself the benefits Christ purchased for me? And if not my healing, then how could I delude myself into thinking I also have the forgiveness of my sins? If these things are a package deal.

Now, Paul said in 2 Corinthians 4, verse 16, though our outward man is perishing, the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light afflictions, which are but for a moment, work for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory while we do not look at the things that are seen, but at the things that are not seen. For the things that are seen are temporal, but the things that are not seen are eternal.

Paul says, yeah, our bodies are wasting away. Our outward man is perishing. But at the same time, our inward man's being renewed.

We can be getting better in our spiritual maturity, in our spiritual purity, in our spiritual quality, I guess, while everything in the outward man is perishing. Because we're not looking at the things that are seen, which is my health, my prosperity, my circumstances. Those are seen things.

I don't worry, those are not my focus. I look at what is not seen. Christ, that with open face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, we are being changed from glory to glory into that same likeness, but not without suffering.

Christ didn't become glorified without suffering. Remember he said to the men on the road to Emmaus, why should not the Messiah have suffered these things and entered into his glory? Peter tells us in 1 Peter 5, 10, he says, the God of all grace, who has called us to his eternal glory, after you have suffered a while, establish and strengthen and settle you. So glory, yes, we're called to glory, but we don't have that glory now.

We suffer as Christ did to enter that glory. Paul said it's through much tribulations we enter the kingdom of God. He said in the 14th chapter of Acts in verse 22, I think it is.

So we have, you know, suffering is part of this life. It's supposed to be, it was part of Christ's life. He was crowned with thorns.

You want to be crowned with roses? How should you be made perfect without suffering if he was made perfect through suffering as Hebrews says. Suffering is not a thing to run away from. It is certainly something to have compassion toward people who have it and to do what we can to relieve them and even to pray that God will heal them if it's his will.

I believe in healing. I just believe it's up to God, not to me. And that is of course, where the word of faith teaching departs from Christianity.

It's almost at the starting point. Christianity starts at deny yourself. Word of faith starts at take power for yourself and get what you want.

And so this is, this would be my summary. By the way, I have four lectures on the word of faith teaching, two of them on healing and one on prosperity and one on the whole concept of positive confession. There at my website, if you go to the topical lectures, there's a four lecture series called the word of faith teaching.

Are there any questions about anything related to this? Yes, sir. Yeah, we've got families that are caught up in it and are ill. Well, it's gotta be devastating to someone who's convinced of that doctrine when they actually have crises that don't go away when they try to confess them away.

I mean, they either have to assume the doctrine's false, but everybody else around them in their group is saying it's true and it works for them, probably doesn't, but they dare not confess otherwise. Or else they just don't have what it takes. And to say, I don't have what it takes, I mean, everybody else is getting well, but I don't have what it takes is a very depressing kind of thing.

Like, you know, I'm doing my best, doing my best to believe God, but it's not working for me. You know, how do you reach out to those people? Well, it's hard to know because there's a sense in which some people in that group I would describe as brainwashed. They're immune to any refutation.

And the reason is, frankly, fear. It is truly fear. Because if they begin to entertain the

slightest doubt, then they will not have their healing.

If, you know, you have to believe with all your heart, you've got to confess unyieldingly, you've got to be consistent in this. And if someone starts coming and saying, you know, this isn't really true, well, then they feel like, oh, you're damaging my faith, and I'm having enough trouble believing that I'm healed without you coming in there and trying to diminish my faith. And so they're kind of in a unreachable state of mind in some cases.

Not everybody is, but there's certainly people who are because of fear. They're unwilling to think of other things. Now, you might ask somebody like that if they would listen to my lectures on it.

Just say, hey, you know, I found this guy who, he thinks differently than you do, but I'd like to know what you think is wrong with what he's saying. You know, could you listen to this and tell me what's wrong? Because it kind of sounds like he's got some good points, but, you know, you may be able to see what's wrong with what he's saying. Would you listen to that? And they'll find if they listen, that I myself, when I was a teenager, started reading Kenneth Hagin and these guys, and I was persuaded briefly of the word of faith teaching.

I mean, it sounded, Kenneth Hagin used a lot of testimonies, a lot of scriptures, misused, but it took me a while to realize they were misused. I actually felt like this guy has, you know, this is what the Bible teaches. I held that view for probably six months maybe, but as I studied the Bible more, I realized these scriptures are being taken out of context.

But the point is, I know exactly what it's like to believe in that doctrine. And so I give those lectures coming from that standpoint. I was in this doctrine myself.

I know the doctrine. I know the arguments of the doctrine. And I just was forced by my study of scripture to change from what I was taught there.

And that might be the small end of the wedge that could get them to listen. I'm not sure it would. Some people just won't.

You know, when someone says, you know, our movement produced its own Bible, which supports everything we say. Yeah, well, no surprise there, but wouldn't you be more interested in a Bible that is written by the apostles and contains what Jesus actually said and did instead of what your teachers want to make that mean? Their own apostles. Yeah, their own apostles.

This is a hard thing. It's very cultic. It's very cultic, I'm afraid.

And it's very, I mean, they're immune to reality. I mean, Kenneth Hagin, again, I keep mentioning him because I read him a lot. He said, and I have a quote from him in my

notes at home, but he said, I have never been sick since I learned these truths.

He said, and if I was sick, I would say I wasn't. And I thought, okay, you just told me you had never been, but now you just told me you'd lie about it if you had been. So, you know, it seems like truth should enter the picture somewhere in a Christian's life, but this is a doctrine that makes no apologies for lying.

Because they would say, you've got cancer through your whole body. If you confess you're well, you are well. All that cancer that's in your body, that's a deception.

And as you're not allowed to even talk truth, imagine how that puts restrictions on you in any conversation, talking about what's really going on in your life. You know, you can't say anything if it's not ultra positive, because if you say something negative, then that negative thing is going to come upon you. Of course, that doesn't.

I've often said, you know, I'm kind of sick. Uh-oh, I made a mistake, I wasn't sick after all, you know, you know. It's just, you don't get what you say.

I mean, you sometimes will, but you would have gotten it without saying it too. It's not saying it that makes it so. And this is, that's more like magic.

It's more like incantations. It's more like spells. It's more like, it's in that category.

It isn't the same thing, but it's in the same category, where you get the power by saying the words and doing the thing. I don't know what to tell you will reach these people. I mean, I gave my lectures with the hopes of reaching people like that, and some, I think, have been reached through them, but I don't know that it'll work for everybody.

The thought that even the elect will be deceived in the latter times. Yeah, it's, again, I think the only thing that'll keep a person from going off on these weird deceptive rabbit trails is being enamored with Jesus. If you're not bored with Jesus, if you really have and know Jesus, he's all compelling.

And when someone says, oh, well, we've got this other thing we've got too, besides Jesus, that doesn't seem like an improved Jesus, any at all. That just seems like a distraction. That's like, that's something tawdry compared to what the glory of Jesus.

It's like you don't make a metal stronger by adding some kind of inferior metal to it. It's just that, I mean, it's a symptom. It's a symptom of the health of the church in America at this present time, or the world, because America's ideas on this subject are feeding the rest of the world through television, but, and traveling speakers.

But, I mean, I just put this challenge out to those who are here. All of you here probably would tell me, if I was talking to you, that you're a Christian, and I'll take your word for it. I'm not gonna doubt it.

But I put this challenge to you. How much satisfaction do you receive from Christ himself? Is Jesus enough? Or are you always kind of groping around? I've got Jesus escorting, so I'm going to heaven, but it seems like there's something more I should be looking at. Now, here's a book on something interesting here.

Here's a YouTube video by some guy who said I should be keeping the Torah. Maybe that would be better. Or maybe I should get into this positive confession thing, or whatever.

I mean, if you're satisfied with Jesus, you're not susceptible to these distractions. And the fact that so many people go after them speaks of how little connection with the real Jesus many Christians have really established in their lives. And that's a frightening thing to realize, really.

Yes? Well, one of the things that stood out to me is the fact that first you have faith in Christ which puts you in the condition where you can have, name it, claim it. But by the simple thing of saying that you have to have a different faith, or a stronger, even bigger faith, to have the healing, or have the wealth, or have whatever, seems to be suddenly cheap than what Jesus did for us. And take away and just falsify everything that he did.

And if they see that, how can they hold to it? Well, yeah, the sad thing is if it's a benefit of the atonement acquirable by faith, then it would seem like it wouldn't take more faith. No, because- Seems like it should take the same faith. And if I don't have enough faith to get healed, then why would I kid myself to think I have enough faith to be saved? Yeah, and they're putting it on us instead of on Jesus.

Exactly. By giving false expectations. Now, the Bible says hope deferred makes the heart sick.

And when someone raises up your hopes for something that's a false hope, and it's deferred, it doesn't just, you don't just live and learn. You get embittered. At least many people do.

You know, God was supposed to come through for me on this. I know a lot of young people raising Christian homes, hearing Christian testimonies of other people that were dynamic testimonies, and these Christian kids, now in their early adult life, they've left the faith because they say, well, it never happened for me. Well, what never happened? Well, what these people testified to.

Well, who's to say that what they testified to is supposed to necessarily happen to you? You need to have your own walk with Jesus, and you need to find the truth of Christ and follow him. And a lot of people have had expectations raised by other people's testimonies or even other people's false claims that Christianity is supposed to make you have a buzz all the time or never get sick or never have a prayer not answered or something like that. When those kinds of teachings are out there, it's setting people up

for becoming embittered against the gospel.

Well, I tried that, it didn't work for me, so I guess I'll go check out Buddhism this week. Anyway, if the church would stick firmly with scripture and with Jesus, I really think we'd have healthier congregations and fewer people subject to this kind of deception, honestly. ♪♪