

God in a Box?

The Sovereignty of God
in Word of Faith
Theology

By Chad Marinelli, D.B.S.

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All scripture quotes are King James Version unless otherwise noted.

Foreword

Is God in Control? Does God orchestrate every event that occurs in human experience? Does God being sovereign mean God can do whatever He wants, if it requires violating the covenant He made with the human race through the blood of His Son? Is it true that we have no control over circumstances and every situation we find ourselves in is a manifestation of the divine will?

Chad Marinelli provides no-nonsense, hard-hitting, straightforward answers to questions like these and more. He tackles one of the most controversial and misrepresented subjects of our time by masterfully unfolding the truth about the sovereignty of God in Word of Faith theology.

In the mid-eighties, some books were released that highly criticized and viciously attacked the Faith Movement. These books, in my opinion, misrepresented the Faith doctrine. God in a Box sets the record straight for all who hunger for truth.

“Any story sounds true until someone tells
the other side and sets the record straight”
– Proverbs 18:17, TLB

Pastor Bill Anzevino
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Introduction

The Word of Faith movement has been attacked by “heresy hunters” in the last decade, leading many people to question its validity. Critics call it the “name it, claim it”, “blab it, grab it”, or “health and wealth” Gospel. This book is a Biblical defense of the Word of Faith as it pertains to the sovereignty of God. Many charismatic authors are busy writing books about the abundant life. This is noble, but we need some solid material that presents a clear and comprehensive defense for what we believe. Why do we believe God wants to heal? Why do we still die? Why do we emphasize positive confession? How can we claim Old Testament promises? Why didn’t the apostles have an abundant life? What about Paul’s thorn? This book answers these questions and deals with various objections head on. It presents references to mainstream evangelical teachers who have taught similar concepts, showing people that the Word of Faith is nothing new. It clears some of the misconceptions about the motives of certain faith teachers, like Kenneth Hagin, E.W. Kenyon, and Smith Wigglesworth. However, it does not defend every view or teaching of any prominent faith teacher. Admittedly, there have been teachings in certain Word of Faith circles that have compromised the person of Christ and sovereignty of God. This book only concerns itself with the concept of faith taught by Word of Faith teachers, and its relation to God’s sovereignty.

I will discuss the historically orthodox position in which the Word of Faith can be classified, without the complexity of a systematic theology book. The reader will embark upon a journey, starting with God’s sovereignty, progressing into God’s will, pressing into God’s covenants, and ending in the realization of His promises through the Word of Faith.

Chapter 1

The Cloudy Waters

In 1997, the film “Mad City” was released. This film portrays a harmless man caught in the web of media deception. After being fired from his security job at the museum, he panicked and held the people in the museum at gunpoint. Though exaggerated in his actions, his intentions were not to hurt anyone, but rather to get his job back. The people inside the museum could soon tell that he was really a good guy who was confused. Hour by hour, the media would propagate information that was misleading, out of context, and negative. They clouded the waters with their selfish ambitions in order to drive up ratings. What happened? The “Mad City” killed the man. The media painted a picture of a bloodthirsty mad man who was beyond negotiation. Therefore the police could not be blamed in taking the first shot they could get. This is similar to what has happened with the Word of Faith movement. Supposed “heresy hunters” have been casting unwarranted judgment on Word of Faith theology via books, articles, and radio shows. They have attempted to cloud the waters in order to sway the church away from Word of Faith teachings. Instead of being open to genuine Word of Faith teachings, they pull quotes from extremists and generalize these for the whole movement.

It’s amazing how these tactics have swayed the church. Suddenly, anyone who teaches faith healing is a cultist. Anyone who teaches that believers should prosper is a greedy money launderer. Anyone who teaches that Christ became sin and descended into Hell has heretically

annihilated one person of the Godhead. Anyone who teaches speaking to your mountains is commanding God to sway at his every selfish desire. Verbal confession of the Word is suddenly considered a New Age chant. The operation of the gifts of the Spirit is suddenly a counterfeit revival. The authority of the believer has suddenly spawned the demotion of God. The prerequisite of faith in prayer has suddenly become offensive. Why has “heresy hunting” expanded its focus from the doctrines of salvation, scriptural authority, and Christ’s deity, into periphery doctrines?

Heresy Hunters and Different Gospel s

The Bible does tell us to cast down vain imaginations, other gospels, and doctrines of devils in meekness and in truth. I thank God for apologists of the past who have brought evangelical Christianity to where it is today. Thank God for the early church apologist Athanasius, who battled false teachings concerning the nature of Christ. Thank God for Martin Luther, who battled false teachings concerning salvation and scripture, and brought about the largest reformation of Christianity since the dawn of the church. Is this the type of heresy hunting that is occurring against the Word of Faith movement? Not quite. Today’s heresy hunting contains much more character bashing, assumptions about motives, and quotes taken out of context. The focus is not necessarily the Gospel itself. In Galatians 1:9, Paul claims that those who preach “any other Gospel” are accursed. What is the Gospel? Paul told the Corinthians,

I declare unto you the Gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand...By which also ye are saved. (1 Cor 15:1, 2)

He then tells us what this Gospel is in verses three and four:

How that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures.

That's it. That's the Gospel. Jesus is the "Christ", or the "anointed" Son of God. Jesus died for our sins, totally apart from our own merit, and then rose again the third day, defeating death, Hell, and the grave. Anything that contradicts these basic elements of the Gospel is "heresy", but we should resist going beyond these in pursuit of heresy. Anything past these fundamental elements should be mere theological discourse and debate, but not so quickly deemed as "heresy". Peter explains,

There were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. (2 Pet 2:1)

So we see that “damnable heresies” and “false teachers” are rooted in the denial of the redemption Christ provided. This would include works-based religions and cults, which teach that man has a portion to pay in his redemption.

The Word of Faith message is not a different Gospel. It is not a new Gospel. It is the same Gospel, or “good news”, that Jesus and the apostles taught. It is an evangelical Christian message that shows believers the depth of the victory we have in Christ and how to unleash the miracle working power of God by faith. The very heart of the Word of Faith message is the work of Christ in redemption – the exact opposite of a “damnable heresy”.

So many Christians live day to day without power; without victory over the circumstances of life. They push their victory to the future saying, “I’m just waiting for the sweet by and by. I have no other guarantees in this life.” They let Satan batter them around like a piñata during their stay on earth. They accept all outcomes in life as God’s direct will. Jesus, on the other hand, taught that we should say to our mountains, “Be thou removed”, and if we do not doubt, we’ll have whatsoever we say. Are these mountains in the sweet by and by? No, they are during this lifetime; mountains of temptation, persecution, sickness, poverty, among many others. These are all obstacles that clearly hold us back from our great commission – to seek and save that which is lost. How can we remove mountains if we don’t know which mountains are evil? How can we have believing faith without clearly knowing what God’s promises are? Do we not need a full grasp of what we are redeemed from? This is a primary objective of this book: To build a rock solid case for the promises of protection, health, longevity, Biblical prosperity, sanctification, and wisdom. I want to you to see that you do not have to be a 21st

century Job and that God does not arbitrarily bring evil circumstances to your life to bring Himself glory. We must transition from a mindset of “woe is me” to a mindset of “greater is He”.

Man’s faith in the goodness and faithfulness of God is the core of the Word of Faith message. Teachers of the Word of Faith should be given credit for their emphasis on the concept of faith, which Martin Luther fought so hard for in the reformation. No teacher is perfect, and I am not defending all of the teachings of Word of Faith teachers. One thing that must be defended, however, is their concept of faith, which is the emphasis of this book.

Word of Faith – a Legacy from the Past

Word of Faith teachings are nothing new. Different elements of these teachings have been present throughout the history of Christianity. A.B. Simpson, founder of the Christian and Missionary Alliance, claimed, “Divine healing is part of the redemption work of Jesus Christ. Its foundation stone is the cross of Calvary.”¹ Yet, in the last decade, faith teachers have been criticized for revitalizing this teaching. Charles Spurgeon, the Prince of Preachers, claimed, “There is nothing like faith. Faith makes you almost as omnipotent as God, by borrowed power of its divinity.”² Was he a heretic? Wasn’t he elevating man and demoting God? By no means, but teachers like Kenneth Hagin are criticized for claiming that we unleash the ability of God by faith.

¹ A.B. Simpson, *The Four-Fold Gospel*, Revised ed. (Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications, Inc., 1984), 47.

² Charles Spurgeon, *The Triumph of Faith in a Believer’s Life* (Lynnwood: Emerald Books, 1994), 128.

George Mueller, a hero among evangelicals, “would tell the Lord his need in the most matter-of-fact way, and simply count it done by faith.”³ Was he compromising the sovereignty of God as so many Word of Faith teachers supposedly do? The early church father Irenaeus (A.D. 185) claimed,

Some drive out demons ... Some have foreknowledge of the future, visions, and prophetic utterances ... Others, by the laying on of hands, heal the sick and restore them to health ... dead men have actually been raised.⁴

Ironically, this was written in a treatise against heresies. Was he involved in an early church “counterfeit revival”? According to today’s anti-Pentecostal writers, who claim miracles and/or gifts of the Spirit ceased with the apostles, this notable church father should be classified as a complete liar. John Calvin claimed that,

Nothing had been done if Christ had only endured corporeal death... it was necessary that he should feel the weight of divine vengeance ... at close quarters with the powers of Hell and the horrors of eternal death.⁵

³ Charles S. Price, *The Real Faith* (Plainfield, NJ: Logos International, 1940), 80.

⁴ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5:6:1, Ante-Nicene Library 10 vols. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1987).

⁵ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, II.16.10.

Calvin shared a similar view on Christ's sacrifice as many of the early church fathers and future well-known teachers such as Charles Spurgeon, Jonathan Edwards, and Billy Graham⁶; That Christ tasted our full penalty, spiritually and bodily, while hanging on the cross – forsaken by the Father – treated like a sinner. Suddenly, the notions of faith teachers pertaining to Christ's spiritual death are heresy. Athanasius was a leading apologist for the beliefs that constructed the 4th century Nicene Creed, which “has remained for nearly seventeen centuries a secure foundation for the church's theology, worship, and prayer.”⁷ Yet, Athanasius claimed, “God became man

⁶ However, Calvin didn't believe Christ suffered in Hell after he died, as many faith teachers do. I do not necessarily defend the position that Christ suffered in Hell, either. The point being made here is that many historical evangelicals have taught that Christ was “forsaken”, or separated from the Father's fellowship on the cross, and viewed as a sinner. Even Martin Luther remarked that God made Jesus “the worst sinner of the whole world,” even though he also acknowledged that the sinless, righteous Christ actually committed no sin himself. Word of Faith teachers call it a spiritual death, just as natural death is a severing of spirit from body. The degree of Christ's spiritual death is taken to differing levels among faith teachers. Kenyon's teaching, which has Christ taking on our actual sinful nature, is seemingly the most severe. Yet, even Kenyon would never deny the Holiness of Christ during His spiritual death. He wrote, “Psalm 88 gives us the picture of a *righteous* man in Hell” (Bible in the Light of Our Redemption, P. 166). He also wrote how the disciples only saw the physical side of His sufferings, “They didn't see demons take that *beautiful* spirit [Christ] and carry it away” (Advanced Bible Course, P. 277).

⁷ Mark A. Knoll, *Turning Points: Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity*, 2nd Ed (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000), 59.

that we might be made God.”⁸ Why was he not condemned for deifying man, as Kenneth Copeland was for calling believers “little gods”, in reference to the authority and dominion given to us by God⁹. Shouldn’t God be charged with the same faulty teaching, having used the Hebrew word for “god” (*elohim*) to describe humans in Psalm 82:6? In describing a certain man’s faith, infamous C.S. Lewis wrote, “His senses and emotions have destroyed his faith in what he really knows to be true.”¹⁰ Is he not creating a dualism between revelation and sense knowledge as Kenyon supposedly does? These parallels could go on and on. The point is, most of the beliefs of the Word of Faith movement are nothing new. They have sprouted here and there throughout the ages, but for some reason they have been attacked in the last couple of decades.

Sovereignty – The Heart of the Issue

Many prominent allegations against the Word of Faith revolve around the sovereignty of God. Critics claim that the Word of Faith stresses human wants and God’s acquiescence to those wants. They claim that it strips God of His sovereignty and places Him in a box. In

⁸ Carl Johnson, *Orthodox Church: Orthodox Catholic Church, Greek Orthodox Church, Eastern Orthodox Church*, 1992. <<http://mb-soft.com/believe/txc/orthodox.htm>> (March 2004).

⁹ Copeland clarified by saying “now you take the word ‘god’ with a little ‘g’ just simply means authority ... Man is not a sovereign being. You’re subject to something. You are ... subject to God” – 1993 South West Believer’s Convention, Video #3 G-63-0307

¹⁰ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1952), 108.

the remaining chapters, I will disprove this assertion. I will not do this with experiential or logical arguments, but with straightforward Biblical insight. You will find that the core of the Word of Faith teaching is, in fact, the sovereignty of God.