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INTRODUCTION

Any story sounds true until someone tells the other side and sets the record straight.

—Proverbs 18:17, TLB

IN THE EARLY 1970S I wandered into a Christian bookstore and purchased two books that were destined to change my life.

The books were *In His Presence* and *Jesus the Healer* by E. W. Kenyon (1867–1948). I discovered that God was, first and primarily, a Father God. I also discovered that Jesus loved me enough to bear my sicknesses and pains as well as my sins. I received my healing from asthma that had plagued me since I was a child. I am no longer bothered by asthma. Praise the Lord!

In 1980 the Lord led me to begin a Bible study that eventually became the church I now pastor, Word of His Grace Fellowship in Kirkland, Washington. I would tell people who wanted to know what the church believed to read *In His Presence*. That book was foundational to our church.

In the mid-eighties some books were released that viciously attacked Kenyon and the Faith movement. These books misrepresented both Kenyon and the modern Faith movement, and one book suggested that Kenyon mixed metaphysics—specifically Christian Science and New Thought ideas—into Christianity, resulting in heresy.¹ The supposition of Kenyon’s heresy is the key piece in a larger argument which asserts that the modern Faith movement is heretical

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because it has drawn heavily from Kenyon's ideas.

Is there truth in these criticisms? If there is, then Kenyon's writings *deserve* to come under close scrutiny and people *should* be warned of their delusive content. But if these accusations are false, the truth should be made known so the body of Christ can make an unbiased evaluation of Kenyon's teachings.

When a book that included criticisms of Kenyon became a best-seller, I began to write a response, primarily for my congregation. In my writing, I used the information about Kenyon that was openly available—books in print and publically available magazine articles. I concluded that Kenyon did not mix metaphysics and Christianity. In fact, he was an outspoken opponent of the cults and was deeply influenced by the orthodox Christian leaders of his day.

Having completed a rough draft, I sought to communicate with Ruth Kenyon Housworth, who at that time ran Kenyon's Gospel Publishing Society with her husband Norm. I had spoken to her a number of times over the years, and I thought she might be blessed to know someone was responding to her father's critics. Sadly, Ruth was in the hospital and went to be with the Lord about a month later. The staff at Kenyon's Gospel Publishing Society asked me to perform the memorial service for Ruth, which I was honored to do.

Around this time I asked the staff if they knew about the "rumored" boxes of unpublished materials that both Ruth and her husband had mentioned to me on separate occasions years earlier. The staff was unaware of these materials.

Three weeks later I received a phone call from Kenyon's Gospel Publishing Society. They had found about five boxes full of old materials—unpublished articles, sermons, previously unknown periodicals from Kenyon's early days, some manuscripts, an old Bible, and some hymn books, a brief journal, many, many, sermon notebooks, lots of poems, and other odds and ends. It was a gold mine of material for someone trying find out more about Kenyon's theological development!

This find, of course, was a tremendous blessing. New statements about Kenyon's mentors were found. A clear picture of his early years emerged. Much more documentation for my previous conclusions was found. Many historical gaps were filled in. But the conclusions themselves were much the same.

The fact that my conclusions were not significantly altered indicates

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that Kenyon's critics have not presented an honest case. By not exploring documentable influences— influences that were clear from the previously available materials—they built a believable case against him. But when we look at the writings of those whom Kenyon said were his mentors, Kenyon's theology and its developments prove to be in harmony with the orthodox Christian leaders of his day. His critics' accusation of cultic influence no longer makes sense.

I wrote this book to provide factual information about the true influences on Kenyon's theology, the influences Kenyon openly acknowledged. This book is not intended to be a complete biography of the man. Although there is much biographical information, the book is more a focused view of the forces that shaped Kenyon's message— his message of faith.

Section one describes his conversion, the two to three years when he was out of fellowship with the Father, the truth about his time at Emerson College of Oratory, and his restoration to faith.

Section two focuses on the three key years of Kenyon's theological development—1894–1897. It was during these years that he was ordained with the Free Will Baptists and pastored a church in New York.

Section three looks at Kenyon's fruitful years of ministry. It shows the many relationships that he had with the orthodox Christian leaders of his day and concludes with his death and the various stories surrounding it. The Faith-Cure movement, a Christian healing movement which predates the Metaphysical movement, is introduced.

Section four takes a topical look at issues where Kenyon's teaching has been attacked. In this section, I am not so much defending Kenyon's theology as pointing out that his views were very similar to those whom he said were his mentors. The reader is free to disagree with Kenyon's perspective, but I believe this section establishes beyond doubt that Kenyon's influences were completely orthodox. His teachings reflect the ideas that were common among the evangelical community of his formative years. The writings of many of his stated mentors are examined and compared with Kenyon's writings.

My research for this book has led me to believe that a little information went a long way in accusing Kenyon of heresy. It brings to mind the story told about Mark Twain when there were widespread rumors that he had died. He responded by sending a cablegram which read, "The reports of my death are greatly exaggerated."

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Like the reports of Twain's death, the reports of Kenyon's heretical teachings are "greatly exaggerated." It is time to tell the true story to this generation.

—Joe McIntyre
Kirkland, Washington

CHAPTER I

EARLY DAYS

I can remember the night that I received eternal life. It seemed as though I hardly touched the sidewalk on my way home. It was a cold winter night in January, but, oh, how beautiful the snow and frost. Yes, the trees stripped of their foliage assumed a beauty I had never noted before.

—E. W. Kenyon

I CAN REMEMBER the night that I received eternal life. It seemed as though I hardly touched the sidewalk on my way home. It was a cold winter night in January, but, oh, how beautiful the snow and frost. Yes, the trees stripped of their foliage assumed a beauty I had never noted before.

E. W. Kenyon was reared in circumstances that were not likely to produce the remarkably fruitful author and teacher that he would become. The son of William A. Kenyon and Ann Eliza Knox, he was born on April 24, 1867, at a lumber camp, the fourth son in a family of ten. The family remained there in Hadley Hills, New York, for a few years and then moved to the nearby village of Amsterdam.

Due to his family's poverty, he left school at the age of ten at which time he could only write his name in capital letters. At twelve he went to work at one of the local carpet mills, where he typically worked from 6 A.M. to 6 P.M. six days a week. His frustration with life at this time led "Will" Kenyon to become "familiar with all forms of wickedness." He dreamed of becoming an actor, which was a disreputable

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profession at the time, and described himself as an agnostic.²

KENYON'S CONVERSION

PROBABLY MOTIVATED BY the mindless nature of mill work and the sinful lifestyle he was living, Will Kenyon began to hunger spiritually in his teen years. His family did not attend church, so Will had only been to church three times in his life. When his friend Wesley Craig invited him to the week of prayer at the local Methodist church which was meeting at an old schoolhouse, he consented. The first night Will raised his hand at the giving of the invitation. The second night when an altar call was given he went forward. He described his walk home on that cold night in the quote above. The next morning Will fell on the ice. But something had changed in him. "I knew," he said, "I had religion."³

E. W. Kenyon was dramatically and soundly converted at seventeen years of age. He began to devour the New Testament that an older man in the church had given him. His conversion stirred within him a longing to get an education and to preach.

Just as soon as a man receives eternal life he wants an education. At the time I was born again, I was working in a factory. I had no education whatever. The third night when I came home from the service my mother asked me where I had been, and I told her.

My brother, older than I, a witty fellow, said, "Mother, that fool will be preaching next."

I ran upstairs to get away from him, for I dreaded his wit, but I said as I went, "Eddie, you are right; I am going to have an education, and I am going to preach."⁴

According to Ruth Kenyon Housworth, E. W. Kenyon's daughter, he "had a thirst for knowledge, and what he learned he wanted to pass on to others. That desire for study was the driving force of his life." And although he worked long hours as a carpet weaver, her father devoted "every spare minute . . . to study."⁵ A newspaper article said of the young Kenyon:

As he plied the shuttle in his loom there raged more and more fiercely within the longing for an education. There were no night

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schools, so he studied as best he might; often registering a vow that he would obtain the coveted treasure.⁶

Kenyon wrote:

I vowed I would do it, and I have done it. I stood by the loom as a boy and vowed that I would become an educator. I did not know what it meant, but I knew that within me was a teaching gift, an undeveloped thing. I vowed I would do it. I did it. I was handicapped as few men have been handicapped, but I did it. I am passing it on to you to show that they cannot conquer you if you will to do it.⁷

After Will Kenyon gave his life to the Lord, he delighted in the joy of sins forgiven. Filled with zeal and the wonder of the new life, he was an enthusiastic soul winner. His witnessing at the factory had a far-reaching influence on the workers.⁸

After three months he began to conduct cottage prayer meetings and street meetings where he led many to Christ. He was eventually given an exhorter's license by the Methodist Episcopal Church in Amsterdam, New York, and was pastoring by the age of nineteen.⁹ He also led his mother and father to faith in Christ.¹⁰

Kenyon also pursued his dream of education. He received permission to leave the factory to attend a three-month term at the academy in his home town and later had another term at Kent's Hill, a local school.

PROBLEMS ARISE

EVEN THOUGH KENYON enthusiastically pursued converts, he was never solidly established in the basic doctrines of the faith himself. "Do you know," he wrote, "when I accepted Jesus Christ, not one word was said to me about justification, the new birth, or the great doctrines of redemption?"¹¹ With such a shaky foundation, problems soon arose. After a few years of faithfully attempting to serve the Lord, E. W. Kenyon gave way to discouragement. The distracted and disillusioned young preacher "left the Lord's vineyard and turned to the affairs of this world."¹²

What were the factors that contributed to Kenyon's falling away

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from the faith? This is an important question to answer, because he would revisit these points in his teaching for the rest of his life.

LACK OF TRAINING

THE FOREMOST REASON Kenyon attributed to his falling away was a lack of training in scriptural truths. He explained, “I got a wonderful experience [his conversion], but I did not know what that experience was.”¹³

I went to the altar and didn't know what I had. I only knew I had my sins forgiven. No one ever told me I had been born again or had received eternal life. I had been in the ministry for years before I knew I had eternal life. Before that time I had never heard anyone teaching about eternal life.¹⁴

Because of his personal experience, Kenyon determined to establish new converts in the scriptures and give them the tools to live the Christian life. He described from his own experience what happens when this foundation is missing.

I remember when I was born again. I said to myself that nothing could happen to me. I was so happy. Joy seemed to run out my fingers. How I labored with the boys to bring them to meeting. One day I went to a picnic with a company of young people. I was amusing the crowd that day; I amused them to such an extent that I got out of fellowship with the Father, and I did not know what ailed me. I had grieved the Spirit.

That night we were going down to The Salvation Army. None of the boys were Christians. I always testified, and God gave me great liberty in testimony in those days, but I waited until toward the end. But I had to speak; it seemed as though I should burst. I got on my feet and told them how miserable I was and how unhappy. I told them that I did not believe that I was a Christian any longer, that I had sinned and I was lost. I had no one to help me. As I went down the stairs with the boys, they told me that I ought to go to the altar and be justified again. . . . Days and days went past before I got my fellowship back again.¹⁵

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A few years later while pastoring he met the same struggle. Although one of his key teachings eventually would be the difference between *relationship* and *fellowship*, this event was the beginning of a downhill slide for Kenyon.

Years went by before I knew the difference between fellowship and relationship. I could not help my people. I would see young people accept Christ and come into the church and their testimony would ring out with great joy for weeks, then it was gone. I would do my best, but could not get them back. I did not know how to help them. Many a choice man and woman did I lose out of my church. I knew they were born again.¹⁶

Although Kenyon experienced some troubled years due to his lack of grounding in the Word, God would use it for good. His desire to firmly establish new converts in the Word emerged from this negative event and marked Kenyon forever—in a good way.

Near the end of his life (1943) Kenyon wrote about someone who had lost their fellowship with the Father after a glorious conversion. Kenyon explained to this inquirer that he hadn't lost his salvation, he had broken fellowship with the Father. "I can understand that. I think every believer goes through that experience unless he has been correctly instructed at the beginning. . . . I passed through that myself."¹⁷

E. W. instructed him to take his correspondence course and read his books. Kenyon's books and courses were designed to help believers avoid falling into the same pit Kenyon did. "Great enthusiasm and joy come at the new birth," Kenyon wrote, "but unless that is cared for and fed by the mind being renewed through feeding on the Word and practicing it, that joy will die out."¹⁸

SKEPTICISM

BECAUSE OF HIS LACK of scriptural understanding, E. W. Kenyon wrote that he became dominated by his skeptical nature.¹⁹

Skepticism is ignorance in the saddle; one is skeptical about a thing he does not know or understand. When he knows or understands it, he is no longer skeptical.²⁰

Young Will was quite sensitive of nature and was beset by doubts. Not having a basis in the fundamental truths of Christianity from

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Scripture his mind was besieged by questions. Although he experienced great joy when his fellowship with the Lord was rich, if it was marred in any way he became helpless and vulnerable. This increased his susceptibility to wonder if Christianity was “a bag of holes.” Ignorance was creeping into the saddle and skepticism was grasping the reins.

LIBERAL INFLUENCES

LIKE MANY YOUNG MINISTERS, Will looked to the elder ministers around him for help and instruction. Unfortunately for Kenyon, those he looked to were not a good influence on him. He shared that his “first view of Jesus the Nazarene was through the eyes of others. Almost all my early experience was through the mental eyes of my elders. I learned my theology from men rather than from God Himself.”²¹

Being young and naive, Kenyon allowed his desire for an education to be fed by ministers with a liberal bent. One minister gave E. W. a book that he had authored on annihilationism, which Kenyon eagerly read. “There was a time when I denied the sufferings of the wicked. I believed in the annihilation of the wicked. I believed it because I was led into it by a man who gave me his book.”²² Kenyon later reflected that the book didn’t contain much Scripture at all, but many quotes from well-known clergy.

Kenyon also noted the devastating effects of one sermon he heard as a young minister. The preacher argued that “God knew Adam was going to fall, and that knowing that, He was not just in creating him.” This message totally disarmed the zealous young soul-winner. Kenyon wrote, “The man that preached it didn’t know what seed he was sowing in my young heart. I was trying to be true to God. When I got into the work and met this argument, I lost faith. I lost everything. For three years I was in darkness.”²³

The justice of God in creating man would later become an important theological theme in Kenyon’s writings. He made this theme the subject of a chapter in his first book *The Father and His Family*.

Kenyon swallowed some poor and damaging teaching. He assumed the integrity of these older ministers and accepted their ideas without examining the Scriptures. After he was restored to the Lord, he would not make *that* mistake again.

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LACK OF RESULTS

ANOTHER WIND OF DISCOURAGEMENT assaulted the tender faith of the zealous young minister: the lack of results he was seeing in those he was attempting to nurture in the Lord. We see a glimpse of this emerging discouragement in the above quotes. It began to really get to him as he attempted to lead others. Kenyon wrote about these early days that he “wondered why the largest percentage of church members and those whom I had led to Christ myself were spiritual failures. I wondered if after all, Christianity was a bag full of holes.” Compared to his zeal, those around him seemed pathetically uncommitted. As he said of himself at the time “I was very zealous. I had consecration services every week,” to fire them up. But, he reported, “I preached hard and worked hard, but my people failed to attend prayer meetings despite all that I could do.”²⁴

NOT RECEIVING THE HOLY SPIRIT

KENYON ALSO POINTED OUT that due to lack of teaching, he had not received the Holy Spirit in the first years after his conversion. (“I had never received the Holy Spirit; if I had, I should never have got in that condition [fallen away].²⁵”) Kenyon’s teaching on the Holy Spirit has come under discussion, and we will examine his beliefs thoroughly in a later chapter. For here, let it suffice to say that he did believe Christians needed to receive the Holy Spirit *after* their conversion.

THREE DARK YEARS

KENYON’S FIRST WIFE, Evva (who died in 1914), said that her husband was disillusioned by “disgust arising from the many inconsistencies in the motives and lives of Christian leaders,” and some failings in his own life, namely, “the pride of life, desire for fame and money in his own nature.”

Kenyon spent between two and three years in darkness.

Years went by and I lost it and went back into sin; I dropped back deeper and deeper until I went into agnosticism. Yet all through those dark days of my doubts, I had a consciousness that I was a child of God. I never left my Bible behind me during those two or

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three years in which I was in darkness, but I never breathed a prayer to God Almighty. I was a son, but I was a prodigal. When I came back, I came into fellowship with my Father.²⁶

We will examine what Kenyon did during these days of darkness in the next chapter. This crucial chapter will answer the question, “Was Kenyon influenced by the metaphysical cults?”