

Kenneth Hagin's Two Faith Messages

By Rev. Mel C. Montgomery

Unknown to most Charismatics, Rhema graduates, Word of Faith people, and Hagin critics, Kenneth Hagin preached two considerably different “faith” messages. I discovered this fact while spending the last two years researching diligently the ministries of life-long friends and associates of Kenneth Hagin, namely the Rev. and Mrs. J.R. Goodwin.

Kenneth Hagin acknowledged the Goodwins as being his primary mentors throughout his life. I was in a ministers meeting in 1991 in which I heard Brother Hagin say, “For the first 40 years of my ministry, whenever God would give me a major vision or revelation, I would not fully teach it and preach it until I had shared the matter with the Goodwins and asked them to judge it and correct me if they thought I needed it.” Such was his confidence in the discerning and balance of the Goodwins' ministry. Brother Hagin and Brother Goodwin were best friends for the many years both were alive.



Sister Goodwin was an elderly widow when God brought her into my life. She took me under her wing and was my friend and mentor for the last 10 years of her life. She talked extensively to me about the churches she and her husband had pastored, spiritual experiences God had given her, principles they had taught and applied in their church, and of their relationship with Kenneth and Oretha Hagin. A number of years after her passing, I was contacted by the Goodwin family and close associates. Because of my relationship with Sister Goodwin, and the reverence I had for the Goodwin ministry, they asked me to feature on my website the recordings that had been made at the Goodwins' church, and I was honored to do so. These treasures can be listened to by download for free at www.brothermel.com.

In working with these recordings and researching the Goodwins' ministry, I came into contact with Brother and Sister Goodwins' only living child--Dr. Charles Goodwin. His is an interesting story in itself. He had grown up in his parents' church hearing and seeing the countless miracles and manifestations of spiritual gifts. In his childhood, Charles had also heard Kenneth Hagin preach in the early years of Hagin's ministry, beginning back in the very late 1930s and the early 1940s. Hagin at the time was pastoring a church in a small town near where the Goodwins were pastoring.

As I understand the story, the Goodwins were among the very first ministers to be supportive of Hagin's itinerant ministry when he left his last pastorate. Charles has mentioned to me how, as a child, he remembers hearing Brother Hagin's knock on the door of their home, and thinking, "There comes Brother Hagin, and here comes the floor!" He thought this because whenever Hagin preached for the Goodwins, he would stay overnight at their home, and was always given Charles' bed, and Charles slept on the floor. The family-like relationship these families enjoyed can be seen in the fact that Charles called Brother Hagin "Uncle Ken," all his life.

When it came time to fulfill his own ministry calling though, Charles did not pursue it within the Assemblies of God as his parents and Hagin had done. It wasn't the right fit for him. Many factors were involved, but one of the major ones was that with the fame of his parents in Charismatic and Word of Faith circles (he did not want to build his own ministry on his parent's name and reputation. He wanted to earn his place in ministry). So, much to everyone's surprise, he joined the Southern Baptists and eventually earned a doctorate and became a professor of New Testament Greek at a Southern Baptist University. This was by no means a repudiation of his parent's ministry though. In fact, when his father passed away, for awhile Charles traveled and held meetings with his mother in Charismatic churches. Charles still accepts invitations to minister both for Southern Baptists Churches and for Word-of-Faith type Charismatic Churches. (As a theologian Charles has been able to minister beyond denominational lines. For example, Charles has ministered as a guest speaker in Presbyterian and United Methodist Churches, as well as Classical Pentecostal denominations such as the Assemblies of God, the Church of God, and others.)

Discussing Bible subjects and Charismatic issues with Charles is always a delight and an education. He grew up seeing the miraculous on almost a daily basis, but he also has the advanced theological education that has given him a thorough understanding of Christian doctrine and Church history. What is especially helpful in discussing spiritual issues and history with Charles is the fact that he is fair minded and even handed. He acknowledges the strengths and weaknesses of both the Charismatic and Evangelical branches of Christianity. He is realistic too about the ministries of his parents, Kenneth Hagin, and other leading Charismatic leaders, many of whom he knew in the early years of their ministries. As with any genuine professor or teacher, he gives you the tools and the context that enables you to judge matters and to reach a logical and reasoned conclusion for yourself. I sense no prejudice, bias, or any agenda in discussions with Charles other than a deep desire to help people understand clearly what the Bible teaches and does not teach.

It is in the context of these unbiased discussions that I came across a fact that I've never heard or read of anyone addressing before. That is the fact that Kenneth Hagin had two substantially different faith messages he preached. I think this has major implications for us today in Charismatic and especially in Word of Faith circles.

Origins of Kenneth Hagin's Faith Message

If you ever had the opportunity to hear Brother Hagin preach in person, or on tapes, he says something over and over that we let go in one ear and out the other. He said that God had healed him as a teenager and raised him up from a death bed as he read "Grandma's Methodist Bible." After being healed, he went forth boldly preaching a pure faith message that I can find no fault with. It was a scriptural message that helped people receive healing, miracles, and answers to prayer in the same way he had received them--through biblical faith. He taught, preached, and practiced faith for years before he came across the writings of E. W. Kenyon. Originally Hagin's "faith message" contained none of Kenyon's influences.

As a result of knowing this, one can immediately put to rest the long standing and oft repeated mantra chanted by the Hagin critics for decades:

"Hagin got his faith message from E. W. Kenyon."

No he didn't.

How can you get a "faith message" from an author you have never heard of and have not read? Kenneth Hagin got his "faith message" by reading his Grandmother's Bible, and by believing and applying what he read. By all accounts, he preached his faith message for years before encountering Kenyon's writings, and never met Kenyon in person.

Kenyon, I believe, was a sincere Christian who had a passion for the Lord. It seems to me that he may have seen principles that were similar to what Hagin would later discover on his own. Kenyon was a man of faith but he was not a theologian. Consequently, he may have expressed some genuine truths about faith in entirely unscriptural language and reasoning. He was certainly not the first or the last preacher of the Gospel to express Gospel truths in theologically incorrect terms. I dare say that every preacher of the Gospel in the history of the Church has at some time preached a sermon only to later realize he had misspoken by using incorrect terminology.

One preacher I heard about took notice of the fact that the King James translators sometimes used the phrase "Holy Spirit" and sometimes, "Holy Ghost" in reference to the Spirit of God. He made a study of these instances, and then went forward from church to church for 25 years preaching on the difference between the Holy Spirit and the Holy Ghost. Eventually to his embarrassment he discovered that although the King James translators had used the English phrases "Holy Spirit" and "Holy Ghost," they were doing so in reference to the exact same Greek wording. In short, there was no difference between the Holy Spirit and the Holy Ghost. Preaching an unbiblical teaching did not make this preacher a false prophet or an emissary of Satan. It simply means the poor soul was ignorant. As he noted later though, although it was sad that he spent 25 years preaching nonsense, what was even more tragic was that in 25 years, no preacher had ever disagreed with him or pointed out his error. I guess his listeners were as biblically ignorant as he was. Worse, there may still be some of his listeners, walking in his footsteps, preaching to this present hour on the difference between the Holy Spirit and the Holy Ghost. God help us.

Paul notes of the Jews of his day:

For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God,
but not according to knowledge.--Romans 10:2.

The Book of Acts tells that Apollos' gospel was incomplete:

And he [Apollos] began to speak boldly in the
synagogue: whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard,
they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way
of God more perfectly.--Acts 18:26.

It is possible to be sincerely zealous for God, but to have a flawed understanding and to express that zeal in entirely wrong language. Such was the case, I believe, with E. W. Kenyon.

To see the notoriety of Kenyon's writings today, you would assume that during his lifetime (1867 - 1948) he must have had a large and influential ministry. On the contrary, he had only a small regional following in the Pacific Northwest of the United States. His ministry was by no means national or international. Kenyon was not a part of the world-wide Pentecostal outpouring of his day. There are some sources that claim that Kenyon did speak in tongues though.

As far as I can determine, his unique teachings and interpretations were not accepted or known to Smith Wigglesworth, Stanley Frodsham, Howard Carter, and other early Pentecostals. The only connection I can find between Kenyon and an early Pentecostal was that some people claim that Kenyon and F. F. Bosworth knew each other. I believe had Kenyon's writings not been referenced in so many of Brother Hagin's materials, the name of E. W. Kenyon would be virtually unknown today.

Somehow, Brother Hagin came across Kenyon's writings and felt a kinship with Kenyon's faith teachings. The kinship would be easy to understand. When Brother Hagin began preaching what came to be later known as the Word of Faith message, he was virtually alone in doing so. If you will research the sermons commonly preached during the Pentecostal Outpouring of the early 1900's and the Healing Revival of the 1940's and 1950's, you will observe that faith was mentioned and preached only in a general way. Multitudes were urged to "have faith," and to "only believe," but few details were ever given on exactly how to have faith or how to specifically believe.

The fact that Hagin's faith message was a truly fresh presentation of the Bible subject of faith was driven home dramatically in an observation he made at a yearly convention of the Voice of Healing. This was a largely informal organization of healing evangelists that were prominent in the Healing Revival of the 1940's and 1950's, headed up by Gordon Lindsay. The organization was later dissolved and folded into Lindsay's other emerging ministry work, Christ For The Nations Institute in Dallas, TX. Hagin reports that of the approximately 100 healing evangelists of that organization, he knew of none of them who were preaching Biblical faith in the way that he was doing. Instead, they would preach biblical messages, and wait for their spiritual gift of healing to come into operation, at which time they would then begin laying hands on the sick.

This is not to imply that Kenneth Hagin preached an entirely new doctrine in his core faith message. His faith message was based primarily on Mark 11:23-24, specifically, exhorting people to believe they had already received the answer to their prayer the instant they prayed, with their assurance resting in the integrity of God's holy written word. Kenneth Hagin did not write or invent Mark 11:23-24. He just spent a lifetime preaching the passage of scripture that had raised him off a deathbed, giving additional insight into concepts and scriptures we already believed. Such is commendable and entirely appropriate.

Tragically however, Kenneth E. Hagin was not a theologian, and had no formal theological training. Therefore, he did not recognize stunningly unbiblical concepts presented in E. W. Kenyon's writings.

Kenneth Hagin's mentors, Rev. and Mrs. J.R. Goodwin recognized that major aspects of Kenyon's teachings were unbiblical, and cautioned Hagin away from them. Sadly though, Hagin would not be persuaded. Perhaps in his lonely and much-criticized quest to teach the biblical principles of receiving from God by faith,

Hagin was too quick to accept the few writings he found that were at least similar to his own understanding.

In order to maintain their friendship, the Goodwins and Hagin quit discussing Kenyon's writings with each other and agreed to disagree. When Kenneth Hagin ministered for the Goodwins, he respected their ideological differences. He left off his book and tape table those of his books and tapes that included teachings he had adopted from Kenyon that the Goodwins did not accept.

Kenneth Hagin's Two Faith Messages

In services in which Kenneth Hagin preached for the Goodwins, he tailored the faith message to fit within orthodox Christian doctrine. The Goodwins fully received and approved of this version of the faith message. Thus, it could be argued that Hagin actually had two faith messages:

1. One which was expansive, and included Kenyon's teachings and deviated from orthodox doctrine. This he preached at Rhema and to the world.
2. A second faith message that was a stripped-down, core faith message minus Kenyon's teachings was what he preached for the Goodwins. This I would characterize as his original faith message that he had learned from the Bible and that when put into practice had raised him up off a deathbed as a teenager. This original or alternate faith message fit within orthodox Christian doctrine, and contained nothing of Kenyon's influences.

As I began to realize that Kenneth Hagin preached two considerably different faith messages, I asked Dr. Charles Goodwin to confirm whether my understanding was correct. He responded as follows:

I can say without equivocation, "Ken Hagin did not preach 'the extreme WOF message' when he ministered at my dad's church. To the best of my memory and knowledge, he preached faith and what can be achieved if one's faith (in God) is exercised and practiced as a regular part of any believer's life. Ken Hagin was a gentleman; he would never have preached Kenyon's teachings at my dad's church because he knew my dad did not approve of same. I think your statement, '*a second one that was a core or stripped-down message, minus Kenyon's teachings . . .*' accurately describes the relationship between my dad and Ken Hagin."

Kenneth Hagin's Original Faith Message Did Not Contain:

The spiritual death of Christ.

Christ literally being made sin instead of having sin imputed to him.

Christ suffering in Hell for three days.

The "God-Kind of Faith" teaching.

The "Little Gods" teaching.

Actual righteousness instead of imputed righteousness.

Did Kenneth Hagin Contradict Himself?

No. Although the two faith messages differed considerably, Kenneth Hagin did not contradict himself or violate his conscience. For instance, at the Goodwins' church Brother Hagin preached that Christ's sufferings paid the penalty for our sins--and he left it at that. Although Hagin believed that those sufferings were both physical at Calvary, and spiritual later in Hell, he did not take note of this in his sermons for the Goodwins. At the Goodwins' church, Hagin preached faith--trust in God and in the integrity of God's word. However, he believed specifically that this faith was the "God-Kind of Faith"--a portion of the faith God Himself used in creating the Universe--but he did not mention this belief at the Goodwins'.

The Results:

Interestingly enough, both messages produced the same miraculous results. There were just as many miracles, prophecies, and manifestations of spiritual gifts when Hagin preached the core faith message in the Goodwins' church, as when he preached the more expansive faith message in other venues. I think this demonstrates an important fact that we in the Word of Faith move need to allow to sink deeply into our thinking:

The genuine faith message was not then, and is not now, dependant on the unique interpretations and teachings of E. W. Kenyon.

The Goodwins themselves, Hagin's mentors, preached faith for over 40 years, remaining well within the boundaries of orthodox doctrine and without relying at all on Kenyon's unusual teachings. They too saw countless salvations, miracles, and manifestations of the Holy Spirit.

In Conclusion:

I do not suggest that we follow in Kenneth Hagin's footsteps by preaching two parallel faith messages. Instead, I believe we need to realize that Kenneth Hagin preached the "faith message" in two entirely different formats, and yet attained the same miraculous results with both. By preaching the "expanded" faith message, which includes Kenyon's odd teachings, we hand to our harshest critics tons of legitimate theological ammunition to use against us. By preaching the core, original message, which contains no Kenyonisms, we remain consistent with the Bible, with sound doctrine, and with what has historically been preached since the days of the Apostles and the early church.

As the years have passed, and as my knowledge of scripture, doctrine, and church history has increased, I have found little or no scriptural support for certain portions of the expanded Word of Faith message that is commonly preached today. I have therefore chosen to preach a faith message, identical to the original one that Kenneth Hagin preached, which does not include any Kenyonisms. I am preaching what I call a "Reformed Word of Faith" message that is compatible with orthodox Christian doctrine. I urge other Word of Faith preachers to consider doing the same.

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