

Keswick Movement: Mark and Avoid

In 1859 William Boardman published his book, *The Higher Christian Life*. [1] The book ultimately birthed the [Keswick Movement](#), so named because the first meeting was held in a church in Keswick, England. The Keswick Movement was filled with doctrinal error from the start and like nearly *all* errors that infiltrated Christendom over the centuries, they remain to this day. This shouldn't surprise us because Satan has always twisted God's Word to his own ends.

Founder of Keswick Movement

William Boardman worked closely with Robert Pearsall Smith, whose wife Hannah Whitall Smith, a Quaker, became well known in the movement for her belief in "quietism". [2] Quietism teaches that "sinless perfection" is attainable in this life and comes from inner quietness or *meditative contemplation* that is believed to allow God to work as all human effort is stopped. Remind you of something today?

Those involved with the Keswick Movement were *continuationists* otherwise known as *anti-cessationists*. These folks then (as well as today), believed the sign gifts including tongues never stopped. History as well as Scripture tells us that this is not true; that in fact, the sign gifts *did* actually cease not long after the last apostle died and the Bible had finished being written (though not yet compiled into Canon).

Though Boardman was a Presbyterian and strongly influenced by the numerous heresies of Charles Finney and others, he was *not* a trained theologian. In fact, it is tragic that many errors that crept into the church were introduced by people who had little to no training in rightly dividing the Word. This is *not* to say that a person with little to no formal training cannot be used by God or that he is exempt from learning the truth of Scripture (Harry Ironsides is a good example). However, there is a proper hermeneutic to be used in studying Scripture and if not applied, many errors can result.

The Keswick Movement urged Christians to seek enlightenment *emotionally*, to press on toward a *higher* ("mystical," aka emotional), experience in Christ. This type of pursuit is diametrically opposed to what God teaches in His Word (2 Timothy 3:16-17). As such, it should be rejected. It is the exact same way that Satan tempted Eve to focus on how she *felt* instead of what God had *said* (Genesis 3).

As a young Christian, because of a lack of discipleship, I was literally tossed about on various waves of theology because of my emotions. It is because of those emotions that I ended up being drawn into the Charismatic Movement. Looking back now, I fully realize my error.

Because of the emphasis on emotion, signs and wonders, the Keswick Movement gave birth to Pentecostalism, the Charismatic Movement and ultimately to today's NAR movement, all facets of the same doctrinal errors. Moreover, today's Contemplative Movement is simply a redressing of the Quaker Quietism.

Doctrinal errors never really go away once introduced and embraced. They are simply renamed and recycled by Satan to a new generation. Too many leaders within Christendom think they've

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found something "new" and introduce their followers to it in books, sermons and seminars. However, they are simply espousing the same error that Satan tempted Eve with thousands of years ago. There is nothing new under the sun. It is simply *seems* new to the latest generation.

One of the main errors within the Keswick Movement is their unbiblical view of *sanctification*. Keswickians believe when a person becomes saved, they are immediately *justified*. This is Scriptural *fact* (Romans 3:21-26; 5:18-19; 2 Corinthians 5:21). In effect, there is nothing I can do to justify myself before God. Only salvation provides this immediate and eternal justification as Christ's righteousness is literally imputed to my account.

Biblically speaking, sanctification is the *process* the Christian goes through that ultimately makes him/her perfect in Christ. This is not only begun by God at our conversion, but *finished* by Him as well when we reach the eternal realm (Hebrews 12:2; Philippians 1:6). In sanctification, Christians are both *passive* and *active*. We are passively trusting in God's ability to fully sanctify us and we are active because we are to choose to do what is right, in thought, word, and deed (Romans 12:1-2; 1 Thessalonians 4:4; Hebrews 12:14, etc).

Adherents of Keswickianism would agree with the above regarding *justification*. However, when it comes to *sanctification*, they move off in a different direction. They generally do *not* believe the Holy Spirit comes *into* the person and takes up residence at salvation, but that the Holy Spirit simply *comes upon* the person to seal them with salvation. It is later, at a time they refer to variously as the "second blessing," or "higher living," when they say sanctification occurs. Ultimately, their view of sanctification is flat out mysticism akin to New Age's altered state of consciousness. This is all based on a strong (and seemingly biblical), desire to *emotionally* "know" God. The person turns inward to meet the felt needs of *self*.

By the way, America has its own [Keswick](#). Keswick remains with the world.

In Thomas Ross' critical review of Keswick Movement, he says:

...the problems in the Keswick theology are severe. Because of its corrupt roots, Keswick errs seriously in its ecumenical tendencies, theological shallowness or even incomprehensibility, neglect of the role of the Word of God in sanctification, shallow views of sin and perfectionism, support of some tenants of Pelagianism and semi-Pelagianism, improper divorce of justification and sanctification, confusion about the nature of saving repentance, denial that God's sanctifying grace always frees Christians from bondage to sin and changes them, failure to warn strongly about the possibility of those who are professedly Christians being unregenerate, support for an unbiblical pneumatology, belief in the continuation of the sign gifts, maintenance of significant exegetical errors, distortion of the positions and critiques of opponents of the errors of Keswick, misrepresentation of the nature of faith in sanctification, support for a kind of Quietism, and denial that God actually renews the nature of the believer to make him more personally holy. Keswick theology differs in important ways from the Biblical doctrine of sanctification. It should be rejected. [3]

But *who* in history who were associated with Keswick and what it stood for? Here are just *some* of the more well-known people below:

- A. W. Tozer [4] (the Keswick Movement gave birth to the Christian and Missionary Alliance denomination of which Tozer belonged)
- Andrew Murray - "*very notable advocate of the continuationistic Keswick theology and a charismatic precursor*" [5]
- Hudson Taylor [6] [6b]
- Watchman Nee [7]
- Brother Lawrence [8]
- Bernard of Clairvaux [9]
- Madame Guyon [10]
- Thomas á Kempis [11]

It is no wonder that as a young Christian, devouring many of the writings by Tozer, Murray, Lawrence and others led me into severe confusion and ultimately pushed me into the Charismatic Movement seeking what I thought was "*holiness*." Turns out it was my unchecked *emotions* that pushed and pulled me.

The concept of holiness is a biblical one. It is something that all Christians should know about and understand how we connect with it. Thomas Constable has this to say about holiness.

Holiness is thus not so much an abstract or mystic idea, as a regulative principle in the everyday lives of men and women. Holiness is thus attained not by flight from the world, nor by monk-like renunciation of human relationships of family or station, but by the spirit in which we fulfill the obligations of life in its simplest and commonest details: in this way - by doing justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with our God in everyday life. [12]

The emphasis within Keswick is that you are never holy enough. Certainly, this is true. However, I am on the *path* to greater holiness as God recreates within me the perfect character of His Son, which will not be completed until I reach eternity. This is God's work of sanctification.

The common thread with all of the people above (and others not listed), is the emphasis on *mystical* experiences that allegedly begin within as we quiet ourselves and wait upon God. Unfortunately, this is clearly not Scriptural because we are not to focus on our "innerspace" as New Agers do. We are to put our hand to the plow and look *forward*, not backward. This can only occur as we submit ourselves to Him (Romans 12:1-2). It really doesn't matter if our emotions catch up with us, nor should they be used to "verify" that we are growing in the Lord. If the heart is deceitfully wicked and cannot be understood (Jeremiah 17:9), what makes us think that once we are saved, our hearts are all of a sudden able to be known?

Adam and Eve lived in a perfect environment and *still* managed to fall through sin! For a time they were sinless. Then...the fall.

Andrew Murray, A W Tozer and others now make perfect sense to me when I read their books. They were *mystics* who sought, focused on and tended to emphasize an emotional *experience* where God was concerned. I understand that because I also desperately reached for that for several years. It doesn't work and causes the Christian to constantly look to his/her emotions for verification.

I have been married to my wonderful wife for 35 years. The day I met her, I *liked* her. As we dated, I fell in *love* with her. That "love" was largely an emotional rush based on my *feelings* toward her. There were times when I thought my heart would explode because of my "love" (emotion) for her. Over time that changed and my love for my wife became more solidified and did not rely on emotion.

Thirty-five years later, I can honestly say I love my wife *more* now than I did early on, though I certainly believed I could not love her more in our early days. However, my love for my wife *now* is absolutely solid. It is not (but can at times include), emotion. It is something far different because it is based in knowledge. I love her and I know she loves me.

I do not use my days to try to go inside myself in attempting to "love" my wife more than I do; to have some type of mystical ethereal awareness of my wife. I understand the desire to know God *more* than we do now, but this largely will not occur until *after* we leave this life and see Him face to face. Christians are to grow through *imitating* God in the area of holiness, which means separating ourselves from the things that offend God. This requires purpose on our part and the Holy Spirit is within us to empower us to do that. Sometimes, it simply requires a resounding "NO!" to the temptation.

Too many leaders and authors are tempting Christians with going "beyond," obtaining "more" than the Bible says we have a right to expect. There is no "second blessing" for the Christian, unless you consider the life after this one the actual second blessing when we will be separated from our sin nature forever, we will see Him as He is and we will be *like* Him. Then we will know in certainty as we are known.

We need to stop reaching for something that God is not giving us and simply live the Christian life as He outlines. He *will* empower us but we may not *feel* it.

[1] <https://faithsaves.net/william-boardman/>

[2] <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Quietism>

[3] <http://truthwatchers.com/keswick-mysticism-infiltrating-fundamentalism/>

[4] <https://www.gotquestions.org/A-W-Tozer.html>

[5] <https://faithsaves.net/andrew-murray/>

[6] <https://www.christianity.com/church/church-history/timeline/1801-1900/the-first-keswick-convention-11630576.html>

[6b] <https://www.gotquestions.org/Keswick-movement.html>

[7] <https://faithsaves.net/watchman-nee/>

[8] <https://kentbrandenburg.blogspot.com/2016/03/keswicks-history-keswick-theologys-rise.html>

[9] <https://www.gotquestions.org/Bernard-of-Clairvaux.html>

[10] <https://kentbrandenburg.blogspot.com/2016/03/keswicks-history-keswick-theologys-rise.html>

[11] Ibid

[12] Thomas Constable, Notes on Leviticus 18