

**Satan' Subtilty: The Keswick Gospel**

The postwar late '40s and '50s brought, with the returning of servicemen and the restoration of a peacetime economy, a massive spurious revival in the United States. People joined churches by the thousands. New churches sprang up and mushroomed into giant complexes overnight. Southern Baptists' slogan, "A million more in '54" was a great success. Evangelistic campaigns under the title of "Revivals" were spectacularly successful. It was in 1949 that Billy Graham's crusade in Los Angeles was an amazing success, and it launched his career that has compassed the Globe. Scores of other crusade teams went into business. A whole new crop and breed of Evangelists appeared brimming and glowing with excitement, enthusiasm and optimism. Scores of "church building" contractors and "church financing" companies appeared to meet the demand for expanding religious activity. New programs, literature and organizations were produced in order to harness and activate all these new people.

By the early 1960s this "revival" began to fade and the new gimmicks and gadgets worked less and less effectively. Some churches began to have trouble paying for the massive building programs which they had launched under the rapid growth period. As attendance began to drop and evangelistic results began to wane, religious leaders worked harder and harder to maintain the pace they had come to expect. More new programs, gimmicks and devices were dreamed up, tried and discarded for something hopefully better.

Worse yet, multitudes swept in by the religious excitement of the previous years were proving to be unsound converts. When the enthusiasm of growth began to fade, their religious fervor proved to be only as warm as the success binge. They had no roots in Christ. They had only joined the bandwagon of a going thing; and when it stopped going, they soon either dropped out of church altogether, or stayed in and opposed the gospel, corrupted the morals and holy standards of God's people, and, in general, became thorns in the flesh of God's preachers.

Ministers, reluctant to admit and face the fact that they had turned the sheepfold into a goat barn, began to try to find some category into which they might fit these spiritual outlaws whom they wished to consider Christian. Before long the answer was handily supplied in "Carnal Christian," "Lordship," and "Deeper Life" theories. These people, they reasoned, had accepted Jesus as Saviour, but had never received Him as Lord. They needed only to make Him Lord of their lives on earth as well as Saviour of their souls in the hereafter. They had been saved from the penalty of their sins, and now they needed to be taught how to stop sinning.

Not all ministers fell into the deeper life rut through a desire to salvage the spurious results of a defective evangelism. Some came into it via the "faith rest" door. Seeing the obvious fallacy of contemporary revivalism, they wanted nothing to do with a gospel that dishonored the Lord and produced a convert that knew nothing of the Lordship of Christ. Instead, they went about in just an exhaustive and destructive course to produce a real, heaven sent revival by paying a price for it. Fasting, praying, sacrificing, preaching repentance, confession of sins and turning to God. All of this is right and should be done, but it is no formula for revival, nor is it guaranteed to produce an immediate harvest of souls. It can be just another hateful activity of the flesh. After having exhausted themselves and their churches through these attempts to produce fruit for Christ, the truths of John 15:5 began to dawn upon them. *"I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing."* Psalm 37:7 *"Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for him . . ."* Psalm 116:7 *Return unto thy rest, O my soul; for the LORD hath dealt bountifully with thee.* These and other related truths were a sweet and welcome libation to men who had labored long and hard trying to produce fruit for God in the energy of their own flesh.

Leading preachers of these truths are the descendants of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Keswick conferences in Scotland and England. This was a movement which was begun to awaken and rescue churches from their deplorable dead and decadent conditions which had been brought about through worldliness and neglect of spiritual truth. It was associated with many fine men of God. It taught the absolute Lordship of Christ as essential in victorious Christian living, victory over the power of sin (not sinless perfection, but power through Christ to break the dominion of sin over one's life), and fruitfulness through abiding and resting in Christ. These truths were to be made realities in the believer's life through revelation of identification with Christ in His death and resurrection. The mystery of the mystic, yet vital and real union of Christ with the believer rendered the "old man" of sin to the death of the Cross and raised the regenerated believer up with Christ in His resurrection power, seated in Him in the heavenlies.

It was an unforgettable and transforming time in my life as the Holy Spirit began to make this missing element of the gospel real to me. I was reading F. J. Huegel's Bone of His Bone as the truth came through to me that the Christian life was lived, not by attempting to imitate Christ, but by learning to participate in His resurrected Life. Other books that have aptly supplied this truth which has been hidden from so many believers through a defective gospel are: The Saving Life of Christ, Thomas, Born Crucified, Maxwell; The Normal Christian Life, Nee, and , Nee, and Beyond Humiliation, Mantle. Some better known contemporary preachers of this message are Ian Thomas, Stuart Briscoe, Bob Hobson, Alan Redpath, John Hunter and Stephen Olford.

A theological truth is handled by men who preach it according to their own light and address it to the contemporary needs of the time in which they live. The original preachers of the Keswick message were men whose theological roots were more soundly grounded in the Protestant Reformation, and who had a much higher view of salvation than its contemporary expounders. They also preached it to a different church situation. The Keswick message today is not aimed so much at restoration of true spiritual life in the churches as it is at gunning down and bringing to a halt the vain, fleshy religious activity that makes u the nonsensical life of most so-called evangelical churches. This indeed needs to be done. And it needs to be done with a vigor. Christianity is Christ, nothing less and nothing more. Victory over sin is attained, not by struggling harder against the flesh in the energy of the flesh, but by reckoning on our judicial death in Christ on His Cross, and our experimental resurrection and present life in Him. Fruitfulness is not brought about

by more clever and diligent activity, but by restfully abiding in Him Who is the Vine, and by walking in unqualified obedience to the Holy Spirit. As Thomas repeatedly says, “restfully available, instantly obedient.”

How, then, can such a message be a stumbling block to recovery of true doctrine and true life in the church today? Why does it deserve to be included in this series? We must remember that the devil is subtle; and he will use truth in itself, wrongly presented and applied, to divert men from God. Did not he quote scripture to Christ during His temptation? And did not Christ refute him by referring to a more complete body of truth? The enemy has not needed to find new tactics. The same ones He used on the Lord vainly, have proven to be extremely successful in this generation. We will list four reasons why the Keswick line has become a stumbling block today.

1. It has been purported to be the central body of truth, when, in fact, it is only a portion that is worse than useless when not applied in the context of other truth. Keswick conferences and Keswick churches have sprung up all over the United States. They are faithfully attended with people equipped with pens and notepads who sit and listen for hours to preachers exploring new approaches to the identification truths. They accumulate reams of notes and stacks of tapes from every deeper life preacher in the country. Yet real spiritual growth and truly effective ministry is sadly lacking. Why? It would seem to be analogous to would-be cowboys being taught the advantages of the western type saddle, boots and trappings in handling cattle on the brush country range. They are constantly equipping themselves with the finest saddles, boots, chaps, hats and spurs. They sit around admiring and polishing their equipment, congratulating themselves that they are not foolishly trying to rope calves on an English saddle (which has no horn around which to snub the rope), or getting their pants torn apart riding through the brush without chaps. The sad part is, most of them do not own a horse, could not ride it if they did, and would not know what to do with a calf if they should get a rope on one. If this analogy seems unkind and harsh, I apologize. I do not intend it to be so. I only want to illustrate that many are attempting to learn about a deeper life, when they do not have life at all. They are trying to go on with God and have not yet caught up. They are attempting to apply a growth principle when they have not yet been born. All they will get for their troubles is more notes and impractical knowledge.
2. It is presented as a means to “get the job done.” In a culture that is success oriented, if one is to gain a hearing, it is imperative that what he has to offer must be presented as a key to producing great results. This pressure is so great it is almost impossible to resist it. Therefore these truths are presented in a way that they can be received as another “gimmick,” a means to a desired objective. Today’s preachers are under a mandate to produce or else. They have to make a showing to prove their worth. So they are not looking for truth. They are looking for something that will work. Now, truth will produce true results; but the results that truth produces, and the results one has as his goal in preaching truth, may be two entirely different things. The deeper life preacher of today is representing his gospel as one that will bring in more and better Christians, produce more prosperity and finances and build bigger and better churches faster than anything else. Because of this, most evangelicals who have heard it and tried it, have found that it did not work, and have discarded it and gone back to their old tried and proven gospel of men’s works. The tragedy of this is that they have thrown out the baby with the wash water. When the Keswick message did not immediately produce what they hoped it would, then they rejected the truth in it, and became more hardened and fixed in their error. They are further than ever alienated from the Christianity that is Christ plus nothing.
3. It leads to passivity. Its leaders emphatically deny this, pointing to their own busy schedules and perpetual activity. But they cannot deny the fruits of their ministry. This condition should not exist. Passivity is not the natural result of teaching faith rest any more than presumption should be the result of Psalm 91:11-12. It results because the truth is presented in an imbalanced way. Corresponding and complementary truth should accompany it. It teaches the blessings of the believer’s position in Christ, but balks at his responsibility. It stops short of spiritual warfare. It is Arminian Hyper-Calvinism . . . Hyper-Calvinism in practice without Calvinistic soteriology. What a contradiction! I am sure most deeper life preachers will object to this on the basis that they believe in Eternal Security. But you cannot take that Calvinistic grape, tie it on to an Arminian banana stalk, and call it a vine. What we have is a theological monstrosity that takes God’s sovereignty out of salvation, and man’s responsibility out of perseverance and spiritual warfare. One prominent Keswick preacher, upon being questioned about the lack of reference to prayer in his ministry, plainly admitted that he did not believe in it on a sustained basis. He disclaimed any spiritual benefit in it whatsoever. To him, prayer was no more than, “Lord Jesus, this is my need. Thank you; Amen.” Sustained prayer and fasting, according to him, is “useless religious gymnastics.” One group of young preachers told him of their intent to spend the night in prayer. “What for?” He demanded. “You can’t improve on your flesh. If you have Christ, you can’t get any more of Him, and He is all you need. What are you going to pray for?” You see how a lop-sided teaching can blind a man to as important an element in Christian life as prayer and spiritual warfare. If Christ found it necessary to have often and long periods of prayer, can we expect to get along without it? The Bible uses words like “wrestling,” “striving,” “diligence,” “war,” “overcoming,” and “labours.” These are all ignored in the faith-rest teaching of today, and they cannot be left out without serious defect in our gospel message.
4. Men have attempted to use the teaching as a patch added to a gospel that will not save. It has been tacked on to easy-believism in an attempt to sanctify and render useful unconverted men. These have been brought into the folds of professing Christianity by accepting Jesus as Saviour without being told that the Saviour is Lord, and that He only saves as Lord. It is merely another “second blessing” gospel. It divides the one Christ into two persons . . . Saviour here and Lord there. It splits the one gospel of the Bible into two . . . one that saves and the other that sanctifies. The truth is this: The Jesus that saves sits as Lord as soon as the man is justified. There can be no interim between justification and absolute surrender. It is true that spiritual growth takes place in one’s life when sin is revealed and unyielded areas are exposed. But this is not a second work of grace. It is a continuation of the one work that was done in initial conversion. It is not possible for a man to be converted to Christ while deliberately rejecting His Lordship in any area.

We are not saying that the deeper life teaching is without value. Without doubt many have been soundly converted to Christ when they turned from self to Saviour through its teachings. Others, being converted previously, have been enlightened, and have laid hold on the precious growth principles that are embodied in its teachings. The Keswick message is a part of the gospel and must not be left out. But men should be warned against camping on it. It is a portion of meat to be ministered in due season, but sadly deficient by itself. It alone will not bring our churches out of the abysmal ignorance in which they lie. The whole body of truth must be preached and applied unsparingly until the scattered bleached dry bones begin to move into place again.

- C. M.