



WHY “LET GO AND LET GOD” IS A BAD IDEA

What is “let-go-and-let-God” theology? It’s called Keswick theology, and it’s one of the most significant strands of second-blessing theology. It assumes that Christians experience two “blessings.” The first is getting “saved,” and the second is getting serious. The change is dramatic: from a defeated life to a

victorious life; from a lower life to a higher life; from a shallow life to a deeper life; from a fruitless life to a more abundant life; from being “carnal” to being “spiritual”; and from merely having Jesus as your Savior to making Jesus your Master. People experience this second blessing through surrender and faith: “Let go and let God.”

Keswick theology comes from the early Keswick movement. Keswick (pronounced KEH-zick) is a small town in the scenic Lake District of northwest England. Since 1875, it has hosted a weeklong meeting in July for the Keswick Convention. The movement’s first generation (about 1875–1920) epitomized what we still call “Keswick theology” today.

People who influenced Keswick theology include John Wesley, Charles Finney, and Hannah Whitall Smith. Significant proponents of Keswick theology include Evan H. Hopkins

(Keswick’s formative theologian), H. Moule (Keswick’s scholar and best theologian), F. B. Meyer (Keswick’s international ambassador), Andrew Murray (Keswick’s foremost

devotional author), J. Hudson Taylor and Amy Carmichael (Keswick’s foremost missionaries), Frances Havergal (Keswick’s hymnist), and W. H. Griffith Thomas, and Robert C. McQuilkin (leaders of the victorious-life movement). People who were influenced by Keswick theology include leaders of the Christian and Missionary Alliance (A. B. Simpson), Moody Bible Institute (D. L. Moody and R. A. Torrey), and Dallas Seminary (Lewis Chafer and Charles Ryrie).

Beginning in the 1920s, the Keswick Convention’s view of sanctification began to shift from the view promoted by the leaders of the early convention. William Scroggie (1877–1958) led that transformation to a view of sanctification closer to the Reformed view. The official Keswick Convention that now hosts the annual Keswick conferences holds a Reformed view of sanctification and invites speakers who are confessionally reformed.

Keswick theology is pervasive because countless people have propagated it in so many ways, especially in sermons and devotional writings. It is appealing because Christians struggle with sin and want to be victorious in that struggle now. Keswick theology offers a quick fix, and its shortcut to instant victory appeals to genuine longings for holiness.

Keswick theology, however, is not biblically sound. Here are just a few of the reasons why:

- 1. DISJUNCTION:** It creates two categories of Christians. This is the fundamental, lynchpin issue.
- 2. PERFECTIONISM:** It portrays a shallow and incomplete view of sin in the Christian life.
- 3. QUIETISM:** It tends to emphasize passivity, not activity.

CONSTRUCTIVELY CRITICIZING A FAULTY VIEW OF SANCTIFICATION CAN ACTUALLY ADVANCE THE CAUSE OF TRUTH AND LOVE.

4. PELAGIANISM: It tends to portray the Christian’s free will as autonomously starting and stopping sanctification.

5. METHODOLOGY: It tends to use superficial formulas for instantaneous sanctification.

6. IMPOSSIBILITY: It tends to result in disillusionment and frustration for the “have-nots.”

7. SPIN: It tends to misinterpret personal experiences.

You can tell that Keswick theology has influenced people when you hear a Christian “testimony” like this: “I was saved when I was eight years old, and I surrendered to Christ when I was seventeen.”

By “saved,” they mean that Jesus

became their Savior and that they became a Christian. By “surrendered,” they mean that they gave full control of their lives to Jesus as their Master, yielded to do whatever He wanted them to do, and “dedicated” themselves through surrender and faith. That two-tiered view of the Christian life is let-go-and-let-God theology.

The Keswick Convention commendably emphasized personal holiness and left a legacy of Christian service, but holy and fruitful living by no means distinguishes Keswick theology from other views. All of the major views on sanctification have adherents who are exemplary, inspiring Christians, and disagreeing with a particular view of sanctification in no way questions the devotion to Christ of those who hold that view.

We shouldn’t determine our view of sanctification by counting up who we perceive to be the most holy Christians and seeing which view has the most. Scripture, and Scripture alone, must determine our view of sanctification.

As John Murray reminds us, “The cause neither of truth nor of love is promoted by suppressing warranted criticism.” Constructively criticizing a faulty view of sanctification can actually advance the cause of truth and love. ♣

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