

Lord, Thy Glory Fills the Heaven

Richard Mant (1776–1848)

Lord, thy glory fills the heaven;
Earth is with its fullness stored;
Unto thee be glory given,
Holy, holy, holy Lord!
Heaven is still with anthems ringing;
Earth takes up the angels' cry,
Holy, holy, holy, singing,
Lord of hosts, thou Lord most high.

Ever thus in God's high praises,
Brethren, let our tongues unite,
While our thoughts his greatness raises,
And our love his gifts excite:
With his seraph train before him,
With his holy church below,
Thus unite we to adore him,
Bid we thus our anthem flow.

Lord, thy glory fills the heaven,
Earth is with its fullness stored;
Unto thee be glory given,
Holy, holy, holy Lord!
Thus thy glorious name confessing,
We adopt the angels' cry,
Holy, holy, holy, blessing
Thee, the Lord our God most high!



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ΤΩ ΧΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

In the Nick of Time

Matters of Doubt

Kevin T. Bauder

A friend recently forwarded a copy of A. T. Pierson's little history of the Keswick Movement. I had read this work some years ago when I was more favorably disposed toward Keswick influences than I am now. But at my friend's urging, I read it again. In particular, he asked that I pay attention to what Pierson (and Keswick) had to say about "matters of doubt."

When I hear this expression, Romans 14 and 1 Corinthians 8-10 leap to my mind. In the former passage, Paul is discussing whether New Testament believers can eat and enjoy food that was prohibited by the Old Testament law. In the latter, he takes up the ethics of eating meat that has been offered to idols. In both cases, Paul refuses to give a straightforward yes-or-no answer. Instead, he lists principles to be weighed in making choices that honor God. He makes allowances for circumstances under which honest believers might see these issues differently.

But that is not what Pierson is writing about. Instead, he appears to be thinking partly of a range of Puritanical, revivalistic, or cultural taboos that some previous generations recognized as standards to which Christians must conform. Among these he singles out specific "doubtful amusements" that, while not biblically forbidden, nevertheless "bear a distinctly worldly stamp." Here he includes theater, opera, dancing, card playing, drinking wine, and racing.

But Pierson's concern is not limited to these cultural taboos. He widens his scope to include any practice done "primarily to please one's self." Such practices, he says, "put at risk" pleasing God. They are not demonstrably wrong in themselves, but they focus one's attention on oneself. As Pierson puts it, "To consult self-gratification and self-glorification is in itself an unwholesome and an unholy habit." He reduces these pleasures to three categories, namely, those of ambition, avarice, and appetite. His philosophy seems to be that the more appealing any activity is, the more important it becomes to avoid that activity.

Why does Pierson dub these activities as doubtful? He never actually says. As nearly as I can tell, it is because he admits that Scripture nowhere

condemns these activities, but he and his friends entertain reservations about them. The activities are doubtful because they are doubtful *to him*. He is willing to bring his moral hesitation to bear as an instrument for judging the spiritual development of those he encounters. A person who engages in the activities that he finds doubtful must be given to self-glory, self-display, and self-indulgence.

I find all of this to be wrong-headed. Granted, we must derive moral imperatives from biblical principles as well as biblical precepts. For that reason, some of the items on Pierson's list may well prove spiritually corrosive. Theater, for example, can insert wrong perspectives and inordinate affections into the soul at a level below conscious reflection. But any analysis of the morality of theater must go well beyond the simplistic assertion that it is "not found associated with an advanced type of piety or of fruitful service."

I also admit the possibility that some of the items on Pierson's list may be biblically prohibited. Odds-on, I find it more than likely that the Bible forbids the beverage use of drinks that produce intoxication when consumed in normal quantities. If that is so, then such practices must be avoided, not because of some nebulous affect upon "an advanced type of piety or of fruitful service," but simply because they are wrong. In other words, they are not doubtful at all.

Pierson *may* see other items on the list as doubtful because of their associations. He does not make that argument in this little book, but I have often heard it made by people who shared his concerns. According to this reasoning, playing Pinochle or Yahtzee may not be wrong *per se*, but these games should be avoided because cards and dice are also used in gambling. Innocent gaming could lead to a temptation to gamble, or it might lead other people to judge that you are gambling.

But I don't think that any of these factors is the core of Pierson's concern. The more I have read Keswick literature, the more I see another consideration coming to the surface. There seems to be an underlying assumption that the enjoyment of anything but God Himself is wrong. Technology, art, nature, and even family must be kept at a distance unless they can be directly tied to some devotional agenda or some utility of ministry.

For example, Pierson wrote during the infancy of automobile racing. It was a time when young men would thunder their machines around dirt tracks. Watching that sport would have been a captivating experience, with the roar of engines drowning out the human voice and the racers jostling for position. In the absorption of the moment, one might forget oneself. One

might even forget to think about God. One can understand why Pierson might think that absorbing amusements like racing must be avoided.

A string quartet might offer a different kind of noise, but if well-written and well-performed, it could be equally captivating. To Pierson, however, it must have seemed self-indulgent. The same could be said about reading a gripping novel. Or viewing a magnificent waterfall or mountain range.

I am not suggesting that Pierson himself never enjoyed any of these things. Indeed, he effervesces about the delightful landscape around Keswick. But he was there for the conference. Would he ever have traveled to Keswick just to see the landscape?

God has created a world of magnificence and beauty. He has put within humans the ability to produce exquisite and intricate works. Such things are God's gifts to humanity. Somehow, the pleasures of family, technology, art, and nature must be compatible with the pleasures of God. Indeed, we cannot claim to enjoy God if we despise His good gifts.

This is the point that Pierson fails to acknowledge. Given his perspective, such activities create doubts in his mind, so they must be "doubtful." If they are doubtful, they must be avoided—not only by him, but by all. At this point, Pierson's philosophy and theology have strayed far from what can be found in the Bible. In my experience, many who follow Keswick have taken to heart its rejection of "doubtful matters." That is a rejection I cannot share.



This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.
