

Lord, Thou Hast Been Our Dwelling-Place

Thomas H. Gill (1819–1906)

Lord, thou hast been our dwelling-place
In ev'ry generation;
Thy people still have known thy grace,
And blessed thy consolation:
Through ev'ry age thou heard'st our cry
Through ev'ry age we found thee nigh,
Our Strength and our Salvation.

Our cleaving sins we oft have wept,
And oft thy patience proved;
But still thy faith we fast have kept,
Thy Name we still have loved;
And thou hast kept and loved us well,
Hast granted us in thee to dwell,
Unshaken, unremoved.

No, nothing from those arms of love
Shall thine own people sever;
Our Helper never will remove,
Our God will fail us never.
Thy people, Lord, have dwelt in thee,
Our dwelling place thou still wilt be
For ever and for ever.

ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

In the Nick of Time

A Response to Criticisms: 2 Corinthians 11:4

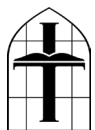
Kevin T. Bauder

Fundamentalists have not often appealed to 2 Corinthians 11:4 as a key text for their understanding of ecclesiastical separation. Even a cursory examination of the verse indicates that their reluctance has been well founded. It fairly bristles with interpretive problems, making it the sort of text that provides a hazardous foundation for a doctrinal proof.

The overall thrust of the verse is clear enough. False teachers had come to the Corinthian church, some of whose members received them with enthusiasm. The result was that many Corinthian believers were rejecting Paul's leadership, even though he had reached them for Christ and taught them their basic doctrine. What Paul intends to do in the first part of 2 Corinthians 11 is to contrast the Corinthians' tolerance of the false teachers with their rejection of him. In verses 5–11 Paul singles out one of the accusations leveled against him by church members at Corinth. He reminds them that his apostleship was fully on display among them (5–6). His only possible offense lay in not taking their money, instead of which he accepted help from other churches so that he could minister to them free of charge (7–9). Rather than being ashamed of this conduct, Paul was willing to boast in it, for it was motivated by love for the Corinthians (10–11). When he should have received gratitude for his personal sacrifice and labor, however, Paul had to endure rejection—the Corinthians allowed themselves to be vexed even by this imagined slight.

Verse 4 provides the contrast, showing the Corinthian attitude toward the false teachers. Paul narrows his description to a single teacher (“he that cometh”), a description that probably focuses upon a leader of his opponents. Paul supposes that this teacher has come with a particular message, and that the Corinthians can sense the falseness of the message. Nevertheless, they “might well bear with” the false teacher. This tolerance contrasts to their treatment of Paul, whom they rejected over the slightest imagined offense.

What is the content of the false message? Paul describes it in the rest of verse 4. This message consists of three elements, but Paul's description of those elements is ambiguous enough to provoke a series of questions. The structure of Paul's description can be charted as follows.



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www.centalseminary.edu | info@centalseminary.edu
900 Forestview Lane N, Plymouth, MN 55441 | 800.827.1043

Actor	Action	Qualifier	Object	Description
He that cometh	Preacheth	Another (<i>allos</i>)	Jesus	Whom we have not preached
You	Receive (<i>lambano</i>)	Another (<i>heteros</i>)	S/spirit (<i>pneuma</i>)	Which ye have not received (<i>lambano</i>)
	Unspecified	Another (<i>heteros</i>)	Gospel	Which ye have not accepted (<i>dechomai</i>)

This text forces interpreters to respond to a whole list of issues. Why the shift from *allos* in the first element to *heteros* in the second and third? Why the shift in person between the first and second elements, and which person ought to be understood in the third element? In other words, was the false teacher preaching a different gospel, or were the Corinthians receiving a different gospel, or both? Should the *pneuma* in the second element be understood as the Holy Spirit, the human spirit, or some sort of attitude or disposition? Why the change from *lambano* (receive) in the second element to *dechomai* (welcome) in the third? These difficulties are not mere cavils: responsible commentators can be found defending each of the various options.

What is certain is that all three elements were coming from the false teacher. The Corinthians were not receiving a different S/spirit that they just thought up; they were receiving one that the false teacher suggested. They were not accepting a different gospel that they invented; they were accepting one that the false teacher proclaimed. While the Corinthian believers were responsible for their acceptance or rejection of the false message, all three elements were being proclaimed by the same false teacher.

Presumably all of these apostates were teaching the same message, but Paul focuses on one single individual. One person was teaching all three false elements. Therefore, setting these elements over against each other as if they belonged to different categories (such as Christology, revelation, and soteriology) is a serious interpretive mistake. They are not three separate teachings: they are three related dimensions of one single denial of the faith. For the Corinthians, to accept one of these false elements was implicitly to accept them all.

The interrelatedness of these elements should not surprise us. The system of Christian doctrine and practice is not simply a collection of isolated teachings. It is a web in which every single doctrine connects to every other doc-

trine. Consequently, every doctrine carries implications (whether directly or indirectly) for every other doctrine.

Sometimes our big theological labels stand for whole networks of doctrines. For example, the doctrine of the Trinity involves the junction between the biblical teaching of a single divine being with the Bible's recognition of three divine persons. The deity of the Father is essential to the Trinity, but so is the full deity of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. The recognition of three divine persons and one divine being forces us to ask how God is one and how He is three. It also leads us directly to the problem of the relationship of the deity of the Son to His humanity. When we say *Trinity* we are not merely talking about theology proper: we are also talking about pneumatology and Christology, and those will quickly lead us to consider anthropology.

The word *gospel* is one of those big theological labels. A rather uninstructed Christian might hear the word *gospel* and automatically think something like, *plan of salvation*. This simple equation, however, would be a mistake. To be sure, the plan of salvation is part of the gospel, but it is not the entire gospel. To understand how it is not, and to understand what the content of the gospel is, we must next turn to a discussion of the gospel itself.



This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of 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.
