

This Is Not My Place of Resting

Horatius Bonar (1808–1889)

This is not my place of resting,
Mine’s a city yet to come;
Onward to it I am hasting,
On to my eternal home.

In it all is light and glory,
O’er it all a nightless day;
Every trace of sin’s sad story,
All the curse hath passed away.

There the Lamb, our Shepherd, leads us,
By the streams of life along,—
In the freshest pasture feeds us,
Turns our sighing into song.

Soon we pass this desert dreary,
Soon we bid farewell to pain;
Never more are sad and weary,
Never, never sin again.

ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

In the Nick of Time

A Response to Criticisms: Conclusion

Kevin T. Bauder

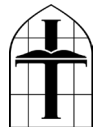
In 2013, the American Council of Christian Churches published a “white-paper” on *The Bible Doctrine of Separation*. Among other things, this paper critiqued my defense of fundamentalism. The core of the critique was contained in the following paragraphs:

Some have emphasized the gospel as the touchstone of orthodoxy. One author used this emphasis in a recent defense of fundamentalism, “The thing that is held in common by all Christians—the thing that constitutes the church as one church—is the gospel itself” [I am footnoted here]. None would deny the importance of the gospel to this question [ecclesiastical separation from false teachers], but the gospel is only one-third of the concerns raised by the apostle Paul in Corinth: “For if he that cometh preacheth another Jesus, who we have not preached, or if ye receive another spirit, which ye have not received, or another gospel, which ye have not accepted, ye might well bear with him” (2 Cor. 11:4).

So where many fundamentalists today are focused on a single category of theology, soteriology, the apostle Paul was focused on at least three: Christology, revelation, and soteriology. Consequently, the gospel-centric approach to ecclesiastical separation is an inadequate summary of the Bible doctrine.

The authors of this document appear to have believed that they disagreed with me. They claimed that the substance of this disagreement focuses on 2 Corinthians 11:4 which, as they understood it, specified three grounds of separation (soteriology, Christology, and revelation) rather than the one (the gospel) that I had advocated. Having spent several weeks examining 2 Corinthians 11:4, I now wish to loop back to the ACCC white paper and to summarize where, in my opinion, the ACCC and I both agree and disagree.

On the disagreement side of the ledger, we are obviously reading 2 Corinthians 11:4 somewhat differently. This text is, after all, the hub of the ACCC argument against me. I believe, however, that this disagreement is more superficial than substantial. In fact, I think that it is really nothing but a quibble. The difference lies in the weight we put on the term *gospel*.



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Evidently, the authors of the white paper understood my reference to the gospel to be restricted to soteriology. Otherwise, their argument simply makes no sense. I can only surmise that they equate the gospel with something like the plan of salvation—or at least they assumed that I did.

As I have explained at length, however, I see the gospel in broader terms. The gospel focuses on events, supported by evidences, elucidated by correct explanations, and resting upon implicit doctrinal assumptions. These assumptions are so inextricably tied to the gospel that they are essential to it. To deny one of the assumptions is to deny the gospel itself. These assumptions reach not only into soteriology but also into bibliology, theology proper, Christology, pneumatology, anthropology, hamartiology, and eschatology. At least some doctrines in each of these disciplines are essential to the gospel, and at least some doctrines within the discipline of soteriology are not.

My reading of 2 Corinthians 11:4 sees Paul specifying three areas that are all important because of their relationship to the gospel. One is the gospel itself. Another concerns the person of Christ, which is obviously essential to the gospel. The third involves the Holy Spirit. While Paul does not specify which aspect of the Spirit's work he has in view, a survey of the New Testament discloses several ministries of the Spirit that occur in connection with faith in the gospel. In other words, I do not believe that the white paper's citation of 2 Corinthians 11:4 counts against my thesis.

The point to note, however, is that the authors of the white paper and I do not disagree over the substance of separation. If the gospel is defined strictly in terms of the plan of salvation, then I am more than prepared to admit that Christians have other grounds of fellowship and ought to recognize other grounds of separation. In other words, I am prepared to concede the ACCC's point, *given the white paper's implicit definition of the gospel*. I would hope that the authors of the white paper would also be prepared to concede my point, given my more inclusive definition of the gospel.

I should also add that I have never argued that the gospel is the only ground for limiting fellowship. Even gospel believers sometimes disagree about aspects of the faith (the whole counsel of God). Even if those differences are over issues that are less essential than the gospel, they may still be important to varying degrees. Such differences may well place limitations upon fellowship and may even require separate organization at some levels. These limitations and separate organizations can rightly be called *separation*.

A good example of limited fellowship can be found in the membership of the ACCC itself. The membership of the ACCC includes Christians who are convinced that baptizing anyone other than professing believers is a sin. The ACCC also includes Christians who believe that denying baptism to the infant children of church members is a sin. Christians who hold these opposite

positions cannot both maintain clear consciences and live peacefully as covenant members of the same churches. Their difference demands separation at the levels of church leadership and membership. Nevertheless, they can and do maintain fellowship at the level of ACCC membership. The reason is that the purpose and function of the ACCC differs from the purpose and function of local church leadership and membership.

The position that I have sketched here (among other places) is known as *secondary separation*. The ACCC wishes to defend secondary separation as thoroughly biblical. I agree with that commitment. While not every application of secondary separation by every fundamentalist has necessarily been faithful to scripture, the idea of secondary separation is part and parcel of a biblical understanding of Christian fellowship.

To be fair, in my chapter and replies in *Four Views on the Spectrum of Evangelicalism*, I did not develop a detailed theory of secondary separation. I articulated only enough of it to illustrate the difference between fundamentalists and conservative (the book says *confessional*) evangelicals. There simply wasn't space to go into greater detail. Perhaps the authors of the white paper took this omission as a denial—I don't really know.

What I do know is that I am about as happy with the ACCC as I am with any Christian organization. I don't know of any other organization that tries to do what the American Council does, while simultaneously remaining as close to a biblical view of fellowship and separation. If the authors of the white paper wish to pursue this discussion any further, I would be happy to engage them in a cordial and fraternal manner. In the meanwhile, I see no reason to back away from my fellowship with the American Council of Christian Churches.



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.
