

Come In, Thou Blessed of the Lord*James Montgomery (1771–1854))*

Come in, thou blessed of the Lord,
Stranger nor foe art thou;
We welcome thee with warm accord,
Our Friend, our Brother now.

The hand of fellowship, the heart
Of love, we offer thee;
Leaving the world, thou dost but part
From lies and vanity.

The cup of blessing which we bless,
The heavenly bread we break,
(Our Saviour's blood and righteousness,)
Freely with us partake.

In weal or woe, in joy or care,
Thy portion shall be ours;
Christians their mutual burden share,
They lend their mutual powers.

Come with us, we will do thee good,
As God to us hath done,
Stand but in Him, as those have stood,
Whose faith the victory won.

And when by turns we pass away,
As star by star grows dim,
May each, translated into day,
Be lost and found in Him.

ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ*In the Nick of Time***Roger Olson on Fundamentalism: Part Three***Kevin T. Bauder*

In January, *Desiring God* posted a brief interview with John Piper discussing the question, "Where Do You Draw Lines for Ministry Partnerships?" Piper's reply envisions Christian ministry associations as a series of concentric circles. In his thinking, the center circle requires the greatest degree of agreement, while the outermost circle requires the least. The six circles are:

1. Elders and church staff
2. Church planting network
3. His own conferences
4. Others' conferences
5. Debates and conversations
6. Rallies with common cause

In Piper's schema, the fifth and sixth circles might involve people who are outside the faith. He might debate some individual over some abridgement of the gospel (as he did with Greg Boyd). He might participate in a political event such as a pro-life rally with people who seriously undermine the gospel (such as Roman Catholics).

To be clear, I do not always draw my lines in the same places that Piper does. Nevertheless, I believe his schema of ministry partnership has value. In fact, it resembles closely the schema that I was taught as a student both in a fundamentalist Bible college and later in a fundamentalist seminary.

Here's the point: when Piper makes decisions about who he will or won't work with, he is really making decisions about fellowship (partnership) and separation. In at least some cases, and at some levels, he is separating from fellow believers. This non-cooperation with, or separation from, fellow believers is precisely what fundamentalists mean by *secondary separation*.

Incidentally, Piper is not alone in implementing some version of secondary separation. Years ago I was conversing with the president of Fuller Theological Seminary. I commented, "I understand that my city has a prominent alumnus of your school who is now *persona non grata* on your campus." Without batting an eye, that president replied, "John Piper." For him, it was



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just a statement of fact. Fuller Seminary is evidently committed to the practice of secondary separation.

I recognize that somebody from Fuller might say, “That’s not separation, it’s just non-cooperation.” Piper might say the same thing. To be fair, I should point out that some fundamentalists would also wish to distinguish separation from non-cooperation.

The problem is that I have never seen or heard anyone really explain this distinction, let alone defend it adequately. How exactly is separation different from withholding fellowship (non-cooperation)? How does one know when one has stopped non-cooperating and begun separating? Any effort to distinguish these two ends up in special pleading or incoherence. Christian fellowship and separation are correlative terms, and they are inversely proportional to one another. To the degree that we engage in fellowship, we are not separated. To the degree that our fellowship is limited, we are separated.

Fellowship is not all the same. Piper has sketched six circles of ministry partnerships (though I question whether the last two are necessarily ministry partnership at all). He rightly recognizes that each level of partnership or fellowship has its own criteria of agreement and its own permissible latitude for disagreement. He recognizes the possibility of partnering (fellowshipping) at one level while not partnering (separating) at another.

We could fill out Piper’s circles with a long listing of levels of fellowship that are evident in the New Testament. Some of these involve simple, personal communion around the gospel. Some involve discipleship relationships. Some involve ministry collaborations. Some involve the relationships of individuals to churches or to parachurch organizations. Others involve relationships between churches or parachurch endeavors. The New Testament envisions many levels at which Christians might relate to one another in fellowship—or, if necessary, separate from each other in non-cooperation.

Understanding that Christian fellowship or cooperation occurs at various levels implies that separation—at least separation among believers—is not necessarily an all-or-nothing thing. We may discover that we must separate at some levels even while cooperating at others. In fact, this is the pattern than almost all of us apply to real choices in Christian fellowship. Our churches regularly admit some believers into membership whom they should never call to be their pastors. Credobaptists and pedobaptists may appear together on certain platforms, even though they could not rightly be members of each other’s churches. We sometimes enjoy personal fellowship with a brother who we would not hire to work in our institution. In all such cases we are making choices to fellowship at some levels but to separate at others.

It seems that even the most vocal opponents of secondary separation find some point at which they insist upon practicing it, not excluding Roger Olson himself. He narrates one such episode as follows.

Toward the end of my tenure at Baylor University’s Truett Theological Seminary, where I taught for 22 years, I learned that an Institute on campus had invited a very well-known, even famous, neo-fundamentalist theologian and ethicist to speak and that his address would happen in the seminary’s chapel. I knew that he had acted unethically toward me, publicly attributing a quote to me that I never said or wrote, one that could damage my reputation and career, and that he refused to retract it or apologize for it. I went to the authorities and requested a private meeting with the “gentleman” and he declined to meet with me (so I was told). I also knew that he was firmly opposed to women’s ordination, women serving as pastors or preachers, etc. He was and is a “complementarian.” Many of our seminary’s students were women called by God to pastor, plant churches, preach, etc. I joined those women in strongly requesting that the man NOT speak in our seminary’s chapel. In the eventuality, he did not. He spoke elsewhere on campus. I did not attend.

My point in reproducing this quotation is not to judge whether Olson’s objections were legitimate. I simply wish to establish that Roger Olson has joined the ranks of those who practice secondary separation.

John Piper practices secondary separation. Fuller Theological Seminary practices secondary separation. Roger Olson practices secondary separation. Could it be that none of us is able to fellowship with every other believer at every possible level? Could it be that we all make choices that result in secondary separation?

If that is the case, then why list secondary separation as a mark of fundamentalism? The answer is that fundamentalists typically practice secondary separation in a particular circumstance where other evangelicals hesitate. Clarifying what that circumstance is and why fundamentalists think it matters will be the goal of my next essay.



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.
