

Planted in Christ, the Living Vine*Samuel Francis Smith (1808–1895)*

Planted in Christ, the living vine,
 This day, with one accord,
 Ourselves, with humble faith and joy,
 We yield to thee, O Lord.

Joined in one body may we be;
 One inward life partake;
 One be our heart; one heavenly hope
 In every bosom wake.

In prayer, in effort, tears, and toils,
 One wisdom be our guide;
 Taught by one Spirit from above,
 In thee may we abide.

Complete in us, whom grace hath called,
 Thy glorious work begun,
 O thou in whom the church on earth
 And church in heaven are one.

Around this feeble, trusting band
 Thy sheltering pinions spread,
 Nor let the storms of trial beat
 Too fiercely on our head.

Then, when, among the saints in light,
 Our joyful spirits shine,
 Shall anthems of immortal praise,
 O Lamb of God, be thine.

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

Fellowship (*koinonia*) is always a function of something held in common. What Christians hold in common is fundamentally the gospel. Consequently, Christian fellowship must never be extended to individuals who deny the gospel.

Certain teachings and affirmations are essential to the gospel and therefore fundamental to Christianity and Christian fellowship. To deny a fundamental is to deny the gospel itself. Consequently, Christian fellowship must never be extended to individuals who deny any fundamental doctrine.

Some denials of the gospel are explicit. Atheists, infidels, and non-Christian religions such as Islam and Hinduism are explicit denials. Other denials of the gospel are implicit. False teachers may claim to be Christians and to believe the gospel while nevertheless denying teachings that are fundamental to it. Those apostates or heretics must be excluded from Christian fellowship, which at minimum means excluding them from membership and especially leadership in any endeavor carried out in the Lord's name.

Scripture is clear about the status of those who deny fundamental doctrines. Paul calls down damnation upon anyone who teaches a different gospel (Gal 1:6–9). Jude warns that because these apostates creep in, Christians must put up a fight for the faith (Jude 3–4). Peter says that they secretly introduce destructive heresies (2 Pet 2:1). John repeatedly labels them as *antichrist* and claims that they do not have God (1 John 2:22; 4:3; 2 John 7).

No Christian commonality exists with teachers who deny the gospel. To include them in Christian fellowship is at best hypocritical. John specifies that we are not to receive apostate teachers into our houses when they come to present their false message. We are not even to give them a civil greeting. The exact meaning of these words may be debated. At minimum, however, they obligate us never to pretend that any level of Christian fellowship, however basic, is possible with heretical teachers. Those teachers must never be viewed as brothers and sisters in Christ. The gospel not only shows us the way of salvation but also forms the hard boundary of Christian fellowship. No Christian fellowship is ever possible with gospel deniers, none at all. This is the idea of separation.



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Fundamentalism began when orthodox Christian leaders in America realized that their denominations, missions, and other Christian endeavors were harboring teachers who denied fundamentals of the gospel. Around 1920 these leaders tried to get their organizations to put the gospel deniers out, but they almost never succeeded. Instead, almost every Protestant denomination formally committed itself to including gospel deniers within both its membership and leadership. In time, gospel deniers came to control the councils of those denominations.

Unable to purge the gospel deniers out of their fellowships, fundamentalists took the only step that would preserve the integrity of Christian fellowship. The only way they could eliminate false fellowship was to leave their denominations, missions, and other ministries, and to start all over again. This step carried a high cost, but those who left were able to rebuild their work in ways that respected the gospel as the boundary of Christian fellowship. Either way, whether putting out or coming out, fundamentalists were committed to the practice of separation.

This cost was higher than some others wanted to pay. While still affirming the gospel as the way of salvation, these others nevertheless abandoned it as the boundary of Christian fellowship. They insisted that they could remain in perpetual organizational fellowship with apostate teachers (i.e., teachers who denied fundamentals of the gospel). To this day one finds gospel-affirming preachers who remain in apostate denominations.

Over time this attitude of inclusivity spread to some who had once identified as fundamentalists. They expressed a willingness to tolerate gospel-denying teachers and to cooperate with them in the Lord's work. In some cases, they even purposed to infiltrate enterprises that had been captured by gospel-denying leadership. They did this in the hope that they could influence gospel-denying teachers toward orthodox Christianity.

Nowhere were these inclusive attitudes more evident than in the practice of cooperative evangelism, which emerged after mid-century. One evangelist in particular pioneered in recruiting apostate teachers to assume leadership in his crusades, sit on his platforms as honored guests, and offer public prayers at his meetings. In exchange for the support of these gospel-denying leaders, he promised to send converts back into their churches. Some Christians who otherwise affirmed the gospel endorsed his behavior. Some imitated it. Others knuckled under to pressure (for pressure was applied) to support his cooperative evangelistic campaigns, even when they personally saw the damage that this practice could inflict.

Advocates of this inclusive position coined the name *neoevangelical* as a self-designation. They trumpeted the superiority of inclusivism over separatism and attempted to sway the broad evangelical movement into sympathy with their direction. In the long run, they were largely successful, and they displaced fundamentalists as the ecclesiastical leaders of the evangelical world.

From a fundamentalist perspective, these inclusivists were guilty of compromising the gospel and the Christian faith. Neoevangelicals did not at first deny any of the fundamentals, but they did deprive the gospel of its rightful role as a determiner of Christian fellowship. The question for fundamentalists then became what to do about those who affirmed the gospel but compromised its rightful role.

Any choice like this needs to be informed by the Bible, and the biblical text that addresses exactly this situation is 2 John 7–11. Here John directly forbids Christians from extending tokens of fellowship to false teachers. He also states that if they do, then they gain a share in the evil that those false teachers accomplish. In other words, they become responsible for the evil works of the false teachers.

A neoevangelical or other inclusivist who extends Christian fellowship to gospel deniers becomes marked by their evil. Someone who bears such a mark can hardly be considered an insightful or discerning Christian. At minimum, Bible-believing Christians who wish to honor the gospel should avoid jumping on that person's bandwagon or of treating that person's ministry as if it were innocent. Rather, discerning leaders should warn others about the destructive effects of compromising the gospel. That is exactly what fundamentalist leaders did from mid-century onwards.

The integrity of the gospel leads separatists to address two issues. The first is non-fellowship with apostate teachers who deny fundamentals of the gospel. The second is non-cooperation with leaders such as neoevangelicals who compromise the gospel's role as the boundary of Christian fellowship.

The latter is the kind of secondary separation that distinguishes fundamentalism from other forms of evangelicalism. It is the practice for which fundamentalists are often condemned. Rightly understood, this kind of secondary separation does not require Christians to treat other Christians as if they were unbelievers. It simply recognizes that one cannot surrender the role of the gospel as the boundary of Christian fellowship without doing significant damage to the Christian faith. It need not lead to bitter attitudes or unholy anger. It simply recognizes that differences over the faith do sometimes result in limitations upon Christian fellowship, and that compromising the gospel as the boundary of Christian fellowship is a serious difference indeed.



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.
