

Hark! How the Watchmen Cry!*Charles Wesley (1707–1788)*

Hark! how the watchmen cry!
 Attend the trumpet's sound;
 Stand to your arms! the foe is nigh!
 The powers of hell surround:
 Who bow to Christ's command,
 Your arms and hearts prepare;
 The day of battle is at hand!
 Go forth to glorious war!

See on the mountain-top
 The standard of your God!
 In Jesu's name I lift it up,
 All stain'd with hallow'd blood,
 His standard-bearer I
 To all the nations call:
 Let all to Jesu's cross draw nigh!
 He bore the cross for all.

Go up with Christ your head,
 Your Captain's footsteps see:
 Follow your Captain, and be led
 To certain victory.
 All power to him is given:
 He ever reigns the same:
 Salvation, happiness, and heaven
 Are all in Jesu's name.

Only have faith in God:
 In faith your foes assail:
 Not wrestling against flesh and blood,
 But all the powers of hell:
 From thrones of glory driven,
 By flaming vengeance hurl'd,
 They throng the air, and darken heaven,
 And rule the lower world.

ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ*In the Nick of Time***Erecting the Right Fences in the Right Places, Part Seven:
Ranking Secondary Doctrine***Kevin T. Bauder*

Through the fourth chapter of *Finding the Right Hills to Die On*, Gavin Ortlund has been discussing primary or first-rank doctrines—the doctrines that are traditionally known as fundamentals or essentials. His thesis thus far has been that when these doctrines are threatened, they are worth fighting for. His attitude toward these doctrines he characterizes as “*courage and conviction*” (95). While I have expressed niggling criticisms here and there—for example, I wish that Ortlund had gone into more detail about the kind of fighting we ought to do over the fundamentals—I have found myself largely in agreement with his approach.

In chapter five, he switches to the discussion of second-rank doctrines. This discussion, he says, is the most difficult part of his book, and here he aims to foster an attitude of “*wisdom and balance*.” While he recognizes that these doctrines are not fundamental (essential to the gospel), he suggests that they are sufficiently serious as to “justify divisions at the level of denomination, church, or ministry” (95). He illustrates his “wisdom and balance” approach by examining three second-rank (as he sees it) areas of doctrinal controversy. These are baptism, miraculous gifts, and women in ministry. His discussion of these three areas occupies most of the chapter.

Ortlund's discussion of the three controversies is so revealing that I want to spend special time on it. I hope to examine his treatment of each of these three areas separately. In preparation for that examination, however, a review of Ortlund's general treatment of second-rank doctrines is necessary.

While Ortlund does not see these doctrines as fundamental to the gospel, he nevertheless claims that they are important for two reasons. First, they affect our understanding and presentation of the gospel. Second, they lead to practical differences that cannot be avoided in the life of the church (96).

At this point in the discussion, Ortlund introduces at least three important caveats. First, he admits that doctrines do not fit into neat categories of importance such as first-rank, second-rank, and third-rank. He concedes that doctrines fall along a spectrum of importance, and that on this spectrum



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some second-rank doctrines may be closer in importance to some first-rank or third-rank doctrines than to other second-rank doctrines (97).

In my view, this concession is both obvious and important. I believe it is possible to draw a clear line between fundamentals and non-fundamentals (though even some fundamentals are more important than others). When it comes to non-fundamentals, however, I question the usefulness of categories such as second-rank and third-rank. If doctrines really do fit into a sliding scale of importance (and it seems clear that they do), then the better approach is to learn the principles and measures for weighing each doctrine on its own merits. Any other approach is likely to result in ham-fisted choices about fellowship and separation.

Ortlund's second caveat is that Christian fellowship takes place at multiple levels. He says it this way: "Being a member in a church and being an elder in a church should have different doctrinal criteria" (98). This sentence is the merest nod toward recognizing levels of fellowship, but it is sufficient to illustrate the point: different levels of doctrinal agreement are necessary for different levels of fellowship. One expects more of a church officer than one expects of a church member.

Without question, Ortlund knows about other levels of fellowship. Later in the chapter he talks about creedal choices that were made by the Gospel Coalition (118–119). Obviously, the Gospel Coalition is an instance of Christian fellowship. Equally obviously, the Gospel Coalition does not aim to embrace all Christians (Wesleyans, for example) within its fellowship. Furthermore, the Gospel Coalition is not a church or denomination, so it cannot base its creedal requirements upon the qualifications for either church membership or church office.

While Ortlund may not realize it, he is really creating a grid for making choices about fellowship and separation. Along one axis of the grid we must weigh the importance of the various doctrines and practices of the Bible. Along the other axis we must discover the degree of agreement that is necessary for any particular level of fellowship. While Ortlund does not seem to have worked out the detailed implications of this approach, its outlines can be glimpsed in his writing.

Ortlund goes a step further, however. He presents a third caveat that effectively transforms this grid into a matrix. He opens up a third dimension for making decisions about fellowship and separation when he suggests, "Many doctrines defy a once-for-all classification without consideration of context" (122).

My initial reaction is to disagree with this statement, but upon consideration I think that Ortlund is on to something here, and it is something important. While I insist that no doctrine varies objectively in its importance, certain circumstances may underline the importance of a given doctrine at a given

time and place. For example, we may not realize how important a fundamental is until someone denies or distorts it. We then discover its genuine importance in the process of defining and defending it.

This recognition helps us to flesh out Ortlund's third dimension for the calculus of Christian fellowship. This dimension becomes unavoidably personal. For example, two people may hold a doctrinal view that disagrees (as I see it) with the Bible. One of them holds this view in a deferential way, while the other holds it with aggression and hostility. I may be able to fellowship with the first at some levels where I cannot work with the second. Ortlund is right that sometimes our context will influence the way that we perceive the role of particular doctrines in either enabling or blocking fellowship and cooperation.

I do see one significant problem in this chapter. Ortlund names biblical inerrancy as one of the "doctrines that are disputed at times by other Christians within the boundaries of orthodoxy" (119). This assessment is badly mistaken. To be clear, Ortlund does not deny the inerrancy of Scripture. What he denies is that inerrancy should be treated as a first-rank (fundamental) doctrine.

Why is this a mistake? Because all Scripture is God-breathed (2 Tim 3:16). If the Scriptures (as originally inspired) affirm errors, then those errors must come from God. If errors come from God, then God is either capable of making mistakes or else God is willing to affirm what He knows is not true. The consequences of either will be devastating. Inerrancy towers as a watershed doctrine in which the whole truthfulness of God—and therefore the reliability of the gospel—is at stake. Denying the inerrancy of Scripture does indeed place one outside the pale of orthodoxy.



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.
