

# ΤΩ ΧΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

## IN THE NICK OF TIME

Occasional Essays and Other Stuff for Christian Students Presented by the President of  
Central Baptist Theological Seminary of Minneapolis

American Christianity needs leaders. American Christianity needs Christian leaders. Christian leaders explain the Scriptures, bringing them to bear upon life's urgent questions. Christian leaders exemplify the life of faith, finding their ultimate satisfaction in God alone. They unite intellectual discipline with ordinate affection, turning their entire being toward the love of God. These essays are dedicated to the task of inviting Christian students to become tomorrow's Christian leaders.

—Kevin T. Bauder

"...Be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine."

March 5, 2010

### Let's Get Clear On This

Kevin T. Bauder

A variety of electronic periodicals reach my inbox regularly. One that arrives nearly every day is published by a retired seminary professor. Most days I derive a great deal of pleasure and often profit from glancing through his cogitations.

Today's number, however, evoked a bit of concern. The dear fellow was reprinting some criticisms that he had received. Here is what they said.

The oft-repeated mantra coming out of Dr. Piper and Dr. Storms is that it is impossible for human beings to enjoy too much pleasure. We are made for pleasure, but it's the pleasure of enjoying God. These guys are full-bore new evangelicals and Piper is a hard line Calvinist. . . . Why are you promoting this sort of thing?

While I can appreciate many things coming out of Dr. Piper's ministry, are you endorsing such a leading New Evangelical with no disclaimer? . . . I am sure you do not endorse the New Evangelicalism that is Dr. Piper's ministry, but when we simply laud a New Evangelical by attending his conference and praising it, that is the result at the practical level.

These responses are typical of the way that some Fundamentalists view conservative evangelicals in general. These men apparently divide all American Christians into only two categories: Fundamentalists and neo-evangelicals. If a Christian leader is not recognized as a Fundamentalist, then he is considered to be a new evangelical, with all the opprobrium that follows.

This binary system of classification is far too simplistic. American Christianity never has been neatly divided between new evangelicals and Fundamentalists. Other groups have always existed, and one of them is the group that we now designate as *conservative evangelicals*.

Conservative evangelicalism encompasses a diverse spectrum of Christian leaders. Representatives include John Piper, Mark Dever, John MacArthur, Charles Ryrie, Bruce Ware, Bryan Chapell, Wayne Grudem, D. A. Carson, Al Mohler, Tim Keller, John D. Hannah, Ed Welch, Ligon Duncan, Tom Nettles, C. J. Mahaney, Norman Geisler, and R. C. Sproul. Conservative evangelical organizations include Together for the Gospel (T4G), the Gospel Coalition, the Master's Seminary, the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, the National Association of Nouthetic Counselors, the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals (at least in its better moments), and Ligonier Ministries. These individuals and organizations exhibit a remarkable range of differences, but they can be classed together because of their vigorous commitment to and defense of the gospel.

Both mainstream ecumenicals and Left-leaning evangelicals would like to classify these individuals as Fundamentalists. Conservative evangelicals, however, do not perceive themselves as Fundamentalists. Most Fundamentalists also recognize some differences. While there are similarities between them, enough differences remain that Fundamentalists and conservative evangelicals ought to be distinguished from each other.

What are those differences? Anti-dispensationalism seems to be more widely characteristic of conservative evangelicalism than it is of Fundamentalism, though it is less vitriolic than the anti-Calvinism of some Fundamentalists. Toleration of Third-Wave charismatic theology is widely accepted among conservative evangelicals but universally rejected among Fundamentalists. Conservative evangelicals are willing to accommodate the more contemporary versions of popular culture, while Fundamentalists restrict themselves to older manifestations. Most importantly, Fundamentalists and conservative evangelicals still do not agree about what to do with Christian leaders who make common cause with apostates.

Conservative evangelicals are different from Fundamentalists, but they are not new evangelicals. New evangelicals were committed to a policy of re-infiltrating ecclesiastical organizations that had been captured by apostates. They wanted to live in peaceful coexistence with apostasy. They were willing to recognize certain apostates as fellow-Christians and to cooperate with them in the Lord's work. These are attitudes that conservative evangelicals explicitly reject. To apply this label to a conservative evangelical is completely unwarranted.

Frankly, conservative evangelicals do seem to take doctrine more seriously today than many Fundamentalists do. Not that the Fundamentalists are unwilling to discuss doctrine! Many of them are at this moment arguing for a "biblical" doctrine of the perfect preservation of the King James Version or of the Textus Receptus. Others have speculated that the work of redemption was not completed until Christ carried His material blood into the heavenly tabernacle, there to abide as a perpetual memorial before the presence of the Father. Still others have engaged in shrill campaigns of anti-Calvinism while defending theories of human nature that almost beg to be described as Pelagian. Such Fundamentalists are too numerous to be dismissed as aberrations—indeed, their tribe seems to be increasing.

Conservative evangelicals have oriented themselves by fixed points of doctrine. They have scoured apostasy from the world's largest seminary. They have debunked Open Theism. They have articulated and defended a Complementarian position against evangelical feminism. They have rebutted the opponents of inerrancy. They have exposed and refuted the New Perspective on Paul. They have challenged the Emergent Church and laid bare its bankruptcy.

In other words, because many Fundamentalists appear to have lost their doctrinal sobriety, the initiative for defending the gospel has shifted from Fundamentalism to conservative evangelicalism. Conservative evangelicals have majored on the centrality of the gospel and the exaltation of God.

Rather than centering themselves upon theological novelties and idiosyncrasies, they have given themselves to a defense of the Faith.

Nevertheless, some Fundamentalists have managed to convince themselves that conservative evangelicals are the enemy. They insist that John Piper is a neo-evangelical. They actually hope to limit his influence—and the influence of other conservative evangelicals—in their churches and among their younger generation.

The apostle Paul insisted that he was “set for the defense of the gospel.” Fifty years ago, that phrase appeared on nearly every Fundamentalist ordination certificate. Today, however, Fundamentalists simply allow others to defend the gospel for them. The sad truth is that the most forceful defenders of the gospel are no longer to be found within the Fundamentalist camp.

To be sure, significant differences continue to exist between Fundamentalists and conservative evangelicals. Those differences, however, are less serious than the ones that exist between the various camps within Fundamentalism. For example, many Fundamentalist churches and institutions have capitulated to the error of King James Onlyism. Many Fundamentalists are willing to tolerate and even idolize arrogant and egotistical leaders. Many Fundamentalists are willing to live with doctrinal shallowness and trivial worship in their pulpits and in their hymnals. Many Fundamentalists continue to believe that manipulative Revivalism will produce vibrant Christians. Who could deny that these matters are serious?

Of course, many Fundamentalists reject these errors as well. Nevertheless, the errors that are tolerated within Fundamentalism are every bit as great as the errors that were committed by the new evangelicalism. They are certainly greater than the differences that exist between mainstream, historic Fundamentalists and conservative evangelicals.

Upcoming young leaders are uncertain about the future of Fundamentalism and about their future with it. And no wonder. One Fundamentalist college recently advertized that it does not teach Greek to theology majors. Why? Because the school has an “absolute conviction that the King James Bible is God’s perfect, preserved Word for the English Speaking World.” Contrast that school’s approach with D. A. Carson’s essays in his upcoming book, *Collected Writings on Scripture*. If young leaders are forced to choose between these two approaches, I have no doubt which choice they will make.

More and more Fundamentalists are coming to the same conclusion. They are not entering into full cooperation with conservative evangelicals, but they are working together in certain targeted areas. Quiet conversations have been occurring between some Fundamentalist leaders and some conservative evangelical leaders for several years. One seminary recently hosted John D. Hannah for a lecture series, and another hosted Ed Welch. A Fundamentalist mission agency brought in John Piper to challenge its missionaries. A leader who is a Fundamentalist pastor and seminary president has written for a conservative evangelical periodical. A very straight-laced Bible college sent its students to T4G. One elder statesman of Fundamentalism chose to preach in the chapel of a conservative evangelical seminary. Other Fundamentalist schools are slated to host Michael Vlach from Master’s Seminary and Mark Dever from Capital Hill Baptist Church. These steps are being taken, not by disaffected young Fundamentalists, but by the older generation of leadership within the mainstream of the Fundamentalist movement.

These leaders are neither abandoning Fundamentalism nor embracing conservative evangelicalism. They are simply recognizing that the Fundamentalist label is no guarantee of doctrinal fidelity. They are aware that historic, mainstream Fundamentalism has more in common with conservative evangelicals than it does with many who wear the Fundamentalist label.

Even such mild and narrow recognition, however, provokes panic from the Fundamentalist opponents of conservative evangelicals. Like the two critics at the beginning of this essay, these opponents express concern that any level of involvement with conservative evangelicals will constitute a blanket endorsement of their errors. These Fundamentalist critics, however, are seldom willing to express these same concerns over the excesses of the hyper-fundamentalist Right.

We Fundamentalists may not wish to identify with everything that conservative evangelicals say and do. To name these men as neo-evangelicals, nonetheless, is entirely unwarranted. To treat them like enemies or even opponents is to demonize the very people who are the foremost defenders of the gospel today. We do not have to agree in every detail to recognize the value of what they do.

If we did not have conservative evangelicals to guard the borders, the real enemy would have invaded our camp long ago. Fundamentalism has exhibited a remarkable freedom from Open Theism, evangelical feminism, New Perspective theology, and other present-day threats to the gospel. The reason is not that Fundamentalists have kept the enemy at bay. The reason is that other thinkers—mainly conservative evangelicals—have carried the battle to the enemy. Conservative evangelicals are the heavy artillery, under the shelter of whose barrage Fundamentalists have been able to find some measure of theological safety.

So let's get clear on this.

Conservative evangelicals are not our enemies. They are not our opponents. Conservative evangelicals have proven themselves to be allies and even leaders in the defense of the faith.

If we attack conservative evangelicals, then we attack the defense of the faith. We attack indirectly the thing that we hold most dear, namely, the gospel itself, for that is what they are defending. We should not wish these brothers to falter or to grow feeble, but rather to flourish. We must do nothing to weaken their hand in the face of the enemies of the gospel. ✖

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This essay is by [Kevin T. Bauder](#), president of [Central Baptist Theological Seminary](#). Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses. New subscriptions to this electronic newsletter can be requested at [inthenickoftime@centralseminary.edu](mailto:inthenickoftime@centralseminary.edu).

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## Penitential Hymns. II.

Jeremy Taylor (1613-1667)

Great God, and just! how canst thou see,  
Dear God, our miserie,  
And not in mercy set us free?  
Poor miserable man! how wert thou born,  
Weak as the dewy jewels of the Morn,  
Rapt up in tender dust,  
Guarded with sins and lust,  
Who like Court flatterers waite  
To serve themselves in thy unhappy fate.  
Wealth is a snare, and poverty brings in

Inlets for theft, paving the way for sin:  
Each perfum'd vanity doth gently breath  
Sin in thy Soul, and whispers it to Death.  
Our faults like ulcerated sores do go  
O're the sound flesh, and do corrupt that too.  
Lord, we are sick, spotted with sin,  
Thick as a crusty Lepers skin,  
Like Naaman, bid us wash, yet let it be  
In streams of blood that flow from thee:  
Then will we sing,  
Touch'd by the heavenly Doves bright wing,  
Hallelujahs, Psalms and Praise  
To God the Lord of night and dayes;  
Ever good, and ever just,  
Ever high, who ever must  
Thus be sung; is still the same;  
Eternal praises crown his Name. Amen. ✠

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