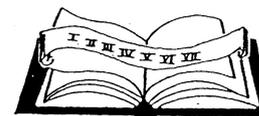


DISPENSATIONALISTS UNDER ATTACK: Why They Love to Hate Us

A PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE BY Manfred E. Kober, Th.D.



1A. OPPOSITION TO DISPENSATIONALISM:

It would be impossible to estimate the number of objections that have been launched against a system which, more than anything else, has actually opened the eyes of lay people to the meaning of the Scriptures. Dispensationalism, more than any other method of interpretation, has enabled believer to understand prophecy. It occasioned the rapid growth of prophecy conferences and multiplication of volumes on prophecy especially in the last century. Despite its benefits to believers, dispensationalism has faced formidable foes. Below are listed a few of the major objections.

1b. Dispensationalism is recent:

Since the study of dispensationalism was popularized only within the last 100 years, it cannot possibly be true. In fact, Covenant Theology is more recent than dispensationalism because it is a Post-Reformation development and in its present form emerged later than a dispensational understanding of the Scriptures.

If dispensationalism can be attacked simply because it is new, then Covenant Theology is equally flawed. As Ryrie points out:



After all, nearly every antidispensational writer attempts to make something of the relative recency of systematized dispensationalism. Those who are of the Reformed tradition always attempt to imply that dispensationalism is a mere infant compared to the ancient and wise man of covenant theology. . .If lack of antiquity is detrimental and refinement is disallowed for dispensationalism, then by the same two criteria covenant theology is discredited. And if these matters are basically nonessential for covenant theology, then they are likewise irrelevant in the critique of dispensationalism.

(Dispensationalism Today [1965], 179, 183)

2b. Dispensationalism is heretical:

Many times dispensationalism is discussed in books on cults and isms and is couched between Seventh Day Adventism and Mormonism. Daniel B. Fuller, the son of Charles E. Fuller, reached the conclusion that dispensationalism is "internally inconsistent and unable to harmonize itself with the Biblical data. . ."

(*The Hermeneutics of Dispensationalism*, unpublished Doctor's dissertation, Northern Baptist Theological Seminary, Chicago, 1957, 386.)

3b. Dispensationalism is man-made:

Men like John Nelson Darby, the "pope of the Plymouth Brethren" movement, is said to have invented it. Since the system is a human innovation, it must be wrong. It is easy to discern the falsehood of such an observation because if something is scriptural, no matter when believers discovered it in the written Word, it is true whether the position was held by the early church or not until after the Reformation.

4b. Dispensationalism is dangerous:

Dispensationalism sees the future establishment of a literal kingdom, a suggestion that is branded as a devilish doctrine. One California group is very outspoken in its hatred for those who subscribe to the dispensation of the kingdom:

Those human devils who are teaching that Christ will set up an earthly utopia or Communistic heaven on earth are promoting Communism under the masquerade of the Christian faith. When they are confronted with this issue they only maintain a surly silence and keep right on with their subversion and subterfuge. They desecrate the faith and the American flag with their premillennial Communism. They who hold the faith in unrighteousness are gravediggers (*Christians Awake*, Summer 1972, 2).

According to the folks in California who sent me the above letter, we are human devils. In the conservative Lutheran publication, *Christian News* (June 14, 1971), pastor Vernon Harley wrote a column on the millennium and the danger which a belief in Christ's reign on earth poses:

Among many fantasies with which some Christians delude themselves and even endanger their salvation is the idea of a millennium, that is, a literal 1000 years in which Christ is to reign here on earth. There are many ways in which this idea varies, some thinking of the millennium as occurring before the Second Coming of Christ; others have it after the Second Advent. Some think of this as being a period of general peace and good will here on earth preceding the Day of Judgment; others seem to expect a visible appearance of Christ here on earth at which time He is to bring about a general conversion of the Jews and rule with His church over the nations. As a result, the eyes of many are directed toward Israeli

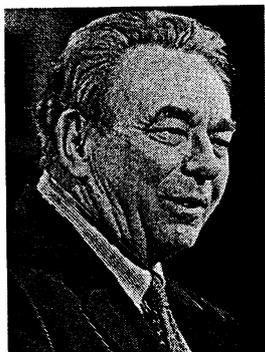
in our time, now that the Israelites again have returned to Palestine as rulers of the Promised Land.

Our Lutheran Confessions reject every type of Millennialism, or Chiliasm, as it is also called. So does our **Brief Statement**, and primarily because such ideas, contrary to Scripture, direct men's faith and hopes to a future glory here on earth, and often even to a second chance for repentance and salvation, rather than to point them to the return of Christ for judgment and the end of the world.

How preposterous! What student of the Bible would ever suggest that this or that belief about the end-times could endanger a believer's salvation? Is salvation dependent on the identity of the Two Witnesses in Revelation 11 or the location of commercial Babylon in Revelation 18? The statement ignores the biblical basis of salvation. Over 200 times in the New Testament salvation is said to be based on belief in the atoning death of Christ.

Furthermore, no true believer will ever lose his salvation (Rom. 8:1; 1. Pet. 1:5). The suggestion that a belief in Christ's millennial reign might involve a second chance for salvation of the unsaved is ludicrous, indicating that Rev. Harley, like most of his amillennial consorts, lacks even a basic understanding of the biblical premillennial position.

5b. Dispensationalists are antinomian:



R. C. Sproul

R. C. Sproul, the president of Ligonier Ministries, seems to be the spokesman for Covenant Theology. In the forward of a book by John Gerstner (*Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth*, 1991), he writes the following, "The dispensational system of theology is inherently and inescapably antinomian. . .Dispensationalism should be discarded as being a serious deviation from Biblical Christianity."

In a taped sermon delivered by R. C. Sproul at St. Paul's Presbyterian Church in Orlando, Florida, in June 1994 entitled "Only One Gospel," he likewise accuses dispensationalists of antinomianism: "I believe that [Charles] Ryrie teaches unvarnished antinomianism and another gospel, and is under the anathema of God."

It would be difficult to think of a single theologian in the dispensational camp who is that harsh in his critique of Covenant Theology. Can anybody cite a statement from Lewis Sperry Chafer, John F. Walvoord, J. Dwight Pentecost, Charles Ryrie, Alva J. McClain or John Whitcomb that labels Covenant Theology as a heretical system under the curse of God, endangering men's salvation?

6b. Dispensationalism is erroneous:

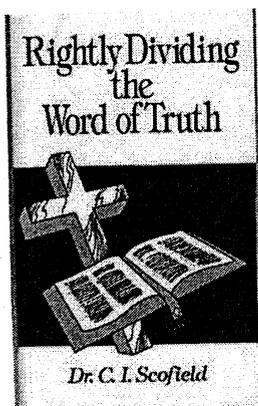
- 1c. Dispensationalism is accused of teaching two ways of salvation. The Old Testament saints are said to be saved by offering sacrifices; New Testament saints are saved by trusting in Christ. In fact Dr. Charles C. Ryrie in his classic book *Dispensationalism* (105-108) refutes this false charge though it is constantly repeated.
- 2c. Dispensationalism is accused of totally disregarding the Sermon on the Mount, relegating it to the Kingdom Age. John MacArthur thinks that “traditionally, dispensationalism says, ‘The Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7) has nothing to do with us, so we don’t need to worry about it’”(teaching tape GC 70-16, “Bible Questions and Answers”).



Has he not read the section in Ryrie’s book on “Dispensationalism and the Sermon on the Mount”? or J. Dwight Pentecost? or John F. Walvoord’s treatment of it in their studies in Matthew?

What is especially disconcerting to dispensationalists is that MacArthur claims to be a dispensationalist, saying “dispensationalism is a fundamentally correct system of understanding God’s program through the ages.” And yet he has some very critical things to say about dispensationalism:

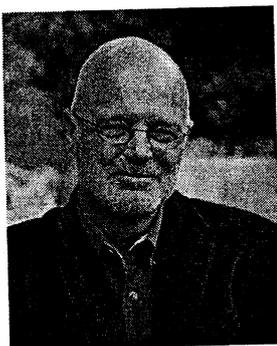
There is a tendency, however, for dispensationalists to get carried away with compartmentalizing truth to the point that they can make unbiblical distinctions. An almost obsessive desire to categorize everything neatly has led various dispensationalist interpreters to draw hard lines not only between the church and Israel, but also between salvation and discipleship, the church and the kingdom, Christ’s preaching and the apostolic messages, faith and repentance and the age of law and grace (*The Gospel According to Jesus*, 25).



One wonders: How can MacArthur call himself a dispensationalist and yet question the basic differences between these concepts? Has he ever read Scofield’s classic booklet, *Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth*?

7b. Dispensationalism is deadly:

In an April 2009 article in *Sojourner's* magazine by emerging church leader, Brian McLaren, McLaren targets fundamentalists in a most vicious manner. The title of his article is, "Four Points Toward Peace in the Middle East." Below are listed the first two points. And it should be noticed that there might be peace in the Middle East if it were not for the dispensationalists:



1. The equal rights of both Jewish and Palestinian people to security, equity, and prosperity, and the equal responsibilities of both groups to seek, not just good for "their own," but the common good of all.

2. The need to confront the **terrible, deadly, distorted**, yet popular theologies associated with Christian Zionism and **deterministic dispensationalism**. These systems of belief—so common among my fellow evangelical Christians—too often lead people to act as if Jewish people have God-given rights but Palestinians do not. They use a **discredited hermeneutic** (way of interpreting the Bible) to imply that God shows favoritism—that God is concerned for justice for one group of people and not for others. They create bigotry and prejudice against Muslims in general ... and in particular against Palestinians, many of whom are Muslim but many of whom are Christian too. These doctrinal formulations often use a **bogus end-of-the-world scenario** to create a kind of death-wish for World War III, which—unless it is confronted more robustly by the rest of us—could too easily create a self-fulfilling prophecy (emphasis added).

If you hold to a deterministic-dispensationalist or Zionist theology, I sincerely hope you will rethink your view. I grew up with these views as well, and have become thoroughly convinced that they are not only biblically unfaithful but also, in too many cases, morally and ethically harmful. I know that rethinking these things can make your life more difficult—friends, church members, and even family members may reject you, for example. But think back to the 1950s and 1960s: Wasn't it necessary for many Christians to have the courage to differ when racism was acceptable and even justified in most American churches? Wouldn't you want to have the same moral courage today you would have wanted to have back then? -- (Note part of the original article appended to this outline).

2A. THE ORIGIN OF DISPENSATIONALISM:

Although throughout church history there were individuals who held to certain dispensational distinctions, the study of a dispensational system is a post-Reformation development.



- 1b. Pierre Poiret (1647-1719)
The roots of dispensationalism can be found in *The Divine Economy*, a 6-volume work originally written in 1687 and then published again in 1713.
- 2b. Isaac Watts (1674-1748), famed hymn writer and theologian. Subscribed to seven dispensations, very similar to those held by C. I. Scofield.
- 3b. John Nelson Darby (1800-1882), who did much to recover the New Testament truth of the church and God's program for the church and Israel.
- 4b. C. I. Scofield and the *Scofield Reference Bible*.
It is very interesting to note a number of the main opponents of dispensationalism give testimony to the fact that they were nourished spiritually by the Scofield Bible and came to a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ through the witness of a dispensationalist. John Gerstner pays tribute to the spiritual help given to him by dispensationalists and so does Brian McLaren.

3A. CONCLUSION:

- 1b. The source of the attacks:

So why do they love to hate us? Why loathe a sound biblical system of interpretation? Dispensationalism is a system derived from the Scriptures which employ the word *dispensation* exactly like we do. The word is found in Eph. 1:10 (Millennium), Eph. 3:2 (Grace) and Col. 1:25-26 (Law implied).

Undoubtedly, there are several reasons for this antipathy. Paul said that "there must be heresies among you, that the approved may be made manifest" (1. Cor. 11:19). Truth stands out ever more clearly and convincingly when confronted by error. Dan Mitchell has put the matter well, "It is significant that God in His sovereign purpose uses dissension and disorder in the assembly to put His people to the test" (*First Corinthians*, 2004, 166).

Furthermore, opponents of biblical truth, whether as believers or unbelievers, are doing the work of the Evil One.

The nefarious nature of the opposition which refers to teachers of a future Messianic Kingdom as "human devils" (*Christians Awake*) and a dispensational

approach to the Scriptures “terrible, deadly and distorted” (MacLaren) certainly does demonstrate that these outburst have their source not in the Holy Spirit but in another spirit. True believers need to heed the admonition of the Apostle John to discern between “the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error” (1. John 4:6).

2b. The stand of the believer:

Those who attack dispensationalism and spiritualize prophecy are very vocal about their rejection of the any-moment return of the Lord in the Rapture. Dispensationalists who view the rapture as a blessed hope for the church (Tit. 2:13) should heed Paul’s inspired admonition how to relate to those who reject the dispensationalism understanding of the end-times, including the pretribulational rapture.

How important is the belief in the any-moment return of Christ? Should the pretribulational return of Jesus Christ ever be made a test of fellowship? The Bible is clearer on this point than even most pre-tribulationists would admit.

Should pre-tribulationism be made a test of fellowship? Two significant passages in 1 Thess. 3 have a bearing on this question:

v. 6: Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us.

v. 14: And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed.



Most forcefully Paul commands separation from those who do not follow the doctrines that he taught them in person and by this epistle. What were the main problems that perplexed the believers at Thessalonica? What is the main doctrinal content of 1 and 2 Thessalonians? It is obvious that the main thrust of both of the Thessalonian Epistles is the return of the Lord in its twofold aspect: the rapture at which Christ returns for His saints, and the revelation at which He appears with His saints. Each chapter in 1 and 2 Thessalonians mentions the return of the Lord.

It is described as:

- **a summoning by the Savior – 1. Thess. 1:10
- **a reunion of all believers – 1. Thess. 2:19
- **an incentive to holiness – 1. Thess. 3:13
- **a rapture of the saints – 1. Thess. 4:17
- **a deliverance from wrath – 1. Thess. 5:9
- **a return in judgment – 2. Thess. 1:9-10
- **an encouragement for steadfastness – 2. Thess. 2:1
- **an enjoinder for patience – 2. Thess. 3:5



Christian News



June 14, 1971

The Millennium

By Vernon Harley



Among the many fantasies with which some Christians delude themselves and even endanger their salvation is the idea of a millennium, that is, a literal 1000 years in which Christ is to reign here on earth. There are many ways in which this idea varies, some thinking of the millennium as occurring before the Second Coming of Christ; others have it after the Second Advent. Some think of this as being a period of general peace and good will here on earth preceding the Day of Judgment; others seem to expect a visible appearance of Christ here on earth at which time He is to bring about a general conversion of the Jews and rule with His church over the nations. As a result, the eyes of many are directed toward Israeli in our time, now that the Israelites again have returned to Palestine as rulers of the promised land.

Our Lutheran Confessions reject every type of Millennialism, or Chiliasm, as it is also called. So does our **Brief Statement**, and primarily because such ideas, contrary to Scripture, direct men's faith and hopes to a future glory here on earth, and often even to a second chance for repentance and salvation, rather than to point them to the return of Christ for Judgment and the end of the world.



Of the Millennium

(St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, N.D.)

[Adopted 1932]

42. With the Augsburg Confession (Art. XVII) we reject every type of millennialism, or Chiliasm, the opinions that Christ will return visibly to this earth a thousand years before the end of the world and establish a dominion of the Church over the world; or that before the end of the world the Church is to enjoy a season of special prosperity; or that before a general resurrection on Judgment Day a number of departed Christians or martyrs are to be raised again to reign in glory in this world; or that before the end of the world a universal conversion of the Jewish nation (of Israel according to the flesh) will take place.

Over against this, Scripture clearly teaches, and we teach accordingly, that the kingdom of Christ on earth will remain under the cross until the end of the world, Act 14:22; John 16:33; 18:36; Luke 9:23; 14:27; 17:20-37; 2 Tim. 4:18; Heb. 12:28; Luke 18:8; that the second visible coming of the Lord will be His final advent, His coming to judge the quick and the dead, Matt. 24:29, 30; 25:31; 2 Tim. 4:1; 2 Thess. 2:8; Heb. 9:26-28; that there will be but one resurrection of the dead, John 5:28; 6:39, 40; that the time of the Last Day is, and will remain, unknown, Matt. 24:42; 25:13; Mark 13:32, 37; Acts 1:7, which would not be the case if the Last Day were to come a thousand years after the beginning of a millennium; and that there will be no general conversion, a conversion en masse, of the Jewish nation, Rom. 11:7; 2 Cor. 3:14; Rom. 11:25; 1 Thess. 2:16.

According to these clear passages of Scripture we reject the whole of Millennialism, since it not only contradicts Scripture, but also engenders a false conception of the kingdom of Christ, turns the hope of Christians upon earthly goals, 1 Cor. 15:19; Col. 3:2, and leads them to look upon the Bible as an obscure book.

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Four Points Toward Peace in the Middle East

by [Brian McLaren](#) [1] 04-16-2009 | 2:30pm



photo by Ryan Rodrick Beiler

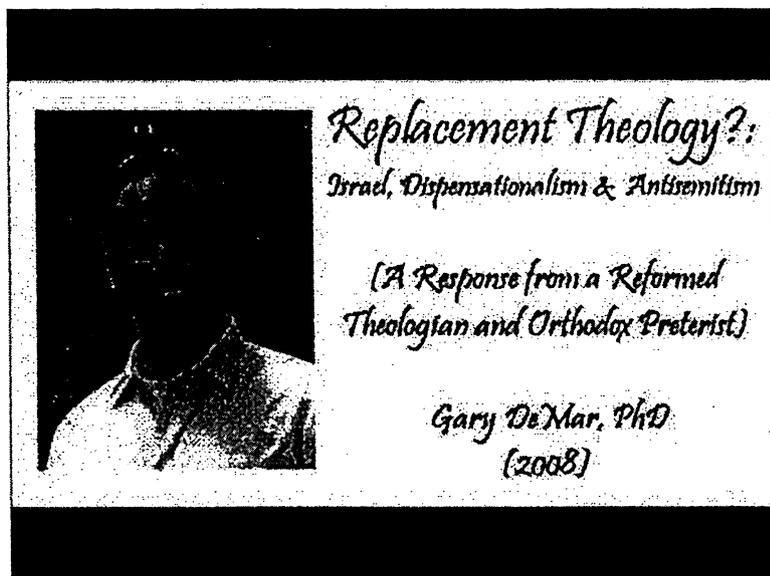
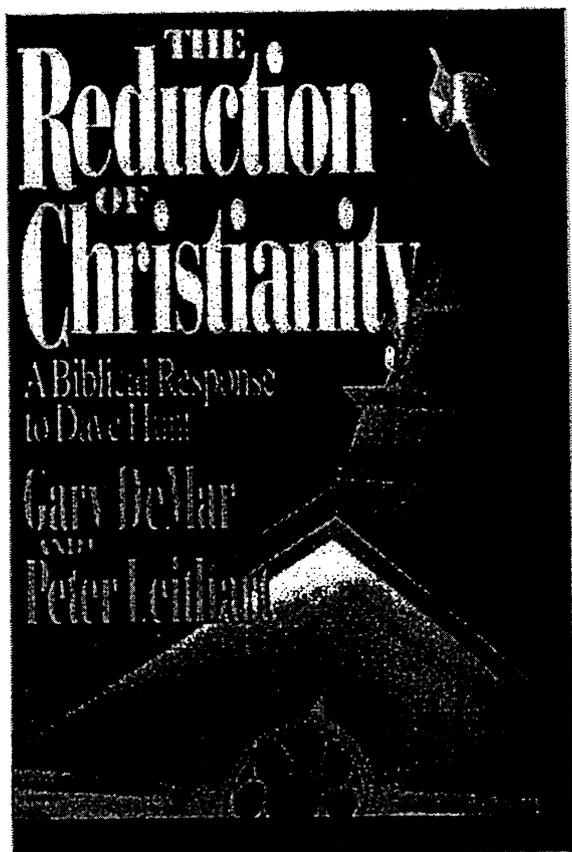
[6]I've written [a lot on Palestine and Gaza](#) [7] in recent years. Any of us who travel (or read) know that peace in the world can't be separated from peace in Israel -- peace for Jews, and peace for Muslim and Christian Palestinians. There is probably no single issue more important to helping Muslims and Christians and Jews live in peace world-wide than resolving the crisis of peace in Israel.

In the coming months, I hope that more and more of us -- especially those of us from evangelical backgrounds -- will start speaking out on this subject, addressing four key issues with courage, passion, and persistence:

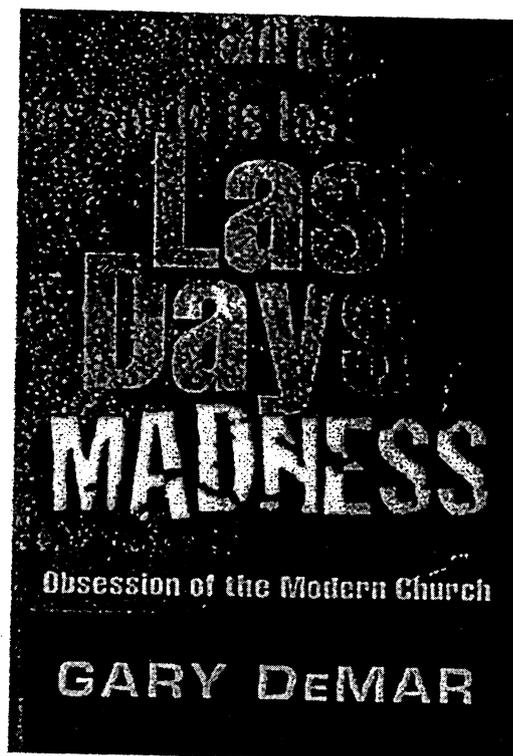
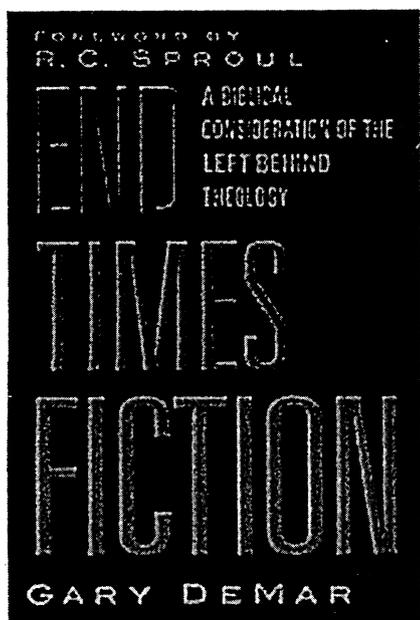
1. The equal rights of both Jewish and Palestinian people to security, equity, and prosperity, and the equal responsibilities of both groups to seek, not just good for "their own," but the common good of all.
2. The need to confront the terrible, deadly, distorted, yet popular theologies associated with Christian Zionism and deterministic dispensationalism. These systems of belief -- so common among my fellow evangelical Christians -- too often lead people to act as if Jewish people have God-given rights but Palestinians do not. They use a discredited hermeneutic (way of interpreting the Bible) to imply that God shows favoritism -- that God is concerned for justice for one group of people and not for others. They create bigotry and prejudice against Muslims in general ... and in particular against Palestinians, many of whom are Muslim but many of whom are Christian too. These doctrinal formulations often use a bogus end-of-the-world scenario to create a kind of death-wish for World War III, which -- unless it is confronted more robustly by the rest of us -- could too easily create a self-fulfilling prophecy.

If you hold to a deterministic-dispensationalist or Zionist theology, I sincerely hope you will rethink your view. I grew up with these views as well, and have become thoroughly convinced that they are not only biblically unfaithful but also, in too many cases, morally and ethically harmful. I know that rethinking these things can make your life more difficult -- friends, church members, and even family members may reject you, for example. But think back to the 1950s and 1960s: Wasn't it necessary for many Christians to have the courage to differ when racism was acceptable and even justified in most American churches? Wouldn't you want to have the same moral courage today you would have wanted to have back then?

If you are unwilling to reconsider your commitment to deterministic-dispensationalist or Zionist theology, I hope you will at least try to avoid extremist tendencies by your colleagues who share these beliefs, so you can be faithful to the scriptures that tell us [God is not a respecter of persons](#) [8], that God shows no partiality (try James 2, for example), that God cares about "the least of these," and that love never rejoices in evil. If you are open and willing to rethink your views, here are three books I'd encourage you to read:



Gary DeMar is known for his unkind attacks on dispensational pretribulationists! One would be unable to find a similar attack by dispensationalists against covenant theologians!



Are We Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth? Fri, May 01, 1992

by Manfred Kober

[Print this page](#)

Series: Faith Pulpit

Faith Pulpit
Faith Baptist Theological Seminary
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May 1992

Are We Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth?

Manfred E. Kober, Th.D.

John Gerstner's *Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth: A Critique of Dispensationalism* (Wolgemuth & Hyatt, 1991) is the latest of a number of books in recent years claiming to be the ultimate refutation of dispensationalism.

1. The design of the book:

The subtitle states the purpose of the book. As one reviewer notes, the word "critique" "is putting it mildly—the book is more like a butchering" (*The Baptist Bulletin*, March 1992, p. 38).

The jacket of the book informs the reader that this is "the most extensive and systematic study of Dispensational theology ever published." J. I. Packer opines that dispensationalism is "seriously astray."

How does Gerstner view dispensationalism? He describes it as not true premillennialism (p. 68) and identifies it as Arminianism (p. 107), Gnosticism (p. 208), pantheism (p. 136, 143), Pelagianism (p. 243), and, preeminently, as antinomianism. More seriously, dispensationalism is "a cult and not a branch of the Christian church" (p. 150). Dispensationalists are heretics and false teachers (p. 262) who have twisted the gospel (p. 252), are void of the gospel (p. 150), and deny the gospel (p. 169).

In his diatribe against dispensationalism Gerstner is liberal in the use of pejorative terms such as "travesty" (p. 141), "blasphemy" (p. 145), "absurdity" (p. 154) and "scandal" (p. 152). The tone of the book is angry, sarcastic, bitter and derogatory, in stark contrast to such irenic critiques of dispensationalism as Oswald T. Allis' *Prophecy and the Church* (1964).

2. The development of the book:

Gerstner's book is divided into three major parts. Part I comprises a historical sketch of dispensationalism, relating the movement to Church history, with special emphasis on its development in America and its relationship to the Reformed churches.

Mistakenly, Gerstner insists that J. N. Darby is the primary source of American dispensationalism. Interestingly, he considers dispensationalism to be "an accident of history," (p. 252) a remarkable position for one who is a strong defender of the Reformed position with its emphasis on providence and the sovereignty of God in history and salvation. Part II covers the areas of philosophy and apologetics, including a discussion of dispensational

hermeneutics. Gerstner insists that "it is impossible to interpret Scripture in a consistently literal fashion" (p. 100) and ridicules dispensationalism for "spoof-texting" (p. 83, 99, 100).

In part III Gerstner attempts to show that dispensationalism is spurious Calvinism, not subscribing to any of its five points (ch. 7), that it denies the gospel (ch. 8), undermines the gospel in its emphasis on a literal kingdom (ch. 9), denies the gospel with its distinction between Israel and the church (ch. 10). Dispensationalism is antinomian (ch. 11–12). The concluding chapter argues for Lordship salvation, paying high tribute to John MacArthur's book and position.

3. The discussions of the book:

Gerstner's book has been reviewed to date in the following periodicals: *Dispensational Distinctives* (Sept.—Oct. 1991), pp. 1–2; *The Baptist Bulletin* (March 1992), pp. 38–39; *Reformation Today*, (Jan.—Feb. 1992), pp. 24–32. In the *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*, (Autumn 1991), pp. 59–70, Zane C. Hodges reacts to Gerstner's Reformed dogmatism with a review entitled, "Calvinism ex Cathedra." Dr. John A. Witmer, archivist at Dallas Theological Seminary, rises to Gerstner's challenge, ("show me the fundamental error in what I teach," p. 263) by writing an incisive two-part analysis of Gerstner's book. In *Bibliotheca Sacra* (April.—June 1992), Witmer deals with Gerstner's inaccuracies in fact and theology. In the July.—Sept. *Bibliotheca Sacra*, he interacts with the theological issues raised by Gerstner, such as hermeneutics, the offer of the kingdom, the way of salvation, the design of the atonement and the relationship of premillennialism to dispensationalism.

4. The defects of the book:

Errors in fact abound in the book, as Witmer demonstrates. Gerstner, praised by R. C. Sproul as "a world-class historian" (p. ix), says, for example, that Wheaton College was established around the turn of the century (p. 52). In fact, it was founded in 1860. William Pettingill is called a Plymouth Brethren dispensationalist (p. 71). He actually was a Baptist pastor.

Gerstner misquotes *The Ryrie Study Bible's* definition of election as a "free temporal," rather than a "pre-temporal" choice (p. 114). Gerstner then criticizes Ryrie for his faulty terminology and theology, saying the mistake "defies comprehension" (p. 115). What really defies comprehension is how Gerstner, to whom Sproul ascribes "careful and painstaking research" (p. ix) could publish such mistakes, misquotations and misrepresentations. As Witmer observes, faulty research like this reflects "at least an indifference to accuracy... these errors place Gerstner's treatment of dispensationalism and his charges against it under a cloud" (*Bibliotheca Sacra*, April—June, 1992, p. 136).

5. The distortions of the book:

While crediting his salvation to the witness of a dispensationalist (p. 1), Gerstner attacks the system mercilessly. He builds several straw men. His charge of antinomianism permeates the book, from the foreword (p. x) to the last paragraph (p. 272). Antinomianism is the view that "the Christian, justified by faith, has no obligation toward the moral law" (*Baker's Dictionary of Christian Ethics*, p. 27). Because dispensationalists insist that the believer is free from the Mosaic law, including the ten commandments (2 Cor. 3:7,11), they do not thereby reject God's moral requirements. As Ryrie notes "although the believer has been set free from the law of Moses, he is nevertheless under the law—the law of Christ" (*The Grace of God*, p. 105).

Gerstner's charge that dispensational preaching is characterized by "a conspicuous absence of moral stress" (p. 250) is untrue. We are saved by **grace** through **faith** unto **good works**. Gerstner's accusation that dispensationalism teaches two ways of salvation grows out of his premise as a Covenant theologian that "the faith of Old Testament believers . . . can be meaningfully described as faith in **Jesus Christ**" (p. 164, Gerstner's emphasis). Gerstner

recognizes that dispensationalists claim to be teaching only one way of salvation (p. 155), but he insists that "their system of doctrine relentlessly militates against this" (p. 151).

The dispensationalist maintains that salvation in every age is based on the death of Christ, that it is appropriated by faith but "the **content** of faith changes in the various dispensations." (Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today*, p. 123, emphasis in the original). Adam and Eve did not understand as fully as we do God's provision for salvation through Christ's sacrifice. But they, along with the other Old Testament saints, trusted in God's promise and were saved (Gen. 15:6). One of the more annoying features of the book is that Gerstner recognizes what men like Ironside, Chafer, Walvoord, and Ryrie are teaching but then he charges them with subscribing to a totally different position than the one they clearly state because, as he sees it, their theology or cold logic forces them to that position, whether they know it or not.

6. The demonstration of the book:

Gerstner maintains that the "dispensational defection from the gospel has come to a head in the Lordship controversy" (p. 252). One of the beneficial byproducts of the book is that it demonstrates the integral connection between Reformed theology and Lordship salvation. Reformed theology teaches that regeneration precedes salvation. The regenerated individual is thus enabled to yield to the Lordship of Christ in order to be saved.

Discussing Gerstner's view that "good works may be said to be a condition for obtaining salvation in that they inevitably accompany genuine faith" (p. 210), Hodges concludes that "in Reformed thought good works **are** a **condition** for salvation" (p. 68, emphasis is his). Dedication is not just possible before salvation but a prerequisite for salvation. This is why John MacArthur can say, "Forsaking one's self for Christ's sake is not an optional step of discipleship subsequent to conversion: it is the sine qua non of saving faith" (*The Gospel According to Jesus*, p. 135). MacArthur shows the influence of Covenant theology at this point. The normal dispensational understanding is that the Holy Spirit moves on or quickens the individual, enabling him to believe (Acts 16:14), At the moment of salvation the Holy Spirit regenerates the individual, creating in him a new nature which prompts submission to the Lordship of Christ and produces good works (Phil. 2:13).

7. The disappointment of the book:

Gerstner has blessed many with his earlier writings, such as *A Bible Inerrancy Primer*, *A Predestination Primer*, *Theology for Everyman* and *The Theology of the Major Sects*. Now, in his mid-seventies, the author has written his *magnum opus* (which the publisher has mercifully trimmed from the original 1,008 pages to 275 pages). For thirty years Dr. Gerstner taught at the liberal Pittsburgh Theological Seminary (1950–80). Instead of leveling his theological guns at the liberals who are the real enemies of the gospel, as Gerstner knows from long personal experience, he attacks his dispensational brethren as heretics and false teachers. Gerstner accuses the dispensationalists of having departed from the gospel, yet it is they, who, more than any other group of people in America, have rightly divided the Word of truth. Through their ministry they have brought millions to an understanding of the Word of God. Through their witness they have shown them the way of salvation through faith in Christ. One of these individuals is John Gerstner.