

DISPENSATIONALISM AND COVENANT THEOLOGY

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Lecture Notes



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1a. Introduction

There are two major theological systems: dispensational theology, and covenant theology. No theologian can escape the many issues and debates that are generated by these two opposing systems of theology. The laity is aware of dispensationalism and covenantalism, but few understand what they really mean or signify. So, Bible-Presbyterians have been wrongly labelled “dispensational” because we believe in the premillennial return of Christ! These critics, without deep study, fail to realise that taking a premillennial position does not necessarily make one dispensational. It is thus the responsibility of full-time students of God’s Word, training to be pastors, missionaries, and teachers, to understand accurately and be able to explain clearly what is the reformed-premillennial system of faith which we believe to be closest to the truth.

2a. Terms and Definitions

1b. Dispensationalism

1c. Term

“Etymologically, the English word *dispensation* is the anglicised form of the Latin *dispensatio*, the Vulgate rendering of the Greek word *oikonomia*. The meaning of the feminine Latin noun is ‘weighing out; management, administration; the office of a treasurer.’ The Greek feminine noun *oikonomia* means: ‘1. Management of a household; 2. Arrangement, order, plan,’ while the masculine noun *oikonomos* refers to the one who acts as the ‘manager’ or serves as the ‘steward’ of the household. The word *oikonomia* itself is a compound of *oikos* which means ‘house,’ and *nemo*, meaning ‘to dispense, manage or hold sway.’ The primary idea in the word *dispensation* then, is the administration or management of a household’s affairs by a steward or manager (e.g., Luke 16, ‘parable of rich man and steward’). It ‘relates primarily to household administration.’ Our English word *economy* is derived from the Greek *oikonomia*.” (Crutchfield, *Dispensationalism*, 23).

2c. Definition

1d. “A dispensation is a period of time during which man is tested in respect of obedience to some *specific* revelation of the will of God.” (Scofield, *Bible*, 5).

2d. “A dispensation can be defined as a stage in the progressive revelation of God constituting a distinctive stewardship or rule of life.” (Chafer, *Themes*, 126).

3d. “A concise definition of a dispensation is this: A dispensation is a distinguishable economy in the outworking of God’s purpose. . . . Dispensationalism views the world as a household run by God. In His household-world God is dispensing or administering its affairs according to His own will and in various stages of revelation in the passage of time. These various stages mark off the distinguishably different economies in the outworking of His total purpose, and these different economies constitute the dispensations. The understanding of God’s differing economies is essential to a proper interpretation of His revelation within those various economies.” (Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 28-9).

4d. “We believe that the dispensations are stewardships by which God administers His purpose on the earth under varying responsibilities. We believe that the changes in the dispensational dealings of God with man depend on changed conditions or situations which man is successively found with relation to God, and that these changes are the result of the failures of man and the judgments of God. We believe that different administrative responsibilities of this character are manifest in the biblical record, that they span the entire history of mankind, and that each ends in the failure of man under the respective test and in an ensuing judgment from God.” (Dallas Theological Seminary 1995-6 Catalog, 138).

2b. Covenantalism

1c. Term

“The Latin noun *foedus*, from which the word ‘federal’ comes, means covenant, treaty, compact etc. . . .

“The word ‘covenant’ (Hebrew *berith*, Greek *diatheke*) is used frequently throughout the Bible. Any arrangement more or less formally instituted between two or more parties may be called a covenant. Sometimes a covenant is a mere promise and does not involve either conditions or consent on the part of the party or parties to whom the promise is made; but more frequently a covenant involves an agreement, either tacit or explicit, between two more more parties, and involves conditional terms.” (Buswell, *Theology*, I:307).

2c. Definition

Covenant theology is defined as “The theological system which rests upon the conception that before the fall, man was under the covenant of works, wherein God promised him (through Adam, the federal head of the race) eternal blessedness if he perfectly kept the law; and that since the fall man is under a covenant of grace, wherein God, of His free grace, promises the same blessings to all who believe in Christ (the federal head of the church).” (*Webster’s Dictionary* quoted by Buswell, *Theology*, I:307).

3a. History

1b. Of Dispensationalism

“Dispensationalism arose in the early nineteenth century in Great Britain with the Brethren movement, which was led by men such as John Nelson Darby, Samuel P. Tregelles, and Charles Henry Mackintosh. They and other Brethren leaders produced volumes of expositional works, which influenced many prominent Christians in the United States, including D. L. Moody, James H. Brookes, and C. I. Scofield.

“The Brethren influence in the United States produced the Bible Conference Movement, starting with the Niagara Bible Conferences in the 1870s. The movement soon spread to other parts of the country. In 1909 C. I. Scofield published his now famous Scofield Reference Bible, which placed the teachings of the conferences and the Brethren into the hands of the general public. The system of theology outlined in the notes of his study Bible soon became known as ‘dispensationalism.’

“Among those influenced by Scofield was an evangelist named Lewis Sperry Chafer. Eventually Chafer would establish the Evangelical Theological College, which later changed its name to Dallas Theological Seminary. The role of Dallas Seminary in the growth of dispensationalism can hardly be overstated. The seminary has produced several giants within the dispensational tradition: John F. Walvoord, Charles C. Ryrie, and J. Dwight Pentecost, to name a few. Following the tradition of their Brethren predecessors, these men have churned out volumes of literature and influenced countless thousands of Christians. In the process they have spread dispensationalism around the globe.” (Mathison, *Dispensationalism*, 10-1).

2b. Of Covenant Theology

“Calvin is in many ways the forerunner of Reformed federal theology. Calvin makes extensive use of the covenant idea in his Institutes (1559) and other writings in the following areas: the unity of the OT and NT, the mutuality and conditionality of the covenant, the benefits of salvation, . . . One can find an elementary form of the covenant of works in his writings.

“As a result of the work of two students of Calvin, the ideas of a pre-fall covenant of works and a pre-temporal covenant of redemption developed. In 1562, Zacharias Ursinus (1534-83) spoke of a pre-fall covenant of law between God and Adam in the garden that demanded perfect obedience with the promise of life and threatened disobedience with the penalty of death. In 1585, Caspar Olevianus (1536-87) presented the idea of a pre-temporal covenant between God the Father and God the Son for the salvation of man. These ideas coupled with the covenant of grace resulted in the federal theology of men such as Johannes Cocceius (1603-69). The covenant of works and grace received credal status in the Westminster Confession and Catechisms (1643-49).” (*New Dictionary of Theology*, s.v. “Covenant,” by P. A. Lillback).

4a. Adherents

1b. Dispensationalists

1c. Classical

The designation *classical dispensationalism* “refer generally to the views of British and American dispensationalists from the writings of **John Nelson Darby**, the foremost theologian of the early Brethren Movement, to the eight volume *Systematic Theology* of **Lewis Sperry Chafer**, the founder and first president of Dallas Theological Seminary. The interpretive notes of the *Scofield Reference Bible* might be considered a key representative of classical dispensationalism.” (Blaising and Bock, *Dispensationalism*, 22).

2c. Revised

“*Revised dispensationalism* designates the views of dispensational theologians writing primarily between the late 1950s and the late 1970s, although it also applies to some publications in the 1990s as well. The designation *revised* is taken from the *revision* of the *Scofield Bible*, completed in 1967 and offering views much more compatible to writers of this second period. Some of the more well-known *revised dispensationalists* include **Alva J. McClain, John Walvoord, Charles Ryrie, J. Dwight Pentecost, and Stanley Toussaint.**” (Blaising and Bock, *Dispensationalism*, 22).

3c. Progressive

1d. How did it start? Read Darrell L. Bock, “Charting Dispensationalism,” *Christianity Today* (September 12, 1994): 26. In 1985, 24 dispensationalists at Biola University started the Dispensational Study Group to discuss and redefine dispensational theology. They have since been dialoguing regularly at the annual meetings of the Evangelical Theological Society.

2d. “Progressive dispensationalism offers a number of modifications to classical and revised dispensationalism which brings dispensationalism closer to contemporary evangelical biblical interpretation. Although the name is relatively recent, the particular interpretations that make up this form of dispensationalism have been developing over the past fifteen years. Sufficient revisions had taken place by 1991 to introduce the name progressive dispensationalism at the national meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society that year.” (Blaising and Bock, *Dispensationalism*, 22-3).

3d. Books representative of this viewpoint are: *Progressive Dispensationalism: An Up-to-date Handbook of Contemporary Dispensational Thought*, and *Dispensationalism, and Israel and the Church: The Search for Definition*, by **Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock.**

2b. Covenantalists

1c. Amillennial

1d. Louis Berkhof (1873-1957)

1e. “A major systematic theologian of the Christian of the Christian Reformed Church and first president of Calvin Seminary. . . . He graduated from the Theological School of the Christian Reformed Church (1900) and Princeton Seminary (1904) where he studied under B. B. Warfield and Gerhardus Vos. Berkhof taught exegetical theology and NT at Calvin Seminary (1906-26). . . . Having distinguished himself in theological controversy, he was appointed professor of systematic theology (1926-44). Concurrently, he served (from 1931) as seminary president.

“A man of many talents and broad interests, Berkhof addressed contemporary theological issues and problems, most notable concerning church and society. His reputation as a Reformed theologian rests almost entirely on his *Systematic Theology* (1941). Initially published for students, the work became a textbook.” (*Encyclopedia of the Reformed Faith*, s.v. “Berkhof, Louis,” by Henry Zwaanstra; see also *Handbook of Evangelical Theologians*, s.v. “Louis Berkhof,” by Fred H. Klooster).

2e. According to Berkhof, “The Amillennial view is, as the name indicates, purely negative. It holds that there is no sufficient Scriptural ground for the expectation of a millennium, and is firmly convinced that the Bible favors the idea that the present dispensation of the Kingdom of God will be followed immediately by the Kingdom of God in its consummate and eternal form.” (Berkhof, *Theology*, 708).

2d. William Hendriksen

1e. “Hendriksen held a Th.D. from Princeton Theological Seminary. He served large congregations in the Christian Reformed Church and for ten years was Professor of New Testament Literature at Calvin Seminary, Grand Rapids, Michigan. Since his emeritation from pastoral work in 1965 he had with diligence and dedication continued the writing of the *New Testament Commentary*. He died in 1982, shortly after completing the commentary on Romans.” (From dust jacket of his *New Testament Commentary* by Baker).

2e. On Hendriksen’s commentary on Revelation—*More Than Conquerors*—Dr Jim Rosscup of

Master's Seminary has this review: "An evangelical but amillennial approach to the Apocalypse. Some will doubt that this is one of Hendriksen's better works, but premillennial readers will profit from following how an amillennialist can explain his view." (Jim Rosscup, *Commentaries for Biblical Expositors*, 308).

3d. J. Gresham Machen

1e. "Militant conservative Presbyterian educator and NT scholar Machen was the son of southern parents and was raised in a cultured and pious Old School Presbyterian home in Baltimore. He studied at Johns Hopkins University, Princeton Seminary, Princeton University, Marburg, and Gottingen. . . . he led in founding the Presbyterian Church of America (later the Orthodox Presbyterian Church)." (*Encyclopedia of the Reformed Faith*, s.v. "Machen, J(ohn) Gresham," by Bradley J. Longfield; see also *J. Gresham Machen: A Biographical Memoir*, by Ned B. Stonehouse, 503-5).

2e. A difference in millennial views was one of the reasons that led Carl McIntire to part ways with his teacher, Machen, in 1937. "Old School Presbyterians believed in the 'Christian liberty' to drink alcoholic beverages, and contrary to almost all other American evangelicals, would not condemn their use. A more substantial rift was the intensification of the Westminster's faculty's opposition to dispensationalism.

"These issues split the Independent Board. McIntire and his more purely fundamentalist group wrested control from Machen and his Westminster allies. . . . The more fundamentalistic group, . . . soon split off to found the Bible Presbyterian Church. In the meantime, Allan MacRae, who had taught at Westminster since its beginning, . . . became president of the new Faith Theological Seminary organized by the McIntire group." (Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism*, 43-40).

4d. Anthony Andrew Hoekema

"Hoekema was born in Drachten, the Netherlands, in 1913 and emigrated with his family to the United States in 1923. He was raised in a Christian Reformed home and nurtured in the confessions of the Dutch Reformed churches (the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, and the Canons of Dort). The influence of his training in the Reformed tradition continued throughout his life and ministry and decisively shaped his later theological method and position.

"Hoekema distinguished himself as a student at a young age and was attracted to the fields of psychology and theology. He

studied at Calvin College (A.B., 1936), the denominational school of the Christian Reformed Church, and at the University of Michigan (A.M. in psychology, 1937). He then engaged in theological study at Calvin Theological Seminary (Th.B., 1942), Princeton Theological Seminary (1942-44); Th.D., 1953), and Cambridge University (1965-66 and 1973-74). . . .

“. . . Hoekema had been a capable defender of the classic amillennialist position.” (*Handbook of Evangelical Theologians*, s.v. “Anthony Hoekema,” by Cornelis P. Venema).

2c. Postmillennial

1d. Charles Hodge (1797-1878)

1e. “Arguably America’s premier Reformed theologian of the nineteenth century. Hodge taught at Princeton Seminary (1822-73). He edited the prestigious *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* (BRPR) and summarized much, though not all, his theological formulae in the influential *Systematic Theology* (3 vols.; 1872-73).” (*Encyclopedia of the Reformed Faith*, s.v. “Hodge, Charles,” by John W. Stewart; see also *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*, s.v. “Hodge, Charles,” by Bruce L. Shelley).

2e. Hodge wrote, “before the second coming of Christ there is to be a time of great and long continued prosperity to be followed by a season of decay and of suffering, so that when the Son of man comes, He shall hardly find faith on the earth. . . . This period is called a millennium because in Revelation it is said to last a thousand years, an expression which is generally understood in a literal sense. Some, however, think it means a protracted season of indefinite duration, as when it is said that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years. . . . During this period, whatever its length, the Church is to enjoy a season of peace, purity, and blessedness such as it has never yet experienced.” (Hodge, *Theology*, abridged by Ed Gross, 540-1).

2d. Loraine Boettner

1e. Boettner “was born in northwest Missouri. He is a graduate of Princeton Theological Seminary (Th.B., 1928; Th.M., 1929). . . . In 1933 he received the honorary degree of Doctor of Divinity, and in 1957 the degree of Doctor of Literature. He taught Bible for eight years in Pikeville College, Kentucky. His books include *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination* (1932), *Studies in Theology* (1947), *Immortality* (1956) and *Roman Catholicism* (1962).” (Clouse, *Millennium*,

221).

2e. Boettner was advocate for postmillennialism in Clouse's *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views*, 117-41). According to Boettner, "Postmillennialism is that view of the last things which holds that the kingdom of God is now being extended in the world through the spreading of the gospel and the saving work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of individuals, that the world eventually is to be Christianized and that the return of Christ is to occur at the close of a long period of righteousness and peace commonly called the millennium." (Clouse, *Millennium*, 117)

3d. Christian Reconstructionists

1e. The Creed of Christian Reconstruction by Rev. Andrew Sandlin:

1f. *A Christian Reconstructionist is a Calvinist.*

He holds to historic, orthodox, catholic Christianity and the great Reformed confessions. He believes God, not man, is the center of the universe and beyond; God, not man, controls whatever comes to pass; God, not man, must be pleased and obeyed. He believes God saves sinners. He does not help them save themselves. A Christian Reconstructionist believes the Faith should apply to all of life, not just the "spiritual" side. It applies to art, education, technology, and politics no less than to church, prayer, evangelism, and Bible Study.

2f. *A Christian Reconstructionist is a Theonomist.*

Theonomy means "God's law." A Christian Reconstructionist believes God's law is found in the Bible. It has not been abolished as a standard of righteousness. It no longer accuses the Christian, since Christ bore its penalty on the cross for him. But the law is a description of God's righteous character. It cannot change any more than God can change. God's law is used for three main purposes: First, to drive the sinner to trust in Christ alone, the only perfect law-keeper. Second, to provide a standard of obedience for the Christian, by which he may judge his progress in sanctification. And third, to maintain order in society, restraining and arresting civil evil.

3f. *A Christian Reconstructionist is a Presuppositionalist.*

He does not try to "prove" that God exists or that the Bible is true. He holds to the Faith because the Bible says so, not because he can "prove" it. He does not try to convince the unconverted that the gospel is true. They already know it is true when they hear it. They need repentance, not evidence. Of course, the Christian Reconstructionist believes there is evidence for the Faith, in fact, there is nothing but evidence for the Faith. The problem for the unconverted, though, is not a lack of evidence, but a lack of submission. The Christian Reconstructionist begins and ends with the Bible. He does not defend "natural theology," and other inventions designed to find some agreement with covenant-breaking apostate mankind.

4f. A Christian Reconstructionist is a Postmillennialist.

He believes Christ will return to earth only after the Holy Spirit has empowered the church to advance Christ's kingdom in time and history. He has faith that God's purposes to bring all nations, though not every individual, in subjection to Christ cannot fail. The Christian Reconstructionist is not utopian. He does not believe the kingdom will advance quickly or painlessly. He knows that we enter the kingdom through much tribulation. He knows Christians are in the fight for the "long haul." He believes the church may yet be in her infancy. But he believes the Faith will triumph. Under the power of the Spirit of God, it cannot but triumph.

5f. A Christian Reconstructionist is a Dominionist.

He takes seriously the Bible's commands to the godly to take dominion in the earth. This is the goal of the gospel and the Great Commission. The Christian Reconstructionist believes the earth and all its fullness is the Lord's; that every area dominated by sin must be "reconstructed" in terms of the Bible. This includes, first, the individual; second, the family; third, the church; and fourth, the wider society, including the state. The Christian Reconstructionist therefore believes fervently in Christian civilization. He firmly believes in the separation of church and state, but not the separation of the state or anything else from God. He is not a revolutionary; he does not believe in the militant, forced overthrow of human government. He has infinitely more powerful weapons than guns and bombs, he has the invincible Spirit of God, the infallible word of God, and the incomparable gospel of God, none of which can fail.

*He presses the crown rights of the Lord Jesus
Christ in every sphere, expecting eventual triumph.*

2e. Rousas J. Rushdoony

He “is the leader of the Reconstructionist movement, sometimes called Christian Constructionism. They define themselves as post-Millennium, meaning that the Earth must be prepared for the coming of Jesus Christ. That preparation concerns the elimination of all sin and sinners from the face of the Earth before Christ's appearance. To arrive at that end, democracies and national constitutions must be replaced by Biblical Law, or more commonly, the Ten Commandments.”

3e. Greg L. Bahnsen

He “is an ordained minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and is the full-time Scholar in Residence for SCCCS. He received his Ph.D. in philosophy from the University of Southern California, specializing in the theory of knowledge. He previously received the B.A. (magna cum laude, philosophy) from Westmont College, and then simultaneously earned the M.Div. and Th.M. degrees from Westminster Theological Seminary. Dr. Bahnsen lectures to a broad range of evangelical Christian groups at many colleges and conferences. He is an experienced apologist and debater, a clear and cogent teacher of the Christian worldview who is devoted to training believers in understanding and applying the Christian faith to every area of life. He has published numerous scholarly articles, a number of well-known books, and has over 1,500 recorded lectures and sermons.” Dr. Bahnsen died on December 11th, 1995.

4e. Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr.

He “is an ordained minister in the P.C.A., and pastor of Reedy River Presbyterian Church in Greenville, SC. Dr. Gentry received a M.Div. from Reformed Theological Seminary, a Th.M. and a Th.D. (summa cum laude) from Whitefield Theological Seminary. He brings to the faculty of SCCCS a wide range of scholarly and pastoral experience. Dr. Gentry has served on numerous boards and advisory committees and has been an instructor for presbyteries, Christian high schools, Whitefield Theological Seminary and Christ College. He has authored many articles and pamphlets along with more than ten books on a wide range of topics including abortion, prophecy, eschatology, theology and law.”

2c. Premillennial

1d. Historic and Anti-semitic

“Premillennialists hold that the return of Christ will be preceded by certain signs, then followed by a period of peace and righteousness in which Christ will reign on earth in person as King. Historic premillennialists understand the return of Christ and the Rapture as one and the same event. They see unity. Therefore they stand apart from the dispensational premillennialist who sees these as two events separated by the seven-year Tribulation.” (House, *Christian Theology*, 132).

1e. George Eldon Ladd

1f. Ladd was “Professor of New Testament exegesis and theology at Fuller Theological Seminary since 1950, was educated at Gordon College and Gordon Divinity School (B.D.) and received the Ph.D. degree from Harvard University. He has also done postdoctoral study at Heidelberg and Basel Universities.” (Clouse, *Millennium*, 222-3).

2f. Ladd wrote, “Ryrie correctly identified myself as a nondispensationalist because I do not keep Israel and the church distinct throughout God’s program; . . .” (Clouse, *Millennium*, 20).

2e. Millard J. Erickson

1f. Erickson was professor of theology at Bethel Theological Seminary. He earned his Ph.D. from Northwestern University.

2f. Erickson concludes that “there are no biblical passages with which premillennialism cannot cope, or which it cannot adequately explain. We have seen, on the other hand, that the reference to two resurrections (Rev. 20) gives amillennialists difficulty. Their explanations that we have here two different types of resurrection or two spiritual resurrections strain the usual principles of hermeneutics. The premillennialist case appears stronger at this point. . . .

“ . . . Accordingly, we judge the premillennial view to be more adequate than amillennialism.” (Erickson, *Theology*, 1216-7).

3f. “The general tenor of biblical teaching fits better the posttribulational view. For example, the

Bible is replete with warnings about trials and testings which believers will undergo. It does not promise removal from these adversities, but ability to endure and overcome them.

“. . . the preponderance of evidence favors posttribulationism.” (Erickson, *Theology*, 1224).

2d. Dispensational

“The *sine qua non* (i.e. essential elements) of dispensational theology are the (1) distinction Israel and the Church, (2) literal interpretation of prophetic texts, and (3) unifying principle of the glory of God. We, as reformed-premillennialists, can agree to to all three points. . . .

“Therefore, have we as Bible-Presbyterians become dispensational? No, because we do not hold to a dispensational scheme but a covenantal one. Covenant theology is succinctly expressed in our doctrinal constitution—*The Westminster Confession of Faith*—in Chapter VII, ‘Of God’s Covenant with Man.’ Neither would dispensationalists accept reformed-premillennialists as belonging to their camp. This is because dispensationalists do not agree that the dispensations are ‘different methods of administering the so-called Covenant of Grace.’

Dispensationalists see the divine goal as the glorification of God, while covenant theologians see the divine goal as the salvation of man. To us, the glory of God is not so much the goal but the *result* of God’s salvific work. Dispensational theology is a *discontinuous* (or *disjointed*) system; it uses a chopper to cut up the Bible into separate pieces. Covenant theology, on the other hand, is a *continuous* (or *unified*) system; it uses a needle with a scarlet thread to tie up the whole Bible. Although we accept the premillennialism of dispensationalists, we categorically reject their theological grid.” (Khoo, *Dispensationalism Examined*, 11-2)

Representative scholars and works of the reformed but (dispensational) premillennial viewpoint are:

1e. J. Oliver Buswell

1f. See his *Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion*, II:346-553).

2f. “The late Dr. Buswell had been dean of the Graduate Faculty of Covenant College and Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri. He taught philosophy and theology for many years. Well known for his stand as a Christian educator, Dr. Buswell had a long and distinguished career in the field of Christian education. He graduated from the University of Minnesota (B.A.), the McCormick Theological Seminary (B.D.), the

University of Chicago (M.A.), and New York University (Ph.D.). The honorary degree of Doctor of Divinity was conferred upon him in 1927 by the Evangelical Theological College of Dallas, Texas, and the honorary degree of LL.D. was presented to him by Houghton College, Houghton, New York, 1936.

“In 1926 he was chosen the third President of Wheaton College, a position which he held until 1940, when he went to Faith Theological Seminary as Professor of Systematic Theology. In 1941 he became President of the National Bible Institute, later Shelton College, in New York City. He left Shelton in 1956 to take up his duties at Covenant College and Seminary.”
(From dust-jacket of his *Systematic Theology* published by Zondervan).

2e. Timothy Tow

1f. He received his M.Div., and S.T.M. from Faith Theological Seminary, and D.D. from Shelton College.

2f. See his books: *Prophescope on Israel, Visions of the Princely Prophet: A Study of the Book of Daniel, Israel a Great Nation*, and *Coming World Events Unveiled: A Study of the Book of Revelation*.

5a. Hermeneutics

1b. Dispensational

1c. Literal Interpretation

“Dispensationalists claim that their principle of hermeneutics is that of literal interpretation. This means interpretation that gives to every word the same meaning it would have in normal usage, whether employed in writing, speaking, or thinking. It is sometimes called the principle of grammatical-historical interpretation since the meaning of each word is determined by grammatical and historical considerations. The principle might also be called normal interpretation since the literal meaning of words is the normal approach to their understanding in all languages. It might also be designated plain interpretation so that no one receives the mistaken notion that the literal principle rules out figures of speech. Symbols, figures of speech, and types are all interpreted plainly in this method, and they are in no way contrary to literal interpretation. After all, the very existence of any meaning for a figure of speech depends on the reality of the literal meaning of the terms involved. Figures often make the meaning plainer, but it is the literal, normal, or

plain meaning that they convey to the reader.” (Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 80-1).

2c. David Cooper’s Golden Rule of Interpretation

“*When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense; therefore, take every word at its primary, ordinary, usual, literal meaning unless the facts of the immediate context, studied in the light of related passages, and axiomatic and fundamental truths, indicate clearly otherwise.*” What is meant by “common sense?” “Cooper does not use the phrase “common sense,” . . . by appealing to an abstract theory of common understanding latent to humanity. Instead, he defines it within a literary context. Common sense for Cooper is controlled by the context of Scripture, not some idea of common meaning residing in the reader of Scripture. Terms like ‘primary,’ ‘ordinary,’ ‘usual,’ and ‘literal’ meaning are developed literarily from Scripture within Cooper’s rule, as well as theologically (i.e. “axiomatic and fundamental truths”). . . . Cooper’s rule is a helpful guide for discerning the Bible’s use of literal or figurative language within the consistently literal system of interpretation.” (Thomas D. Ice, “Dispensational Hermeneutics,” in *Issues in Dispensationalism*, 35).

3c. Continuity and Discontinuity

“Theological positions can be placed on a continuum running from views holding to absolute continuity between the Testaments to views holding to absolute discontinuity between the Testaments . The more one move in the continuity direction, the more covenantal he becomes; and the more he moves in the discontinuity direction, the more dispensational he becomes.” (Feinberg, *Continuity and Discontinuity*, xii).

4c. The Analogy of Antecedent Scripture

The hermeneutic of Walter C. Kaiser. It is a type of dispensational hermeneutic which is basically discontinuous in character. See my paper, “The Sign of the Virgin Birth,” *The Burning Bush* 1 (1995): 5-33.

5c. Complementary Hermeneutics of Progressive Dispensationalism

1d. Complementary hermeneutics believes that “the New Testament does not introduce change and advance; it does not merely repeat Old Testament revelation. In making complementary additions, however, it does not jettison old promises. The enhancement is not at the expense of the original promise.” (Blaising and Bock, *Israel and the Church*, 392-3).

2d. Ryrie’s analysis: “The first sentence of their definition opens the door for their already/not yet view of the Davidic kingdom. The last two sentences keep them from becoming amillennialists.” (Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 89).

3d. Progressive Dispensational hermeneutic is certainly a move away from discontinuity towards continuity in the dispensational theological framework.

2b. Covenantal

1c. Literal Interpretation

Covenant theologians, like dispensationalists, hold to the literal or historical-grammatical method of biblical interpretation. Amillennial covenantalists, however, would differ with dispensationalists in their hermeneutical approach to biblical prophecy.

2c. Dispensational Misrepresentation

“There is a growing realization in the theological world that the crux of the millennial issue is the question of the method of interpreting Scripture. Premillenarians follow the so-called ‘grammatical-historical’ literal interpretation while amillenarians use a spiritualizing method.” (Walvoord, *Millennial*, 50).

3c. Albertus Pieters’ Qualification

“No one defends or employs the allegorizing method of exegesis. Calvin and the other great Bible students of the Reformation saw clearly that the method was wrong and taught the now generally accepted ‘grammatical-historical’ literal interpretation, so far as the Scriptures in general are concerned. That they retain the spiritualizing method in expounding many of the prophecies was because they found themselves forced to do in order to be faithful to the New Testament” (cited by Cox, *Amillennialism*, 14).

4c. How do amillennialists interpret prophecy?

1d. Floyd Hamilton states: “a good working rule to follow is that the literal interpretation of the prophecy is to be accepted unless (a) the passages contain obviously figurative language, or (b) unless the New Testament gives authority for interpreting them in other than a literal sense, or (c) unless a literal interpretation would produce a contradiction with truths, principles, or factual statements contained in non-symbolic books of the New Testament. Another obvious rule to be followed is that the clearest New Testament passages in non-symbolic books are to be the norm for the interpretation of prophecy, rather than obscure or partial revelations contained in the Old Testament. In other words we should accept the clear and plain parts of Scripture as a basis for getting the true meaning of the more difficult parts of Scripture.” (cited by Cox, *Amillennialism*, 24-5).

2d. My Critique: The above principles at face value may be correct, but they are not comprehensive enough to cover all

aspects of prophetic interpretation. In the interpretation of biblical prophecy, proper attention must be paid to the prophecy's historical context. Fallacious amillennial hermeneutics seeks to interpret historically rooted passages, especially those which relate to national Israel, allegorically. It is important that we do not confuse Israel with the Church. God is serious about keeping His covenant promises to Israel even though they had strayed from Him. The doctrines of grace demand that we see God's relationship with Israel in this light.

5c. Analogy of Scripture

This is taught in the *Westminster Confession of Faith*: "The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself; and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture, (which is not manifold, but one) it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly." (Chapter I, paragraph 9).

6a. Theological Systems

1b. Dispensational

1c. The Seven Dispensations

1d. Explanation

"The Scriptures divide time (by which is meant the entire period from the creation of Adam to the 'new heaven and a new earth' of Rev. 21:1) into seven unequal periods, usually called dispensations (Eph. 3:2), . . .

"These periods are marked off in Scripture by some change in God's method of dealing with mankind, or a portion of mankind, in respect of the two questions: of sin, and of man's responsibility. Each of the dispensations may be regarded as a new test of the natural man, and each ends in judgment, marking his utter failure in every dispensation. Five of these dispensations, or periods of time, have been fulfilled; we are living in the sixth, probably toward its close, and have before us the seventh, and last: the millennium." (Scofield, *Rightly Dividing*, 13-4).

2d. The seven dispensations are:

1e. Innocence (Gen. 1:26-3:24)

1f. Test: to abstain from the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

2f. Failure: Adam and Eve, when tempted by the devil, ate the forbidden fruit.

- 3f. Judgment: God drove man out of the garden.
- 2e. Conscience (Gen. 4:1-7:24)
 - 1f. Test: to use conscience as a basis for right moral judgment—to do good and eschew evil.
 - 2f. Failure: “the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.”
 - 3f. Judgment: the Flood.
- 3e. Human Government (Gen. 8:1-11:26)
 - 1f. Test: to govern the purged world.
 - 2f. Failure: rebellion against God by building the tower of Babel.
 - 3f. Judgment: the confusion of tongues.
- 4e. Promise (Gen. 11:27-Exod. 18)
 - 1f. Test: to keep the conditions of the Abrahamic covenant.
 - 2f. Failure: violation of every one of these conditions.
 - 3f. Judgment: bondage in Egypt.
- 5e. Law (Exod. 19:1-Acts 1:26)
 - 1f. Test: to obey the Mosaic Law.
 - 2f. Failure: violated all the commandments in the wilderness and in the land.
 - 3f. Judgment: driven out of the land by Assyrians and Babylonians.
- 6e. Grace (Acts 2:1-Rev 19:21)
 - 1f. Test: to believe in Jesus Christ.
 - 2f. Failure: unbelief of the world and apostasy of the church.
 - 3f. Judgment: the great tribulation.

7e. Kingdom (Rev 20:1-22:21)

- 1f. Test: to submit to the reign of Christ on earth.
- 2f. Failure: rebellion led by Satan.
- 3f. Judgment: the Great White Throne.

2c. Purpose of the Dispensational Tests

“Such tests are not for the purpose of enlightening God but for the purpose of bring out what is in people, whether faith or failure.” (Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 34).

3c. Critique of the Dispensational Tests

“Dispensationalists often claim that each dispensation involves a test for man, a failure, and a judgment. While many claim this is a secondary characteristic of a dispensation, many take this idea to suggest that what God is doing with history is attempting to demonstrate that man is a failure under all circumstances and thus needs God. . . .

“. . . if this is what God is doing with history, it is surely odd. Why does God have to prove anything to anyone? If God says no one is righteous and that none seeks on his own to do God’s will (and God surely says that), isn’t that enough proof? Is God suspect as a potential liar until he runs history through all the dispensations to prove that he was right all along? Moreover, if God is trying to prove this, why seven times over? Wouldn’t two or three times do? Or maybe before we can agree, God needs to prove this in all *possible* economies, and that would surely be more than seven. If this sounds strange, and it does, it suggests that such thinking is utterly wrong-headed.” (Feinberg, *Continuity and Discontinuity*, 70).

2b. Covenantal

1c. The Two Covenants (WCF, VII.1-6)

“Of God’s Covenant with Man”

1d. *The distance between God and the creature is so great, that although reasonable creatures do owe obedience unto Him as their Creator, yet they could never have any fruition of Him as their blessedness and reward, but by some voluntary condescension on God’s part, which He hath been pleased to express by way of covenant.*

2d. *The first covenant made with man was a covenant of works, wherein life was promised to Adam; and in him to his posterity, upon condition of perfect and personal obedience.*

3d. *Man, by his fall, having made himself incapable of life by that covenant, the Lord was pleased to make a second, commonly called the covenant of grace; wherein He freely offereth unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ; requiring of them faith in Him, that they may be saved, and promising to give unto all those that are ordained unto eternal life His Holy Spirit, to make them willing, and able to believe.*

4d. *This covenant of grace is frequently set forth in Scripture by the name of a testament, in reference to the death of Jesus Christ the Testator, and to the everlasting inheritance, with all things belonging to it, therein bequeathed.*

5d. *This covenant was differently administered in the time of the law, and in the time of the gospel: under the law, it was administered by promises, prophecies, sacrifices, circumcision, the paschal lamb, and other types of ordinances delivered to the people of the Jews, all foreshadowing Christ to come; which were, for that time, sufficient and efficacious, through the operation of the Spirit, to instruct and build up the elect in faith in the promised Messiah, by whom they had full remission of sins, and eternal salvation; and is called the old Testament.*

6d. *Under the gospel, when Christ, the substance, was exhibited, the ordinances in which this covenant is dispensed are the preaching of the Word, and the administration of the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper; which, though fewer in number, and administered with more simplicity, and less outward glory, yet, in them, it is held forth in more fulness, evidence and spiritual efficacy, to all nations, both Jews and Gentiles; and is called the new Testament. There are not therefore two covenants of grace, differing in substance, but one and the same, under various dispensations.*

2c. Two Covenants, Two Tests (see Berkhof, *Doctrine*, 64-5, 74-8)

1d. The Covenant of Works

1e. Scriptural Basis

“Paul draws a parallel between Adam and Christ in Rom. 5:12-21. In Adam all men died, but in Christ all those who are His are made alive. This means that Adam was the representative head of all men, just as Christ is now the representative head of all those who are His.” Adam’s sin is called a transgression of the covenant in Hos. 6:7: “But they like *Adam* have transgressed the covenant.”

2e. Elements

1f. The Parties

“A covenant is always a compact between two parties. In this case they are the triune God, the sovereign Lord of the universe, and Adam as

the representative of the human race. Since these parties are very unequal, the covenant naturally partakes of the nature of an arrangement imposed on man.”

2f. The Promise

“The promise of the covenant was the promise of life in the highest sense, life raised above the possibility of death. This is what believers now receive through Christ, the last Adam.”

3f. The Condition

“The condition was that of absolute obedience. The positive command not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was clearly a test of pure obedience.”

4f. The Penalty

“The penalty was death in the most inclusive sense of the word, physical, spiritual, and eternal. This consists . . . fundamentally in the separation of the soul from God.”

3e. Present Validity

“The demand of perfect obedience still stands for those who do not accept the righteousness of Christ. Lev. 18:5; Gal. 3:12. Though they cannot meet the requirement, the condition stands. It holds no more, however, for those who are in Christ, since He met the demands of the law for them.”

4e. Adam Tested and Failed

“Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned: (For until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam’s transgression, who is the figure of him that was to come” (Rom. 5:12-14).

2d. The Covenant of Grace

1e. Scriptural Basis

“It is clear that the plan of redemption was included in God’s eternal decree, Eph. 1:4ff.; 3:11; II Tim. 1:9. Christ speaks of promises made to Him before He came into the world, and repeatedly refers to a commission which He received from the Father, John 5:30, 43; 6:38-40; 17:4-12. He is evidently a covenant head, Rom. 5:12-21, I Cor. 15:22. In Ps. 2:7-9 the parties of the covenant are mentioned and a promise is indicated, and in Ps. 40:7, 8 the Messiah expresses His readiness to do the Father’s will in becoming a sacrifice for sin.

2e. Elements

1f. The Parties

“God is the first party in the covenant. He establishes the covenant and determines the relation in which the second party will stand to Him. . . . The covenant may be regarded *as a purely legal agreement, in which God guarantees the blessings of salvation to all who believe*. If we think of the covenant in this broader sense, we can say that God established it with believers and their children, Gen. 17:7; Acts 2:39; Rom 9:1-4.”

2f. The Promises

“The main promise of the covenant . . . is contained in the oft-repeated words, “I will be a God unto thee and to thy seed after thee,” Jer. 31:33 This promise includes all others, such as the promise of temporal blessings, of justification, of the Spirit of God, and of final glorification in a life that never ends.”

3f. The Requirements

The two things God requires of those who stand in covenant relationship to Him are:

1g. “that they accept the covenant and the covenant promises by faith, and thus enter upon the life of the covenant.”

2g. “that from the principle of the new life born within them, they consecrate themselves to God in new obedience.”

4f. The Characteristics

1g. Gracious

“... it is a fruit and manifestation of the grace of God to sinners. It is grace from start to finish.”

2g. Eternal

“It is also an eternal and inviolable covenant, to which God will always be true, though men may break it.”

3g. One

“This covenant is also characterized by unity. It is essentially the same in all dispensations, though the form of its administration changes. The essential promise is the same, Gen. 17:7; Heb. 8:10, the gospel is the same, Gal. 3:8, the requirement of faith is the same, Gal. 3:6, 7, and the Mediator is the same, Heb. 13:8.”

4g. Conditional/Unconditional

“It is conditional because it is dependent on the merits of Christ and because the enjoyment of the life it offers depends on that exercise of faith. But it is unconditional in the sense that it does not depend on any merits of man.”

5g. Mediatorial

It “differs from the covenant of works in that it has a mediator. Christ is represented as the Mediator of the new covenant, I Tim. 2:5; Heb. 8:6; 9:15; 12:24. He is Mediator, not only merely in the sense that He intervenes between God and man to sue for peace and persuade to it, but in the sense that He is armed with full power to do all that is necessary for the actual establishment of peace. As our Surety, Heb. 7:22, He assumes our guilt, pays the penalty of sin, fulfils the law, and thus restores peace.”

[Here ends Berkhof]

3e. Administrative Differences

- 1f. Rites
 - 1g. More in OT
 - 1h. Sacrifices and offerings.
Examples: burnt offerings (Lev. 1), peace offering (Lev. 3), grain offering (Lev. 2), sin offering (Lev. 4-6)
 - 2h. Feasts and festivals.
Examples: Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread (Exod. 12:1-20, 23:15), Feast of Weeks (Exod. 23:16, Lev. 23:15-21), Feast of Tabernacles (Exod. 23:16, Lev. 23:33-43), Day of Atonement (Lev. 16).
 - 2g. Less in NT
 - 1h. The Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:23-26), and Water Baptism (Matt. 28:19).
 - 2h. The Lord's Day or Christian Sabbath (Acts 20:7, 1 Cor. 16:1-2)
- 2f. Revelation
 - 1g. In OT, through
 - 1h. Types (1 Cor. 10:11, Heb. 10:1). Examples: Lamb (Gen. 4:4), Bronze Serpent (Num. 21:9), Shewbread (Exod. 25:30), Manna (Exod. 16:35), Kinsman-Redeemer (Isa. 59:20), Rock (Exod. 17:6).
 - 2h. Spectacular Means.
Examples: God's own voice (1 Sam. 3:4-15), visions and dreams (Num. 12:6), angels (Gen. 19:1), personal appearances (Gen. 18:1).
 - 2g. In NT, through
 - 1h. His Son (Heb. 1:1-2)

2h. The Bible (2 Tim. 3:16,
Rev 22:18-19).

4e. Christ Tested and Passed

“But not as the offence, so also is the free gift. much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many. And not as it was by one that sinned, so is the gift: for the judgment was by one to condemnation, but the free gift is of many offences unto justification. For if by one man’s offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ.) Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous. Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.” (Rom 5:15-21)

7a. Doctrinal Issues

1b. Ecclesiology

1c. Dispensational

1d. Ryrie says, “Indeed, ecclesiology, or the doctrine of the church, is the touchstone of dispensationalism (and also of pretribulationism).” (Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 123). “The church stands distinct from Israel and did not begin until the Day of Pentecost, and thus did not exist in the Old Testament.” (Ryrie, *Theology*, 399).

2d. Propositions (Mathison, *Dispensationalism*, 17)

1e. *God has two distinct programs in history, one for Israel and one for the church.*

2e. *The church does not fulfill or take over any of Israel’s promises or purposes.*

3e. *The church age is a “mystery,” and thus no Old Testament prophecies foresaw it.*

4e. *The present church age is a “parenthesis” or “intercalation” during which God has temporarily suspended His primary purpose with Israel.*

5e. *The church age began at Pentecost and will end at the pretribulation rapture of the church before Christ’s second coming.*

6e. *The church, or body of Christ, consists only of those believers saved between Pentecost and the rapture.*

7e. *The church as the body of Christ, therefore, does not include Old Testament believers.*

3d. Scriptural Arguments (Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 127-9)

1e. “Israel is addressed as a nation in contrast to Gentiles after the church was established at Pentecost (Acts 3:12; 4:8, 10; 5:21, 31, 35; 21:28).”

2e. “In Paul’s prayer for natural Israel (Rom. 10:1) there is a clear reference to Israel as a national people distinct from and outside the church. See also 1 Cor. 10:32.”

3e. “Paul, referring to natural Israel as his “kinsmen according to the flesh,” ascribes to them the covenants and the promises (Rom. 9:3-4).”

4e. “Believing Jews and believing Gentiles, which together make up the church in this age, continue to be distinguished in the New Testament, proving that the term *Israel* still means the physical descendants of Abraham.”

4d. Critique of Propositions under 2d.

1e. I agree with propositions 1e and 2e if the programmes and promises are seen only at the physical, geographical and national level. The salvific programme containing spiritual promises under the covenant of grace remains true for both Israel and the Church.

2e. I do not accept:

1f. Proposition 3e. The New Covenant of Jer 31:31-34 certainly includes the church. See Homer A Kent, “The New Covenant and the Church,” *Grace Theological Journal* 6 (1985): 289-98.

2f. Propositions 4e, 5e, 6e, and 7e. Although the NT Church Local began at Pentecost, Israel

may be deemed the OT “Church” (Acts 7:38). The Church Universal comprises all true believers—both in OT and in NT (Eph 1:22-23, 4:4-6).

3f. The distinction between Israel and the Church should be understood in its *institutional* (between Israel as a national body and the Church as an ecclesial body), rather than *racial* context (between Jews and Christians).

2c. Covenantal-amillennial

1d. William Cox writes, “The historic Christian teaching holds that national Israel was a type or forerunner of the church, and that *the church replaced Israel* on the Day of Pentecost.” (Cox, *Amillennialism*, 45).

2d. Propositions (see Cox, *Amillennialism*, 46):

1e. God’s national promises to Israel were fulfilled in the Old Testament.

2e. God’s national promises to Israel were invalidated because of disobedience.

3e. God’s spiritual promises to Israel are being fulfilled through the Church which is made of both Jews and Gentiles.

4e. The Church has replaced Israel as God’s chosen people.

3d. Scriptural Arguments

“Christ was, and is, the only hope of Israel. The crucifixion was Israel’s most heinous crime against God.

“It was at this point—their treatment of the Messiah—that Israel failed the most miserably to keep the conditions laid down in God’s promises to her. The Scriptures say, ‘He came unto his own, and they that were his own received him not’ (John 1:11). . . . ‘O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, that killeth the prophets, and stoneth them that are sent unto her! How often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!’ (Matt. 23:37). . . . ‘Pilate answered, Am I a Jew? Thine own nation and the chief priests delivered thee unto me . . .’” (John 8:35).

“What was the penalty for Israel’s failure to meet the conditions laid down by Jehovah, and which climaxed in her heinous treatment of the Messiah? “Jesus saith unto them, Did ye

never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes? Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof. And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder. And when the chief priests and Pharisees had heard his parables, they perceived that he spake of them" (Matt. 21:42-45). "Behold, your house is left unto you desolate" (Matt. 23:38). . . . God withdrew his presence from Israel as a nation. The Jewish state came to a bitter end in A.D. 70. Nor will national Israel ever again be a fruitful nation. This fact is made obvious by Jesus' curse on the fig tree. "Now in the morning as he returned into the city, he hungered. And when he saw a fig tree in the way, he came to it, and found nothing thereon, but leaves only, and said unto it, Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever. And presently the fig tree withered away. (Matt. 21:18-19). . . . Most conservative Bible students agree that the fig tree represents national Israel. This being true, then our Lord pronounced a curse upon national Israel and said that she would never again bear fruit. This is in perfect agreement with many other prophecies of the Bible." (Cox, *Amillennialism*, 42-4).

4d. Critique of Propositions and Arguments

1e. Many of God's national promises to Israel have been fulfilled in the OT. Examples: the promise of a land they could call their own (Deut. 1:8, Josh. 11:23, 21:41-45), and the promise of release and restoration after Babylonian captivity (Jer. 29:10-14).

2e. But there are promises to Israel that await a future or NT fulfillment. Examples: the second regathering of the dispersed of Israel (Isa. 11:11-12), and the 70th week of Daniel (Dan. 9) which is called "the time of Jacob's trouble" (Jer. 30:7).

3e. The fulfillment of spiritual promises to Israel in the Church does not cancel Israel's standing before God as His original chosen nation (Rom. 11:1, 26).

4e. Cox argues that the fig tree of Matt 21:18-19 refers to Israel, and Israel was cursed by Jesus for her fruitlessness. It is important to note that the fig tree is also found in Matt 24:32 and here it speaks of the fig tree prospering. Although Israel is presently cursed, God has promised a future blessing when the nation turns to Him.

5e. Dr John Whitcomb has correctly observed: If Israel had indeed been cast away by God because of her

disobedience, then how about the Church? Is the Church any less guilty than Israel in her disobedience towards God at the present time? Does not the Church deserve to be cast away also?

3c. Covenant-premillennial

1d. *The Westminster Confession of Faith* (XXV.1-2, “Of the Church”)

1e. *The catholic or universal Church, which is invisible, consists of the whole number of the elect, that have been, are, or shall be gathered unto one, under Christ the Head thereof; and is the spouse, the body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all.*

2e. *The visible Church, which is also catholic or universal under the Gospel (not confined to one nation, as before under the law), consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion; and of their children: and is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God, out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation.*

3e. There is a distinction between Israel and the Church, but with certain qualifications (see propositions below).

2d. Propositions

1e. The Church did not replace Israel because of her disobedience.

2e. God has two programmes in His salvation plan: one for Israel, and another for the Church.

3e. The Church Universal comprises all saints from the time of Adam till the time of Christ’s return.

4e. The Church Local existed within the nation of Israel in the time of the OT, but in the NT it comprises both Jews and Gentiles from all over the world.

3d. Scriptural Basis

1e. Acts 1:6-7 cf 2 Sam. 7:12-13, Isa. 9:6-7

1f. “When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power” (Acts 1:6-7).

2d. “Some conclude from the Lord’s response that the apostles had a false concept of the kingdom. But this is wrong. Christ did not accuse them of this. If the followers of the Lord Jesus had an incorrect view, this would have been the time for Him to correct it. The fact is, Christ taught the coming of an earthly, literal kingdom (cf. Matt. 19:28; Luke 19:11-27; 22:28-30). Acts 1:3 states that the Lord instructed the disciples about the kingdom; He certainly gave them the right impression as to its character and future coming.” (Stanley D. Toussaint, “Acts,” *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, 354).

2e. Rom. 11:13-25

1f. Has God cast off Israel? “There is a school of thought in Christendom which says that in the church God has fulfilled everything in the Old Testament and there is no future for the Jew as a nation. But the opposing view is that God has set aside for an age, and at some future time (in the next age) God will fulfill to the letter every promise He has made to Israel as a nation.” (McClain, *Romans*, 196).

2f. In Romans 11, “Paul asks, ‘Hath God cast off His people?’ and in answering, states and develops three facts here: (1) there is a present election, which proves God has not cast them off (vv.1-10); (2) there will be a future reception (vv. 11-24); (3) there will be a final salvation of Israel (vv. 25-32).” (McClain, *Romans*, 195).

3e. Gal 6:16

The term “Israel” is used 65 times in the NT with reference to ethnic Israel, never the Church. Read S. Lewis Johnson, “Paul and ‘The Israel of God’: An Exegetical and Eschatological Case Study,” in *Essays in Honor of J. Dwight Pentecost*, 181-96.

4d. Observation

Progressive dispensationalists come closer to the covenant-premillennial understanding of the Church. Ryrian dispensationalism say that the church is a “mystery”—completely unrevealed and totally nonexistent in the OT. The progressives do not agree fully with this. Saucy, a progressive, writes, “A mystery may be hidden in the sense that its truth has not yet been realized.

The corresponding revelation consists not in making the truth known in an objective or propositional sense but in bringing it to reality or existence.” (Robert L. Saucy, “The Church as the Mystery of God,” in *Dispensationalism, Israel, and the Church*, 144).

2b. Soteriology

1c. Dispensational

1d. Four-point Calvinism

1e. “. . . dispensationalism claims to be a ‘moderate’ variety of Calvinism. . . . Professing to be ‘moderate’ Calvinists, dispensationalists often claim to teach four of the ‘five points of Calvinism.’” (Mathison, *Dispensationalism*, 45-6). Instead of TULIP, it is TUIP. They reject the third point—limited atonement.

2e. Unlimited Atonement

“The dispensational and Arminian view, as expressed by Robert Lightner, is that Christ died ‘to make possible the salvation of every lost sinner, to make them all savable.’ Lewis Sperry Chafer likewise contends ‘that the death of Christ of itself saves no man, either actually or potentially, but that it does render all men savable.’” (Mathison, *Dispensationalism*, 60). “Christ’s death is a finished transaction, the value of which God has never applied to any soul until that soul passes from death unto life. It is *actual* as to its *availability*, but *potential* as to its *application*.” (Chafer, “For Whom Did Christ Die?” *Bibliotheca Sacra* [Oct-Dec 1980]: 316).

2d. Non-atoning View of Christ’s Life Sufferings

1e. “Without in any way detracting from the reality or the intensity of Christ’s sufferings in life, or from the sinlessness of His person and His absolute obedience to the law of God, this view denies that the active obedience of the Savior was in any way vicarious or atoning. Those who subscribe to this view reserve the substitutionary work of Christ to His death on the cross and to that alone. It was not the blood shed when He was circumcised or even when He prayed in Gethsemane which made an atonement for sin. Only as He became a curse as He hung on the accursed tree and cried, ‘It is finished,’ did He become the full and final sacrifice for sin as He took the sinner’s place. All the contradictions of sinners which the Savior endured in life were real and cannot be viewed lightly. Though genuine and without comparison, they were not vicarious.” (Robert P.

Lightner, "The Savior's Suffering in Life," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 127 [1970]: 35).

2e. Dispensationalists in general reject the doctrine of *the active obedience of Christ*. But progressive dispensationalists seem to say otherwise, "He (i.e. Christ) was completely obedient to the stipulations of the Mosaic covenant. This is why those who are *in Christ* are counted righteous (cf. Deut. 6:25; 1 Cor. 1:30) and find the curse of God completely satisfied for them." (Blaising and Bock, *Dispensationalism*, 198).

3d. Non-salvific Ministry of the Spirit in OT

1e. "The universal (among believers) and permanent indwelling of the Spirit is distinctive of this age and was not experienced in Old Testament times." (Ryrie, *Holy Spirit*, 43).

2e. "The Spirit indwelt many (Dan. 4:8; 1 Peter 1:11) and came upon many others for special power (Ex. 29:3; Judg. 3:10; 1 Sam. 10:9-10), but there was no guarantee that He would permanently or universally indwell God's people as He does today." (Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 112).

4d. Abrogation of the Moral Law

1e. "The true believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, therefore, is not 'under the law' in any sense as a means of salvation, or as a part of his salvation experience. The Christian is not under the law as a way of justification. 'By the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified' (Rom. 3:20). The Christian is not under the law as a way of sanctification. 'Sin shall not have dominion over you: for you are not under the law, but under grace' (Rom. 6:14).

"Any attempt to put the Christian 'under the law' is dangerous both spiritually and morally. The law not only cannot bring victory, but it is certain to bring moral and spiritual defeat The entire seventh chapter of Romans is a stern warning against the error of putting the Christian believer under the law as a rule of life for the purpose of attaining holiness. The result can be nothing but defeat and utter despair. The Christian begins by grace through faith apart from the law, and it must continue in the same way. To teach otherwise is utter foolishness . . .". (Alva J. McClain, "Grace and Law," a position statement by the faculty of Grace Theological Seminary).

2e. ". . . the Mosaic Law was given only for a time. It began with Moses and it ended with Christ. The written

instructions of the teaching of Moses are not applicable to the present age. The Law, which conditioned blessing on the ground of personal merit, is done away.” (Chafer, *Theology*, abridged ed., 2:346)

“The written Law of Moses was not intended to be the rule of the believer’s life under grace, but nevertheless the abiding principles of the Law which are adaptable with grace are carried forward and restated under the teachings of grace not as law but reformed to the mold of infinite grace.” (Chafer, *Theology*, abridged ed., 349).

3e. “The progressive dispensationalism of New Testament theology is not antinomian. For while it teaches that Mosaic covenant law has ended dispensationally, it also teaches that it has been replaced by new covenant law, and it presents this dispensational change as integral to God’s plan of redemption which affirms and fulfills the divine demand for righteousness and holiness even as it saves and eternally blesses the redeemed.” (Footnote: “Antinomianism is the teaching that obedience to God’s law is not a necessary component of the Christian life.”). (Blaising and Bock, *Dispensationalism*, 199, 313).

5d. Non-Lordship Salvation

The dispensational aversion to the Moral Law has led some dispensationalists to advocate that salvation involves receiving Jesus only as Saviour, but not as Lord. This has to do with the “Lordship Salvation” debate. The whole controversy arose when John MacArthur wrote his book—*The Gospel According to Jesus*—where he propounded that a person must receive Jesus both as Saviour and as Lord in order to be saved. In his book, he attacked Dallas Theological Seminary for teaching that it is not necessary and even unreasonable to impose the need to surrender one’s life to God as an added condition of salvation. Out of Dallas came two rebuttals; one from Zane Hodges—*Absolutely Free*—which represents the radical non-Lordship position, and Charles Ryrie—*So Great Salvation*—which represents the non-Lordship view. (See Desmond Koh, “A Critique of the Non-Lordship View of Salvation as taught by Zane C. Hodges and Charles C. Ryrie,” B.Th. thesis, Far Eastern Bible College, 1994).

2c. Covenantal

1d. Five-point Calvinism (Read my tract, “Arminianism Examined”).

2d. Limited Atonement

1e. Neither Arminianism nor Hypercalvinism (see Talbot and Crampton, *Calvinism, Hyper-Calvinism, and Arminianism*, 29-39).

2e. Dr J. O. Buswell, himself a Calvinist, explained that the atonement of Christ was unlimited or universal in that it was *sufficient, applicable, and offered* to all. There is no disagreement with the Arminians here. The disagreement with them lies in the fact that the Arminians do not see the atonement as being limited or particular it is *design and intention*. They regard the atonement of Christ as being sufficient and efficient for the world generally. Neither is it right to go to the other extreme that the atonement of Christ is sufficient and efficient for the elect only, as avowed by hypercalvinists.

3e. John Calvin on Limited Atonement

1f. On John 3:16

It is because Christ did die for the world sufficiently that John was able to offer the gospel to all when he wrote, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). Does the word “world” here mean the the world of the *elect only*? Are not unbelievers the object of God’s love also? Calvin understood God’s love here to be universal. On “For God so loved the world,” Calvin wrote, “faith in Christ brings life to all, and that Christ brought life to all, because the Heavenly father loves the human race, and wishes that they should not perish.” (see John F. MacArthur, Jr., “The Love of God for Humanity,” *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 7 [1996]: 7-30).

2f. On 2 Pet. 3:9

Did Calvin understand this love of God to apply only to the elect? Calvin’s commentary on 2 Pet. 3:9 which is a parallel text to the above revealed that he did not. On “The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance,” Calvin wrote, “So wonderful is his love towards mankind, that he would have them all to be saved, and is of his own self prepared to bestow salvation on the lost. But

the order is to be noticed, that God is ready to receive all to repentance, so that none may perish; for in these words the way and manner of obtaining salvation is pointed out. Every one of us, therefore who is desirous of salvation, must learn to enter in by this way.” That is why Jesus in John 3:16 “employed the universal term, whosoever, both to invite all indiscriminately to partake of life, and to cut off every excuse from unbelievers. Such is also the import of the term World, which he formerly used; for though nothing will be found in the world that is worthy of the favour of God, yet he shows himself to be reconciled to the whole world, when he invites all men without exception to the faith of Christ, which is nothing else than an entrance into life.”

3f. God’s Desiderative Will

God’s desire for all men to be saved comes “desiderative will” (see Timothy Tow, *Sevenfold Will of God*, 40-6). Murray and Stonehouse, former professors of Westminster Theological Seminary, explain this aspect of God’s will. “This will of God to repentance and salvation is universalized and reveals to us, therefore, that there is in God a benevolent lovingkindness towards the repentance and salvation *of even those whom he has not decreed to save*. This pleasure, will, desire, is expressed in the universal call to repentance.”

It may however, be asked: If God does not desire that any should perish, how is it that the majority of people do in fact perish? Calvin replied, “To this my answer is, that no mention is here made of the hidden purpose of God, according to which the reprobate are doomed to their own ruin, but only of his will as made known to us in the gospel. For God there stretches forth his hand without a difference to all, but lays hold only of those, to lead them to himself, whom he has chosen before the foundation of the world.”

4f. Augustine’s formula, “Sufficient for all, efficient for the elect,” was affirmed by Calvin in his commentary on 1 John 2:2, “And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for our’s only, but also for the sins of the whole world.” In discussing the third point of Calvinism—limited atonement—we are addressing the intent, and not the extent of the atonement. It needs to be

reiterated that a correct understanding of Calvin's doctrine of the atonement requires one to accept that the atonement of Christ is "sufficient for all, efficient for the elect."

3d. Vicarious-atonement View of Christ's Life Sufferings

1e. Christ's Two-fold Obedience

1f. Active Obedience

In His life, He kept perfectly the Moral Law on our behalf (Matt. 3:15, 5:17-18, John 15:10. Rom. 10:4, 2 Cor. 5:21). Read also my paper: "Christ's Active Obedience in His Substitutionary Atonement: An Exposition of Galatians 4:4-5," *The Burning Bush* 3 (1997): 1-15).

2f. Passive Obedience

In His death, He sacrificed Himself willingly on the cross to pay the penalty of our sins (Isa. 53:6-7, John 1:29, 10:14-18, Phil 2:8).

2e. See George Skariah, "The Soteriological Significance of the Active Obedience of Christ," M.Div. thesis, Far Eastern Bible College, 1996.

4d. Salvific Ministry of the Spirit in the OT

1e. Did the Holy Spirit indwell OT saints in the same way He indwells NT saints?

2e. "By indwelling is meant the continuedness of the Spirit's residence with the saint following the occasion of regeneration. Regeneration is a momentary act, when spiritual life is imparted to a sinner. It happens instantaneously. Indwelling, on the other hand, only begins then. It is the Spirit that enacts regeneration, and when he does He enters into the person, so that the person becomes 'temple of God' (1 Cor. 3:16,17; 2 Cor. 6:16). Indwelling means that this relation continues from that point on.

"The fact that the Holy Spirit does indwell Christians is established by numerous texts: Romans 5:5; 8:11; 1 Corinthians 2:12; 6:19,20; 2 Corinthians 5:5; Galatians 4:6; 1 John 3:24; 4:13. In Romans 8:9, in fact, the statement is made, 'If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his'; and Jude 19 identifies the non-Christian as a person 'having not the Spirit.'

“The question at issue is whether or not this indwelling of the Holy Spirit characterized saints of the Old Testament as well as of the New. Some scholars assert that it did not. John Walvoord, for instance, states, ‘In the Old Testament . . . the Holy Spirit did not indwell all the saints,’ and cites as evidence 1 Samuel 16:14 where the Spirit is said to have departed from Saul. The prior discussion . . . has shown that this departure from Saul did not concern regeneration or indwelling, but only empowerment. The question of indwelling is not settled by this or similar texts, then, any more than is the question of regeneration.

“On the other hand, a strong argument that Old Testament saints were indwelt may be built on the fact that they were regenerated, as shown above. It was argued that, since they were regenerated, it must have been the Holy Spirit who brought this about. Now it may be argued that, since these Old Testament saints certainly remained in a regenerated condition, it must have been the Holy Spirit who kept them so. The New Testament is clear that the Christian is incapable of keeping himself, any more than he is capable of saving himself. He must be “kept by the power of God” (1 Peter 1:5). One must ask, then, Did the Old Testament saint possess an ability for perseverance not known to the New Testament saint? The answer is clear: They did not possess such an ability and were not able to keep themselves. But, if not, they must have been kept by God, and this means, surely, the Spirit of God. One must argue that the Spirit could have kept them, whether continually indwelling them or not. Since He keeps the New Testament saint by indwelling, however, it seems reasonable to believe that he kept the Old Testament saint in the same way.” (Wood, *Holy Spirit*, 69-70).

5d. Applicability of the Moral Law

1e. *The Westminster Confession of Faith* (XIX.5-7)

1f. *The moral law doth forever bind all, as well justified persons as others, to the obedience thereof; and that not only in regard of the matter contained in it, but also in respect of the authority of God the Creator who gave it. Neither doth Christ in the gospel any way dissolve, but much strengthen, this obligation.*

2f. *Although true believers be not under the law as a covenant of works, to be thereby justified or condemned; yet is it of great use to them, as well as to others; in that, as a rule of life, informing them of the will of God and their*

duty, it directs and binds them to walk accordingly; discovering also the sinful pollutions of their nature, hearts, and lives; so as, examining themselves thereby, they may come to further conviction of, humiliation for, and hatred against sin; together with a clearer sight of the need they have of Christ, and the perfection of his obedience. It is likewise of use to the regenerate, to restrain their corruptions, in that it forbids sin, and the threatenings of it serve to show what even their sins deserve, and what afflictions in this life they may expect for them, although freed from the curse thereof threatened in the law. The promises of it, in like manner, show them God's approbation of obedience, and what blessings they may expect upon the performance thereof; although not as due to them by the law as a covenant of works: so as a man's doing good, and refraining from evil, because the law encourageth to the one, and deterreth from the other, is no evidence of his being under the law, and not under grace.

3f. Neither are the forementioned uses of the law contrary to the grace of the gospel, but do sweetly comply with it: the Spirit of Christ subduing and enabling the will of man to do that freely and cheerfully, which the will of God, revealed in the law, requireth to be done.

2e. The Three-fold Function of the Law

1f. A Sword (Rom. 3:19-20)

2f. A Rod (Gal. 3:24)

3f. A Lamp (Ps. 119:105)

3e. Read Timothy Tow's *The Law of Moses and of Jesus*, for an excellent critique of the dispensational view of the Law.

6d. Reformed View of Saving Faith

1e. Saving faith (*fides salvifica*) consists of these three factors:

1f. The knowing (*noticia*) of the Word of God.

2f. The agreeing (*assensus*) to the Word of God.

3f. The willingness (*fiducia*) to obey the Word of God.

2e. Rom. 10:9—“That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the LORD Jesus (i.e. SAVIOUR), and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.” Saving faith is not only intellectual (i.e. of the mind), it must also be volitional (i.e. of the heart).

3e. Therefore, the salvation equation is:

1f. Not [Faith + Works = Salvation].

2f. Not [Faith = Salvation - Works].

3f. But [Faith = Salvation + Works].

3b. Eschatology

1c. Dispensational Premillennial

1d. Doctrinal Statement from 1995-6 Dallas Theological Seminary catalogue (Articles XIX, XX):

2e. Pretribulational Rapture of the Church

“We believe that the translation of the church will be followed by the fulfillment of Israel’s seventieth week (Dan. 9:27; Rev. 6:1-19:21) during which the church, the body of Christ, will be in heaven. The whole period of Israel’s seventieth week will be a time of judgment on the whole earth, at the end of which the times of the Gentiles will be brought to a close. The latter half of this period will be the time of Jacob’s trouble (Jer. 30:7), which our Lord called the great tribulation (Matt. 24:15-21). We believe that universal righteousness will not be realized previous to the second coming of Christ, but that the world is day by day ripening for judgment and that the age will end with a fearful apostasy.”

3e. Premillennial Return of Christ

“We believe that the period of great tribulation in the earth will be climaxed by the return of the Lord Jesus Christ to the earth as He went, in person on the clouds of heaven, and with power and great glory to introduce the millennial age, to bind Satan and place him in the abyss, to lift the curse which now rests upon the whole creation, to restore Israel to her own land and to give her the realization of God’s covenant promises, and to bring the whole world to the knowledge of God (Deut. 30:1-10; Isa. 11:9; Ezek. 37:21-28; Matt. 24:15-25:46; Acts 15:16-17;

Rom. 8:19-23; 11:25-27; 1 Tim. 4:1-3; 2 Tim. 3:1-5; Rev. 20:1-3).”

2c. Covenant

1d. Amillennial

The millennial reign of Christ is idealised or spiritualised or realised. Although they believe in the second coming of Christ, they reject the view of a literal thousand-year-reign of Christ on earth. Amillennialists hold to a posttribulational rapture.

2d. Postmillennial

The Church would usher an indefinite period of unprecedented peace, prosperity, and righteousness before second coming of Christ. The world will be Christianised before the Lord returns. They are either posttribulational or *attribulational* (?) as far as the rapture is concerned.

3d. Premillennial

1e. Pretribulational

Christ will return at the end of the seven-year Great Tribulation to establish His Kingdom on earth for a literal thousand-year period. The Church is to be distinguished from Israel. The OT promises to Israel will be fulfilled in the time of the millennium when Christ's sits on the Davidic throne to rule the world from Jerusalem.

2e. Mid-tribulational

Holds to the same premillennial view of Premillennial-pretribulationists, but believes that the rapture will take place at the middle of the tribulational week (so Buswell, *Theology*, 456; and Tow, *Unveiled*, 60-2).

3e. Posttribulational

Christ will return at the end of the seven-year Great Tribulation to establish His Kingdom on earth for a literal thousand-year period. There is no distinction between Israel and the Church. All prophecies connected to Israel are to be spiritually interpreted as referring to the Church. A position taken by historic premillennialists.

8a. Conclusion

What constitutes Dispensationalism? According to Ryrie, the sine qua non of dispensationalism are threefold: (1) A dispensationalist keeps Israel and the Church distinct, (2) this distinction between Israel and the Church is a result of using a system of hermeneutics called literal interpretation, and (3) the underlying purpose of God in the world is the glory or exaltation of God. (Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 38-41).

The BPCS and FEBC—being covenant and premillennial in theology—are agreeable to all three points. Perhaps, the point that may cause some difficulty is the third, but the Westminster Confession of Faith (II.1) states, “God . . . [works] all things according to the counsel of His own immutable and most righteous will, *for His own glory*.” On eschatology, the *Westminster Confession of Faith* is neither premillennial nor amillennial. As such, the Bible-Presbyterian Church, has thought it wise to insert a parenthetical statement in the Confession to state her premillennial conviction: “God hath appointed a day (*which word in Scripture in reference to the last things may represent a period of time including the thousand years following the visible, personal and premillennial return of Christ*), wherein he will judge the world in righteousness by Jesus Christ, to whom all power and judgment is given of the Father. In which day, not only apostate angels shall be judged, but likewise all persons that have lived upon earth shall appear before the tribunal of Christ, to give an account of their thoughts, words, and deeds, and to receive according to what they have done in body, whether good or evil.” (Chapter XXXIII, paragraph 1).

Although we are premillennial (more dispensational than historic), we remain covenantal or reformed in theology. We are fully committed to chapter VII of the *Westminster Confession of Faith*. In any case, Dispensationalists themselves would not accept covenant-premillennialists as belonging to their camp. According to dispensationalists, “the dispensations are not . . . different methods of administering the so-called Covenant of Grace” (Doctrinal Statement, DTS 1995-6 catalogue, 138).

Dispensational theology is a system of discontinuity—it uses a chopper to cut up the Bible into separate pieces. Covenant theology, on the other hand, is a system of continuity—it uses a scarlet thread to tie up the whole Bible. Although we accept the premillennialism of dispensationalists, we categorically reject their theological grid.

