

DISPENSATIONALISM AND THE EVERLASTING GOSPEL

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Is There a Problem with Dispensationalism?

Before I understood the true nature of the Gospel and the significance of justification by faith, Bible prophecy was not at the heart of my interests. The subject always seemed fraught with tenuous speculation and conflicting opinions. It was not until God opened my heart to understand His Gospel that I began to see the teaching of my heritage from a new perspective. I was raised a dispensationalist and really didn't *know* its significance. I don't mean that I didn't understand the basic teaching that made up dispensationalism. I mean that I didn't realize how much all my understanding of the Bible was under the control of a dispensational grid or worldview. Until the last year, I was not aware how my view of the biblical truth of God's plan in history and eschatology were throttled by the dispensational view. As I began to study it, vis-a-vis the Gospel, I came to realize that dispensational thought is a significant problem for many of my friends and colleagues in my former faith. I realize now that my former view of the plan of salvation was largely determined by specific assumptions passed on to me by dispensationalist teaching. I write this paper in hopes that it will provoke some to examine and discover just how much their view of God's redemptive plan is directed, clouded or obscured by dispensationalism.

It is hard to escape the influence of dispensationalism. It is pervasive in contemporary American Christianity. Its prevalence is what makes Dispensationalism a significant force in the way that many Christians read their Bibles:

We live in an era flooded with dispensational preaching, books, schools, and even study Bibles. The teaching of dispensationalism has successfully crossed the boundaries of most major Protestant denominations. Turn on the radio and you will hear a steady diet of this teaching being broadcast from most evangelical stations.¹

Dispensationalism is an interpretive scheme for ordering the history of salvation and for reading the Bible. The central issue this article takes with dispensationalism is that it distracts from and obscures the biblical Gospel. Dispensationalism, as a system imposed on the Bible, has led a number of Christian groups to teach that there are a variety of ways to be saved throughout history and even since Christ’s passion. To be balanced, I recognize that there are a number of orthodox dispensationalists who teach that salvation is by grace through faith in Christ. This is more despite, rather than because of, dispensationalism. Even for the most orthodox Christians, dispensationalism can rest within their theological thought processes with the potential to mislead them as they continue to read and apply the Scriptures. The most tragic result of this is the way the dispensationalist scheme has encouraged many to relegate justification by faith to only one era of biblical history, if that. Along with this, it also promotes a view of justification by faith that is more often a caricature of the biblical one. Justification is often considered a *first step, initial stage* or *only a part* of Christian initiation. Many are led to believe that *more is required* for a return to the “full” or “whole” gospel. [cp. [“Can the Gospel Be Fractured?”](#)]

To understand dispensationalism, one must have some knowledge of the active millennialism which preceded, and subsequently was made popular by, pietists and revivalists in the early 19th century. Following that, one should understand the role Adventism plays as a forerunner of dispensationalism. Then one should look at a brief definition and history of dispensationalism. We will look at all of these. Then we will examine how extensively Pentecostalism has been and is influenced by dispensational thought. After this we will address a few of the major problems we see with dispensationalism. One of the greatest of these is how more radical interpretations of dispensationalism came to insert “dispensations” into the Church Age, thus teaching different conditions for salvation within the “dispensation of grace.” Finally, we will contrast dispensationalism with the everlasting Gospel of Jesus Christ as taught in Scripture.

Origins of Millennialism

Christians throughout history have included in their faith, the hope that God would providentially bring the world to completion in a unique way – just as He promised in the Bible. For many of these Christians the fascination with biblical prophecies and their relationship to end-time events led them to

amplify and embellish that which is found in the Bible. They became preoccupied with trying to determine, through minute inspection of these prophecies, the exact plan for the end of the world:

These are individuals who are *deeply preoccupied* with eschatology, who place it at the *center* of their theological speculations, and who teach that God at the beginning of time determined a *specific, detailed* play for history’s last days - a plan revealed in the Bible with minute particularity, though in symbolic language and veiled images. They are committed (sometimes obsessively so) to elucidating these prophetic mysteries and using them to illuminate and explain the course of contemporary history.²

A specific manifestation of this “deep preoccupation” in the 19th century was called millenarianism, also known as millennialism. Millennialism provided the soil out of which dispensationalism grew. It begins with a belief that the reign of Christ will be a literal one thousand years (millennium: *mille* = thousand; *annus* = years). As a concept, millennialism is pre-Christian and takes its name from specific notions about the millennium which originated in speculative Jewish apocalyptic writings, such as II Esdras. It developed among Jews who believed the promises of Yahweh that He would restore to them an earthly kingdom. However, because their people were oppressed by all the Gentile nations for centuries, some began to look for another way for the promise of God to be fulfilled. They explored the prophetic books of the Old Testaments and came to the conclusion that the Kingdom promised by God would be a “heavenly kingdom” rather than an earthly one. They disconnected God’s bringing of the Kingdom within the processes of human activity and history. Instead they looked for cataclysmic, supernatural events outside the process of human history to usher in the “true” spiritual, heavenly kingdom of God.

Millennialism took hold shortly after the Reformation and strongly influenced many pietistic branches and radical reformers of Christianity:

After the Reformation, it became a favorite doctrine of mystical enthusiasts and sects, who looked upon it as a comfort in the disappointment of their wishes and hopes.³

The Roman Catholic Church (RCC) leaders viewed the Church as a visible institution which fulfilled the reign of Christ on the earth. However, many within the RCC rejected this view because of the corruption they saw in the institutional Church. Some protestors claimed that the Pope was the Antichrist⁴. Instead, they turned to apocalypticism and embraced a view that the true church was only a

spiritual body and that the physical reign of Christ was in the future after Christ’s Second Coming. Men like Joachim of Fiore (1135-1202)⁵ and John Bonaventura⁶ engaged in prophetic speculation, predicting dates for the end of the world and the Second Coming of Christ. Others withdrew to asceticism waiting for the judgment of God - the Day of the Lord - to come.

There were groups who joined the Protestant movement, coming out of Catholicism, who held to apocalyptic and millennialist interpretations of salvation history. One prominent person was J. A. Bengel (1687-1752), a German Lutheran scholar, who was the harbinger of modern dispensational thought today. He engaged in end-time speculation, predicting an exact date for the Second Coming of Christ. He influenced the thinking of many dispensationalist in Britain and America through what is called Adventism.⁷ Two different streams of Adventist prophetic speculation developed. One was from England and the other in America.

Adventism a Forerunner of Dispensationalism

In America the most prominent exponents of Adventism was William Miller. He predicted that Christ would return sometime between March 1, 1843 - March 1, 1844. Followers of Miller arrived at the exact date of October 22, 1844. Many sold their property in anticipation. Some jumped from trees and buildings at midnight in expectation they would be “raptured,” or taken up to Heaven. When Christ “failed” to return they called it the “Great Disappointment.” From Miller’s Adventist movement emerged several groups that are well known today. One of these is the Seventh-Day Adventists, who identify closely with the ministry of Ellen G. White. She claimed to have 2000 dreams and visions which her followers hold as slightly less authoritative than Scripture. Another Adventist offshoot is the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. It was founded by Joseph Smith, who is famous for his fantastic and imaginative prophetic speculations. A third Adventist product is the Jehovah’s Witnesses, which was formed by Charles Taze Russell in Pittsburgh, PA, under the original name International Bible Students Association:

In 1872 he organized a group devoted to Bible study. In the same year he published a small book stating that Christ would return, invisibly, in 1874 and that the world would end in 1914.⁸

The American tradition of Adventism is generally rejected by many churches. On the other hand, the British form of Adventism, became popular and accepted among Fundamentalist in America. British Adventism has its roots in the teaching of [Edward Irving](#) (1792-1834). Many “Irvingites” carried forward his prophetic speculations. John Nelson Darby (1800-1882), once priest of the Anglican Church of Ireland, who later founded the Plymouth Brethren, became the great-grandfather of modern dispensationalism. He came to America and taught in a number of prophecy conferences held by Keswick and Fundamentalist leaders. Darby described the nature of the dispensations in this manner:

The detail of the history connected with these dispensations brings out many most interesting displays, both of the principles and patience of God’s dealings with the evil and failure of man; and of the workings by which He formed faith on His own thus developed perfections. But the dispensations themselves all declare some leading principle or interference of God, some condition in which He has placed man, principles which in themselves are everlastingly sanctioned of God, but in the course of those dispensations placed responsibly in the hands of man for the display and discovery of what he was, and the bringing in their infallible establishment in Him to whom the glory of them all rightly belonged . . . in every instance, there was total and immediate failure as regarded man, however the patience of God might tolerate and carry on by grace the dispensation in which man has thus failed in the outset; and further, that there is no instance of the restoration of a dispensation afforded us, though there might be partial revivals of it through faith.⁹

Darby’s scheme held that there was a distinction between the spiritual church and the visible one - which was man-made. In this he was a pioneer of modern Dispensational thought:

For Darby, the end would come in two stages, the first being in the "rapture of the church," a concept unknown even to the millenarians of the past. This period would be followed by seven years of tribulation, and the final appearance of the Kingdom of God. Animal sacrifices would be revived along with temple worship and God would accept Israel's obedience in exchange for their salvation.¹⁰

One of Darby’s students was James H. Brookes¹¹ (a Presbyterian minister) who popularized Darby’s teaching in a book entitled, *Maranatha, or The Lord Cometh* (1870). A convert of Brookes was the famous C. I. Scofield (1843-1921), whose reference Bible turned dispensationalism into a Christian household concept. His student, whom he ordained into the ministry, was Lewis Sperry Chafer, who founded Dallas Theological Seminary (1936) and systematized dispensational thought.

Chafer’s *Systematic Theology* was essentially a defense and elaboration of Scofield’s teaching. Today, Chafer is the authority often quoted by advocates of the dispensational teaching. His teaching has been perpetuated and augmented by three important dispensationalists at Dallas Theological Seminary, John F. Walvoord, J. Dwight Pentecost and Charles C. Ryrie.

Of all the dispensational teachers, next to Scofield, Clarence Larkin did the most to popularize dispensationalism among many fundamentalist Christians. He spent three years preparing a book of charts which provided visual images of the general dispensational schemes. His books sold extensively into many printings. He is the father of the Bible prophecy chart-maker tradition so popular in the early decades of the 20th century. (Cp [Figure 1](#)) This practice is still very popular as exemplified by John Hagee’s television chart teaching.

How did the idea of the millennium come about? Christian Millennialists arrive at the exact number of one thousand by citing Revelation 20:1-17. In verse six it says:

Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years. (NIV)

The Old Testament passage frequently cited to support this is Hosea 6:2, “After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will restore us, that we may live in his presence.” This verse is coupled with Psalm 90:4, “For a thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by, or like a watch in the night,” and 2 Peter 3:8, “But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day.” Therefore since a “day” for God is the equivalent, in the prophetic sense, to one thousand years, then the word “day” in Hosea means a thousand years. Dispensationalists take Hosea 6:2 to mean that for two thousand years after the Cross (the Church Age) the Jewish nation will be set aside while God builds the Church. But, after this, He will turn His attention back to Israel, and they will be restored to rule on the earth during the Millennium. This verse in Hosea is viewed as an Old Testament hint at what all the other prophets failed to see – the Church Age.

In millennialism, the millennium is pictured as:

... a glorious period of peace and joy in which the elect shall dwell under the immediate personal rulership of Christ, on earth, after his return and the close of the present dispensation.¹²

One has said, “All millenarian movements outlive the non-fulfillment of their prophecies.” This is regrettably true. This fact is a source for skeptics and pundits who laugh at the real promises of God in the Bible. The Church must be very diligent to doubt all claims of personal prophecy which distort the clear teaching of Scripture and lead to a diminishing of the Gospel of Christ and the eternal plan of God. Calvin warned his readers,

We know our flights of ingenuity and how vain curiosity tickles us to know more than we should. He wishes the day of His coming to be so hoped for that yet no one should dare to ask when it will come. He deliberately wished it kept hidden from us, that we should never be so carefree as to neglect our unbroken lookout. The chief part of our wisdom consists in keeping ourselves soberly within the bounds of the Word of God.

Before I go on, let me say, my complaint is not with the idea that Christ will return, or that He will reign on the earth, or that He will have a people who reign with Him. I also don't wish to be petty about whether there is a literal thousand years or not. I would say that, along with many orthodox scholars of the Bible, the thousand years is only indicative of a very long period of time, rather than an exact one thousand years. I believe, after He returns, the reign of Christ will be forever. I don't see any need to limit the time to an exact one thousand years. Nevertheless, the chief truth to which all Christian must cling, is that, Jesus promised to literally return in human history.

Some may read this article and come to the wrong conclusions about what I saying. Because I question the interpretations of dispensationalism, it does not mean that I have rejected the inerrancy and total inspiration of Scripture. God forbid! This is often a criticism laid on those who question dispensationalism. I believe fully in the infallibility of Scripture. I also believe with all my heart in the Second Coming of Jesus Christ for his Church. That Christ will establish His eternal reign and kingdom on this Earth is part of my faith. What I reject are man-made interpretations which confuse and distort the plain passages of Scripture, and in the process, obscure the hope which the biblical Gospel promises to all who believe. I share the opinion of a great man of God, George Müller:

My brother, I am a constant reader of my Bible, and I soon found that what I was taught to believe (by Darby's doctrine) did not always agree with what my Bible said. I came to see that I must either part company with John Darby, or my precious Bible, and I chose to cling to my Bible and part from Mr. Darby.¹³

What is Dispensationalism

Definition

What is dispensationalism? Dispensational means something that has to do with dispensations. The word dispensation means, “A specific arrangement or system by which something is dispensed.” The word “dispensation” is found in the Bible. The English word “dispensation” is used four times in the New Testament, and comes from the Greek word οἰκονομία which means an “economy” or a household administration. It is used by Paul to refer to God’s arrangement of redemption’s plan. Dispensation in this sense is Biblical. The difference is when it becomes an “ism.” What the word dispensation means within Dispensationalism is something different.

Dispensationalism is an elaborated system, promoting certain theological assumptions extraneous to the Bible. Dispensationalism,¹⁴ as an “ism,” is a scheme for reading Scripture [Cp. [“How Do We ‘Read’ the Bible?”](#)]. It functions like stained glass letting in sunlight. It colors the light as it comes through and even bathes everything it shines on with the color of the glass. In like manner, many groups’ interpretations of the plan of salvation are deeply colored by the stained glass of dispensationalism, as the light of Scripture is refracted through it. Historically: “Dispensationalism is a form of premillennialism¹⁵ originating among the Plymouth Brethren in the early 1830’s.”¹⁶

It is a system of Bible interpretation, distinct from Scripture itself, that:

. . . builds on the idea of God's administration of or plan for the world describing the unfolding of that program in various dispensations, or stewardship arrangements, throughout the history of the world. The world is seen as a household administered by God in connection with several stages of revelation that mark off the different economies in the outworking of his total program.¹⁷

The word dispensation means an “order of things regarded as established or controlled by God” (Oxford Dictionary, 4th edition, p.233). According to Walvoord it is a “stage in the progressive revelation of God constituting a distinctive stewardship or rule of life.” Ryrie says it is a “distinguishable economy in the outworking of God’s purpose.”¹⁸

According to premillennial dispensationalism the present dispensation, the Church, would end in judgment and the “historical kingdom of Christ on the earth [would] be established in a future millennium.”¹⁹

Cyrus I. Scofield defines the idea of dispensations in this manner:

These periods are marked off in Scripture by some change in God’s method of dealing with mankind, in respect to 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.”²⁰

Although early dispensationalism held to three dispensations, typical dispensations teaches seven dispensations, which are: 1) Innocence (before the Fall); 2) Conscience (Fall to the Flood) 3) Human Government (Noah to Abraham); 4) Promise (Abraham to Moses); 5) Law (Moses to Christ); 6) Grace (the church age), and 7) Kingdom, Millennial or Divine Government (the millennium).

Dispensational theology centers upon the concept of God's dealings with mankind being divided into (usually) seven distinct economies or "dispensations", in which man is tested as to his obedience to the will of God as revealed under each dispensation.²¹

The key distinction of dispensationalism is the teaching that God has *two plans* at work in salvation history: one for Israel and one for the Church.

What separated dispensationalists from everybody else was their novel method of biblical interpretation. Everything in the dispensationalist system seemed to rest on the conviction that God had two completely different plans operating in history: one for an earthly people, Israel, and the other for a heavenly people, the church.²²

The essence of dispensationalism, then, is the distinction between Israel and the Church. This grows out of the dispensationalists’ consistent employment of normal or plain interpretation, and it reflects an understanding of the basic purpose of God in all His

dealings with mankind as that of glorifying Himself through salvation and other purposes as well.²³

Dispensationalists see God as pursuing two distinct purposes throughout history, one related to an earthly goal and an earthly people (the Jews), the other to heavenly goals and a heavenly people (the church).²⁴

This cannot be understated: the dispensational distinction between Israel and the Church creates serious implications for the nature of the Church and the Gospel itself. Since the Church is considered by dispensationalists to be a “parenthesis” in God’s plan for Israel, dispensationalists say the promises to Israel in the Old Testament are not - cannot be - fulfilled in the Church. The Church came about because Israel rejected the Kingdom Christ offered to them. “God suspended his timetable for the Jews at the end of Daniel’s sixty-ninth week and began building a new and heavenly people -- the church.”²⁵

The church, according to Darby, did not come into existence until Pentecost. Even from the beginning it was never composed of “natural branches” (as were the Jews). Moreover, the church was not even revealed in the Old Testament. Israel had been an earthly kingdom with material promises and blessings. Christ came to fulfill the promises and ideals of that earthly kingdom but was rejected by His people. When that happened, God stopped the prophetic clock and instituted the church. Not until the rapture of the church will this clock start again, at which time God again will resume His purposes for His earthly people, Israel. Because the church, as the body of Christ, is heavenly, it must be raptured out of the earth in order that God’s earthly program with Israel might be resumed.²⁶

Thus, Christ went to the Cross to bring salvation to the Gentiles and create the Church. But, since God will not work with two peoples at once, He will not pick up His plan for Israel until after the Church is raptured.²⁷ These beliefs: 1) that the prophecies for Israel are not fulfilled in the Church, 2) that the Church was a parenthesis in God’s plan, 3) and that the Church must be removed in order for God to resume His plan for Israel, necessitated a new teaching (an uncommon teaching in the first 1800 years of Church history²⁸): that Christ’s Second Coming will take place at *two different times*. The first is said to occur *before* the “Tribulation Period” (Daniel’s 70th Week) when Christ returns in the air (*for his saints*) to catch the Church up into Heaven. God’s program for the Jews then resumes with the Tribulation, Antichrist, bowls of wrath, 144,000 Jews preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom and Armageddon. Then, after the Tribulation, Christ returns (*with his saints*) to set up His earthly Kingdom to rule Israel and the world.

It is extremely important to understand that the idea of the “rapture” as the first stage of Christ’s Second Coming grew out of this issue of God having two plans for two different people (Israel and the Church). It came about over a debate about the place the Old Testament believers held in God’s plan of salvation:

It must be emphasized that the crux of the debates that took place over the rapture was a more fundamental issue: the relationship between Old and New Testament saints. Darby made a radical separation between the two groups of saints, positing that the church (Pentecost to rapture) has a special glory and that the Old Testament saints had an inferior relationship to God.²⁹

I will address the error of this split between the Old and New Testament believers later. What is necessary here is to realize that the division of God’s plan into dispensations and, consequently, the claim of two separate plans for the Church and Israel are the key distinctives of dispensationalism. It is these distinctions which I believe have undermined the teaching of the Gospel in many churches today.

The Impulses Behind Dispensationalism

In this section I have given a sketch of the beliefs which distinguish dispensational thought. This is not enough to understand the nature of dispensationalism. One must go deeper below the surface of ages schemes to see what drives it. The waters which fill the lakes come down on the mountains and highland. These waters pulled by the force of gravity, create streams and rivers which traverse various terrain, picking up sediment, which they deposit at their final destination. The same is true with ideas and beliefs. They come to us with a history. They start at one point in history, they are drawn down through time by the various people who adopt them, and they are shaped by the groups and historical context they through which they flow. Dispensationalism is the deposit of the flow of persisting ideas through certain groups over time. We *must* recognize this process in order to understand what is behind the modern teaching of dispensationalism.

What are the basic impulses or ideas which dispensationalism seeks to preserve? First, dispensationalism is an *Millenarian movement*. The impulse behind this is the future triumph of the Kingdom of God over the kingdoms of this world. This powerful force is behind dispensationalism. Those who are dispensationalist ardent look for the future triumph of the Christian Kingdom.. Key to this

coming kingdom is the coming King, Jesus Christ. Thus, the *Adventist impulse*, is also behind dispensational thought. The Second Coming of Christ is integral to the Triumph of the Kingdom and the initiation of the Millennial reign of Christ. It is the third impetus that reveals the deeper currents from which dispensationalism draw their convictions. It assumes with other Restorationists that Jesus will not come until the Church is restored to the glory it possessed at the time of Jesus’ Ascension. In fact, dispensationalist would say that Jesus cannot return until the Church is restored to its original state.

A more radical form of dispensationalism sees this restoration taking place in Church history through a sequence of stages in which the Church was progressive returned to its original condition. They would say that Luther and the Reformation brought justification by faith, then Wesley restored the doctrine of Holiness or Perfection, after this, the Pentecostals restored tongues, gifts and healing. Today, “third wave” Pentecostal/Charismatics would say that God has restored Apostles and Prophets. These are necessary for the Church to be restored, for Christ to come, and the for the Kingdom to finally triumph.

A Brief History of Dispensationalism

The modern or classical form of dispensationalism, with which this paper is preoccupied, is a recent movement in Church history:

About 1830, however, a new school arose within the fold of Pre-millennialism that sought to overthrow what, since the Apostolic Age, have been considered by all pre-millennialists as established results, and to institute in their place a series of doctrines that had never been heard of before. The school I refer to is that of “The Brethren” or “Plymouth Brethren,” founded by J. N. Darby.³⁰

Dispensationalism has lateral roots in early American and British revivalism and the apocalyptic speculation that accompanied its radical forms. It is descended from the premillennialism³¹ that emerged at the time of French Revolution. Because many believed the revolution in France marked the end of the world, they saw those events as the fulfillment of Daniel chapter seven, with Napoleon as the Antichrist. For nearly 1800 years a majority of Christians held to a “historicist³²” view of Daniel and Revelation. That is, the events of those books took place within the history of the Church. The more common understanding was that the Church Age fulfilled the prophecies concerning the Millennium, and that

Christ would return after this period of time was finished.³³ But after the French Revolution, a “futurist” view became more popular. That is, the events of Daniel and Revelation will occur at some future time just prior to Christ’s Second Coming and at the end of the world.

Many prophecy students at this time looked for clues as to know when Christ would return. Those involved with missions to the Jewish people taught that the Jews were the key to Christ’s Second Coming. They were convinced that the conversion of the Jewish people would usher in Christ’s earthly Kingdom. As more attention was given to Israel and the Church a number concluded that when the prophets spoke about God’s promises to Israel they did not refer to the Church. They were convinced that the all prophecies made to Israel had to be fulfilled in Israel and not in the Church. They asserted that their study of the prophets revealed a clean distinction between God’s plan for Israel and His plan for the Church.

A more recent shaping of dispensationalism grew out of what is called Adventism. Historical Adventism has two main branches: the American Adventism of William Miller in the early 1800s and the British form advocated by Edward Irving, John Nelson Darby and Mary MacDonald (first person to coin the word “rapture”) in the 1830s, and later C. I. Scofield at the turn of the 20th century. Miller and his form of premillennialism was generally discredited because of other eccentric views and practices of Miller’s followers. Their failed predictions of the exact day of the Lord’s coming created great cynicism toward American Adventism. But, the British version was accepted and subsumed into evangelical orthodoxy through certain Keswick and Fundamentalist leaders. It was brought to American soil through the influence of John Nelson Darby, a leader of the Brethren movement, and through such men as Dwight L. Moody and James H. Brookes. Darby visited North America seven times from 1862 to 1877. He spoke at the Niagara Bible Conferences on Bible prophecy (originally the Believers’ Meeting for Bible Study) held at Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario, Canada, where he influenced many future fundamentalist leaders.

One of those influenced by Darby was James H. Brookes, who became president of the Niagara Bible Conference and publisher of the official periodical of premillennialism. He is famous for his work systematizing Darby’s views. Darby’s views were later popularized by C. I. Scofield, Brook’s apprentice, through his Scofield Bible. Scofield saw dispensationalism as a way to harmonize the complexity of Scripture. He wrote: “Augustine said: ‘Distinguish the ages, and the Scriptures harmonize.’”³⁴ Scofield was encouraged by dispensationalist Arno C. Gabelein to place his notes on

dispensationalism in a study Bible. This changed history. If Scofield had placed them in a separate book, he may have found only a small following. But, thousands of people read Scofield’s Bible as though his notes were the literal meaning for the Scriptures. (My first Bible, given to me by my grandfather, was a Scofield Reference Bible) Thus, Christians across all denominations propagated and proliferated Darby and Scofield’s dispensational teaching for several generations.

Pentecostalism and Dispensational Teaching

The Pentecostal faith was drawn from Millennialist aspirations. Two substantive issues provided the impetus for these hopes. On one side was the ominous threat posed to the American culture by Modernism³⁵. On the other, was the spiritual condition of the main-line churches. John N. Darby in the late 1800s called conservatives to leave the mainline denominations because he viewed them as apostate. At the turn of the 20th century, the world was experiencing the onslaught of advancing secularism brought on by the Enlightenment. German rationalism attacked the inspiration of Scripture. Freud was advancing a radical view of human nature contrary to that of the Bible. Science was seen as a rival authority to religion in answering life’s questions. Darwinism was presented as a replacement for supernatural Creation. Accelerated technological advancement created a confidence in human ability and potential, leaving less room for dependance on supernatural assistance. Industrialism, borne out of esteem for hard work and material success, challenged populist Christian values. The social pessimism that followed the Civil War created a “widespread loss of confidence in the powers of community.”

Wiebe describes the *zeitgeist*, specifying how “countless citizens in towns and cities across the land sensed that something fundamentally was happening to their lives, something they did not want, they responded by striking out at whatever enemies their view of the world allowed them to see.”³⁶

The Civil War all but destroyed the mainline denomination’s post-millennial optimism and confidence that Christianity would advance until the whole world was converted and the Kingdom of Christ was ushered in. Modernism offered a humanistic approach to a better life now, as a substitute for the Christian hope of suffering now for other-worldly or eternal life. One of the results of this cultural shift in America was that most mainline denominations (because of the post-millennial paradigm) embraced Modernism in the form of Christian Liberalism.

These Protestants attempted to find new interpretations of religious experience and an understanding of history that could accommodate the implications of the theory of evolution and discoveries in psychology, archaeology, and ancient history.³⁷

This was done partly because it was believed that the tools of Modernism could be used to produce the Kingdom of Christ on the earth. Other liberals abandoned hope of “pie-in-the-sky” and saw fulfillment in Christ as “this worldly.” Thus, the Social Gospel³⁸ replaced THE Gospel as was traditionally held by orthodox evangelical Christians. At this time, J. Gresham Machen, who left Princeton and founded Westminster Theological Seminary, wrote his famous book *Christianity & Liberalism*. He denounced the accommodation of mainline churches to Modernism, defending orthodox Christianity and the Gospel. From this Modernist controversy, Fundamentalism³⁹ emerged as a violent reaction to Modernism and Theological Liberalism. Fundamentalists saw the mainline denominations as compromising the Gospel to the secular world through liberalism. They believed that these denominations were apostate and called for the ouster of liberal theologians and leaders from orthodox Protestantism.

Pentecostalism and Fundamentalism were sibling branches of conservative Protestantism.⁴⁰ Their roots overlapped and intertwined. They were both deeply troubled by the impact of secularism on America and their churches. Both saw the beginning of the twentieth century as a time of great crisis for the American culture. Rather than hope in a reformation of the visible culture or the conversion of American society, they looked for God to end the present era of time in judgment, and usher in His millennial Kingdom on the Earth. Thus, premillennialism became a way of understanding the place of the Church in chaotic times:

Evangelicals, now prone to see history spiraling into chaos and destruction before Jesus’ return, widely accepted the theology of premillennialism.⁴¹

Whereas Fundamentalists fought against Modern Science and the intellectual issues of the culture, Pentecostals were Christians of simpler means and were not motivated to give intellectual answers to the threat of Modernism. Rather, being descendants of revivalistic and pietistic groups, they sought assurance in experience and personal piety. Their particular answer took the form of an individual, personal, ecstatic experience of the Holy Spirit, which to them, signaled the imminent return of Christ, and the end of the world in its present state:

Some turned inward, losing interest in societal reform, some flocked to the countless new Holiness and Pentecostal sects, others practiced and promoted a religion of the Holy Spirit (advocating healing of the body and soul).⁴²

Rather than challenge the skeptics with biblical arguments, Pentecostals sought to transcend the debate by claiming an irrefutable experience as confirming the Bible. They denounced skepticism and retreated from secular society or the “world.” Their’s was a mystic reaction to the threat of the world. Rather than embrace Modernism, as did Liberalism, or fight Modernism for the minds of the culture, as did Fundamentalism, Pentecostals looked to escape Modernism’s advance by obtaining, what they termed, the promised outpouring of the Spirit on the Church. This would herald the end of the culture, the Judgment of God, and usher in the Second Coming of Christ.

From their reading of Scripture, Pentecostals determined that Christ could not return until the “everlasting gospel”⁴³ (Rev. 14:6-7) or “full” Gospel,⁴⁴ was preached to the whole world. Pentecostals saw their mission as two-fold: 1.) Preach the gospel to the whole world; 2.) Announce the Second Coming of Christ. They concluded that the weak spiritual condition of the visible Church was the reason the gospel had not reached the whole world. The Church was considered too spiritually impoverished to fulfill its mission. Logically, they asserted that the Church had to be restored before it could obey Christ’s call to take his gospel to the whole world. Thus, Pentecostalism was driven irresistibly by a restorationist yearning and mind set.

Latter Rain

In holding to both restorationism and dispensationalism, Pentecostals had to face conflicting ideas. Dispensationalism taught that the gifts such as prophecy and speaking with tongues were not for this latter part of the Church Age. These, in stark contrast, were the hallmarks of Pentecostal distinctives. This forced Pentecostals to modify their dispensationalism to fit their Pentecostal experience and faith. This was accomplished through the use of what is called the “Latter Rain” motif.

While they unquestioningly embraced most of Darby’s view of history, early Pentecostals rejected his insistence that the “gifts” had been withdrawn. They introduced into his system their own dispensational setting where the gifts could again operate in the church: The device through which they legitimated those gifts was their teaching on the latter rain.⁴⁵

“Latter Rain” was one of the chief metaphors from restorationism adopted by Pentecostals. Taken from Deuteronomy 11:10-15, the “latter rain” was the promise of Yahweh, that, if Israel would serve Him with all their heart and soul, He would give them rain for their land in its seasons. This included both the “early” and the “latter rain.” The result would be a bountiful harvest. Holiness-Pentecostals saw this as a Old Testament type for the Church. If the Church was truly serving God with all its heart and soul, God would give them a spiritual latter rain or revival. Some taught that the latter rain would match the first or early rain in intensity. Since they interpreted the Book of Acts as recording the “early rain” of the Holy Spirit upon the earliest Church, then the “latter rain” must logically be a recreation or recapitulation of the phenomena of the Book of Acts.

It was this teaching of the latter rain, and its Pentecostal implications, which separated most Pentecostals from Fundamentalists. “It was the Pentecostal view of their place in history that most basically set Pentecostals apart from most other Protestants.”⁴⁶ David Wesley Myland appears to be the first to articulate the importance of the latter rain concept in Pentecostal thought. His explanations, written in his book *The Latter Rain Covenant* (1910), became one of the first defenses of Pentecostalism within the Dispensational framework. While Pentecostals held to most of Scofield’s dispensational scheme, Fundamentalists reacted quite vigorously to the Pentecostal distortion of it in the “latter rain” doctrine:

Dispensationalism, as articulated by Scofield, understood the gifts of the Spirit to have been withdrawn from the Church. Rejecting the latter rain views by which Pentecostals legitimated their place in God’s plan, dispensationalists effectively eliminated the biblical basis for Pentecostal theology; and although Pentecostals embraced most of Scofield’s ideas (and enthusiastically promoted the Scofield Reference Bible in their periodicals), they remained irrevocably distanced from fundamentalists by their teaching on the place of spiritual gifts in the contemporary church.⁴⁷

The fact that Fundamentalist-Dispensationalist teachers rejected the Pentecostal modifications, does not change the fact that their system of interpreting biblical history played a major role at the inception of Pentecostal eschatological thought. If the Kingdom of God was to come, it would not be through the present apostate Church. It would have to come through the work of a restored, apostolic Church, empowered by the “latter rain” outpouring of the Spirit. Then, enabled by the gifts of the Spirit,

with manifestations of healing and power, this Church would be enabled to reach the whole world with the “full” Gospel.

Problems With Dispensationalism

I wish to state that I respect dispensationalism’s attempt to preserve historic Christian concepts in the face of the onslaught of higher criticism and liberalism. Its teachers are to be commended for this motivation. In most cases, dispensationalists hold firmly to nearly all of the tenets of orthodox Christianity. For this they must be highly regarded. The problems I find in dispensationalism have nothing to do with the good things they believe, but with the ways their system causes a distortion of the Gospel. The influence of dispensationalism has led many Christians to believe that redemptive history was divided up into a number of time periods or dispensations (usually seven). Within these time periods a person was saved conditional to their obedience of the “revealed will of God” for that period:

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.⁴⁸

One of the **first problems** of dispensationalism is that it divides salvation - it teaches more than one plan of salvation. Its fatal flaw is the dividing of God’s plan, separating His plan for Israel from His plan for the Church (see further information below). The ages of dispensationalism are taught as temporary stages of salvation. Each dispensation offers a distinct plan or way of salvation. The nature of salvation in each varies according to that particular dispensation. Each dispensation concludes, and the following one is necessitated, by the failure of Mankind to follow its terms, arrangements, or conditions.

In each of these chronological compartments: a distinct revelation is given; men are tested by this revelation; judgment follows upon the failure of men with reference to this stewardship.⁴⁹

This scheme of dispensationalism presents salvation as coming about in a progression. It is as though in each age God makes an improvement on the previous one. It teaches that God is working to get it right or find something that works while Humanity keeps defeating His attempts. God is seen as *developing* a plan until He finally succeeds (partially) through Jesus Christ. The notion inherent in dispensationalism is that God has neither one *sole* eternal plan, nor the ultimate control and power by

which He can provide and faithfully administer our salvation throughout human history. Instead, He has a *variety of plans* which, all but one, has failed. Thus, substitute plans or subsequent measures are required.

In sharp contrast, the “age schemes” of the earliest Church divided the dispensations or ages by Christ⁵⁰. They believed that the basic dispensation division was between the Old and the New Covenant. The division rested upon the Person and Work of Christ. Alone with the view, the Church was considered the “organic succession” of Israel. That is why the Church claimed the Hebrew or Older Testament as her own. Even more importantly, the Bible presents God’s plan of salvation as single, eternal and settled from the foundation of the world:

For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will – to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. (Ephesians 1:4-8 NIV)

All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast-- all whose names have not been written in the book of life belonging *to the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world*. (Revelation 13:8 NIV my italics)

It has always been the same plan - salvation by faith in Jesus Christ. Prior to Christ’s coming, those who trusted in the promise of Christ were saved by faith:

Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness. (Genesis 15:6 NIV)

Through faith in God alone, who promised them redemption in Christ, the Old Testament believers were assured of their salvation:

Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the LORD does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit. (Psalm 32:1,2 NIV)

They looked forward to the promise of Christ and embraced it by faith. After Christ’s coming and redemptive work, all believers look back to the finished work of Christ and embrace the promise of salvation. Whether looking forward or looking back all believers must look to Christ alone for salvation. There are no other *ways or plans* of salvation:

Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved. (Acts 4:12 NIV)

There is only one Lord, and thus only one faith (Ephesians 4:5). This plan did not fail (John 6:37 *All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away.*), because it is perfect (Hebrews 7:28). The Bible teaches that God’s power is effective to accomplish His one, eternal plan of redemption.

The **second problem**, as already mentioned, is that it impugns the sovereignty of God. It teaches that most all of God’s plan(s) to save Mankind failed because it was thwarted by human inability. That’s why dispensationalism teaches that the Church age was a surprise to the prophets. They did not anticipate that when Israel failed to receive Christ that God would turn to the Gentiles. The truth is, the Old Testament does teach that salvation would come to the Gentiles.⁵¹ And the failure of Israel was not a surprise to God, but on the contrary, totally expected. He anticipated all Humanity to fall short of His glory. That is why He determined to save the world, both Jew and Gentile, slave and free, male and female, in and through Jesus Christ.

Because of dispensationalism’s aversion to God’s sovereignty, and also being predicated on a rigid form of Arminianism (salvation necessary through free will rather than by God’s grace), God is viewed as less than almighty or capable of saving the world by himself. This is both a biblical, as well as a supreme theological, error. Scripture clearly teaches that God is sovereign in effecting his plan of salvation:

It is not as though God's word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children. On the contrary, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." In other words, it is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring. For this was how the promise was stated: "At the appointed time I will return, and Sarah will have a son." Not only that, but Rebekah's

children had one and the same father, our father Isaac. Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad-- in order that God's purpose in election might stand: not by works but by him who calls-- she was told, "The older will serve the younger." Just as it is written: "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated." What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all! For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy. (Romans 9:6-16 NIV)

God succeeds and does what He wills. The twists and turns in the river of salvation history are not created by the banks of human failure, but only to show that “God’s purpose in election might stand.” We must always understand that salvation is predicated, not on human ability, but on God’s integrity, sovereignty and omnipotence. The Psalmist gave praise to the one true God by saying, “to him who alone does great wonders.” (Psalm 136:4 NIV)

The **third problem** is that it leads one to believe that some are actually saved because of their obedience. This understanding of salvation is akin to Pelagianism⁵², the Roman Catholic view of merit (Semi-Pelagianism⁵³), and to the teachings of those like revivalist Charles Finney.⁵⁴ This was not Scofield’s intent when he published his reference Bible. He believed that salvation was of Christ alone: “It is this manifestation of Jesus Christ, his Person as “God manifest in the flesh” (1 Tim. 3:16), his sacrificial death, and his resurrection, which constitutes the Gospel.”⁵⁵ However, the way dispensationalism was commonly taught undermined Scofield’s Gospel belief and encouraged salvation to be viewed as something obtained through obedience.

If Salvation comes through obedience to the currently revealed plan, then it becomes something earned by the “obey-er.” In dispensationalism, salvation is given to those who meet the conditions:

If, indeed, man is tested in respect to obedience to the will of God in each of these "dispensations", what is the reward - or punishment? If the reward is salvation, as obviously Scofield taught concerning the dispensation of Law, that salvation is not of grace but of works! The dispensationalist, misunderstanding the concept of Law and Gospel, offers salvation to those who meet the condition of the "dispensation" in which they are tested, thus even in the dispensation of Grace, faith becomes a work which entitles us to Christ. If one can only muster from the depths of one's heart enough "faith", one can meet the condition of this dispensation and be rewarded with salvation.⁵⁶

A **fourth problem** with dispensationalism is that the Scofield tradition believes grace is only available in the Church dispensation. People are saved by obedience in all other dispensations. This may appear to be innocuous, but the idea that obedience is necessary in other dispensations while only grace is offered in the Church dispensation leads to serious theological distortions. The dispensational view of Law of Grace creates an improper distinction between Law and Gospel (see my article on this very important subject [“The Struggle to Balance Law & Grace](#)). When Law and Gospel are not properly related, it creates a false assumption among dispensationalistic groups that the Law does not have a place in the present Christian life. Thus, the door is open among many groups and churches to look to their personal house rules for laws or principles by which to govern the lives of sinners and saints. The truth is that the Law is still as much of a force as it every was. It is in force during the age of the Church to reveal sin and bring sinners to an awareness of their sinful. God uses the Law to drive sinners to the Cross. When the sinner realizes that he or she is unable to meet the demands of the Law, which represents God’s perfect holiness, then, they are broken and prepared for the healing of the Gospel. In the Church age, it is not grace alone. It is Law for the unrepentant sinner, then grace for the repentant sinner who turns to and trust wholly in Jesus Christ. If this balance is confused then human rules and perfection take the place of God’s Law.

As to grace only in the Church dispensation: modern Scofield followers have modified this position and others have not.⁵⁷ There are three components which identify every dispensation: 1) It begins with a new divine revelation; 2) A certain span of time which it covers; 3) Specific requirements of salvation for those in that time period. Various sects and cults took this scheme and applied it to the Church Age. They said that *within* Church history God makes salvation available through progressive revelation and human response to the given revelation. Notice how this scheme describes the initial pattern followed by every Christian sect. Since God deals with humanity differently in every dispensation there must be a new revelation discovered and proclaimed so that people know how to be saved in that dispensation. The system sets up unwary Christians to look past the already revealed Gospel (as understood through justification), to something ever newly revealed.

A **fifth, and most serious problem**, can be seen in the teaching of Lewis Sperry Chafer:

Chafer, in keeping with the standard definition of a dispensation, sees the Atonement as making grace possible throughout the various ages, which allows salvation to be viewed as gracious regardless of the added requirements of that specific dispensation.⁵⁸

This issue is subtle but very significant. Notice the language in this quote: “making grace possible.” To me this is one of the more insidious problems with dispensationalism. While it speaks of salvation by grace, it actually redefines grace. Grace in the biblical and orthodox sense is *unmerited favor*. But in the Dispensational sense it is favor that *is merited*. God offers the “gift” of salvation differently in various dispensations. One’s reception of this “gift” is determined by whether the “requirements of that specific dispensation” are met. This means that one pays for the gift through obedience. The pernicious dimension of this is that dispensationalism uses all the orthodox language of salvation by grace through faith, but in many cases, *does not mean the same thing*. It is really grace obtained through obedience. Too many groups today have inherited or adopted this definition of grace.

The distinction between Israel and the Church, is a **sixth major problem** with dispensationalism.

Dispensationalism sees Israel as an earthly people with earthly promises, and the church as a heavenly people with heavenly promises. Membership in Israel is by natural birth. One enters the church by supernatural birth. Dispensationalists view Israel and the church as having distinct eternal destinies. Israel will receive an eternal earthly Kingdom, and the church an eternal heavenly Kingdom.⁵⁹

There is a serious problem with this idea. The Bible teaches that God’s plan for Israel is fulfilled *in the Church*. Charles Ryrie, a chief Dispensationalist, recognizes this to be a crucial issue:

If the church is fulfilling Israel’s promises as contained in the new covenant of anywhere in the Scripture, then [dispensational] premillennialism is condemned.⁶⁰

This is, in fact, the case. It can be easily demonstrated that the promises and prophecies spoken to Israel were indeed fulfilled in the Church. [The Promises To Israel Are Fulfilled in the Church](#) This is a fundamental mistake of dispensational teaching. They deny that these promises are fulfilled in the Church, but rather must be fulfilled in Israel, even if it necessitates rearranging the entire sequence of end time events. This is exactly what dispensational teachers do.

The biblical teaching is that the promise to Israel of the Kingdom comes through Jesus and is fulfilled through the Church. God is not running two different plans of salvation. The covenant of works was kept by only one, that was Jesus. The remnant of the true Israel came down to one. That one was Jesus the Messiah. At the end of Old Testament there was just one faithful member of the covenant.

Jesus was the true Israel. The only way to be part of the faithful, obedient remnant of Israel is to be in Christ. We are in Christ by placing all faith in him alone. All of Israel is saved only by trusting in him. The surprising truth that the Jewish Christians had to wrestle with was that God also accepted and saved the Gentiles through their Messiah as well. All nations inherit the promise of the kingdom in and through Jesus Christ. However, dispensationalism does not see this. By teaching two separate agendas in God’s plan, it encouraged later dispensational groups to adopt even more radical ideas, which effaced the simple Gospel of Christ.

Another very **important problem** with much of teaching accompanying dispensationalism is that it is overweening in its speculations. Too many tenuous or unsubstantiated conclusions are made about the end-times. Very little or no textual support, mixed with enthusiastic imaginations, bred by dispensationalistic impulses, have led to a number of unbiblical teachings. We must take great care how we treat certain isolated texts of Scripture as they relate to the end-times:

Much harm has been done by well-meaning but incautious zealots who have allowed their enthusiasm to run riot in wild and dogmatic assertions upon points where dogmatism is impossible. Still more harm has been done by those who have seized upon certain isolated texts and woven around them doctrines which are inconsistent with the rest of Scripture. Any theory of the hereafter which modifies or weakens any doctrine plainly stated elsewhere in Scripture is to be held suspect.⁶¹

Lastly, I am very concerned that the teaching of **dispensationalism is not essentially comforting**. It is not good news that God’s plan has been thwarted in the past. It is not good news that God had to come up with an alternative plan since Israel rejected Christ. It makes the Gospel sound like plan B. There is another aspect of this that might be quite sensitive to readers of this paper. It’s the way that too many dispensationalists teach the Second Coming of Christ. Their presentation is oriented toward fear for the Christian rather than faith. Granted, the truth that Jesus will return and judge the earth in righteousness ought to inspire fear and awe in sinners. It should drive them to their only hope -- Jesus Christ. But, in many circles this fear is urged as much upon believers as it is sinners. Instead of inspiring the believer to *faith* that Christ will return and complete his salvation, one is provoked to *fear* whether they might be ready when the Lord returns. I have heard many people, who were raised under this teaching, say that as a small child, they returned home (from school, etc.), found it unexpectedly empty, and then were struck with anxiety attacks, out of fear of being left behind. Is this the comfort the Gospel

gives? No! It is a message of apprehension and insecurity. I believe dispensational teaching contributes to this message.

This is well illustrated in the book and movie “Left Behind.” The purpose, as given by Tim LaHaye⁶², is to present a fictional representation of what might happen after the Rapture occurs. As with other such attempts, as *The Late Great Planet Earth* by Hal Lindsey, *A Thief in the Night* by Russ Doughten, or Michael Tolkin’s *The Rapture*, an element of fear is created over what might happen to those who miss the Rapture. I do not criticize any of these presentations which contain a true, biblical accounting of God’s coming judgment on sinners. Nor do I wish to diminish anything which announces Christ’s return. These are biblical teachings. Having said this, the message of the Church is not merely God’s judgment to come. It is even more about God’s salvation from judgment through faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus came to save us from God’s judgment.

The Gospel is corrupted if there is an imbalanced teaching on judgment. It is also a distortion of the Gospel to preach fear rather than comfort to believers over the Lord’s Coming. It is not good news that one might be left behind when a secret “rapture” takes place. This gives the appearance of using a truth, which is meant to be comforting to God’s saints, in order to elicit a desired response from a crowd or assembly of Christians. I would admonish those who claim to represent Christ and yet preach fear in the place of hope through Jesus Christ. You have lost the main focus of the Gospel.

When Paul concluded his description of the Lord’s return to the churches of Thessalonica, he left them these words, “Therefore, comfort one another with these words.” He did not say, “Now use this information to scare the socks off people.” He did not imply that his account would be good subject matter for getting a large number to respond at an altar call. He said, “*comfort one another with these words.*” This is what is comforting: that God has one never failing plan, and that plan is Jesus Christ, who will soon return a second time for all who trust in Him. That plan has no need of modification and it will never need improvement. If you trust in Jesus Christ as your only hope of salvation, be comforted – He is coming for you!

Dispensations in the Church Age: More Than One Plan, Gospel and Kingdom?

Many of the Fundamentalists of the Keswick groups adopted a pre-millennial dispensationalism which they passed on to their descendants in the later Pentecostal movement. Most Pentecostals today are avid Dispensationalists even though the original scheme of Scofield held that speaking with tongues and other such gifts ceased in the Church Age when the canon of Scripture was completed. The distinction between Israel and the Church and the belief in dispensational ages was modified by Pentecostals who divided the Church Age up into various stages of progressive revelation - a sort of dispensationalism-within-dispensationalism.⁶³ Therefore since some had only an increment of the full truth “available” to them, they were only responsible for the truth or “light” revealed by God in their era. One was saved according to the how much they walked according to the “light available to them.” For example, Luther is considered a great man of God who received more light when he taught justification by faith. But, the truth of the Pentecostal experience, which came after Luther, was a fuller revelation than what Luther knew. Luther cannot be judged for not speaking in tongues because it was not “revealed” or was not “available” in his day. However, we are responsible for the Pentecostal truth. We cannot merely rely on justification by faith, because greater truth has been revealed. Since we have more light, we must walk in that light or lose what we already have. This is the rationale of many Pentecostals.

This concept of “walking in all the light revealed” is a well-traveled concept, going back to at least the earliest pietistic groups in America. This notion is based on a complex of biblical passages coupled with a dispensational view of salvation. One passage is John 12:35,⁶⁴ where Jesus warns, “Walk while ye have the light.” Another parallel verse is 1 John 1:7, where John tells us to “walk in the light even as he is in the light.” Hebrews 6:4 is used by some, because it speaks of “being enlightened” as though it were a stage, from which a Christian is to go on to perfection. Others, like Phoebe Palmer, refer to Jesus’ words in John 16:12, “I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now,” to support the idea that there are different levels or stages of “light” that a Christian moves through. For Palmer, this passage explained why she could remain justified while lacking entire sanctification.

Phoebe Palmer used this idea, possibly drawing from Charles Finney who used this language to explain her experience of sanctification:

Could I stand still at this point, and remain in a state of justification while refusing to comply with what I knew to be the demand of God and in fulfilment of covenant engagements long since made? I saw I could not; I must either make the necessary sacrifices, or I must sin, and, by my disobedience, forfeit a state of justification. And it is here justification would have ended with me had I refused to be holy. Do you ask, How did you retain a state of justification before, when all was not given up? Perhaps I cannot answer your question better than by referring you to what the Saviour said to His disciples, “I have many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now.” I had, for some time previous to this, been answerable to the light as I had received it. The holy Spirit had led me onward, revealing higher and yet higher duties, as I was able to bear the, till I was brought up to the point described, and was unable to be answerable to my covenant engagements, and yield my self up entirely and irrevocably to God;⁶⁵

A primer on holiness written in 1918 states that the proper candidates for entire sanctification are, “All who have been clearly converted, and are still walking in all the light.”⁶⁶ Current holiness teachers still use this concept in their teaching on Christian perfection and holiness:

A Christian can make a lot of mistakes in ignorance and still have a perfect heart. He (or she) might blunder where he doesn't know better. But where he has the light, there he walks. . . . Doretta was as determined to follow Christ as any teenage convert I had ever seen. And just as full of mistakes. But Doretta was walking in all the light she had. She had a perfect heart. That is why she matured spiritually. As light increased, so did her Christian growth.⁶⁷

At the 1997 General Conf. of the Church of God (Cleveland Tennessee), Paul S. Jernigan stated: “There are yet things to be brought to light and revealed to the Church.” He exhorted the conference: “Our cry in The Church of God is, “Lord, shine your light of truth upon us now.” He criticized those who did not “walk in all the light”:

We were confounded by the people that seemed to be well satisfied to just be in the shadow of the truth. . . . It seems to me some people are only happy with half-truths, or just enough light that doesn't bring them to that place of change.⁶⁸

Another example of the abuse of the “walking in all the light” concept I found was in this statement:

All it takes to be in God's organisation (sic) is sincere faith in him. Religious experts hate sincerity; for it destroys their monopoly on God. They forget that, although the Good Samaritan was wrong in his religion, he was right in his heart, where it really counts. A cult member, Hindu, or atheist may be in the kingdom of heaven if walking in all the light that he or she has.⁶⁹

The logical end of the “walking in the light” is hard to dismiss. Since God reveals truth in stages and one is right with God by following that light, then those who don't walk in all the light are walking in darkness. Therefore, those who were right with God previously, when they were faithful to all the truth that was available, but subsequently fail to accept the new light, cease to fellowship with God. Hence, those presently walking in all the light are to reject fellowship with the “lesser lights:”

So God's people are to fellowship together with only those who walk in the light as Christ is in the light. And since in Christ there is no darkness or error or false doctrine at all, then this Biblical test for fellowship would prevent God's people from worshipping with any groups or churches who were not following, walking, or living in all the truth, but who had a mixture of truth and error within.⁷⁰

Further proof of the exclusivistic trajectory this thinking takes comes from a ministry web site which claims as its purpose “the preaching of the WHOLE gospel message of present truth.” It asserts: “There are many precious truths contained in the Word of God, but it is `PRESENT TRUTH' that the flock needs now.” “Present Truth” is a catch phrase in some more extreme quarters of the Pentecostal/Charismatic movement. The Bible is considered past truth. We need it and must believe it. But, God also gives “present truth” through modern apostles and prophets. Those who follow this path of “Full Gospel” thought find themselves challenging the Protestant conviction of Scripture alone. For them, there is truth which goes beyond and in some ways improves on the knowledge the Bible provides. These examples demonstrate how “Full Gospel” teaching *can* be taken to extremes and how whole or full gospel teaching *can* eventually lead to sectarianism and various forms of spiritual elitism.

On a recent internet Christian discussion site, one person took the “walking in the light” doctrine to its logical and fatal conclusion. He asked: “If the Buddhist has never sinned, and has walked in all the

light he or she has, then how can he be condemned?” This points out the fatal mistake of determining one’s responsibility to truth by a *sliding scale*. If one is only responsible for what light may be available to them, then one who has never heard of Christ can claim salvation outside of Christ on some other basis. It also points out the problems that occur when truth is thought of as being revealed in stages or dispensations rather than in the objective words of Scripture and in the Person of Jesus Christ. Paul clarified this issue for the Greeks in Athens with these words:

"Therefore since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone-- an image made by man's design and skill. In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead."⁷¹

The whole world will be judged by Christ on the basis of his resurrection. It is the revelation of God’s truth in objective, factual, and historical form. The light that is available to this generation and all who have lived in the Age of the Church comes from Jesus Christ. He is the Light of the world: "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." (John 8:12 NIV) And it is this Light by which all nations will be either saved or judged.

What I have just shared illustrates how many Pentecostals applied the Dispensational logic to the Church Age. While Scofield and others saw salvation as a progressive revelation in biblical history, Pentecostals took it to radical extremes, teaching that there was progressive salvation in the Church dispensation. This was not acceptable for most dispensationalists, but it was strangely logical and consistent to the method of dispensationalism. For certain Pentecostals the logic was: “Since one could arbitrarily divide the history of salvation in the Bible into different economies of salvation, why couldn’t one do the same with the Church Age?” If one accepts the former, there is little to prevent the latter.

I would challenge the unfounded concept that the Church Age contains several different ways or means to salvation. Difference stages or levels of “light” do not exist in the age of the Gospel. Jesus is the only door (John 10). The Father draws all men through Jesus (John 6:44). We trust only Him. Jesus is the Light (John 9:5). We only need walk in the Light (a figurative expression for living by faith in Christ) to be saved. The notion of difference levels of “light” fails to be supported by the plain teaching of Scripture. There is only one Gospel (Galatians 1:8,9). There is only one faith (Ephesians 4:5; Jude 3). Christ is the only way to God (John 14:6). We trust in only one Savior (1 Timothy 4:10; Jude 26). Any

complication and confusion of these facts is created by a foreign system seeking to reconstruct God’s plan in order to validate itself. The mistake initiated by the dispensational scheme (different means of salvation in different dispensations) eventually bore the unbiblical fruit of distorting the Gospel in the Church Age (or dispensation).

This problem has afflicted Pentecostals as much or more than other Christian groups. Many Pentecostals, rooted in the restorationist tradition, have interpreted church history as a sequence of restorative steps back to the pristine or Apostolic era of the Church. Aimee Semple McPherson was one prominent early Pentecostal who propagated this idea. She shared these ideas in her book *Lost and Restored*. McPherson claimed that she received this understanding by direct revelation without a premeditative thought about it.⁷² In this book was a chart depicting the revelation she received about the Church Age. ([Figure 2](#)⁷³)

This chart is based on Joel 1:4 and Joel 2:25 which she understood as referring the history or dispensation of the Church. The first half of Church history was a spiritual decline of the Church illustrated by the imagery of Joel’s locust devouring the tree. Aimee saw the Church’s falling away as starting after the time of the Apostles. From that time until the Middle Ages the Church was seen as progressively falling into greater apostasy. The second half of the chart points to the restoration of the Church as God returns the tree to its former state before the plague of locusts stripped it. This is seen as beginning with the Reformation and progressively improving until the time of the Pentecostal outpouring at the turn of the 20th century.

An almost exact recreation of Aimee’s chart of the Church’s fall and restoration, is found in S. C. McClain’s *Highlights in Church History* ([Figure 3](#)⁷⁴). His book has shaped many Oneness people’s views of Church history and its restoration. It also has influenced their understanding of the place of Oneness theology in Church history. McClain says that the Pentecostal movement brought “the beginning of a new epoch in the history of the Christian church. Many new organizations, standing for different phases of gospel truth, had sprung up as results from the great revivals in the previous church period, . . .”⁷⁵ McClain believed that within the Age of the Church itself there were “different phases of gospel truth.” His teaching was merely the perpetuation of the impetus begun in dispensational theology and the subsequent modifications which emerged in Pentecostalism.

Since there was more light revealed to each stage of Church History, it was logically incumbent upon all Christians to search out what new truth was waiting to be revealed from the Bible. This contributed to the view of the Bible as truth-within-Truth [cp. [How We Read the Bible](#) for more a more in-depth treatment of this subject]. Fused with the restorationist impulse of Holiness-Pentecostal theology, dispensationalism encouraged many early Pentecostals to search the Bible for “new truth” to be revealed in their day. This drive to discover something “new” became a hallmark of Pentecostal piety, as noted by Howard Goss, a early leader of the Pentecostal movement:

Walking in the light of God’s revelation was considered the guarantee of unbroken fellowship with God. I feel that it still is, for that matter. Consequently, a preacher who did not dig up a new slant on some Scripture, or get some new revelation to his heart every so often; one who did not propagate it, defend it, and let it be known that if necessary he was prepared to lay down his life for it, was considered slow, dull, and unspiritual. Calling a man a “compromiser” killed his ministry far and wide. Because of this, no doubt, many new revelations, which began to cause confusion, were condoned.⁷⁶

The central figure in Oneness theology was G. T. Haywood. He wrestled with the state of those who did not follow the New Birth doctrine held by many Oneness Pentecostals. He resolved the conflict in his mind by utilizing the “walking in all the light” model:

The one question that is so often asked is, ‘are all those people who thought they were born of the Spirit, and were not, lost?’ No, not by any means. They shall be given eternal life in the resurrection if they walked in all the light that was given them while they lived. God is a just Judge, and there is not unrighteousness in Him. But those who refuse to walk in the light shall be overtaken with darkness. (John 13:35, 36; see also John 15:22-24).⁷⁷

The second figure in the development of Oneness teaching was A. D. Urshan. He used the same logic as Haywood to resolve the same issue:

Q. Would these folks be lost if they had not gone on to the water and Spirit birth?
A. No, for when they continued to walk in the light they had, they consequently entered into the deeper and higher divine experiences. 1 John 1:4-7. Also John 8:31-36.⁷⁸

Admittedly, many of these “revelations” of light were no more than insights from biblical texts to be applied in one’s Christian life. However, there were significant cases where much more was involved. In some instances, more than merely fresh understanding and application of the Gospel of Christ was proposed. In some radical forms of dispensationalism a new order or economy of God’s working in salvation was taught. This included the expectation by some of a better or “full” salvation - greater light which God requires of people which was not known previously in Church history. This understanding lead to the whole “full gospel” movement which radically shaped the Protestant Church in America. [cp. [“Can the Gospel be Fractured?”](#) for an extensive treatment of this subject.]

I am not saying that every dispensationalists teaching is questionable or wrong. Many Gospel preaching people have been and are dispensationalists. What I am saying is that dispensationalism is a system, brought *to* the Bible, rather than found *in* it. As a scheme exogenous⁷⁹ to the Bible it creates a restrictive grid, that directs the reader to see certain biblical texts in ways that harmonize them with dispensational theology. This is a serious problem because the Gospel is either obscured, lost or some other agenda, – even one’s doctrine of salvation – supplants the biblical one. I believe this has happened in the case of the movement which produced the United Pentecostal Church. Their view of salvation and interpretation of Acts 2:38, both in original conception, and now as they perpetuate it, is deeply conformed to and restrained by the dispensationalist view. I have yet to read any of their authors address this issue. Obviously, this is because the dispensational system is natural to their theology and would not come under question from someone within their belief system. Nevertheless, there is a critical need within Oneness Pentecostalism for biblical, historical and theological reflection on dispensational theology’s impact on Oneness Pentecostal theology.

The Everlasting Gospel

The larger part of this paper has been a critique of Dispensational theology and its influence. My motivation does not grow out of antipathy for dispensationalism itself. Nor do I have a personal prejudice against those who hold to its tenets. My motivation is to defend the Gospel against those teachings which distract from, neglect or dishonor its message. It is my conviction after a great deal of study, that the more one persists in a dispensational conception of salvation, the history of the church, and the nature of the end-times, the more one will move away from the biblical Gospel, or subscribe it to the periphery of one’s attention and concern.

I wish to make this very clear: It is not a prophetic scheme, the arrangement of ages, nor the sequence of end-time events which preoccupies and dominates the biblical landscape. It is the everlasting Gospel. This is the principal truth which governs all the material we find in Scripture. It is the *everlasting* Gospel because it is not bound by time, ages, or dispensations. It was in the foreknowledge of God before the world was made (Revelation 13:8), and it will be the song of the redeemed throughout eternity (Revelation 7:10). It is the everlasting Gospel because it is about the Savior who is the first and the last, the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, who is, who was, and who is to come, the Almighty. God planned our salvation with Him in mind (Romans 8:29; Ephesians 1:5). The whole universe along with human history is moving toward Christ, who is the Omega point. Therefore, all that occurs between eternity past and future eternity is marked by Christ and His everlasting Gospel:

All history bears the marks of Christ. The events of the Old Testament, with their recurring pattern of captivity and restoration, point to that ultimate act of judgment and deliverance in the death and resurrection of Christ. Salvation history reaches its end (telos) in the Christ event. It is concentrated in Jesus Christ. The whole stream of Old Testament events – the Creation, the Flood, the Exodus, the Babylonian exile and deliverance – is gathered up and recapitulated in Him who is the Lord of history.⁸⁰

The Indivisible Link Between the Second and First Coming

If we are to understand the Second Coming of Christ, we must understand what Jesus did in his First Coming. The First Coming of Jesus is good news. It is good news because of what he did when he came. This is why it is called the Gospel. When he came, Jesus *manifested* God’s salvation, the Kingdom of God, and announced the end of the world under the reign of sinners. He lived a *perfect* life, meriting the total pleasure of his Father. He lived a perfect life of righteousness. Then, out of grace, through the work of the Cross, Jesus imputed that righteousness to those who believe in Him. He took the wrath of God against *our* sin on the Cross. He destroyed the power of sin and Satan by dying on the Cross. He is risen, ascended and has received immortality and glory. Because of this He is able to pour out His Spirit “upon all flesh.” What Jesus did at his First Coming is the heart of the Gospel. Thus, we must always allow the Gospel of Jesus to define our eschatology,⁸¹ not vice versa. The nature of the Gospel – the First Coming – must inform our vision of the last days, even unto eternity, and not the reverse. While the last days are not yet accomplished, the Gospel is. Jesus’ work on the Cross is finished. This one and only Gospel comprehensively shapes and molds the last things, making them to serve the purpose of the salvation Christ obtained for us.

The Gospel and the End-Times

It is *absolutely necessary* to understand what Jesus did at his First Coming if we are to comprehend the meaning of his Second Coming. This means we must allow that which is *finished* to be the guide of that which is not. The end time events are yet to be unfolded, but the Gospel of Jesus is already unfolded or revealed. Too often it is lost upon Christians that the last things are a *direct result* of the finished work of Jesus. The Second Coming of Christ is the completion of what Christ obtained for us at his First Coming. If we do not relate these properly, we will not properly connect the Gospel with the last things. What happens in the end is an essential consequence of what Jesus did in his death and resurrection. Since he died, rose and ascended to the highest place, he will come again, receive his Church and judge the world. By his work at his First Coming, Jesus earned the right to control the events of the end-times (Acts 2:34-36). It is Jesus who pours out the Spirit in the last days (Acts 2:33). It is Jesus, as the Head of the Church, who directs the movements of the Church in history (Ephesians 1:22) . It is Jesus who comes and raises the dead to life and receives the Church into glory (1 Timothy 4:13-18). It is Jesus who judges all Mankind (2 Timothy 4:1). It is Jesus who reigns and rules in Heaven and the New Earth forever (1 Timothy 6:15; Revelation 17:14; 19:16).

The Gospel of Jesus is not an after thought of God’s plan. It is not the last stage in a series of dispensations. It is the *everlasting* Gospel. Is the plan of God from eternity, and will echo into eternity to come. It is God’s best and thus His only plan. It transcends all of human history, and yet it descends into human history to direct it and give it meaning. The Gospel that Jesus brought is an *ancient* Gospel. It was promised by God to our first family as recorded in Genesis 3:15. It was promised to Abraham, the father of the faithful, and all the patriarchs:

"We tell you the good news: What God promised our fathers he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus. As it is written in the second Psalm: "You are my Son; today I have become your Father.' The fact that God raised him from the dead, never to decay, is stated in these words: "I will give you the holy and sure blessings promised to David."⁸²

All the promises God gave to Israel through the prophets were fulfilled in Jesus Christ. “For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ. And so through him the "Amen" is spoken by us to the glory of God.” (2 Corinthians 1:20 NIV) The irony is that many dispensationalists are waiting, after two thousands years, for God to fulfill the promises made to Israel when the many

important ones are already fulfilled in Jesus Christ. How can this be? It is because the Gospel is not rightly related to the end-times (eschatology). It is not correctly understood that the Church is the New Israel and the promises made to Israel under the Old Covenant are fulfilled in Christ and the Church in the New (Galatians 3:11, 28, 6:16; Romans 2:28,29; Romans 10:12,13).

The “Already” and the “Not Yet”

All that Christ obtained for us through his work during his First Coming will be completely given to us upon his Second Coming. At his First Coming Jesus announced from the Cross, “It is finished.” What he meant was, all he had to do to obtain our salvation was finished. He did not mean that sin was obliterated from the earth, that the Devil could no longer work, nor that death ceased and that all men were now immortal. These things were yet to be realized at a future time – the time of Jesus’ Second Coming. The Apostle John makes this clear:

Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. (1 John 3:2 NIV)

We have “already” obtained certain of the benefits of the salvation which Christ obtained. But we have *not* received *all* the benefits. *Now* we are God’s children. However, what we “*will be*” is “not yet” revealed to us. We have benefits coming, dimensions of salvation which are “not yet.” The portion of our salvation which we received between Christ’s two comings is only *partial*. It is not *complete* or become ultimate. It is only the *earnest* or *down-payment* for all that is promised. Thus, the Christian lives in the time of the “already” and the “not yet.” Regrettably, many Christians lack hope and assurance because of one or two errors: 1) Some do not know what they “already” have when they trust in Christ alone; 2) Others fail to realize that there are benefits which are “not yet,” and thus attempt to claim them prematurely.

Error of the Full Gospel

This is the case with the “Full Gospel” theology (I have written an extensive article on this topic. If you wish to read more in-depth then compare: [“Can the Gospel Be Fractured?”](#)). This is a very popular theology held by a large segment of the Dispensational movement. “Full Gospel” theology is predicated upon certain teaching that confuses what is “already” with the “not yet.” It

assumes that there is a third state between the “already” and the “not yet” which it calls “full” salvation. The problem with this is that the Bible does not teach anything of the kind. One is saved, and is a believer in the “present state” with all of its benefits, or one is not. There is no between condition, nor are there various stages in between the present and the future state of the believer. Those who are believers in the present state are to look only for the future state as the fullness or completion of their salvation. They are not instructed to look for several greater stages *now* in the present Christian life. Obviously, there should be significant growth in the life of all Christians. The Bible calls for this. But that is all part of the *present state*, and not a higher “full salvation” distinct from just “plain” salvation.

The error of the “Full Gospel” theology is that it does not properly discern what belongs to the Christian in the present state, and confuses some of the future state with the present. It either lacks faith to believe the Bible concerning what we have *by faith* in Christ *now*, or it misinterprets and thus confounds that which is "not yet" with the "already." It confounds what we receive at Christ's Coming with what we have now as Christians before Christ's Coming. These mistakes are serious and sometimes fatal for the life of many Christians.

The Spirit as Down-Payment or Deposit

At the end of his First Coming, Jesus purchased our salvation. In the Church Age, He gives us the down-payment to keep us until his next and final return:

. . . set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come. (2 Corinthians 1:22 NIV)

Now it is God who has made us for this very purpose and has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come. (2 Corinthians 5:5 NIV)

And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, 14 who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession-- to the praise of his glory. (Eph.1:13, 14 NIV)

We have only the firstfruits of the Spirit now:

Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently. (Romans 8:23-24 NIV)

Just as the Holy Spirit is given to the believer as a deposit so is righteousness imputed as a covering or provision of that which the believer cannot produce themselves. This brings up a truth that is very hard for some to conceive and for others to accept. The Bible speaks of the forgiveness of sins for those who trust in Jesus. But even more, it speaks of the righteousness of Jesus being imputed or accounted (reckoned in the KJV) to the believer in the place of the believer’s own unrighteousness (or righteousness - which is unrighteousness before God). The reason the righteousness of Christ is imputed for salvation rather than the believer instantaneously and miraculously made righteous is that such a transformation will not take place until the Second Coming of Christ. In the mean time, we are covered with the perfect righteousness of Christ. Then, on the Day when Jesus returns and we are made like unto his glorious nature, we will be made *actually* righteous.

This same principle is true in many other ways. Paul told the Corinthians that they were made to sit together in heavenly places in Christ. But they were not in heaven when they heard those words. They were sitting in house churches and synagogues. What Paul was saying was that because Christ was sitting on the right hand of God (the place of power), and they were “in Christ” by faith, therefore, in a spiritual sense, they were sitting in heaven with Jesus. However, the Apostle John in his vision of redemption sees the saints in heaven seated in the thrones that conjoin the throne of the Lamb, Jesus Christ. This points to the truth that while we “sit in heavenly places” spiritually through Christ right now, the time will come, in the Consummation, when Jesus returns, that we will sit with Him in His throne.

The present state of the believer is one of mortality. Believers die. Yet, Jesus says that they have eternal life. How can this be? It is the same principle as above. The eternal life of the resurrected Christ is given us as a deposit or as a measure. We are new creations “in Christ.” But, we are not created completely new yet. That reality will not occur until Jesus comes again. Then, those who trust in Him will be transformed, made fully new, and take on immortality. Now, we are partially endowed with new life. But then, we will be totally take on that new existence Christ promised us.

It is the “already” portion of our salvation which enables us as pilgrim people to complete our journey in this life. At his Second Coming, Christ will give to us all the benefits of our salvation. In the mean time, we walk by faith in what Christ has done, possessing the seal of our inheritance, with the taste of the world to come on our lips. The time will come for us to inherit all that Christ has done for us, and that will occur at his Second Coming. Please don’t misunderstand me. I am not saying that Jesus did not give us many of the benefits of our salvation between his two the advents. He did. Still, we have not come into all that Christ obtained. We are still in a fallen, sinful, evil world. Death still happens to believers. Satan still tempts us. We do not have immortality yet. We do not have the “crown of righteousness” yet. Oh, but we *shall* have all of this and more. Jesus has obtained more than our present eyes have seen and ears have heard.

I think an appropriate analogy to the “already” but “not yet” dimensions of our salvation can be seen in the idea of the trust fund. The famous singer Nat “King” Cole died leaving a large estate for his family. His daughter was a member of E. V. Hill’s church. She applied for a job as the church secretary. Pastor Hill asked her why she would want a job making two dollars an hour (minimum wage at that time) when her father was a millionaire. She told him that her father has left her a large sum of money in a trust fund. But, she could not access it until she was twenty-one. She was a millionaire, but she had not “grown into” it yet. She enjoyed many of the blessings of being Nat Cole’s child, but she had not yet received her inheritance in *full*. There was an “already” and a “not yet” dimension to her life.

This is exactly the case for us as Christians today. We all share an “already” and a “not yet” dimension of our salvation. What happened through Jesus at his resurrection was the first fruits or the beginning of all that will happen when the Church is resurrected and given immortality. Jesus is the beginning of redemption; we will be the ending of it. He is the first fruits; we will be the final harvest. Although we presently, as Paul says, sit in heavenly places, we do not yet have all that is promised to us. We do not yet physically sit in heavenly places. Christ now has the immortality we will have in the end. We possess this immortality only by faith. By faith we trust in Christ. By faith we are "in Christ." Being "in Christ" we share in his victory. It is "in Christ" that we possess these blessings. Jesus Christ possesses all power in heaven and earth now. However, all the power and blessings will not be fully our's until He returns. The promise is now, the final reality is “not yet.”

The Importance of Hope

This is why hope is so important in the Christian life. It is the future aspect of our faith. Hope is not “I hope the Lord returns,” or “I hope I’m ready when He comes.” It is the settled confidence that what God has promised is true. When we say we hope, we mean that we are *sure* that Christ will return and that He *will* save us, who trust in Him.

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us. (Romans 5:1-5 NIV)

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, 13 while we wait for the blessed hope -- the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, (Titus 2:11-13 NIV)

Any scheme or view of the end-times which is more filled with fear or terror than it is with hope is leaning away from the Gospel. The end-times are not about the Anti-christ. They are about Jesus Christ. We are not to live in fear and awe of the Beast. We are to look with hope and reverence to the Lamb. The teaching of the Second Coming of Jesus should be a comfort to children, and not a frightening tool to bring them into the church out of fear. Hope is that which grasps the promises of God before they are realized. We hope because God has promised and given us His Word. We are taught in the Book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ that there is war between the Beast and the Lamb. And the Lamb wins! That is why we hope.

We yearn for all of our salvation now. That is to be expected. This present age is never satisfying. At times it is painful, trying and even grievous. This is how the Christian life is. There are two dimensions to the Christian life.⁸³ We have this “treasure in jars of clay.” On the one hand we are forgiven, given the Spirit, made alive in Christ, and set free from the power of sin. On the other, we still struggle with the Evil One, we fight our flesh, we wrestle with principalities and powers. We still feel pain and shed tears. Our loved ones still die. This is the reality of living in the “already” and the “not yet.”

But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body. (2 Corinthians 4:7-11 NIV)

But we are not stalemated. We are more than conquerors. We sit in heavenly places in Christ. We march in the victor's parade. We are joint-heirs with Christ. We are able to do “immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us. . .” (Ephesians 3:20 NIV) The ultimate victory is ours, because Christ has already won it. But the final celebration and the full sharing of the spoils will *not* take place *until* Jesus comes again.

Living Now . . . For the Future

Today, we nobly march toward what is ours - into what awaits us. We expectantly desire to grasp what has been promised. Through faith in Christ we boldly move toward what our Father has laid up for us. We are pilgrims now. For a short season we sojourn. But, in that Day when our Lord begins his holy peregrination from Heaven, in that eternal moment, all will be changed. We will receive the glory which Jesus secured for us at his Passion:

Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.⁸⁴

One might ask, “Well if most of what we are living for is in Heaven, why live this life out. Wouldn't it be better to forego this life and go straight to Heaven?” I must ask a question in response, “Doesn't the knowledge of our inheritance to come make living this life more special?” To me, this life only has meaning because we are heading into a certain future where Christ will rule and we will be clothed with immortality. It makes this life that much more wonderful. Everything we do is filled with purpose because it matures us and prepares us for our future life. All that we do for others in service is not lost in the “ugly ditch of history.” It does matter whether we are heroes or villains. It makes a difference that we help instead of hurt. The one without hope lives for the now only. He or she lives for what is personally expedient. They don't think life is any more than their own personal survival and well-

being. But the person who has a future can live for others. Life is about more than me and mine. It is about a cosmic plan of the Creator in which I have a part. Therefore, why fight over the little stuff. The one with hope in the life to come can share what they have now, but they have so much for which to look forward.

There is a reason why when God saves us He does not resurrect us straight to Heaven. There is reason why this life is necessary and must be lived out. God has a purpose for us here. Paul stated, “For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better: Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you. (Philippians 1:23,24 KJV) We have a service in God’s plan that we must perform in this mortal life. That is why God does not take us straight to Heaven. He gives us just enough of our salvation now to do what He has called us to do. Then, He gives the hope of the world to come to direct and strengthen us in what we are called to do. He fills our little lives with the profound meaning of the life to come, in order to energize us in our mortal work now.

Not to long ago, a popular movie attempted to address how we take for granted the preciousness of life. It was called *The Sixth Sense*. It was about a boy who could see the dead as though they were alive. The irony of the whole story was that the doctor, who was treating him, was actually dead (all through the movie), but he didn’t know it (neither did the audience until the end). This was to dramatize how everyday we can be like dead people moving around, oblivious to the areas of our lives which are dead.

Having a “sixth sense” about the reality of our lives is more than a good plot for a movie. We suffer over dying much more than we consciously realize. In many ways we are dead and dying, but we don’t know it. The sheer finality of death is more chilling than we can deal with. We lose our youth, our innocence, our health, even the parts of our bodies wear out. As we grow older our relationships age, our dreams and visions smolder and reality sets in. We are dying by degrees. It is an ominous force in our lives. We know that we cannot defeat death in ourselves. It is the “king of terrors.” The Bible tells us that all sinners are dead in sin, with judgment hanging, like the sword of Damocles, over their heads – and most don’t really know it.

Since death is hanging over the world, how do we, as believers, live our lives fully in a dying world? I believe a powerful answer to this can be found in a story from the life of Christ. This story means more than we might readily discern:

Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. This Mary, whose brother Lazarus now lay sick, was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair. So the sisters sent word to Jesus, "Lord, the one you love is sick." When he heard this, Jesus said, "This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it." Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. Yet when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days. Then he said to his disciples, "Let us go back to Judea." "But Rabbi," they said, "a short while ago the Jews tried to stone you, and yet you are going back there?" Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? A man who walks by day will not stumble, for he sees by this world's light. It is when he walks by night that he stumbles, for he has no light." After he had said this, he went on to tell them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up." His disciples replied, "Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better." Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep. So then he told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead, and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him." Then Thomas (called Didymus) said to the rest of the disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him." (John 11:1-16 NIV)

Lazarus was an everyday ordinary person like all of us. But, life “killed” him. Maybe it was an accident that got him, or an illness. Maybe he just worked himself to death. Whatever -- something killed him. The Bible says that we are all under the power of death because we have sinned. You are dying.... and so am I. We die a little every day. Just look in the mirror. Check out pictures from 10 years ago. Things are happening every day, killing us by degrees: A career crash, a failed marriage, a fatal disease, a child gone astray. Death comes upon all men. The world is groaning under this death we have brought upon it. And Jesus groaned over Lazarus.

When Mary and Martha intercepted Jesus, He comforted them with the Gospel: “I AM THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE!” But, they did not understand this. Their grief blinded them to the good news. They thought he meant something which fit better into their preconceived religious notions. In essence, they responded, “I know you could have healed him,” (past tense) or “I know he will rise on the last day.” (future tense) But, there was more to Jesus’ words than they could receive. Jesus was saying that he is the Resurrection for RIGHT NOW! The resurrection of Jesus has meaning for the “already.”

Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. "Take away the stone," he said. "But, Lord," said Martha, the sister

of the dead man, "by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days." Then Jesus said, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me." When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go." (John 11:38-44 NIV)

Jesus raised him from death to live again. But, Lazarus was not raised to immortality. After a time he died again. Jesus raised him only to a *mortal* existence. WHY? Jesus didn't tell Lazarus, "This day wilt thou be with me in Paradise." He said, "take off his grave clothes and let him go." In essence he said, "Let him go back to finish his life!" "Let him go back to his work, family, and friends!" HIS LIFE WAS NOT OVER. So often we give up when our life is not finished. Maybe its your marriage. It could be your relationship with a loved one. It might be a career or a ministry. To you it is dead, and you buried it. But Jesus says, "_____, come out." He redeemed you to resurrect your life and give it back to you, so you can finish it.

Lazarus was not the only one raised to "mortality." That is what the resurrection of Christ is to our lives now. Although we do not have the fullness of the resurrection yet, that does not mean that Christ's resurrection is without power and meaning now. Christ's resurrection means that we can finish our lives. He raised us from the dead spiritually in order to send us out into the world to do a work for His Kingdom.

Matt. 9:23 When Jesus entered the ruler's house and saw the flute players and the noisy crowd, 24 he said, "Go away. The girl is not dead but asleep." But they laughed at him. 25 After the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took the girl by the hand, and she got up. 26 News of this spread through all that region.

Luke 7:12 As he approached the town gate, a dead person was being carried out-- the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the town was with her. 13 When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and he said, "Don't cry." 14 Then he went up and touched the coffin, and those carrying it stood still. He said, "Young man, I say to you, get up!" 15 The dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him back to his mother. 16 They were all filled with awe and praised God.

"A great prophet has appeared among us," they said. "God has come to help his people."

Once Jesus had raised these to live out the rest of their mortal lives, they were forever touched or impacted by the resurrection of Christ. They were not just “dead men walking” They were alive “in Christ.”

NIV Ephesians 2:1 As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, 2 in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. 3 All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. 4 But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, 5 made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions-- it is by grace you have been saved. 6 And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, 7 in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

The power of Jesus’ resurrection is certainly a power culminating in immortality – eternal life:

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16 NIV)

But whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life. (John 4:14 NIV)

I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life. (John 5:24 NIV)

For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. (John 6:40 NIV)

I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand (John 10:28 NIV)

However, we always think of this “eternal life” as life in the future. Nevertheless, there is a profound present dimension to the resurrection power of Jesus. By the working of His Spirit within us,

we are made to live out our mortal existence. Lazarus had not finished his mortal life. Therefore, Jesus raised him so he could finish it. Jesus wants to empower you and me through the Gospel – not only to live in eternity – but to live out or finish our mortal lives. When Christ gives you back your life it’s to say “Your life is not over.” YOU HAVE TO FINISH IT! You can’t give up on your life when God is not finished with it.

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.
Gal. 2:20

The life we have to finish is now touched by the power of Jesus. We live our mortal life “IN CHRIST,” and our purpose is to “reveal him.” .

And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you. (Romans 8:11 NIV)

For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body. (2 Corinthians 4:11 NIV)

Now, we are tasting of the powers of the world to come: “who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age.” (Hebrews 6:5 NIV) We are like the Israelites who saw the lush and beautiful cluster of grapes brought back from the promised land by the ten spies. We know only a sample of what God has up ahead.

Now we gather weekly as the faithful flock. We come together to be reminded how to live in the “already” and to be refreshed about the “not yet.” We hear the Good News. We worship our Savior who sits on His throne in the Heavens. And he invites us to take his Supper, while we look forward to the time when he shares it anew in the Kingdom. We take the cup and the bread. As we partake, we see the simple elements of our lives represented by the bread and the cup. Our lives are small, simple and short. It is simple wine and bread. And we are but a “bite of bread.” We are just a “drink.” But, the Lord’s Supper represent the eternal work of Christ. We are given the taste of eternity on our lips. This earthly supper symbolizes the profound elements of Christ’s body and blood in mere bread and wine. He gives it and as we take it we savor eternal things. It is a very small meal. Still, it creates a hunger in us

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for more - for the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. It is a promise of the great supper we will share with all God's people in Heaven. It will be ours . . . when he comes. Then time will be no more, and all that will remain will be the fruit of the everlasting Gospel.

For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory." (1 Corinthians 15:53,54 NIV)

ENDNOTES

1. Mark Sarver, “Dispensationalism: Part I - Millennial Views Prior to the Rise of Dispensationalism,” Online, Accessed: Sep 14, 2001, Available at: <http://www.graceonlinelibrary.org/full.asp?ID=653>
2. Paul Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More*, (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1992), p.x.
3. The New Shaff-Herzog. Vol. VII, p. 375.
4. The identification of the Pope with the Antichrist provoked the Roman Catholic Church in the counter-reformation, in order to deflect the attack on the Pope, to propose other options. Luis de Alcazar (1554-1613) taught that the Book of Revelation deals with events that occurred during the pagan Roman Empire. Thus, Nero was the Antichrist. His system became known as the “preterist” view. In 1590 Spanish Jesuit priest Francisco Ribera (1537-1591) refuted the Protestant view in his commentary on Revelation. He saw the greatest portion of the Revelation to be fulfilled in the distant future. He said the Antichrist would be one evil person who would be accepted by the nation of Israel, rebuild Jerusalem, reject Christ, persecute the Church and rule the world for 3 ½ years. The irony is that the latter teaching eventually became the popular position of conservative and dispensational fundamentalists.
5. He divided history into three dispensations: 1) Dispensation of the Father: from Adam to Christ - Law; 2) Dispensation of the Son: from King Josiah, through Christ’s time, up to Joachim of Fiore’s day - Grace; 3) Dispensation of the Spirit: future time of holiness, purity, signs and wonders, and revelations of the Spirit - Revelation. He stated: “But that God who once gave the spirit of prophecy to the prophets has given me the spirit of understanding to grasp with great clarity in His Spirit all the mysteries of sacred scripture, just as the prophets who once produced it in the Spirit understood these mysteries.” He set the date for Christ’s return at 1260.[“The New Millennium,” Michael S. Horton, ©1994, 1998 Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals, Online, Accessed: 29 June 2001 at: <http://www.alliancenet.org/pub/mr/mr94/1994.03.MayJun/mr9403.msh.NewMillennium.html>]
6. He claimed that the appearance of St. Francis of Assisi’s was the opening of the sixth seal in the Book of Revelation.
7. **Adventism:** is taken from the word Advent which means “coming.” Adventists took this label because their focus was on the Second advent or coming of Christ.
8. "Russell, Charles Taze," *Microsoft® Encarta® Encyclopedia 2000*. © 1993-1999 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

9. C. Norman Kraus, *Dispensationalism in America, Its Rise and Development*, (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1958), p. 29.
10. Online. Accessed 29 June 2001 at:
<http://www.alliancenet.org/pub/mr/mr94/1994.03.MayJun/mr9403.msh.NewMillennium.html>
11. James H. Brookes, D. D. (1830-1897) was pastor of Washington Avenue Presbyterian Church, St. Louis, MO. The Brookes Bible Institute of St. Louis was named in his honor. Dr. Brookes was a prolific writer, having authored more than 200 booklets and tracts. He was the editor of *The Truth*, and was a well-known Bible teacher. One of his very influential students was C. I. Scofield, editor of the popular *Scofield Reference Bible* (1909, 1917, revised as the *New Scofield Reference Bible* 1967). Brookes was also a key leader in the famous prophetic conferences of 1878 and 1886. [From *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*, Autumn 1993 - Volume 6:11, article “Self-examination as it Relates to Assurance,” Online, Accessed: Oct 28, 2001, Available at:
http://www.faithalone.org/journal/1993ii/J11-93d.htm#_ftn2
12. The New Shaff-Herzog. Vol. VII, p. 374.
13. George Müller, a contemporary and one time supporter of Darby quoted by Robert Cameron in his book *Scriptural Truth About The Lord's Return*, pp.146-7.
14. **Dispensationalism:** A system of biblical interpretation associated with J. N. Darby (1800-1882) and his followers and popularized through the notes of the Scofield Reference Bible. It builds on the idea of God's administration of or plan for the world describing the unfolding of that program in various dispensations, or stewardship arrangements, throughout the history of the world. The world is seen as a household administered by God in connection with several stages of revelation that mark off the different economies in the outworking of his total program. [“The New Millennium,” Michael S. Horton, ©1994, 1998 Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals, Online, Accessed: 6 June 2001 at:
<http://www.alliancenet.org/pub/mr/mr94/1994.03.MayJun/mr9403.msh.NewMillennium.html>]
15. It is very important that one understands that classic Historic Premillennialism is not the same as Dispensational Premillennialism. They are two very different systems or schemes. Cp. [Differences Between Historic Premillennialism and Dispensational Premillennialism](#). I do not believe that Historic Premillennialism creates the serious problem I see in Dispensationalism. That's the reason for this paper. BLG
16. “*Dispensationalism: A Return to Biblical Theology or Pseudo Christian Cult?*,” Gospel Plow web site, <http://www.frii.com/~gosplo/w/displ2.html>

17. “The New Millennium,” Michael S. Horton, ©1994, 1998 Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals, Online, Accessed: 6 June 2001 at:
<http://www.alliancenet.org/pub/mr/mr94/1994.03.MayJun/mr9403.msh.NewMillennium.html>
18. Greg Herrick, “Dispensationalism and God’s Glory,” Online. Accessed 7 June 2001 @
<http://www.bible.org/docs/theology/dispenglorydis.htm>.
19. Randall J. Stephens, *More Recovered: A Review of Recent Historical Literature on Evangelicalism in the Late Victorian Era*, Quodlibet Online Journal of Christian Theology and Philosophy, Winter 2001 Issue, p. 4, Accessed 18 June 2001 At:
<http://www.quodlibet.net/stephens-victorian.shtml>
20. Timothy Weber, “The Dispensationalist Era,” *Christian History*, Issue 61: Vol. XVIII, No. 1, p. 34.
21. “The New Millennium,” Michael S. Horton, ©1994, 1998 Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals, Online, Accessed: 29 June 2001 at:
<http://www.alliancenet.org/pub/mr/mr94/1994.03.MayJun/mr9403.msh.NewMillennium.html>
22. Weber, Op. Cit.
23. Keith A. Mathison, *Dispensationalism: Rightly Dividing the People of God?*, (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishers, 1995), pp. 4-8.
24. “Dispensationalism: A Return to Biblical Theology or Pseudo Christian Cult?,” Gospel Plow web site, <http://www.frii.com/~gospplow/disp2.html>
25. Weber, Op. Cit., p. 35.
26. Mark Sarver, “Dispensationalism: Part II - The Genesis and Development of Dispensationalism in Nineteenth-Century England,” Online, Accessed: Sep 14, 2001, Available at:
<http://www.graceonlinelibrary.org/full.asp?ID=654>
27. This is why Daniel’s Seventieth Week (Daniel 9) was broken into 69 weeks (already fulfilled) and the final week (yet to be fulfilled in the tribulation). It was necessary for dispensationalists to do this to make their system work. They believed that there are prophecies not yet fulfilled that only could be fulfilled if the Seventieth week was after the Church Age. Since they could not make the prophecies of the Old Testament fit the Church Age, they devised a scheme which called the Church Age a surprise or mystery revealed as a “parenthesis” in God’s time-table. Why did dispensationalists work so hard to

come up with these ideas? They were fighting a terrific battle with liberal German rationalist theology which attacked the authority of Scripture. Dispensationalism was the conservative Christian response in reaction to the troubling questions of Bible prophecy brought up by theological Liberalism.

28. Morgan Edwards (1722-95) states in a work written between 1742-1744 and published in 1788 under the title *Two Academical Exercises on Subjects Bearing the following Titles; Millennium, Last-Novelties*, "Another event previous to the millennium will be the appearing of the son of man in the clouds, coming to raise the dead saints and change the living, and to catch them up to himself, and then withdraw with them.....This event will come to pass when Antichrist be arrived at Jerusalem in his conquest of the world; and about three years and a half before his killing the witnesses and assumption of godhead.....The last event, and the event that will usher in the millennium, will be, the coming of Christ from paradise to earth, with all the saints he had taken up thither (about three years and a half before).....". In an even earlier statement found in Ephraem the Syrian's sermon *On the Last Times, the Antichrist, and the End of the World* (c. 374-627), "All the saints and elect of God are gathered together before the tribulation, which is to come, and are taken to the Lord, in order that they may not see at any time the confusion which overwhelms the world because of our sins." The Pseudo-Ephraem document goes on to describe Christ's Second Coming to earth after this time of tribulation. [My thanks to Shelby Smith for directing me to this information. BLG]

29. Mark Sarver, "Dispensationalism: Part II," Loc. Cit.

30. Alexander Reese, *The Approaching Advent of Christ, An Examination of the Teachings of J. N. Darby and His Followers*, (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1937), p. 19.

31. **Premillennialism:** is the belief that Christ will return *prior* to a literal one thousand years of His earthly reign. I have greater respect for the premillennial position in general. It is with a *particular* form of premillennialism - dispensationalism - that I take issues.

32. In the history of Church exposition, there developed *three general positions* to account for the time period which the Book of Revelation describes. The first is the *historicist*, which sees the events of the Revelation taking place over the span of Church history. The second, made popular by Roman Catholic scholar Ribera, is the *futurist*, which places the events of the Revelation at a future time at the end of Church history. A third position, also the produce of Catholic scholarship, was the *preterist* view which considers all the events described in the Revelation as occurring within the first century of the Church.

33. This is known as post-millennialism [cp. Chart on the [Four Major Views of the End-times](#)]. The millennium was considered to be the time when the Church filled the earth. Some saw it as a literal one thousand years. When church history extended beyond one thousand years, the millennium was

reinterpreted to be symbolic of a long time period. Since the time of the Church was considered the Millennial time, the Second Coming of Christ was seen as taking place at the conclusion of this time. Thus, the label post-millennialism was applied.

34. C. I. Scofield, *Scofield Reference Bible*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1945), p. iii.

35. Modernism, also known as Liberalism, was a movement within American Protestantism led by such men as Harry E. Fosdick, Shailer Mathews, H. N. Wieman, “who interpreted the Bible and religion along evolutionary or developmental lines.” [Van A. Harvey, *A Handbook of Theological Terms*, p. 143.] The concern was to reconcile science and religion, esp. Christianity. “The major distinctive is the desire to adapt religious ideas to modern culture and modes of thinking.” [Evangelical Dictionary of Theology, Walter A. Elwell, p. 631.] In the process, they rejected supernaturalism because they saw no distinction between the natural and supernatural. Modernism was opposed by conservative American Protestant, later called Fundamentalists. A series of books called the “Fundamentals” were produced to counter the teaching of Liberalism. An insightful book which summarizes the chief issues between Liberalism and Christian orthodoxy is Gresham Machen’s *Christianity & Liberalism*.

36. Stephens, Op. Cit.

37. "Modernism (religion)," Microsoft® Encarta® Encyclopedia 2000. © 1993-1999 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

38. “Social Gospel, a liberal movement in American Protestantism, prominent in the late 19th century, which sought to apply Christian principles to a variety of social problems engendered by industrialization.” "Social Gospel," Microsoft® Encarta® Encyclopedia 2000. © 1993-1999 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

39. The five essential doctrines of Fundamentalism were: 1) The inerrancy of Scripture; 2) the virgin birth of Christ; 3) the substitutionary atonement of Christ; 4) the bodily resurrection of Christ; 5) the historicity of miracles. (cp. Walter A Elwell, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, p. 443.)

40. Not all scholars of Fundamentalist and Pentecostalism agree on this. Some say that they do not have common roots. I believe that the constituents and ideas of these two movements overlap to such a degree that it is impossible to cleanly separate them into distinguishable groups.

41. Stephens, p. 4.

42. Stephens, p. 4.
43. D. William Faupel, *The Everlasting Gospel*, (Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), p. 20.
44. “The Full Gospel motif provided the doctrinal emphasis as it applied to the life of the Christian believer. The three-fold work of Christ on the cross assured justification, sanctification, and healing. The ascended Christ baptized the believer with the fullness of the Spirit. The returning Christ became the ultimate hope of the believer’s destiny. The sole Pentecostal contribution to this five-fold gospel was that the baptism of the Holy Spirit must be initially evidenced by speaking in an unknown tongue.” D. William Faupel, *The Everlasting Gospel*, (Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), p. 30.
45. Edith L. Blumhofer, *The Assemblies of God: A Chapter in the Story of American Pentecostalism*, Vol. 1 – To 1941, (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1989), p. 153.
46. Blumhofer, p. 150.
47. Blumhofer, p. 193.
48. C. I. Scofield, *Scofield Reference Bible*, 1909, 1917 (notes on John 1:17 sec. 2), p. 1115.
49. Mark Sarver, “Dispensationalism: Part I - Millennial Views Prior to the Rise of Dispensationalism,” Online, Accessed: Sep 14, 2001, Available at: <http://www.graceonlinelibrary.org/full.asp?ID=653>
50. Kraus, *Op. Cit.*, p. 23.
51. Paul in Romans 9:25 refers to Hosea 1:10, 2:23. In Romans 15:9-12 he cites 2 Samuel 22:50, Psalm 18:49, Deut. 32:43, Psalm 117:1, Isaiah 11:10.
52. *Puh - lay' - jee - uhn - izm*: “Pelagianism is the name given to the teachings of Pelagius, a British Christian active in Rome in the late 4th and early 5th centuries. Often identified as a monk but probably a layman, Pelagius was a biblical interpreter (he wrote a commentary on Paul's letters) and theologian who stressed the human ability to fulfill the commands of God. . . . Pelagianism may thus be considered a reform movement within late Roman Christianity. Its doctrine, however, was condemned as heresy. . . . In claiming that humans can do what God requires, Pelagius had emphasized the freedom of the human will and the ability to control one's motives and actions under the guidance of God's law. In contrast, Augustine insisted that no one can control his or her own motivation and that person requires the assistance of God's Grace if he or she is to will and to do good.” [“Pelagianism,” *BELIEVE: Religious Information Source*, Online, Accessed: Oct 29, 2001, Available at:

<http://mb-soft.com/believe/txc/pelagian.htm>.]

53. **Semi-Pelagianism:** “Doctrines, upheld during the period from 427 to 529, that rejected the extreme views both of Pelagius and of Augustine in regards to the priority of divine grace and human will in the initial work of salvation.” [“Semi-Pelagianism,” *BELIEVE: Religious Information Source*, Online, Accessed: Oct 29, 2001, Available at: <http://mb-soft.com/believe/txc/pelagian.htm>.]

54. Of course, this is what Finney believed and preached. The title of one of Finney’s sermons epitomizes this: “Sinners Bound to Change Their Own Hearts.” He also rejected original sin: “Finney believed that human beings were capable of choosing whether they would be corrupt by nature or redeemed, referring to original sin as an "anti-scriptural and nonsensical dogma." Tragically, this thinking lead him to reject the orthodox view of [justification by faith](#).

55. C. I. Scofield, *Scofield Reference Bible*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1945), p. vi.

56. *Dispensationalism: A Return to Biblical Theology or Pseudo Christian Cult?* Online, Accessed 7 June 2001, Available at: <http://www.frii.com/~gosp/low/disp2.html#c5>

57. The purpose of each dispensation, then, is to place man under a specific rule of conduct, but such stewardship is not a condition of salvation. In every past dispensation unregenerate man has failed, and he has failed in this present dispensation and will in the future. But salvation has been and will continue to be available to him by God's grace through faith. [C. I. Scofield, *Scofield Reference Bible*, 1909, 1917 (notes on John 1:17 sec. 2), p. 3.]

58. *Dispensationalism: A Return to Biblical Theology or Pseudo Christian Cult?* Op. Cit.

59. *Dispensationalism: A Return to Biblical Theology or Pseudo Christian Cult?* Op. Cit.

60. Charles Ryrie, *The Relationship of the New Covenant to Premillennialism* (unpublished Master's thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary 1947), p. 31.

61. T. C. Hammond, *In Understanding Be Men, A Handbook on Christian Doctrine for Non-theological Students*, (Chicago: Inter-Varsity Press, 1958), p. 188.

62. “Prophecy as Fiction?” Recorded interview with Tim LaHaye, *Modern Reformation*, Volume 10, No. 5, Sept/Oct 2001, pp. 42-46.

63. This idea was propagated by Aimee Semple McPherson in her book *Lost and Restored*. Many Pentecostals have interpreted church history as a sequence of restorative steps back to the

pristine or Apostolic era of the Church. Aimee claimed that she received this understanding by direct revelation without a premeditative thought about it. This almost exact view of Church restoration, with Aimee’s modified chart, is found in S. C. McClain’s *Highlights in Church History*. His book has shaped many Oneness people’s views of Church history and its restoration. It also has influenced their understanding of the place of Oneness theology in Church history. McClain says that the Pentecostal movement brought “the beginning of a new epoch in the history of the Christian church. Many new organizations, standing for different phases of gospel truth, had sprung up as results from the great revivals in the previous church period, . . .” McClain believed that within the Age of the Church itself there were “different phases of gospel truth.”

64. John 12:35 Then Jesus said unto them, Yet a little while is the light with you. Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you: for he that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth.

65. Phoebe Palmer, *Full Salvation; Its Doctrine and Duties*, (Salem, OH: Schmul Publishers, 1979), p. 27.

66. Harmon A. Baldwin, *Lessons for Seekers of Holiness*, (Chicago, W. B. Rose, Agent, 1918), Online, Accessed: 24 July 2001, Available at: <http://home.earthlink.net/~adamsfm/mac/Chptr04.html>

67. J. W. Jepson, *If You Want To Be Perfect, Start Now*, copyright © 1998 by J. W. Jepson, Online, Accessed: 24 July 2001, Available at: <http://www.christcenter.net/Perfect.htm>

68. “It’s Not Dark Where I’m Standing,” Paul S. Jernigan, General Sunday School Coordinator, 92nd Annual General Assembly of The Church of God, August 29, 1997, Chattanooga, Tennessee, Online, Accessed 24 July 2001, Available at: <http://www.thechurchofgod.org/97assembly/messages/pjernigan.htm>

69. “The Last Seven Years,” Online, Accessed: 24 July 2001, Available at: <http://godstuff.virtualave.net/BB3/BB3.06.html>

70. "Let There Be Light" Ministries," January - February, 2001, Online, Accessed 24 July 2001, Available at: <http://www.lightministries.com/webdoc241.htm>

71. Acts 17:29-31 (NIV).

72. Aimee relates that she was standing before a large crowd and praying for God to give her something to say, when: “**Just then something happened** – the power of God went surging through my body, waves of glory and praise swept through my soul, until I forgot the throng of eager faces that

had a moment before seemed to swim before me, forgot the footlights, and the learned men with their long tailed coats, forgot that I was only a child of eighteen, and the many there with their grey hair knew more in a moment than I in the natural could know in a lifetime, and ‘**I was in the Spirit.**’ . . . My mouth opened, the Lord took control of my tongue, my lips and vocal organs, and began to speak through me, not in tongues but in English. The Spirit spoke in prophecy, and as He spoke through me I did not know what the next word was to be. . . .” [Aimee Semple McPherson, *Lost and Restored: The Dispensation of the Holy Spirit from the Ascension of the Lord Jesus to His Coming Descension*, (Los Angeles, CA: Foursquare Publications, 1989), p. 8f.]

73. McPherson, *Lost and Restored*, p. 4.

74. S. C. McClain, *Highlights in Church History*, (Hazelwood, MO: Word Aflame Press, 1990), n.p.

75. McClain, Op. Cit, p. 55. On this same page McClain interprets Nahum 2:3-5 as predicting the coming of the automobile. He says that the fulfillment of this “prophecy” is a confirmation of the Pentecostal revival because “in the very year 1900, in which Henry Ford demonstrated his first automobile on the streets of Detroit, God began in a general way to pour out His Holy Spirit with the initial sign of speaking in other tongues in the same manner as on the Day of Pentecost in 30 A.D.”

76. Ethel E. Goss, *The Winds of God*, (Hazelwood, MO: Word Aflame Press, 1990), p. 245-6.

77. G. T. Haywood, *The Birth of the Spirit in the Days of the Apostles*, (Indianapolis, IN: Christ Temple Book Store, n. d.), p. 12.

78. Evangelist Andrew D. Urshan, *Apostolic Faith Doctrine of the New Birth*, (Cochrane, WI, self-published, 1941), p. 13.

79. Coming from the outside. Not developing within but being insert from the outside.

80. Robert D. Brinsmead, “Christ, the Meaning of All Scripture, Life and History,” Online, Accessed: 21 August 2001, Available at: www.presenttruthmag.com/archive/XLIII/43-1.htm

81. Eschatology means the study of last or final things.

82. Acts 13:32-34 (NIV)

83. Compare my chart on the [“The Already and the Not Yet”](#)

84. 1 John 3:2-3 (NIV)