

Modern dispensationalism

AUTHOR [Allis, Oswald T.](#)

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MODERN DISPENSATIONALISM AND THE DOCTRINE OF THE UNITY OF SCRIPTURE

the rejection of the Old Testament, in part or in whole, was one of the numerous errors of the Gnostics

by

Oswald T. Allis

No doctrine concerning Scripture is of more practical importance to the Bible student than that which affirms its unity and harmony. Obviously, the trustworthiness, perspicuity and plenary inspiration of Scripture cannot be maintained aside from the belief that the Bible is a thoroughly self-consistent whole. The Westminster Confession of Faith in enumerating some of the “incomparable excellencies” of Scripture, mentions “the consent of all the parts”. And it is on the basis of a recognition of this essential feature that the Westminster divines laid down this “infallible rule” for the interpretation of Scripture

“The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself; and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold, but one) it may be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly.” (1)

This rule has been called the "analogy of Scripture" or the "analogy of faith". Its meaning and importance has been well stated by Hodge:

"If the Scriptures be what they claim to be, the word of God, they are the work of one mind, and that mind divine. From this it follows that Scripture cannot contradict Scripture. God cannot teach in one place anything which is inconsistent with what He teaches in another. Hence Scripture must explain Scripture. If a passage admits of different interpretations, that only can be the true one which agrees with what the Bible teaches elsewhere on the same subject." (2)

This great doctrine has been recognized and accepted, more or less clearly and consistently, by the Christian Church throughout its history. It has been a sign of heresy to reject or ignore any part or portion of Holy Writ. Thus the rejection of the Old Testament, in part or in whole, was one of the numerous errors of the Gnostics. Within comparatively recent times-a century or more-this doctrine has been challenged by two quite different groups, both claiming a place within the Christian Church.

The so-called "Higher Criticism" has as one of its most characteristic and fundamental assumptions the denial of the unity and harmony of the Scriptures. In place of the doctrine of the "consent of all the parts", it posits the doctrine of the dissent of all or many of the parts. It divides the Pentateuch, for example, into documents which differ from and even contradict one another; and it is not too much to say that these documents are constructed on the basis of, and with a view to establishing and illustrating, the alleged differences. Thus, the opening chapters of Genesis are alleged to evidence two different and contradictory traditions as to the antiquity of the covenant name LORD (JHWH). According to one tradition (the J account) the name was known and used from the earliest times; according to the other (the P account) it was first used in the days of Moses. So considered the Higher Criticism may be described as a quest of contradictions. Document is pitted against document; and it is simply astonishing the number of differences and contradictions which the enterprising critic can find in narratives which to the uninitiated show remarkable evidence of unity, continuity and harmony. The Higher Criticism is justly entitled to the name "divisive", because it divides up Scripture into documents which have no existence except in the imagination of the critics. The Higher Criticism is also rightly called "destructive" because the divisive method which it employs is de-

destructive of the ordered and organically progressive unity of the Bible and tends to disintegrate it into a meaningless mass of contradictions. One of the most dangerous of the contradictions introduced into Scripture by the critics is the recognition of two distinct types of religion in the Bible, the priestly and the prophetic, “prophetic” religion being the true one and finding its fruition in Christianity. This leads logically to the rejection of the vicarious atonement of Christ, of which the “priestly” religion of the Old Testament was directly typical. The Higher Criticism in short is the error of the Bible disbeliever.

II

The second” divisive “tendency within Christendom today is one which we hesitate to place in the same category with the one just mentioned because while it clearly belongs there it differs from the Higher Criticism in many important respects. If Higher Criticism is the error of the Bible-disbeliever, “Dispensationalism “, as it is called, is the error of many a Bible-believer. The Higher Criticism is naturalistic and is largely dominated by the theory of evolution. Dispensationalism is intensely super-naturalistic and even catastrophic in its view of human history and destiny. Higher Criticism reduces Scripture to a merely human book, inspired if at all only as Shakespeare is inspired.

Dispensationalism holds a high view of Scripture and assigns to it a unique inspiration and authority as the very Word of God. Higher Criticism, at least in its consistent forms, finds in the Cross a stumbling block or foolishness.

Dispensationalism, with an important exception to be noted later, exalts the Cross as the only hope of hell-deserving sinners. But, despite these and other differences that might be mentioned, Dispensationalism shares with Higher Criticism its fundamental error. It is divisive and holds a doctrine of Scripture which tends to be and is in many respects as destructive of that high view of Scripture which its advocates assert as it is disastrous to some of the doctrines most precious to the hearts of those that hold it. In a word, despite all their differences Higher Criticism and Dispensationalism are in this one respect strikingly similar. Higher Criticism divides Scripture up into Documents which differ from or contradict one another. Dispensationalism divides the Bible up into dispensations which differ from or even contradict one another; and so radical is this difference as viewed by the extremist that the Christian of today who ac-

cepts the Dispensational view finds his Bible (the part directly intended for him) shrunk to the compass of the Imprisonment Epistles.

The divisive tendency inherent in Dispensationalism appears clearly in the definition of a” dispensation “as given, for example, in the widely used Scofield Bible:

“A dispensation is a period of time during which man is tested in respect to obedience to some specific revelation of the will of God. Seven such dispensations are distinguished in Scripture.” (3)

Dispensationalists differ as to the number and extent of these dispensations. The seven recognized in the Scofield Bible are Innocency, Conscience, Human Government, Promise, Law, Grace, Kingdom. And since during each dispensation man is tested in respect of some special revelation of the will of God”, the tendency is to confine to or concentrate each of these specific features in its own proper period, and to set each period definitely and distinctly over against and even at odds with the others. This leads to strained exegesis and strong-arm methods of inclusion and exclusion which are dangerous in the extreme. For the purpose of the present discussion we shall confine ourselves to the last three of the dispensations : Law, Grace, Kingdom.

One of the best known and at the same time most characteristic illustrations of the dispensational method and the dangers that beset it is the Lord’s Prayer. There are thousands of Christians today who do not use this prayer: there are many ministers who have eliminated it from the accustomed order of worship in their churches. Why is this ? The reason is briefly stated in the comment which is found in the margin of the Scofield Bible on the Fifth Petition, “and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors”:

“This is legal ground. Cf. Eph. iv. 32, which is grace. Under law forgiveness is conditioned upon a like spirit in us ; under grace we are forgiven for Christ’s sake, and exhorted to forgive because we have been forgiven. See Matt. xviii. 32 xxvi. 28, note.” (4)

“This is legal ground” is the indictment brought by Dispensationalism against this petition. Law, of course, belongs to the Dispensation of Law. We are today in the Church age, the Dispensation of Grace. Therefore this petition and by

inference the whole prayer is legal and not for the Christian. Dr. Haldeman puts it bluntly when he says “. . . it does not belong to the Church, it is not for the Christian at all “. He calls it “a prayer that has no more place in the Christian church than the thunders of Sinai, or the offerings of Leviticus “(5)

It should hardly be necessary to call attention to the radical way in which Dispensationalism thus cuts itself off from historical Protestantism. Schaff in a brief comparison of “the typical Catechisms of Protestantism,” – Luther’s (1529), the Heidelberg (1563), the Anglican (1549), and the Westminster Shorter Catechism (1647) – says of them all: “They are essentially agreed in the fundamental doctrines of catholic and evangelical religion. They teach the articles of the Apostles’ Creed, the Ten Commandments, and the Lord’s Prayer; that is, all that is necessary for a man to believe and to do in order to be saved. They thus exhibit the harmony of the chief branches of orthodox Protestant Christendom.” (6)

Three elements common to all – the Apostles’ Creed, the Ten Commandments and the Lord’s Prayer ! (7). Yet many Dispensationalists refuse to recite the Lord’s Prayer, mainly because the Fifth Petition is legal ground; and of course the inclusion of the Ten commandments in these catechisms makes them doubly offensive to the thoroughgoing Dispensationalist. For what could be more legal than the Decalogue ?

III

Having noted how radical is the departure of Dispensationalism from traditional Protestant usage as to the Lord’s Prayer, let us examine the reasons given in the Scofield Bible in support of it. After describing the words of the ” Fifth Petition” as “legal ground”, the comment goes on to say, “Cf. Eph. iv. 32, which is grace.” This verse which reads as follows, “And be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you “; is interpreted to mean, ” Under law forgiveness is conditioned upon a like spirit in us ; under grace we are forgiven for Christ’s sake and exhorted to forgive because we have been forgiven”. We are then referred to ” Matt. xviii. 32 and xxvi. 28, note.” Turning first to the latter passage where there is a marginal note which deals with the subject of “Forgiveness” we read, “Human forgiveness rests upon and results from the divine forgiveness. In many passages this is

assumed rather than stated, but the principle is declared in Eph. iv. 32 ; Matt. xviii. 32, 33". We have turned to this note first, because it indicates with perfect clearness that Matt. xviii. 32, 33, like Eph. iv. 32, states the principle of forgiveness under grace. This can be the only meaning of the placing of Eph. iv. 32 and Matt. xviii. 32, 33, together in the statement : " . . . the principle is declared in Eph. iv. 32 ; Matt. xviii. 32, 33 ". Both passages referred to must illustrate the same thing, the principle of forgiveness under 'grace'. Let us now turn to Matt. xviii. 32, 33. These verses are a part of the conclusion of the Parable of the Unmerciful Servant, a passage which sets forth the obligation of forgiveness with terrible impressiveness

"32. Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me

"33. Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee ?"

This according to the Scofield Bible is "grace" and is similar to Eph. iv. 32. But let us read on to the end of the chapter:

"34. And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him.

"35. So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses."

What is verse 35 if not a tremendously impressive enforcement of the " Fifth Petition" ? Could its words correspond more exactly to the "reasons annexed" to that petition – the only petition in the whole prayer which receives further elucidation and emphasis from the lips of the Divine Teacher ?

"For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you:

"But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."

And does not this whole principle find clear and beautiful expression in the words of the Westminster Shorter Catechism ? “In the fifth petition, which is, And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors, we pray, that God, for Christ’s sake, would freely pardon all our sins which we are the rather encouraged to ask because by his grace we are enabled from the heart to forgive others.” (8)

We have here a striking illustration of one of the worst features of the Scofield Bible, the frequent ignoring of verses which refute the view of the editor. Matt. xviii. 32 and 33 are appealed to because they seem, superficially considered, to support the distinction between “law” and “grace” that is here insisted on, but Matt. xviii. 35 is ignored because that verse proves the distinction to be a mistaken one by teaching exactly what Matt. vi. 12 and its inspired elucidation in verses 14-15 teach, that only those who forgive may expect to be forgiven. Either, like the higher critic whose methods he abhors, the Dispensationalist must divide the Parable of the Unmerciful Servant into two “documents ‘, a “law” document containing verse 35 and a grace” document containing verses 32-33 or he must treat that parable throughout as either “law or grace “(9); or he must admit that the interpretation which he places on the Fifth Petition is a mistaken one and that the sentiment expressed in it is eminently Christian and is obligatory upon every true follower of Him who said to his disciples, When ye pray, say, “...forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors...”

While the Dispensational treatment of the Lord’s Prayer is sufficiently startling to the uninitiated, there are other aspects of Dispensationalism which are even more destructive of a consistently Christian view of the Scriptures. The issue in the case of the Lord’s Prayer concerns the difference between the dispensation of “law” and that of “grace “. We now turn to a question which concerns or rather becomes especially insistent as regards the last two dispensations, those of ” grace ” and of the kingdom.”

IV

The very heart of the Bible is its message of Salvation. It is because it gives the only true and adequate answer to the question, “What must I do to be saved ? ” that the Bible is the most precious Book in the world. Now the question may very properly be asked in view of the alleged distinct dispensations, whether

the Bible gives a consistent answer to this question throughout or not. In 'Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth', Dr. Scofield makes a statement that is arresting to say the least, "It should be needless to say that, in this Dispensation, neither Jew nor Gentile can be saved otherwise than by the exercise of that faith on the Lord Jesus Christ whereby both are born again..." (p.5) Why the qualifying words, "in this Dispensation" ? the reader naturally asks. Have there been or are there to be dispensations of which this could not be said ? The very fact that the statement is qualified implies or at least suggests an affirmative answer.

But the question is far too important to leave the answer to mere inference. Is there definite warrant for such an inference ? For an answer to our question we turn back to the Scofield Bible. A comment on the word "Gentiles" at Matt. x. 5 reads thus : "The kingdom was promised to the Jews. Gentiles could be blessed only through Christ crucified and risen. Cf. John xii. 20-24." Here we have a statement that seems clearly to teach that there was an essential difference between salvation for the Jew and salvation for the Gentile. The one needed the kingdom, the other needed Christ crucified and risen. (10) We turn to a still more noteworthy statement. In the comment on the word "everlasting" in the phrase "everlasting gospel" (Rev. xiv. 6) we are told in the Scofield Bible that "four forms of the Gospel are to be distinguished". They are the Gospel of the kingdom, the Gospel of the grace of God, the everlasting Gospel, and what Paul calls "my Gospel". The statements regarding all four are informing and should be carefully studied by every one who really desires to understand Dispensationalism. It is with the first two "forms" that we are here particularly concerned. They are defined and contrasted in the following terms:

"(i) The Gospel of the kingdom. This is the good news that God purposes to set up on the earth, in fulfilment of the Davidic Covenant (2 Sam. vii. 16, and refs.) a kingdom, political, spiritual, Israelitish, universal, over which God's Son, David's heir, shall be King, and which shall be, for one thousand years, the manifestation of the righteousness of God in human affairs. See Matt. iii. 2, note.

"Two preachings of this Gospel are mentioned, one past, beginning with the ministry of John the Baptist, continued by our Lord and His disciples, and ending with the Jewish rejection of the King. The other is yet future (Matt. xxiv.

14), during the great tribulation, and immediately preceding the coming of the King in glory.

(2) The Gospel of the grace of God. This is the good news that Jesus Christ, the rejected King, has died on the cross for the sins of the world, that He was raised from the dead for our justification, and that by Him all that believe are justified from all things. This form of the Gospel is described in many ways. It is the Gospel 'of God' (Rom. i. i), because it originates in His love ; 'of Christ' (2 Cor. x. 14) because it flows from His sacrifice, and because He is the alone Object of Gospel faith ; of 'the grace of God' (Acts xx. 24) because it saves those whom the law curses ; of 'the glory' (I Tim. i. 11 ; 2 Cor. iv. 4) because it concerns Him who is in the glory, and who is bringing the many sons to glory (Heb. ii. 10); of our salvation' (Eph. i. 13) because it is the 'power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth (Rom. i. 16) ; of 'the uncircumcision' (Gal. ii. 7) because it saves wholly apart from forms and ordinances ; of 'peace' (Eph. vi. 15) because through Christ it makes peace between the sinner and God, and imparts inward peace." (p.1343, note 1)

The most startling thing about these two "forms" of the Gospel, when we compare them, is their mutual exclusiveness. The one speaks of the Davidic King, the other of the crucified and risen Saviour. The Gospel of the grace of God-in a word, the Cross-belongs to the Church age; the Gospel of the kingdom was preached before the Church was founded and is to be preached after the Church is "raptured ". But it is a different Gospel. It is the Gospel of the Crown, not the Cross. This is consistent Dispensationalism. "Grace" and "the Kingdom" belong to two distinct dispensations which are set definitely in contrast, and each has a Gospel of its own (11).

Salvation clearly will be on a quite different basis in the Kingdom age from what it is today in the Church age.

V

It is not the purpose of the present discussion to enter into a consideration of such problems as the "postponement" theory of the Kingdom and the "parenthesis" view of the Church, the very intricacy of which shows, how difficult, how impossible in fact, it is to impose the dispensational theories upon the Bible. What we are now concerned to point out is the grievous error of separat-

ing in this arbitrary way between the precious offices of Christ, as Prophet, Priest, and King, all of which belong in a most real and vital sense to every age. It was the crucified and risen Lord who had showed his disciples the print of the nails in his hands who said to them, “All power is given unto me in heaven and on earth.” The present reign of Christ as king of his Church is a doctrine that is sadly obscured or directly denied by Dispensationalism. Yet Paul is not speaking of a future Kingdom age but of a present state when he affirms in writing to the Christians at Colossae that they have been translated into the kingdom of God’s dear Son; or when he reminds the Church at Ephesus that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ has exalted Him “far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come “: The Westminster Confession of Faith rightly affirms that the visible Church is “the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ ” (Chap XXV.2).

And the Westminster Shorter Catechism declares that ” Christ executeth the office of a king, in subduing us to himself, in ruling and defending us, and in restraining and conquering all his and our enemies.” (Q.26). To divorce the priestly and kingly offices of Christ, to assign one to the present age and the other to a future age is to impoverish both. The Lord Jesus Christ in all his precious and indispensable offices belongs to each and every age. As Hodge has well expressed it: “The common doctrine of the Church has ever been, that the plan of salvation has been the same from the beginning . . . having the same promise, the same Saviour, the same condition, and the same salvation.”

(Systematic Theology Vol. 2, p.366). This does not mean that there is not a valid and proper distinction to be drawn between the mediatorial kingdom and the final kingdom, between the Church militant and the Church triumphant. But it does mean that Christ as Saviour and as King belongs to both, is indispensably necessary to both.

The distinction between the Church age and the Kingdom age which we have been considering, a distinction which involves the recognition of a distinct “Gospel” for each, brings us naturally and inevitably to this question: How will men be saved in the Kingdom age ? For an answer to this question we turn to the “Summary” on the “Kingdom” (Old Testament) as given in the Scofield Bible, where we read

“The kingdom is to be established by power, not persuasion, and is to follow divine judgment upon the Gentile world-powers (Ps. ii. 4-9 ; Isa. ix. 7; Dan. ii. 35, 44, 45; vii. 26, 27 ; Zech. xiv. 1-19). See Zech. vi. 11, note.” (p.977).

It will be observed that practically all the passages here quoted speak in terms of kingly rule and obedient service, but not in terms of redemption or atonement. (12) Men are to be saved apparently by obedience to the King and not by trust in the Saviour. The Sermon on the Mount is said to give us the “Constitution ” of the kingdom. It is “pure law” ; and apparently it is to be perfectly kept by all the righteous in the Kingdom age (13). Thus we observe that the New Testament Kingdom age of the future has a very important feature in common with the Old Testament Kingdom age. The Davidic kingdom belonged to and was a part of the dispensation of “law”.

The future Kingdom age will likewise be an age of “law”, not of grace.

How, then, does the ” Gospel of the kingdom ” which is, as we have seen, a gospel of power and obedience and belongs to an age of law, compare in effectiveness with the “Gospel of the grace of God” ? The answer is significant. In the comment on what the Scofield Bible declares to be “Dispensationally... the most important passage in the New Testament” (Acts xv. 13f), the statement is made, “The Gospel [that is, ‘the Gospel of the grace of God’] has never anywhere converted all, but everywhere called out some.” (p.1168). But during the Kingdom age (p.977) which is to follow and apparently show the results of the preaching of the “Gospel of the kingdom” “the enormous majority of earth’s inhabitants will be saved”; and the comment goes on to state, “The New Testament (Rev. xx. 1-5) adds a detail of immense significance – the removal of Satan from the scene. It is impossible to conceive to what heights of spiritual, intellectual, and physical perfection humanity will attain in this, its coming age of righteousness and peace (Isa. xi. 4-9 ; Psa. lxxii. 1-10).” What does this mean, if not that the preaching of the Cross is relatively of little efficacy as compared with the exercise of the kingly power at or in connection with the coming of the King and the “removal of Satan from the scene” in the Kingdom age? And if the establishment of the kingdom and the removal of Satan can make it possible for men to attain in that age to such incredible heights of spiritual, intellectual, and physical perfection, how will this “enormous majority of earth dwellers” be able to join with the Church-saints, who never attained to these

heights, in singing praises to the Lamb that was slain, and hath redeemed us by his precious blood? What meaning will the Cross have for those who have attained to a legal righteousness in the Kingdom age ?

VI

This separation between the Kingdom and the Church which is as unscriptural as it is dangerous leads to one of the most serious errors of Dispensationalism, the tendency to minimize the importance of the present Gospel age in the interest of the Kingdom age that is to come. This is the age of individual conversions, the snatching of a brand here and there from the burning. That is to be an age of mass conversions, nations born in a day. Yet this age as has been pointed out is, according to Dispensationalism, pre-eminently, we may even say exclusively, the age of the preaching of the Cross. We have said above that the Dispensationalist with an exception to be noted later, exalts the Cross as the only hope of hell-deserving sinners. Here we see clearly what the exception is. It is a very important exception. It is for the dispensation of grace, for the Church age and for this age only that he exalts the Cross. One of the most amazing statements to be found in the Scofield Bible concerns the meaning of the phrase "at hand" as used by Jesus in Matt. iv. 17:

"'At hand' is never a positive affirmation that the person or thing said to be 'at hand' will immediately appear, but only that no known or predicted event must intervene. When Christ appeared to the Jewish people, the next thing, in the order of revelation as it then stood, should have been the setting up of the Davidic kingdom. In the knowledge of God, not yet disclosed, lay the rejection of the kingdom (and King), the long period of the mystery-form of the kingdom, the world-wide preaching of the cross, and the out-calling of the Church. But this was as yet locked up in the secret counsels of God (Matt. xiii. 11, 17 ; Eph. iii. 3-10)." (p.998 note).

How such a statement can be reconciled as to the Old Testament with the 22nd and 110th Psalms and the 53rd of Isaiah, or as to the New Testament with the words with which the Baptist greeted our Lord, "Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world"; or with the words of the risen Lord to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, "O fools and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: Ought not Christ to have suffered these things,

and to enter into his glory ?” or with the whole grand argument of the Epistle to the Hebrews, is a mystery. They are simply irreconcilable. But what we are here concerned to point out is the terrible way in which this treatment of the Cross disparages it and minimizes its importance in the history of redemption. The “Gospel of the grace of God” is, according to the Scofield Bible, the Gospel for the Church age ; and the Church age is a parenthesis of indeterminate length between the sixty-ninth and seventieth weeks of Daniel ix. It is an interlude in the history of God’s people Israel. It is a time when the great prophetic clock is silent. It does not figure in prophetic history.

It is “time out ” in sacred chronology. Yet this parenthesis period is the Church age, the age of the Cross, of the preaching of the gospel of the grace of God. How could a “Bible Christian” minimize more seriously the value and centrality of the Cross in Biblical Revelation ? (14)

This will sound like a gross misrepresentation to many Dispensationalists.

But we ask them simply to ponder the words: “When Christ appeared to the Jewish people, the next thing in the order of revelation as it then stood, should have been the setting up of the Davidic kingdom.” We ask them to read again the definition of the “Gospel of the kingdom” and then to face this question seriously and squarely, Where does the Cross come in? It is hard to see how any thorough-going dispensationalist can sing the lines of the familiar hymn, “In the Cross of Christ I glory, Towering o’er the wrecks of time; ‘All the light of sacred story Gathers round its head sublime’.” For, according to the logic of his position, the Cross belongs to the Church age, not to sacred story as a whole. And it is a parenthesis, we are tempted to say, merely a parenthesis, between the Kingdom age that is past and the Kingdom age that is yet to come.

One of the most characteristic features of Dispensationalism is its pessimistic view of the present or Church age. The Bible teaches that this is the age or dispensation of the Spirit. Jesus said to his disciples before his Death, “It is expedient for you that I go away. For if I go not away the Comforter will not come unto you.” The Bible also teaches that this is the age of the invisible reign of the Sovereign Lord who said, “All power is given unto me in heaven and on earth.” Yet the Dispensationalist regards this age as demonstrably bankrupt and is looking to the Kingdom age to accomplish by a display of kingly power and

through the binding of Satan what the preaching of the Cross has been unable to accomplish in nineteen Christian centuries. What is this if not to minimize the Cross? Yet it is the clear teaching of Scripture and the experience of every true Christian that it is the preaching of the Cross which is the power of God unto salvation, that it is by his Cross that the divine Saviour, has drawn, is drawing, and will draw all men unto Himself.

VII

In what has been said above the writer has been speaking of consistent Dispensationalism and its implications, and has appealed especially to the express statements of the Scofield Bible. Fortunately the Dispensationalists are not thoroughly consistent. Doubtless many of the Dispensationalists who read this article, if they do read it, will say that they do not draw these conclusions. The reason the Scofield Bible is such an extremely difficult book to understand is because the attempt to avoid the logical implications of a consistent dispensationalism makes it at many points a jumble of inconsistencies and contradictions. But if we are to have the distinct dispensations of law, grace and the kingdom, and if the dispensation of grace, or the Church age, is to be regarded as merely an interlude in God's dealings with Israel, a parenthesis in the history of redemption, the inferences and conclusions which we have stated are logical and inevitable.

The fundamental error of Dispensationalism is, as was stated at the outset, that its attitude toward Scripture is divisive, and consequently destructive of its essential unity and harmony. What is needed today is a return to and a hearty recognition of the fundamental importance of that great doctrine regarding Scripture of the "consent of all the parts". The slogan of Dispensationalism, "rightly dividing the word of truth", is itself a misinterpretation. This exhortation does not mean to divide up Scripture into dispensations and set each one at variance with the others, but so to interpret it that by a study of each and every part, the glorious unity and harmony of the whole shall be exhibited and the correctness of the exposition of the one part be established by its perfect agreement with every other part of Scripture as the God-inspired Word.

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

OSWALD T. ALLIS, former Professor of Old Testament in Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia

1 chap. I, 9.

2 Systematic Theology, Vol. I, 187.

3 p. 5, note 4.

4 p. 1002, note 1.

5 How to Study the Bible, pp. 135, 140.

6 History of the Christian Church, Vol. VI, p. 555.

7 In the Westminster Shorter catechism there are 107 questions and answers of which about forty deal with the Ten commandments and nine with the Lord's Prayer. 8 The word "freely" is especially noteworthy. This is not unwarranted exegesis. It is simply the application of the principle that Scripture, which so clearly teaches that salvation is of grace, must interpret this passage in harmony, not in conflict with itself. 9 According to the Scofield Bible Matt. xviii. belongs to the period after "the kingdom of heaven ...has been morally rejected" and "the new message" of "rest and service" or "discipleship has been substituted (cf. Scofield Bible, p. 1011). Since according to the Scofield Bible the "final rejection" did not take place till Matt. xxi. (Bullinger puts it at Acts xxviii.), the attempt might be made to explain the alleged contradiction between "law" and "grace" in Matt. xviii. 32-35 as due to the period being "transitional". But there is no excuse for ignoring verse 35, however it may be explained. 10 In justice to Dr. Scofield it should be stated here that he not only recognizes but stresses the fact that the Old Testament ritual of sacrifice plainly sets forth in type Christ in his atoning work as Saviour. But the form of statement here must be admitted to be both unfortunate and dangerous. 11 The antithesis between these different "forms" of the Gospel appears especially clearly in a statement in the definition of the "everlasting Gospel" which is mentioned third in the list (p. 1343). There we are told definitely, "It is neither the Gospel of the kingdom, nor of grace". 12 In the comment on Zech. vi. 51, there is definite reference to the priesthood of Christ. But this note is itself an anomaly because according to the definite teaching of the Scofield Bible, the "rejection of the king", which led directly to the Cross, "was as yet locked up in the secret counsels of God" (p.998). How then could it be revealed in Zech. vi. 11f? 13 p. 999, note 2. It is not expressly stated here that perfect obedience will constitute "righteousness" in the Kingdom age. But the inference is a natural one. It is instructive to note

in this connection that the “exposition of the Davidic Covenant by the prophets” (p.977) makes no mention of “atonement”. Yet we are told that this Covenant “has not been abrogated but is yet to be fulfilled.” Furthermore we are told elsewhere (p.1226) that this promise “enters the New Testament absolutely unchanged” and the sections under this head which describe the future kingdom say nothing of salvation but speak in terms of royal rule and authority. Chafer (‘The Kingdom is, History and Prophecy’, p.49) tells us: “It should be borne in mind that the legal kingdom requirements as stated in the Sermon on the Mount are meant to prepare the way for, and condition life in, the earthly Davidic kingdom when it shall be set up upon the earth...” 14 The “parenthesis” view of the Church which is taught in the Scofield Bible sheds important light upon the distinction drawn there between the Gospel of the grace of God and the Gospel of the kingdom. Throughout the entire Church age the Gospel of the grace of God has been and is to be proclaimed by Christians, i.e. by Church-saints. But if the entire Church, every true Christian, is to be raptured ”at the (invisible) return of Christ for his saints, there occurs of necessity a definite break between the Church age and the Kingdom age which it is difficult to bridge. After the Rapture there will be no Christians left on earth to preach that Gospel which has been the power of God unto salvation during the Church age.

Consequently, those who hold this view have recourse to the two witnesses” (Moses and Elijah, or Enoch and Elijah) of Rev. xi. 3, and a Jewish remnant who will have turned unto the Lord during the Great Tribulation (Scofield Bible, p. 1205). They are to take up and proclaim the beautiful gospel of the kingdom” (Ibid., p.949). We observe, therefore, that the Gospel of the kingdom differs from the Gospel of the grace of God, no less as to its contents than as to its heralds. It is to be a continuation of the Old Testament kingdom and its heralds are to be not the New Testament apostles but Old Testament saints (Moses or Enoch and Elijah) and not believing Christians, but Jews, who have not believed at the preaching of the Gospel of the grace of God during the Church age (had they done so they would have been raptured), but to whom the preaching of the Cross was foolishness, and who remained in unbelief until after the Rapture. How could the break between the Kingdom and the Church be made more emphatic?

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