

# DISPENSATIONALISM IN THE 90s AND ITS RELATION TO PRETRIBULATIONISM

Charles C. Ryrie

(Much of this material is included in a chapter in a forthcoming book. Therefore, I did not feel the liberty to reproduce the entire chapter in advance of publication. Hence only this outline).

Two questions to be considered. (1) Is dispensationalism developing and/or changing? (2) What may be the effect of change or development on pretribulationism?

I. The Difference Between Development and Change in Theology (including the need for criteria against which development and/or change can be measured)

II. Contributions in the Past

- A. J. N. Darby (1800-1882)
- B. Early Bible Conferences in America (1883-1897)
- C. C.I. Scofield (1843-1921) and L.S. Chafer (1871-1952)
- D. The Sine Qua Non in Dispensationalism Today (1965)

III. Today's Progressive Dispensationalism

- A. Its Rejection of the (and probably any) Sine Qua Non
- B. The "Already/Not Yet" Fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant
- C. The Blurring of the Israel/Church Distinction
- D. Its Complementary Hermeneutic

IV. Possible Eschatological Fallout from Progressive Dispensationalism

- A. Because the Body of Christ Is Less Distinct, since
  - 1. The mystery of the body of Christ is redefined, and
  - 2. Spirit baptism is not unique to this age, and
  - 3. The Israelitish character of Daniel's 70 weeks is given very little attention;
- B. The Pretribulation Rapture Is No Longer on Solid Ground, since
  - 1. History teaches us that the 'already/not yet' view of the kingdom can accommodate posttribulationism (as in the theology of G.E. Ladd), and in the moderate form of dispensationalism (the designation used by posttribulationist Robert Gundry before progressive dispensationalism came on the scene),  
  
and since
    - 2. A complementary hermeneutic provides no sure boundaries against complementary revelations which in reality depart from literal interpretation. For example, what, in using a complementary hermeneutic, forbids understanding the temple

in Rev. 11 as an image representing the messianic community of both Jews and Gentiles, therefore placing the church in the tribulation?

and since

3. The importance between a present earth vs. a new earth millennium is already lessened, can the importance of God's returning to His program for Israel in the tribulation, having removed the church before the 70th week begins, be far behind? The following quotes are taken from *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church* (Zondervan, 1992).

Robert L. Saucy, pp. 145, 146: "A mystery may be hidden in the sense that its truth has yet been realized. The corresponding revelation consists not in making the truth known in an objective or propositional sense but in bringing it to reality or existence . . . [Saucy then quotes Grosheide with approval] Hidden does not mean 'totally unknown,' but 'not yet existing.'"

David L. Turner, p. 288: "This number [12] is . . . most frequently associated with the sons of Jacob, the twelve tribes of Israel, and the twelve apostles of the 'new Israel,' the church."

Bock and Blaising pp. 392-393 on the meaning of complementary hermeneutics: "According to this approach, the New Testament does introduce change and advance; it does not merely repeat Old Testament revelation. In making complementary additions, however, it does not jettison old promises. The enhancement is not at the expense of the original promise."(.)

The following quote is from Robert L. Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism* (Zondervan, 1993), pp. 183-186. "The recognition that Spirit baptism belongs to all of the participants of the new covenant, including the nation of Israel when it turns to the Messiah, raises the question how to apply the images metaphors associated with the present work of God in the church. This question is especially important in relation to the metaphor of the body. According to the apostle Paul, baptism with the Spirit forms the body of Christ [which] is frequently identified with the church . . . From this we could conclude that all participants in the new covenant, including the nation of Israel, are included in the church as the body of Christ and therefore any distinction between Israel and the church--which is at the heart of the dispensationalism interpretation--is prohibited. And what can be said of the body would seem to apply to the other images of the church also . . . A study of the body metaphor therefore leads us to conclude that this image is applicable to others besides believers who are in the church."

The following quote is from *Understanding Dispensationalists* by Vern S. Poythress (Zondervan, 1987), p. 22: "A fourth and final point of distinctiveness [of normative dispensationalism] is the belief in a pretribulational rapture . . . Though this is one of the best known aspects of popular dispensationalism, it is not as foundational as the other distinctives. It is simply a product of the other distinctives. Nevertheless it is an important product. Scofield maintains that the church and Israel have distinct, parallel destinies. Since prophecy concerns Israel and not the church, the church must be removed from the scene at the Rapture before Old Testament prophecy can begin to be fulfilled again. At that time Israel will be restored and Daniel 9:24-27 can run to completion. If the church is not removed, the destinies of the church and Israel threaten to mix."