

Saturday, April 28, 2012—*Soldiers Training for Service*—Faith of Our Fathers—I: A Brief History of Dispensational Theology Through 1825

## **Introduction**

- In this first study we are going to focus our attention on dispensational theology in general. Therefore we will be looking at the history and development of dispensational thinking and principles through the year 1825. The next two studies will focus specifically on the historical development of the Mid-Acts position.
- The opponents of dispensational theology, including some of our former colleges, have sought to attack the mid-Acts position by creating the perception that dispensational theology is new in church history and is therefore false. It is commonly repeated that dispensational theology was invented in the 1800s by John Nelson Darby (JND), thereby, creating the perception that the dispensational approach to Scriptures simply fell out of the clear blue sky in early 1800s with JND.
- Not only is this approach historically false, but more importantly it is scripturally false. God has always been a dispensationalist regardless of man's knowledge of it. The Greek word *oikonomia* has been in the Bible since the first century when the New Testament was written.
  - Luke 16:2-4—"stewardship"
  - I Corinthians 9:17—"dispensation of the gospel"
  - Ephesians 1:10—"dispensation of the fulness of times"
  - Ephesians 3:2—"dispensation of grace"
  - Colossians 1:25—"dispensation of God"
- Therefore, dispensationalism is not new; it is as old as the Bible itself. What happened in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with dispensationalism is the same as what happened in the 16<sup>th</sup> century Reformation with justification by faith. Luther did not invent a "new" doctrine; rather he restored a very old doctrine back to its right place of prominence. It is inconsistent to charge Darby and other early dispensationalists with inventing a new doctrine but then not hold Luther to the same standard.
- Consequently, the goal of this lesson is twofold: 1) consider some of the straw man attacks that have been directed against dispensational theology, and 2) to answer these attacks by surveying the history of dispensational thinking through the year 1825.

## **Dispensational Straw Men**

- Clarence E. Mason, author of *Eschatology*, states the following regarding the origins of dispensationalism:
  - "It has been asserted or assumed by almost all opponents of the dispensational viewpoint that the whole idea is of comparatively recent origin. Some of the lesser informed have attributed its origin to Dr. C.I. Scofield or/and some anonymous conferences. Those who

consider themselves better informed knowingly and unctuously affirm that Scofield got his idea from John Nelson Darby with perhaps an assist from Dr. James H. Brookes, with whom he studied privately after his conversion in St. Louis in 1879. It is also assumed that if they but knew the “facts” (that is, of its recent and Plymouth Brethren origin), most of the present-day adherents of dispensationalism would be shocked and, very probably, reconsider the advisability of retaining their view.” (Mason, 20-21)

- J.E. Bear begins his treatment of dispensationalism with the following statement:
  - “Dispensationalism as we know it today is of comparatively recent origin, having had its beginning in England in the last century among the Plymouth Brethren.” (quoted in Mason, 21)
- Charles C. Ryrie, author of *Dispensationalism Today*, does an excellent job addressing the origins of dispensationalism. Ryrie states:
  - “A typical statement about dispensationalism goes like this: “Dispensationalism was formulated by one of the nineteenth-century separatist movements, the Plymouth Brethren.” This is a loaded statement. It contains two charges: 1) since dispensationalism is recent, it is therefore unorthodox. 2) it was born out of a separatist movement and it is therefore to be shunned. The implication in these charges is clear: If the poor misguided souls who believe in dispensationalism only knew its true origin they would turn from its teachings like the plague.” (Ryrie, 65)
- Ryrie cites the work of Daniel P. Fuller to prove that his comments are not too sarcastic:
  - “Ignorance is bliss, and it may well be that this popularity would not be so great if the adherent of this system knew the historical background of what they teach. Few indeed realize that the teaching of Chafer came from Scofield, who in turn got it through the writings of Darby and the Plymouth Brethren.” (quoted in Ryrie, 65)
- “A further implication in a statement like Fuller’s is that dispensationalism is obviously man-made, and a person would never arrive at such ideas from his own personal Bible study.” (Ryrie, 66)
- *Straw Man Number 1*—“The first is the straw man of saying that dispensationalists assert that the system was taught in the post-apostolic times. Informed dispensationalists do not claim that. They recognize that, as a system, dispensationalism was largely formulated by Darby, but that outlines of a dispensationalist approach to the Scriptures are found much earlier. They only maintain that certain features of the dispensational system are found in the teachings of the early church.” (Ryrie, 66)
- *Straw Man Number 2*—“Another typical example of the use of a straw man is this line of argument: pretribulationism is not apostolic; pretribulationism is dispensationalism; therefore, dispensationalism is not apostolic. But dispensationalists do not claim that the system was developed in the first century; nor is it necessary that they be able to do so. Many other doctrines were not developed in the first century—including covenant theology which is seventeenth century. Doctrinal development is a perfectly normal process in the course of church history.” (Ryrie, 66)

- “This straw man leads to a second fallacy—the wrong use of history. The fact that something was taught in the first century does not make it right (unless taught in the canonical Scriptures), and the fact that something was not taught until the nineteenth century does not make it wrong unless, of course, it is unscriptural. Nondispensationalists surely know that baptismal regeneration was taught in the early centuries yet many of them would not include that error in their theological systems simply because it is historic.” (Ryrie, 66-67)
- “The charge of newness was leveled long ago at the doctrine of the Reformers. Calvin answered it with characteristic straightforwardness, and his answer is one which defends dispensationalism equally well against the same charge. He wrote:
  - First, calling it ‘new’ they do great wrong to God, whose Sacred Word does not deserve to be accused of novelty. . . . That it has lain long unknown and buried is the fault of man’s impiety. Now when it is restored to us by God’s goodness, its claim to antiquity ought to be admitted at least by right of recovery.” (quoted in Ryrie, 67)
- “It is granted by dispensationalists that as a system of theology dispensationalism is recent in origin. But there are historical references to that which eventually was systematized into dispensationalism. There is evidence in the writings of men before Darby that the dispensational concept was a part of their viewpoint.” (Ryrie, 68)
- George E. Ladd tries to stack the deck against dispensationalism by making it appear that there is no historical record of dispensational thinking prior to Darby. Ladd writes:
  - “It is not important for the present purpose to determine whether the views of Darby and Kelly were original with them or were taken from the antecedent and made popular by them. Sources to solve this historical problem are not available to the present writer. For all practical purposes, we may consider that this movement – for dispensationalism has had such wide influence it must be called a movement – had its source with Darby and Kelly.” (Ladd, 49)
- Not only is Ladd’s statement misleading, but it is certifiably false. Arnold D. Ehlert’s *A Bibliographic History of Dispensationalism* was published in volumes 101-103 of *Bibliotheca Sacra*, between January 1944 and January 1946. Ladd’s book *Crucial Questions About the Kingdom of God*, was not published by Eerdmans until 1952.
- Ehlert’s work is indispensable because it furnishes evidence that dispensational concepts were held early and throughout the history of the church.
  - “Biblical exposition of the subject (dispensationalism) abounds. But there are those who shy away from teaching which is not expressly covered in the creeds and dogmas of the Church, no matter how appealing the Biblical exposition may be. To such there will be some comfort in learning that dispensationalism is not too “modern,” and that it was acknowledged, in one form or another, by many able men, whose general teaching is accepted, in different branches of the household of faith. . . . Some may expect to find works referred to that will not appear. Due to the immensity of the literature on limited phases of the whole subject, it was necessary to eliminate all works dealing with only one or two dispensations, with the millennium as such, with Israel, and with the law-grace controversy. Only such works as mention *three or*

more dispensations or economies of God's redemptive dealings with men can be admitted." (Ehlert, 6-7)

### Unsystematized Dispensationalism or Early Dispensational Concepts

- *Justin Martyr (110-165)*—in the *Dialogue with Trypho*, Justin Martyr states the following when discussing the subject that God always taught the same righteousness. Earlier in the same work he spoke of the present dispensation and of its gifts and power.
  - “For if one should wish to ask you why, since Enoch, Noah with his sons, and all others in similar circumstances, who neither were circumcised nor kept the Sabbath, pleased God, God demanded by other leaders and by the giving of the law after the lapse of so many generations, that those who lived between the times of Abraham and Moses be justified by circumcision and the other ordinances – to wit, the Sabbath, and sacrifices, and libations, and offerings. . .” (quoted in Ryrie, 68-69)
- *Irenaeus (130-200)*—wrote about the reason there are four gospels. While he did not call these time periods dispensations, he often spoke of the dispensations of God and especially of the Christian dispensation.
  - “. . .and the Gospel is quadriform, as is also the course followed by the Lord. For this reason were four principal covenants given to the human race; one, prior to the deluge, under Adam; the second, that after the deluge, under Noah; the third, the giving of the law, under Moses; the fourth, that which renovates man, and sums up all things in itself by means of the Gospel, raising and bearing men upon its wings into the heavenly kingdom.” (quoted in Ryrie, 69)
- *Clement of Alexandria (150?-220?)*—clearly distinguishes four patriarchal dispensations in Adam, Noah, Abraham, and Moses. (Ehlert, 26) “Samuel Hanson Coxe (1793-1880) backed up his own sevenfold dispensational scheme by Clements’s fourfold one.” (Ryrie, 69)
- *Pelagius (360?-420?)*—“In his discourse on *Original Sin*, Augustine takes Pelagius and Coelestius to task for “dividing the times” so as to say that “men first lived righteous by nature, then under the law, thirdly under grace,--by nature meaning all the long time from Adam before the giving of the law.” Augustine then quotes Pelagius as having stated the following:
  - “For then, say they, the Creator was known by the guidance of reason; and the rule of living rightly was carried written in the hearts of men, not in the law of the letter, but of nature. But men’s manners became corrupt; and then, they say, when nature now tarnished began to be insufficient, the law was added to it whereby as by a moon the original luster was restored to nature after its original blush was impaired. But after the habit of sinning has too much prevailed among men, and the law was unequal to the task of curing it, Christ came; and the Physician Himself, through His own self, and not through His disciples, brought relief to the malady at its most desperate development.” (quoted in Ehlert, 26-27)
- *Augustine (354-430)*—reflects early dispensational concepts in his writings. “Although his oft-quoted statement, “Distinguish the times, and the Scripture is in harmony with itself,” does not in

its context apply to dispensational ideas, he elsewhere makes some applicable statements.” (Ryrie, 69)

- “The divine institution of sacrifice was suitable in the former dispensation, but is not suitable now. For the change suitable to the present age has been enjoined by God, who knows infinitely better than man what is fitting for every age, and who is, whether he give or add, abolish or curtail, increase or diminish, the unchangeable Governor as He is the unchangeable Creator of mutable things, ordering all events in his Providence until the beauty of the completed course of time, the component parts of which are the dispensations adapted to each successive age, shall be finished, like the grand melody of some ineffably wise master of song, and those pass into the eternal contemplation of God who here, though it is a time of faith, not of sight, are acceptably worshipping Him.” (quoted in Ehlert, 28)
- “If it is now established that that which was for one age rightly ordained may be in another age rightly changed,—the alteration indicating a change in the work, not the plan, of Him who makes the change, the plan being framed by His reasoning faculty, to which unconditioned by succession in time, those things are simultaneously present which cannot be actually done at the same time because the ages succeed each other.” (quoted in Ehlert, 29)
- *Theodoret, Bishop of Cyrrhus (390?-457?)*—is credited with having said, “God dispenseth all things suitably to the particular time, and measureth his institutions by the abilities and powers of men.”
- *Alfricus Grammaticus (?-1006/20?)*—Anglo Saxon translator of Genesis stated the following: “Now it thinketh me, love, that that work (the translation of Genesis) is very dangerous for me or any man to undertake; because I dread lest some foolish man read this book, or hear it read, who should ween that he may live now under the new law, even as the old fathers lived in that time, ere that the old law was established, or even as men lived under Moyses’ law.” (Ehlert, 30) His views could be summarized as follows:
  - Patriarchal—“in that time, ere that the old law was established”
  - Mosaic—“Moyses’ law”
  - Christian—“now under the new law.”
- *Joachim of Fiore (1130/45-1201/02)*—the abbot of Cosenza in Calabria formulated a system of historico-prophetical theology. “His fundamental argument is that the Christian area closes with the year 1260, when a new area would commence under another dispensation. Thus the three persons of the God-head divided the government of ages among them; the reign of the Father embraced the period from the creation of the world to the coming of Christ; that of the son, the twelve centuries and a half ending in 1260, and then would commence the reign of the Holy Spirit. This change would be marked by a progress similar to that which followed the substitution of the new for the old dispensation. Thus man, after having been carnal under the Father, half carnal and half spiritual under the Son, would under the Holy Ghost, become exclusively spiritual. So there have been three stages of development in society, in which supremacy belonged successively to warriors, the secular clergy, and monks.” (quoted in Ehlert, 30-31)

- Ryrie offers the following point in summation of this section, “It is not suggested nor should it be inferred that these early Church Fathers were dispensationalists in the modern sense of the word. But it is true that some of them enunciated principles which later developed into dispensationalism, and it may be rightly said that they held to primitive or early dispensational concepts.” (Ryrie, 70)
- Stuart Allen concurs with Ryrie, “We do not suggest that the church Fathers were dispensationalists as the word is used today. But some of them saw Scriptural principles which later developed into dispensational concepts.” (Allen, 33)

### **From the Reformation to 1825**

- In *Dispensationalism Today*, Charles C. Ryrie refers to this time period as “Developing Dispensationalism or the Period Before Darby”. (Ryrie, 71)
- “The Reformation, as we have seen, was largely concerned with bringing back the basic truths of Christianity and not until Bible students began to be once more concerned with prophecy and eschatology, did dispensational truth begin its part in Scriptural understanding.” (Allen, 33)
- “This is the period during which the larger doctrine of ages and dispensations had its beginning and unfolding. By 1825 there was a considerable literature to be found on the subject, and the doctrine was well established as a theological concept. It is a strange phenomenon that almost without exception dispensational writers since that date, however, have ignored this body of literature.” (Ehlert, 33)
- *William Gouge (1575/78-1653)*—presents the earliest system of dispensations during the time period now under consideration. Gouge was educated at St. Paul’s in London and King’s College, Cambridge. In 1643 he was made a member of the Westminster Assembly of Divines, and was chosen to write the Assembly’s annotation on I Kings to Job. His great work was his commentary on Hebrews which he finished just prior to his death. (Ehlert, 33)
- “Gouge’s scheme of dispensations, while he does not call them such, is based on the ancient sex-millennial tradition. The specific advance that he makes over the mere division of time into six periods consists in this, that he views them in relation to the development of God’s program of redemption. Therein lies the distinction between the terms ages and dispensations. A theological dispensation has two major aspects: a time-period aspect, and a redemptive-program aspect. Either alone is not dispensationalism.” (Ehlert, 33)
- “In his notes on Hebrews 1:1, commenting on the phrase, “in these last days,” Gouge recalls Augustine’s outline of the ages and links them up with the so-called covenant of grace as follows:
  - I—Adam to Noah, the covenant first made to man
  - II—Noah to Abraham, the covenant renewed
  - III—Abraham to David, the covenant appropriated to Abraham and his seed
  - IV—David to the captivity of Israel, the covenant established in a royal line
  - V—Captivity to Christ’s coming in the flesh, the covenant revived by Israel’s returning
  - VI—Christ’s first coming in the flesh to his second coming in glory, even to the end of the world, in which the covenant was most firmly and-inviolably established. (Ehlert, 34)

- *William Cave (1637-1713)*—published a book shortly after Gouge’s death in which he identified the following three dispensations:
  - I—Patriarchal, from the beginning of the world till the delivery of the law upon Mount Sinai
  - II—Mosaical, from the delivery of the law till the final period of the Jewish state
  - III—Evangelical, to last to the end of the world
  
- *Pierre Poiret (1646-1719)*—a French mystic and philosopher who wrote more than forty works “attempted, like many others, to comprehend the whole story of redemption in one sweep, and saw clearly that the work of God through the ages falls into various periods differing in detail yet preserving a unifying thread throughout. His great work, *L’Oeconomic Divine*, first published in Amsterdam in 1687, was rendered into English and published in London in six volumes and an appendix, in 1713. . .its most interesting and significant feature is the fact that it is premillennial and dispensational. . . There is no question that we have here a genuine dispensational scheme. He uses the phrase “period or dispensation” and his seventh dispensation is a literal thousand-year millennium with Christ returned and reigning in bodily form upon the earth with His saints and Israel regathered and converted. He sees the overthrow of corrupt Protestantism, the rise of the Antichrist, the two resurrections, and many of the general run of end-time events. . .His outline is as follows:”
  - I—Infancy, to the deluge
  - II—Childhood, to Moses
  - III—Adolescence, to the prophets, or about Solomon’s time
  - IV—Youth, to the time of the coming of Christ
  - V—Manhood, “some time after that”
  - VI—Old Age, “the time of his (man’s) Decay
  - VII—Renovation of all Things (Ehlert, 34-36)
  
- Poiret writes, “Tho’ I do not pretend precisely to determine the Number nor Duration of these Periods, it is obvious however unto all, that the World hath really passed thro’ Periods of this nature.” (Ehlert, 36)
  
- *John Edwards (1639-1716)*—was educated at St. John’s College Cambridge, where he later became a scholar and fellow. In 1697, Edwards moved to Cambridge where he spent the following two years devouring the library. “In 1699 he published two volumes totaling some 790 pages entitled *A Complete History or Survey of all the Dispensations*.” The following quotation is from the preface: “I have undertaken a Great Work, viz. to display all Transactions of Divine Providence relating to the Methods of Religion, from the Creation to the end of the World, from the first Chapter of Genesis to the last of Revelation. For I had not met with any Author that had undertaken to comprise them all, and to give us a true account of them according to their true Series: nor had I ever lit upon a Writer (either Foreign or Domestick) who had designedly traced the particular cause and Grounds of them, or settled them in their right and true foundations. Wherefore I betook myself to this Work, resolving to attempt something, tho it were only to invite others of greater skill to go on with it.” (Ehlert, 37)
  
- Edward’s scheme saw three great Catholic and Grand Oeconomies, the third of which he subdivided constituting the main sweep of Biblical time to the consummation and conflagration. The following is his outline:

- I—Innocency and Felicity, or Adam created upright
- II—Sin and Misery, Adam fallen
- III—Reconciliation, or Adam recovered, from Adam’s redemption to the end of the world, “The discovery of the blessed seed to Adam:”
  - Patriarchal economy:
    - 1) Adamical, antediluvian
    - 2) Noachical
    - 3) Abrahamick
  - Mosaical
  - Gentile (concurrent with a and b)
  - Christian or Evangelical:
    - 1) Infancy, primitive period, past
    - 2) Childhood, present period
    - 3) Manhood, future (millennium)
    - 4) Old age, from the loosing of Satan to the conflagration (Ehlert, 37-38)
  
- *John Shute Barrington (1678-1734)*—also known as the First Viscount Barrington, was educated at Utrecht and was friends with John Locke. Barrington published an essay titled, *The Dispensations of God to Mankind as Revealed in Scripture*, in which he stated the following in opposition to Deism, “the single notion, that runs through the several dispensations of God to mankind in its full light . . . and that it pursues it in the precise order and manner in which it was exhibited in those several dispensations, and will at the same time shew, how all the peculiar doctrines of revelation refer to it. For such a sketch alone will discover to us all the beauties of revealed truth; shewing it in its proper connection, and in all its revelations (particularly its use and advantage), and in its unity.” Ehlert adds, “He understands the dispensations to be “the various methods in which God has extraordinarily discovered Himself to mankind.” (Ehlert, 38)
  
- *Isaac Watts (1674-1748)*—the great hymn writer wrote an essay entitled, *The Harmony of all the Religions Which God ever Prescribed to Men, and all his Dispensations Towards Them.*” Ehlert attributes the following quotation to Watts: “The public dispensations of God towards men, are those wise and holy constitutions of his will and government, revealed or some way manifested to them, in the several successive periods or ages of the world, wherein are contained the duties which he expects from men, and the blessings which he promises, or encourages them to expect from him, here and hereafter; together with the sins which he forbids, and the punishments which he threatens to inflict on such sinners: Or, the dispensations of God may be described more briefly, as the appointed moral rules of God dealing with mankind, considered as reasonable creatures, and as accountable to him for their behavior, both in this world and in that which is to come. Each of these dispensations of God, may be represented as different religions, or, at least, as different forms of religion, appointed for men in the several successive ages of the world.” (Ehlert, 39) The following is Watts’ dispensational outline:
  - I—The Dispensation of Innocency, or, the Religion of Adam at first
  - II—The Adamical Dispensation of the Covenant of Grace, or the Religion of Adam after his Fall
  - III—The Noachical Dispensation; or the Religion of Noah
  - IV—The Abrahamical Dispensation; or, the Religion of Abraham
  - V—The Mosaical Dispensation; or, the Jewish Religion
  - VI—The Christian Dispensation (Ehlert, 40)



- “It becomes evident at once, of course, that this is exactly the outline of the first six dispensations that has been so widely publicized by the late Dr. C.I. Scofield in his notes.” (Ehlert, 40)
- It is interesting to consider the following quote from Watts in light of Pauline truth, **“This last and best dispensation of grace, viz, the Christian religion, was not properly set up in the world, during the life of Christ, though he was the illustrious and divine Author and Founder of it: As the reason is plain and obvious, viz. because many of the peculiar glories, duties, and blessings of it, as they are described in Acts, and in the sacred epistles, did really depend upon those facts, which had no existence in Christ’s own life-time, viz his death, resurrection, ascension, and exaltation.”** (Ehlert, 40)
- *Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758)*—while he does not develop a scheme of dispensations comparable to those of the writers just noted, does speak of the whole plan and development of redemption as “the whole dispensation,” which he outlines in his *History of Redemption* in three major divisions:
  - I—From the fall to the incarnation
  - II—From Christ’s incarnation to his resurrection
  - III—From Christ’s resurrection to the end of the world
- Edwards said the following regarding the law and grace controversy of his day, “All allow that the Old Testament dispensation is out of date, with its ordinances; and I think a manner pertaining to the constitution and order of the New Testament church, that is a matter of fact wherein the New Testament itself is express, full and abundant, in such a case to have recourse to the Mosaic dispensation for rules or precedents to determine our judgment, is quite needless and out of reason. There is perhaps no part of divinity attended with so much intricacy, and wherein orthodox divines do so much differ as the stating the precise agreement and difference between the two dispensations of Moses and Christ.” (Ehlert, 41)
- *John Taylor Norwich (1694-1761)*—states the following in his work on Romans published in 1745: “As to the order of time; the apostle carries his arguments backwards from the time when Christ came into the world, (chap. 1:17 to chap. 4) to the time when the covenant was made with Abraham (chap. 5) to the time when the judgment to condemnation, pronounced upon Adam, came upon all men (chap. 5:12 to the end). And thus he gives a view of the principal dispensations from the beginning of the world.” (Ehlert, 41)
- *John Fletcher (1729-1785)*—a friend of the Wesleys, is credited with stating, “If a judicious mariner, who has sailed around the world, sees with pleasure a map, which exhibits, in one point of view, the shape and proportion of the wide seas, . . . a judicious Protestant may profitably look upon a doctrinal map, . . . more especially if this map exhibits, with some degree of accuracy, the boundaries of truth . . . Without any apology, therefore, I shall lay before the reader a plain account of the primitive catholic Gospel, and its various dispensations.”
  - I—Gentilism, “natural religion”
  - II—Judaism, “the Mosaic dispensation”
  - III—The Gospel of John the Baptist, “the Jewish Gospel improved into infant Christianity”
  - IV—The Perfect Gospel of Christ, the other three, “arrived at their full maturity”

- “To these four he adds two ‘great dispensations of grace and justice’ yet to take place ‘with respect to every man: (V) the one in the day of death . . . (VI) the other in the day of judgment.’ Following the second coming of Christ there will yet be (VII) ‘another Gospel dispensation,’ which we have now in prophecy, ‘as the Jews had the Gospel of Christ’s first advent,’ during which the Church now reigns with Christ for a thousand years, and which he connects with the ‘restitution of all things.’” (Ehlert, 42)
- The following is a listing of other less significant dispensational writings and authors from this time period.
  - Joseph Priestly (1733-1804)—in 1771 wrote *Analogy of the Divine Dispensations*
  - George Stanley Faber (1773-1843)—stated the following in the Bampton Lectures in 1801, “connection of the Patriarchal, the Levitical, and the Christian dispensations, viewed as the component parts of one grand and regular system, the economy of grace.” Faber enlarged upon his dispensational system in his two-volume work, *The Genius and Object of the Patriarchal, the Levitical, and the Christian Dispensations*.
  - David Russell (1779-1848)—wrote *A Compendious View of the Original Dispensation established with Adam, and the Mediatorial Dispensation established through Christ*. (Ehlert, 44-45)
- Ryrie sums up the main reason for presenting the preceding chronology, “To sum up: In answer to the charge that dispensationalism is recent and therefore suspect, we have tried to show two things: (1) Dispensational concepts were taught by men who lived long before Darby. (2) It is to be expected that dispensationalism, which is so closely related to eschatology, would not be refined and systematized until recent times simply because eschatology was not an area under discussion until then. The conclusions drawn from the charge of recency by opponents of dispensationalism are therefore unjustified. In all of this discussion, too, it is necessary to remember that the verdict of history is not the final authority. Every doctrine, whether ancient or recent, in the final analysis must be tested by the light of the revelation of Scripture.” (Ryrie, 77-78)

### **The Charge of Divisiveness**

- “Dispensationalism is not only charged with being recent but also with having originated in divisiveness. The inference is that anything that is factious in origin cannot be valid. Darby was a separatist; Plymouth Bretherenism is a separatist movement; and many adherents of dispensationalism today are found in movements which have separated from the larger denominations of Christendom; therefore, dispensationalism is a teaching which causes nothing but dissension in the church.” (Ryrie, 78) Consider the following example of this line of reasoning:
  - “One need not scrutinize contemporary evangelical church life too closely to see this principle at work today. Nor does it take more than a casual survey of the history of theology since Darby’s day to trace the continuity of his view of separation to our day. There exists a direct line from Darby through a number of channels—prophetic conferences, fundamentalist movements, individual prophetic teachers, the Scofield Reference Bible, eschatological charts—all characterized by and contributing to a spirit

of separatism and exclusion. The devastating effects of this spirit upon the total body of Christ cannot be underestimated.” (Ryrie, 78)

- “This kind of attack is based on two basic premises: (1) ecclesiastical separatism is always wrong, and (2) dispensationalism has been the principal (the inference is “only”) factor causing ecclesiastical separation in the modern period. Both premises are fallacious.” (Ryrie, 78-79)
- “One can be schismatic and still remain with a group, which does not make his schism right simply because he did not break away from that group. And one can be a separatist and break away from a group and be right. Whether or not organizational unity is maintained or broken is not the criterion for judging the rightness or wrongness of an action. To say that ecclesiastical separation is always wrong is not thinking clearly about the Biblical concepts involved.” (Ryrie, 79)
- To say ecclesiastical separation is always wrong would result in the condemnation of some of the most fruitful movements in church history, i.e., the Reformation.

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