

Dr. John H. Gerstner

**Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth**

A Book Review

by

Dr. Stanford E. Murrell, Pastor  
**Sovereign Grace Baptist Church**  
705 Frederick Court  
Apollo, Pa 15613  
(724) 727-3621

## **A Much Needed Work**

One of the most important books to be published exposing the erroneous teaching of Dispensational Theology is *Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth* by Dr. John H. Gerstner. This 476-page critique of dispensationalism is in its second edition with corrected and expanded material. Published by *Soli Deo Gloria* Publications, edited by Don Kistler, *Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth* has a foreword by R.C. Sproul, which follows Dr. Gerstner's Introduction. One point in particular Dr. Sproul applauds in the work is that of exposing Dispensationalism as being inherently antinomian. "*Gerstner insists, protests to the contrary, that the dispensational system of theology is inherently and inescapably antinomian.*" Having read the book it is hard to deny that Dr. Gerstner proves his charge against dispensationalist.

## **A Spiritual Legacy**

In the Introduction to his work Dr. Gerstner humbly shares his spiritual indebtedness to good men who embrace Dispensational teaching. "*My conversion came about, I believe, through the witness of a dispensationalist.*" Dr. Gerstner once told me in private conversation that he believed men could have better hearts than they do theology. God will honor His Word in as far as it is faithfully proclaimed. The author continues. "*As I grew older in years, and in the faith I realized, however, that Dispensationalism as a system of doctrine was not sound, though it retained the elements of truth by which I came to know Jesus Christ savingly.*"

## **Contending for the Faith**

After fifty plus years of learning and teaching about the Christian faith Dr. Gerstner came to believe it was time for him to formally challenge the errors of Dispensationalism in a detailed manner. *Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth* is an endeavor to examine the main points of the departure of Dispensationalism from historic Christianity. In his work Dr. Gerstner does not engage in personal attacks but reveals the theological areas of concern while offering correction and instruction in righteousness. The tone of the work is vigorous but gracious.

## **Four Parts and a Surprise**

*Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth* is divided into four sections.

- Part One: Historical Sketch of Dispensationalism
- Part Two: Philosophy and Hermeneutics
- Part Three: Theology
- Part Four: Wrongly Dividing "*Wrongly Dividing*"

Surprisingly enough Dr. Gerstner considers Part Four of the book, which is basically an appendix in which he answers Dispensational critiques of his work, more important than the main body of the text. Dr. Gerstner reasons that if the critiques of *Wrongly Dividing* have no better responses to what he has written than they do then, "*the book must be essentially sound and Dispensationalism must be essentially indefensible as this book and many others, argue.*" In Part Four Dr. Gerstner responds to three dispensationalists: Zane Hodges, John Witmer, and Richard Mayhue.

## Chapter 1: A Historical Sketch of Dispensationalism

One of the main arguments of many modern dispensationalist to gain credibility for their system of belief is to claim a historical connection. Charles Ryrie has written, "*Premillennialism is the history faith of the Church*" (Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *The Basis of the Premillennial Faith*). In 1977, Allan B. Boyd, a student at Dallas Theological Seminary working on his Th.M thesis challenged this position. After carefully examining the texts of the early church fathers, Boyd ends by saying, "*It is the conclusion of this thesis that Dr. Ryrie's statement is historically invalid within the chronological framework of this thesis.*" It is instructive to be informed that Mr. Boyd received the letter grade of an "A" for his thesis that indicates that he proved his thesis statement.

Dr. Gerstner easily dismisses the contention of Dispensationalist to have a historical lineage by noting, "*There is little point in closely surveying early church history for anticipation of Dispensational proper.*" It does not exist. Dispensational theology is a novelty though there are some elements of the system that are very old. For example, there is the concept of pre-millennialism.

Simply stated a historic pre-millennialist is a person who anticipates an earthly rule and reign of Christ on the earth for 1,000 literal years. The details of this Royal Reign of Christ on the earth are in dispute but the concept of a visible, physical, thousand-year (*chilism*) reign of Christ on earth from Jerusalem is very old. The problem is this. "*Most dispensationalist are prone to claim the whole sub-apostolic age for premillennialism.*" But that is going too far. While men such as Justin Martyr, Hermas, Papias, and Irenaeus may have been premillenarians, and the *Epistle of Barnabas* sympathetic to that view, there are some important factors that must be remembered by Dispensationalist before a common heritage is claimed.

- **Item.** These early church fathers were not dispensational. "*For example, Justin and Irenaeus regarded the church as the fulfillment of the new covenant of Jeremiah 31:31*". Dispensationalist regard the church age as being a mystery revealed to Paul, not as something predicted by the Old Testament prophets.
- **Item.** Justin Martyr, though a premillennialist did not regard premillennialism as a test of orthodoxy.
- **Item.** Chilism was widely held among the heretics. "*Chiliasm never formed a part of the general creed of the church. It was diffused from one country (Phrygia), and from a single fountainhead*" (W.G.T. Shedd, *A History of Doctrine*). Dr. Gerstner states that "The arch-heretics Cerinthus, Marcion, and Montanus were premillennialists, as were the apocalyptic books of *Enoch, The Twelve Patriarchs, and the Sibylline Books*."
- **Item.** Premillennialism was never any part of the creeds of the universal church. It did not find a place in the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds. The Council of Constantinople, when speaking of Christ's kingdom affirmed that "*of whose kingdom there shall be no end.*" The Athanasian Creed states: "*at whose coming all men shall rise again with their bodies and shall give account for their own works, and they that have done good shall go into life everlasting, and they that have done evil into everlasting fire*" (Philip Schaff, ed., *The Creeds of Christendom*).

- **Item.** A good argument can be made that millennialism was very ambiguous. A recent premillennial writer admits as much. D. H. Kromminga writes, “*So far as the available evidence goes, there is no ground for ascertaining that Millenarianism was prevalent in the church during the apostolic period, ending with the year 150 AD. Not only was there very little of it, so far as the literature indicates, but what little there was can be traced rather definitely to unchristian Jewish apocalyptic sources*” (*The Millennium in the Church*).

### **The Third Century and Beyond**

During the time period leading up to the Council of Nicea (AD 325), millenarianism was not promoted widely in the church. Nevertheless, there were some strong proponents of this view. “*Commodus, early third century bishop, anticipated a thousand years during which the Christians were to be served by sinners. This era was to follow upon the defeat of the Antichrist by Christ*” (JHG). Another illustrious champion of chilism was Lactantius. However, during this same time period were anti-millenarians such as Origen, Hippolytus, and Victorinus. “*With the coming of Constantine and the favoring of the Christian church, we note a more complete turning from premillennialism*” (JHG).

It was Augustine who put “*a virtual end to millennialism for a millennium of church history*” (JHG). Augustine once held to chilism but came to reject it because of its carnal features. He taught that “*the Millennium was to be understood as the reign of the saints with Christ during the interadvent period. The first resurrection in Revelation 20:5 refers to regeneration, and only the second to the physical resurrection. Satan’s being restrained refers to his inability to prevent the church from gathering souls from the nations. His binding took place at the first coming of Christ which began the world conquest by the gospel. The church is the kingdom. Here, the saints reign with Christ over their own lusts and their church*” (*City of God*).

#### ***The Regeneration of the First Resurrection***

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- ◆ **Revelation 20:5** “*But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection.*” **John 5:25** “*Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live.*”

#### ***The Restraint of Satan to Reach the World with the Gospel***

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- ◆ **Revelation 20:2-3** *And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, 3 And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season. Matthew 28:19-20* *Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: 20 Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen.*

#### ***The Binding of Satan at the First Advent***

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- ◆ Matthew 12:24-30 *But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils. 25 And Jesus knew their thoughts, and said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand: 26 And if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how shall then his kingdom stand? 27 And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your children cast them out? therefore they shall be your judges. 28 But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you. 29 Or else how can one enter into a strong man's house, and spoil his goods, except he first bind the strong man? And then he will spoil his house. 30 He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad.*

### **Summary of the Early Church Fathers**

*“Advocates of premillennialism in the early church lacked dispensational eschatological distinctives such as the notion of a pretribulational rapture. Furthermore, they affirmed beliefs, such as the nature of the relationship between Israel and the church, which are fundamentally incompatible with Dispensationalism“ (JHG).*

### **The Middle Ages**

The medieval period was not known for its views of eschatology. *“Some theologians, such as Thomas Aquinas, saw the reign of the church as the millennial glory. In direct opposition to this, the Franciscan Spirituals, such as Ubertino of Casale and Peter Olivi, regarded the ‘Babylon’ of Revelation 18 to be the church and the ‘Beast’ as the papacy. This view became prominent during the later part of the medieval period” (JHG).*

One important person during this time period whose writings would surface in the centuries to come was the Cistercian monk Joachim of Flora (c. AD 1135-1202). *“He saw history as three ages—the age of the Father (the law), the age of the Son (the gospel), and the age of the Holy Spirit (monasticism with its spiritual earnestness). This last period was the proper fulfillment of Christ’s promise of the coming of the Holy Spirit” (JHG).* Thomas Aquinas vigorously opposed the teachings of Joachim. His writings were condemned at the Council of Arles. Nevertheless, his views lived on.

### **The Reformation Period**

*“With the Reformation came a resurgence of eschatological thinking and preaching” (JHG).* This point is of particular significance because modern Dispensationalist often maintains that the reason The System they teach is not found clearly in church history is because there was not an interest in the subject or concentrated study on the matter. That is simply not true. What is true is that the Reformers held substantially the same creedal position with regard to eschatology as the creeds of the early church. *“They usually affirmed that Christ would return to judge the living and the dead and then establish the eternal state. This is true of such creeds as the Tetrapolitan Confession, the Second Helvetic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, the Canons of Trent, the Orthodox Confession of 1642, the Westminster Confession of Faith, and the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England. Article seventeen of the Lutheran Augsburg Confession condemned the “Jewish notion” that, before the resurrection, the saints should occupy this world, as does the Reformed Second Helvetic Confession ‘We also do reject the Jewish dream of a Millennium, or golden age on earth, before the last judgment’” (JHG).*

## **The Post-Reformation Period**

It is the modern age that has witnessed a resurgence of premillennialism. The reasons for this will be observed. Various men and their contributions to the rise of premillennialism may be noted.

- Johannes Bengel made premillennialism respectable in the Lutheran church after taking away the concept of an imminent return of Christ.
- Jung-Stilling effectively introduced premillennialism into the communities of the Reformed brethren.
- The Jesuit Ribera (d. 1591) expected the Antichrist to come as a Jew who would reign for three and a half years.
- John Alsted, a 17<sup>th</sup> century Reformed theologian, wrote a work defending premillennialism.
- Johannes Cocceius (1603-1669), was especially significant. He:
  - ❖ suggested seven dispensations (though not the same as Scofield);
  - ❖ placed great emphasis on prophetic literature;
  - ❖ believed in a one to one correspondence between prophetic prediction and its historical fulfillment (instead of a 'dual' fulfillment which is often argued for today)
  - ❖ stressed typology;
  - ❖ was interested in unfulfilled prophecy;
  - ❖ did not regard the Sabbath as binding;
  - ❖ taught that the Old Testament saints had an imperfect justification for their sins were simply overlooked (paresis) not forgiven (aphesis);
  - ❖ embraced chilism;
  - ❖ believed that peace will come to the world, the Jews will be converted;
  - ❖ Babel, the Roman Catholic Church, will perish;
  - ❖ the kingdom of Christ will appear in which all the nations will serve; and the gospel will be preached in all the world.

While Cocceius cannot be considered a modern dispensationalist, his views certainly anticipated and influenced many positions they hold.

### **The Changing View of Dispensationalism**

What is important to notice as Dispensationalism initially struggled for identify are the constant changes. Dr. Wick Broomhall gives a helpful list of ten distinguishing features of modern Dispensationalism as over against an older premillennialism.

#### **Old**

- The church was in the forevision of the OT prophecy.
- The great burden of OT prophecy was the coming of Christ to die at the First Advent and the kingdom age at the Second Advent.
- The First Advent was the specific time for Christ to die for man's sin.
- The present age of grace was designed by God and predicted in the OT.
- One may divide time in any way so long as one allows for a Millennium after the Second Advent.
- The Second Advent is one event.

#### **New**

The church is hardly if at all in the Old Testament prophets.

The great burden of OT prophecy is the kingdom of the Jews.

The kingdom (earthly) should have been set up at the First Advent for that was the predicted time of its coming.

The present age was unforeseen in the OT and thus is a "great parenthesis" introduced because the Jews rejected the kingdom.

The only allowable way is to divide time is in seven dispensations. The present age is the sixth such dispensation. The last one will be the millennial age after the Second Advent. It is from this division of time that Dispensationalism gets its name.

The Second Advent is in two sections—"the Rapture" and "the Revelation". Between these two events is an unfulfilled (so-called) seven-year period (Dan 9:23-27) called the Great Tribulation.

- Certain signs must precede the Second Advent.

There are no signs to precede The “Rapture-Stage” of the Second Advent for this may occur at any moment. However, there are signs for the Revelation. The first stage is undated and unannounced; the second stage is dated and announced.

- The book of the Revelation is to be viewed in a historical symbolic manner.

Revelation is a picture in symbolic form of the main events in the present age. Most of the Revelation is futuristic (chapters 4-19). These “literal” events will take place during the Great Tribulation or Daniel’s seventieth week, which is believed to be unfulfilled.

- The mindset was tolerate.

The mindset is dogmatic. Modern dispensationalism has introduced novelties in prophetic interpretation that the church never heard of until about a century ago.

**Note.** “No one disputes, of course, that there have been some changes in Dispensationalism, especially in this century and in this country” (JHG). When in the right direction change is commendable. However, the very fact that Dispensationalism *must* change and is in a fluid state reflects its novelty and uncertainty. It would be far better to abandon Dispensationalism and return to the historic faith of the saints once and for all delivered (Jude 3).

## Chapter 2: Modern Dispensationalism in England

In the second decade of the nineteenth century another new religious movement arose that has become known with passing of time as The Plymouth Brethren. Since many groups of people were reacting against the established Church of England beginning with the Puritans there was nothing unusual about another concerned group.

It is possible that the actual beginnings of The Plymouth Brethren may be traced to an incident within an Independent church in Dublin. Apparently a Dr. Edward Cronin, who had been converted from Roman Catholicism, sought to take communion only to discover he was not qualified until he joined some visible and independent church. That did not seem right. Dr. Cronin thought it was inconsistent that he could be welcomed into the fellowship of the saints but not have communion with them. Dr. Cronin withdrew from the assembly along with Edward Wilson. H. Hutchinson, William Strokes, J. Parnell, J.G. Bellett, and John Nelson Darby later joined them.

According to Napoleon Noel in *The History of the Brethren*, it was in 1826 that the first breaking of bread together occurred. The initial formal meeting for that purpose took place in a private house in Dublin in 1827. The first public meeting place was in 1830. Soon to overshadow the new movement with his presence was John Nelson Darby.



## **The Influence of John Nelson Darby**

1. John N. Darby was born on November 18, 1800, in London England. He entered Trinity College in Dublin, Ireland, in 1815 when he was fourteen and graduated four years later with a B.A. law degree.
2. Turning to religion, Darby became a deacon in the Anglican Church in 1825. In 1826 he was ordained a priest and served in that capacity in County Wicklow located south of Dublin.
3. However, Darby became very dissatisfied with the beliefs and practices of the Church of England
4. In 1827 Darby had a terrible accident. A horse threw him against a door post. During a long convalescence period Darby came into contact with the little band of original Brethren.
5. Their informal worship impressed him.
6. Giving himself to renewed Bible study during this same period Darby began to formulate his prophetic views. Of particular interest is that he began to look upon the Rapture as being a separate phase of the coming of the Lord.
7. The exact origin of the idea of a separate (third) coming of Christ is not easy to establish.
  - Dr. Gerstner suggests it was introduced in 1831 in Oxford during the first Powerscourt meeting, a symposium on Biblical prophecy, hosted by the wealthy Lady Powerscourt.
  - Jon Zens attributes the idea of a secret, pretribulational Rapture to Edward Irving.
  - Dave MacPherson concludes that it arose through the prophecies of young 16-year-old Margaret MacDonald who was given to visions in the Irvingite group. Darby himself thought Miss MacDonald was deluded.
8. What is more certain is that in 1831 Darby began to publish his thoughts on the field of prophetic interpretation and the concept of a secret

## **Dissension and Schism**

Despite its noble intentions and idealistic beginnings the Brethren Movement was to be plagued with dissension and schisms. The first major split occurred in 1846 at Plymouth, England, when John Darby could not convince B.W. Newton and J.L. Harris of the error of their return to “clericalism” (preaching on a regular basis). The second split occurred two years later at Bethesda over the issue of what constitutes proper “separation” from those holding to “error” as per 2 John 10-11 *“If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed.”* In spite of all the divisions, the Brethren movement continued to grow. The Brethren would touch Switzerland, Germany, India, and America.

### **Chapter 3: Dispensationalism in America**

In this short chapter Dr. Gerstner traces the rise of Dispensational thought in American culture through the influence of men such as James H. Brookes who was born in 1830 in Pulaski, Tennessee. Brookes worked closely with John Darby who came often to America to advance his views. As a result of his proximity to Darby and his saturation with dispensational thinking, Brookes was able to influence many young people one of which was C.I. Scofield.

#### **The Man and His Bible**

Cyrus Ingerson Scofield was born in 1843 and reared in Tennessee. After serving with distinction in the Confederate army he later studied law. Scofield was admitted to the bar in the territory of Kansas, served in the Kansas House of Representatives and was, for two years, US District Attorney for Kansas. After leaving this post Scofield moved to St. Louis to establish a private practice. He also became known as a heavy drinker. There is evidence that he abandoned his wife.

In 1879 a friend named McPheeters led Scofield to the Lord. A man with many gifts Scofield became involved in a Congregational church. He was asked to become pastor of a Congregational assembly in Dallas, Texas. He was ordained to the ministry and served the congregation from 1882-1895. Bible study was an important part of his ministry. In 1885 he published *Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth* which incorporated many of the lessons which he had learned from Brookes.

After making a name for himself in Bible conference work, Scofield decided to place the dispensational thinking in margin notes in a Reference Bible. Between 1902 and 1909 he was engaged in work on the *Scofield Reference Bible*. Encouraged in this effort by Arno C. Gaebelin in August, 1902, and largely financed by John T. Pirie the Scofield Reference Bible was first printed in 1909 and revived in 1917. The work became an extraordinarily influential document in American evangelicalism.

#### **The Theology of the Scofield Reference Bible**

One of the distinguishing features of the *Reference Bible* is that it contends for a *dispensational* interpretation of history. According to C.I. Scofield, “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.” With this definition in mind Scofield divided up the Bible according to seven dispensations: Innocency, Conscience, Human government, Promise, Law, Grace, and Kingdom. For concerned Christians there are many elements to Scofield’s teaching beginning with his definition of a dispensation.

1. W.E. Vine, who is not unsympathetic to Scofield’s theology, correctly challenges Scofield’s definition of a dispensation being a period of time as he writes that, “A *dispensation* is not a period of epoch (a common, but erroneous, use of the word), but a mode of dealing, an arrangement or administration of affairs”.
2. The word “*dispensation*” is used only four times in the Authorized Version (1 Cor. 9:17; Eph. 1:10; 3:2; Col.1:25).
  - ◆ 1 Cor 9:17 *For if I do this thing willingly, I have a reward: but if against my will, a dispensation of the gospel is committed unto me.*

- ◆ Eph 1:10 *That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him:*
  - ◆ Eph 3:2 *If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward:*
  - ◆ Col 1:25 *Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God;*
3. According to Vine a dispensation primarily signifies the management of a household or a household of affairs. The word came to refer to the management or administrative of the property of others, and so to a stewardship (cp. Luke 16:2,3,4).
- ◆ Luke 16:2-4 *And he called him, and said unto him, How is it that I hear this of thee? Give an account of thy stewardship; for thou mayest be no longer steward. 3 Then the steward said within himself, What shall I do? For my lord taketh away from me the stewardship: I cannot dig; to beg I am ashamed. 4 I am resolved what to do, that, when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses.*
4. The apostle Paul used the word dispensation in 1 Corinthians 9:17 in the sense of having the responsibility or stewardship entrusted to him of preaching the gospel. The RV recognizes this concept and translates the word “*stewardship*.”
- ◆ 1 Cor 9:17 *For if I do this thing willingly, I have a reward: but if against my will, a dispensation of the gospel is committed unto me.*
5. In Colossians 1:25 the apostle feels the responsibility of the stewardship committed to him “*to fulfill the Word of God*.” The fulfillment being the proclamation of the truths relating to the Church as the body of Christ.
- ◆ Col 1:25 *Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God;*
6. Writing to the saints at Ephesus (Eph. 3:2) Paul speaks of how God gave to him as a stewardship (dispensation) the mystery of the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ.
- ◆ Eph 3:2 *If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward:*
7. In Ephesians 1:10 and 3:10 the word is used of the arrangement or administration by God, by which in “*the fullness of the times*” (or seasons) God will bring to a conclusion and sum up all things in heaven and on earth in Christ.
- ◆ Eph 1:10 *That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him:*

- ◆ Eph 3:10 *To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God,*

### **The Message Spreads**

One reason the *Scofield Reference Bible* proved to be so popular was that it found a sympathetic audience due in large part to the preaching of the great evangelist D. L. Moody. From 1880 through 1887 and again from 1894-1902 the Northfield Conferences, which Moody founded and promoted, were strongly influenced by dispensationalists. Countless people were introduced to dispensational teaching at these conferences who in turn went forth to teach others.

The establishment of Dallas Seminary by Presbyterian minister and singer Lewis Sperry Chafer (1871-1952) gave dispensationalism a scholarly basis of legitimacy. Chafer is also credited with producing the first full and definitive systematic theology of Dispensationalism. His "*massive eight-volume work is a full articulation of the standard Scofieldian variety of dispensational thought, constantly related to the Biblical texts and date on which it claims to rest*" (JHG). Popular evangelism, Bible conferences, seminaries, the rise of the Bible school movement, and endless literature promoting its distinctives has made certain that Dispensational theology has been and will continue to be a great challenge to the historic Christian faith.

### **Chapter 4: Dispensationalism and the Reformed Churches**

Because Dr. Gerstner was a Reformed Presbyterian minister, his heart was particularly concerned about the influence of dispensational theology within his denomination. Chapter 4 traces the havoc that dispensational theology has brought to the Reformed Churches when it is embraced in whole or part by good men such as Donald Grey Barnhouse and Wilbur Smith. These men "*apparently never saw the discrepancy between Dispensationalism and the Reformed confessional standards they had pledged to uphold*" (JHG).

### **Chapter 5: Philosophy and Hermeneutics**

Moving from the history of Dispensationalism to its hermeneutics, Dr. Gerstner begins to expose the inadequate pillars that try to support this system of theology. The first point that Dr. Gerstner makes is that "*Dispensationalism has no philosophy of its own. Indeed, Dispensationalism is almost anti-philosophical in that it tends to de-emphasize philosophy.*"

[**Note:** An examples of a philosophy would be the Scottish Common Sense Realism of the Old Princeton theologians such as Charles Hodge and B.B. Warfield which provided the philosophical framework for its articulation of Calvinism. Scottish Realism was a response to the unacceptable eighteenth-century skepticism of David Hume who denied general ideals, which undermined confidence in moral reason. Scottish Realism also challenged the implausible idealism of George Berkeley who contended that the essence of a thing lies in its perception by mind thereby denying the reality of material substance.]

For Dr. Gerstner the absence of a distinct philosophy is a fatal flaw for it means that Dispensationalism has no viable life on its own but "*has been largely content to depend on the theoretical labors of others, especially Reformed theologians, in the evangelical camp*". One proof of this dependence is manifested "*in the early part of this century in the circumstances surrounding the publication of 'The Fundamentals', a co-operative effort of dispensational and non dispensational conservatives. Scholarly Princetonians and other conservative academicians*

*joined with the less academic dispensationalists in their common cause to defend inerrancy and other fundamental doctrines of the Christian religion” (JHG).*

Dr. Gerstner points out that dispensationalists do tend to place great value in the laws of logic. *“They tend to follow a rather pedestrian line of logical thought. The power of inductive logic is particularly attractive to dispensationalists.*

### **Dispensational Apologetics**

The brilliance of Dr. Gerstner flashes forth in this section as he establishes the difference between the “pre-suppositional approach” to Scriptures, which is associated with Cornelius Van Til and Westminster Theological Seminary, and the “classical” or “rational” approach (supported by external evidence such as miracles) to apologetics which is associated with the theologians of Old Princeton [i.e. Princeton before it became liberal in its theology]. Dr. Gerstner notices that Dispensationalism tends to follow the historic or classical apologetic pattern (as Gerstner does himself) *“but in a weakened form. By this, we mean we find here the traditional arguments for the credibility of revelation, but that they are usually somewhat less cogent than elsewhere encountered”* (JHG). The end result, contends Dr. Gerstner, is that dispensationalists cannot give an adequate reason for why they believe what they believe.

### **Chapter 6: Dispensational Hermeneutics**

*The problem of Dispensationalism is its hermeneutical principle that militates against inductive study and prevents it from seeing the unity in the Scriptures.”*

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**Dr. Daniel Fuller**

Dispensationalists take pride in a verbal-plenary-literal-grammatical-historical approach to Bible interpretation. Certainly that is commendable but not exceptional for all conservative Christians believe the Bible is to be taken in a verbal-plenary-literal-grammatical-historical manner.

### **Inspiration**

Without reservation Dispensationalist hold to the plenary inspiration of Scripture. John Nelson Darby wrote that the Holy Scriptures are *“inspired of God”* and are *“authoritative.”* *It is “not merely that truth is given in them by inspiration. They are inspired.”*

### **Literalism**

Reacting against what they feel to be *“spiritualizing”* hermeneutics Dispensationalist claim to be literal in their method of interpreting the Bible. Hal Lindsey explains.

When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense,  
Seek no other sense; therefore, take every word at its  
primary, ordinary, literal meaning unless the facts of the  
immediate context, studied in the light of related passages  
and axiomatic and fundamental truths, indicate clearly otherwise.

The irony is that upon examination “*dispensationalists are not as far removed from their non-dispensational conservative friends as they suppose*” (JHG). All conservative Christians agree that most literature, including the Bible, is to be understood according to the literal construction of the words that are used. However, there are certain concepts that are not meant to be taken literally for a metaphor is being used or an allegory. So then the question arises as to *when* the Scriptures are to be taken literally. Dr. Gerstner believes that the literalness of the dispensational hermeneutic is driven by an *a priori* commitment to dispensational theological distinctives. Of particular concern for the Dispensationalist is a fundamental commitment that Israel in the Bible holds a unique place in the plan of God until the end of time. The Church and Israel are two distinct groups of whom God has a plan for each.

### **A Great Challenge**

The challenge to dispensational thinking is to consider that the true Israel of God is not racial but spiritual. Romans 9:6 “*For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel:*” The true “Israel” consists of those who have the faith of Abraham, whether Jew or Gentile. Galatians 3:7 “*Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham.*”

### **Prophecy**

O.T. Allis exposes the claim of Dispensationalist to be consistently literal in the area of prophecy, Israel means Israel, Canaan must mean Canaan, etc. “*He points out that they tend to reverse the unusual view and instead of reading history literally and prophecy figuratively, they spiritual history and literalize prophecy*” (JHG). And they all do it. M. R. DeHaan, John Darby, and C.I. Scofield are literalists who have spiritualized some part of the Bible in violation of their own hermeneutical principles. For example, in one of his books M.R. DeHaan “*spiritualizes*” the valley of dry bones in Ezekiel’s vision and “*he justifies this procedure (which he would condemn in others) by saying that ‘it is a figure of a literal thing’*” (JHG). Many conservative non dispensationalists are conformable with Augustine’s directions that, “*Whatever can be shown to be in its literal sense inconsistent either with priority of life or correctness of doctrine must be taken figurative.*”

### **Dispensation Divisions**

In dealing with prophecy one distinguishing mark of Dispensationalism is to see divisions instead of unity. Classical Dispensationalist have seen a division between the Church and Israel, the Day of the Lord and the Day of Christ, the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Heaven, the Sermon on the Mount and the Epistles etc. A central proof text for drawing such dramatic distinction is 2 Timothy 2:15. *Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.* While it is not wrong to understand that God has different administrations in the divine economy, it is erroneous to view the periods of time so sharply they divide one from the other rather than unfold Biblical revelation in a developmental form “*just as the blossom unfolds from the bud of a flower*” (JHG). The essential unity of the Bible is not to be lost.

## Chapter 7: Spurious Calvinism

One of the major objectives of *Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth* is to expose the fact that Dispensationalism is not historic Calvinism in whole or in part as many Dispensationalist claim. Dr. Gerstner takes great offense that Dispensationalism should be viewed as embracing four of the five points of Calvinism, which were propounded by the Synod of Dordt in 1619.

That men of Calvinistic backgrounds should be the ones to advocate Dispensationalism is just another strange anomaly about the System. Dispensationalism “*was born in the mind of an Anglican rector (John Nelson Darby), was widely popularized by a Congregational lawyer (C.I. Scofield), and had its most thorough systematization by a Presbyterian theologian (Lewis Sperry Chafer)*” (JHG). In *Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth* Dr. Gerstner deals individually with each of the Five Points to show how Dispensationalism rejects the doctrines of grace. A summary of his teaching is provided.

### CALVINISM

### DISPENSATIONALISM

#### *Total Depravity*

Man is totally sinful in his  
Fallen moral nature which affects  
All aspects of his inalienable human  
Nature (thought, feeling, and will.

Man is sinful in all aspects of his  
personality but is morally able of  
himself to receive the gospel offer.

#### *Unconditional Election*

While all men are totally indisposed  
To God, God the Father mercifully  
elects a multitude to eternal life  
apart from any condition in themselves.

All men being sinful, God elects to  
eternal life those whom He  
foreknows will believe.

#### *Irresistible Grace*

The Holy Spirit regenerates those whom  
the Father chose and for whom the Son  
died, faith following simultaneously.

Fallen man of himself chooses to  
believe in Christ, regeneration by  
God following simultaneously.

#### *Perseverance of the Saints*

The Spirit of God continues to work faith  
in the regenerate and they therein persevere  
in good works, always struggling against  
the remnants of their original sin whose  
guilt is pardoned but whose power is  
decreasingly felt until destroyed at death.

The “*regenerate*” new nature, being  
divine, can never sin or perish, while  
the old nature is unaffected by it and  
continues to operate sinfully, as  
before regeneration, until destroyed  
at death.

## **Chapter 8: Dubious Evangelicalism: Part I**

The concern Dr. Gerstner has with Dispensational teaching is most evident in this chapter as he associates it with cultic overtones because of the assault of dispensational theology upon salvation. *“We define a cult as a religion which claims to be Christian while emptying Christianity of that which is essential to it. If Dispensationalism does this, then Dispensationalism is a cult and not a branch of the Christian church. It is as serious as that. It is impossible to exaggerate the gravity of the situation”* (JHG).

Having suggested a most serious charge against Dispensationalism, Dr. Gerstner sets forth what the advocates of The System teach about the people of God and salvation. It is Dr. Gerstner’s considered opinion that Dispensationalism teaches more than one way of salvation. Concerning this accusation most *“dispensationalists are satisfied to deny without refuting”* (JHG).

### **The “Scofield Problem”**

The reason why Dr. Gerstner contends that Dispensationalism teaches more than one way of salvation is because of the statements of C.I. Scofield. It was the position of Scofield that legal obedience to the law was the condition of salvation in the Old Testament while faith in Christ was and is the condition of salvation in the New Testament.

As a dispensation, grace begins with the death and resurrection Of Christ...The point of testing is no longer legal obedience as the condition of salvation, but acceptance or rejection of Christ, with good works as the fruit of salvation. (*Scofield Reference Bible*)

Trying to deflect the damage done by such statements *“Dispensationalist have adopted a number of strategies in dealing with the scandal caused by this passage”* (JHG). One technique is simply to assert that Scofield did not mean what his words clearly teaches. Another technique is to modify what Scofield meant by a dispensation. Scofield taught that a dispensation is *“a period of time in which man is tested in respect of obedience.”* The new definition of a dispensation is given in the *New Scofield Reference Bible* of 1967.

The purpose of each dispensation, then, is to place man under the 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.

Dr. Gerstner is not impressed with the attempt to deal with Scofield’s teaching. *“The newer Dispensationalism is one grand charade, its dispensations signifying nothing. While Scofield said too much, his successors, in their desire to avoid the scandal of the “Scofield problem”, have qualified the term dispensation to the point of extinction”* (JHG).



## The Negative Purpose of a Dispensation

If men are not saved in different ways as Dispensationalism teach [legal obedience in the Old Testament, gospel obedience in the New], of what value are the various dispensations? Perhaps there is a repetitive attempt to convince men of their need for a Saviour? But this cannot be for prior to the Fall in the dispensations of innocence and conscience there was no need for a Saviour since there was no sin. And after the Fall men knew they had a need for a Saviour for God has written the law on the hearts of men (Rom. 2:14-16). No, another purpose for the various dispensations has to be found. It is at this point that Calvinism, being theocentric, *“compares favorably with the theological absurdity of Dispensationalism. Not only does Dispensationalism not glorify any of the attributes of God, it does not even glorify the salvific, merciful aspects of God. We see that the stated purpose of the seven dispensations reveals nothing and obscures everything about God”* (JHG).

## The “Chafer Problem”

Like Scofield, Lewis Sperry Chafer has a problem showing that he taught only one way of salvation. Chafer writes, *“With the call of Abraham and the giving of the Law...there are two widely different standardized, divine provisions whereby man, who is utterly fallen, might come into the favor of God”* (Chafer, Systematic Theology, 7:219). Interestingly enough, *“according to [John] Walvoord, Chafer became ‘quite indignant when here writings were interpreted as teaching anything other than that salvation was always by grace and by faith’”* (JHG).

Time and again in Dispensational teaching the pattern is found whereby statements are made while the content of their meaning is denied. It is an interesting phenomenon—and very frustrating.

## The Continuity of Faith

Dispensationalist, such as Charles Ryrie, advocate a system of salvation for Old Testament saints based on divine benevolence while New Testament believers need faith in Christ specifically. In contrast, the Scriptures set forth the continuity of faith for all men in all ages.

- Acts 17:30 *And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent:*

**Note.** Paul, as an Apostle to the Gentiles, was not referring to Old Testament saints when he spoke these words. He was referring to the *“ignorance”*, which God *“overlooked”*.

- Romans 3:25 *[Christ Jesus] Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God;*

**Note.** Passing over of sins (*paresis*) was the equivalent of the forgiveness of sins (*aphesis*).

- John 1:21 *And they asked him, What then? Art thou Elias? And he saith, I am not. Art thou that prophet? And he answered, No.*

**Note.** The Jews knew the Christ was coming based on the pre-figurations of sacrificed lambs which is why John could say, “*Behold the Lamb of God*” (John 1:29). The Jews knew from the Old Testament who the Christ would be, but not which person He would be.

- John 7:40 *Many of the people therefore, when they heard this saying, said, Of a truth this is the Prophet.*

**Note.** The reason John was asked if he were the Prophet and the reason many believed he was the Prophet despite his protestations was because the people knew that “the Prophet” was coming. This point is significant because it proves that Jesus Christ was known in the Old Testament by way of pre-figuration.

- 1 Peter 1:10-11 *Of which salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: 11 Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow.*

## **Chapter 9: Dubious Evangelicalism: Part II**

As Dispensational theology has a spurious Calvinism so it suffers from a “*dubious evangelicalism*” according to Dr. Gerstner. In chapter 9 Dr. Gerstner plainly demonstrates how the “Kingdom Offer” concept to the Jews undermines the gospel.

According to Dispensational Theology Jesus Christ did not come primarily to die as a substitute for sinners but to establish His kingdom according to nationalistic Jewish expectations of a militant Messiah. “*When Jesus came, He made a bona fide offer of the Kingdom and power to the people of Israel*” (Donald G. Barnhouse). Unfortunately, the “Kingdom Offer” was rejected which led to (1) the suspension of time and (2) the introduction of the “Church Age.” One day, according to Dispensational Theology, the “Church Age” will end and the “prophetic clock” will move forward again giving the Jews seven years of history according to Daniel’s prophecy of seventy weeks (cf. Daniel 9:24-27). During this seven-year period the Anti-Christ will emerge to lead the world to a blood bath at Armageddon. The Church Age saints will not be present during this “Great Tribulation” period having been “Raptured” seven years earlier at the beginning of the period.

The major problem with this whole scenario is that had the Jews responded to Christ’s offer to establish His kingdom “*as they ought to have responded. There never would have been a gospel of Jesus Christ*” (JHG). It is this positions that Dr. Gerstner finds most objectionable. “*This ‘Kingdom Offer’ is surely an appalling notion*” (JHG).

The notion is appalling because it is immoral. “*The clear implication of the dispensational view is that God was offering Israel a very wicked option. According to Dispensationalism, the Lord Jesus Christ was offering something to the Jews in good faith which, had they accepted, would have destroyed the only way of man’s salvation*” (JHG). This, God would never do because He is righteous. “*If God did offer a kingdom which He could not have permitted to be established, He could be neither honest nor sincere*” (JHG).

## A Single Scripture Destroys the System

There is one very important verse that overthrows the whole concept that Jesus came to offer the Jews a kingdom they rejected.

- John 6:15 *When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take him by force, to make him a king, he departed again into a mountain himself alone. (KJV)*
- John 6:15 *Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself. (NIV)*

The conclusion of the matter for Dr. Gerstner is that the kingdom offer as proposed by Dispensational theology makes the Cross of Christ *unnecessary!*

### Chapter 10: Dubious Evangelicalism: Part III

One reason why Dispensational theology is able to set forth the notion of a rejected kingdom offer is because of a distorted view of Israel and the church. *“According to Dispensationalism, Israel and the church are different in almost every way. Israel is an ethnic group, the Jews, the descendants of Abraham and Sarah. The church is composed of all nationalities. The Abrahamic covenant which made his descendants God’s chosen people was absolutely unconditional while the covenant of grace which brings the church into being is conditional in that it requires faith. Consequently, regeneration or the new birth is required, whereas one becomes an Israelite by being born, not by being reborn. Israelites never received a baptism or indwelling of, the Spirit which is essential for a member of the church. Israel is national and spiritual, the church is individual and invisible. Israel is an entirely earth people, with earthly promises and an earthly destiny eternally. The church is a spiritual people with eternal life in heaven for its destiny. Presently, Israel as God’s people is in eclipse but soon (probably) to be fully restored to the Promised Land and dominion over the earth. The church is now alive, growing, and soon to be raptured to heaven” (JHG).*

### Disruption of Historical Unity

Tragically, the Dispensational view destroys the tradition teaching of the essential unity between spiritual Israel and the church. While dispensationalists claim that the church was an unforeseen entity or prophetic “parenthesis” many passages teach otherwise.

- **Hosea 1:10** *Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured nor numbered; and it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people, there it shall be said unto them, Ye are the sons of the living God.*

**Romans 9:22-26** *What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: 23 And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory, 24 Even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles? 25 As he saith also in Osee, I will call them my people, which were not my people; and her beloved, which was not beloved. 26 And it shall*

*come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people; there shall they be called the children of the living God.*

- **Hosea 2:23** *And I will sow her unto me in the earth; and I will have mercy upon her that had not obtained mercy; and I will say to them which were not my people, Thou art my people; and they shall say, Thou art my God.*

**1 Peter 2:9-10** *But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: 10 Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.*

- **Amos 9:11** *In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof; and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old:*

**Acts 15:14-16** *Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. 15 And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, 16 After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up:*

As there are many Old Testament passages that teach the church was foreseen so there are other passages referring to Israel which, in the New Testament, are applied directly to the church. A few examples will be sufficient to demonstrate the point.

- **Exodus 19:5-6** *Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: 6 And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel.*

**1 Peter 2:9** *But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light:*

- **Jeremiah 24:7** *And I will give them an heart to know me, that I am the LORD: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God: for they shall return unto me with their whole heart.*

**2 Corinthians 6:16** *And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.*

- **Jeremiah 31:31-34** *Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: 32 Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD: 33 But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. 34 And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.*

**Luke 22:20** *Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the New Testament in my blood, which is shed for you.*

- **Leviticus 19:2** *Speak unto all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say unto them, Ye shall be holy: for I the LORD your God am holy.*

**1 Peter 1:15** *But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation;*

Despite an impressive array of Scriptures setting forth the essential unity of spiritual Israel in the Old Testament with the spiritual church in the New Testament, dispensationalists are committed to their System as they wrongly divide asunder what God's Word has joined together. Because of a radical cleavage between the Old and the New Testament, Dispensational theology allows one error after another to be taught with bitter fruit.

### **A Fundamental Contempt for the Christian Church**

One example of bitter fruit is Dispensationalism's attitude toward the organized Christian church. *"Dispensationalist often evidence intense suspicion toward the organized, visible church. Darby, for example, wrote that, 'the Year-books of Christianity are the year-books of hell.' Another Plymouth brother wrote of organized Christianity, 'It is worse, by far, than Judaism; worse by far than all the darkest forms of Paganism.'"* (JHG) Such examples could be multiplied endlessly.

The basic reason why many Dispensationalist can set forth a fundamental contempt for the church is because of a Israel/church distinction *"which assumes that Israel is an entirely temporal matter and the church an entirely spiritual affair. As a result, dispensationalist retreat into a hyper-spiritual Gnosticism which spurns the structures of the visible church which God has graciously given to His people"* (JHG).

### **Chapters 11 and 12: Dispensational Anti-nomianism: Part I and Part II**

Continuing his relentless exposure of the errors of Dispensational theology Dr. Gerstner presses his case to charge the System with being Antinomian. *"In this chapter I will show that all traditional dispensationalists teach that converted Christian persons can (not may) live in sin throughout their post-conversion lives with no threat to their eternal destiny."* If Dr. Gerstner is

right and dispensationalist teach this doctrine directly or indirectly then it is nothing but out and out antinomianism or lawlessness. W.K.B. Stoeber defines the term.

The label “*antinomianism*” derives from the syndrome’s distinctive mark, Namely, the denial of the relevance of the moral law to true Christians Because of the ability claimed for the Holy Spirit to separate persons directly and radically from the obligations of ordinary worldly existence.

To prove his charge against Dispensationalism Dr. Gerstner examines an underlying dispensational teaching setting forth the proposition that the Christian has two natures. One is “*carnal*” and the other is “*spiritual*.” In as far as the Christian acts like an unbeliever in his life he is said to be “*carnal*” or “*fleshly*.” In as far as the believer is obedient to the gospel principles he is “*spiritual*.” A summary statement of the two classes of Christians may be noted. According to dispensationist there are

Those who “abide in Christ” and those who “abide not”; for those who are “walking in the light,” and those who “walk in darkness”; those who “walk by the Spirit,” and those who “walk as men”; those who “walk in the newness of life,” and those who “walk after the flesh”; ...those who are “spirit” and those who are “carnal”; those who are “filled with the Spirit,” and those who are not. All this has to do with the qualities of Daily life of saved people, and is in no way a contrast between the saved and unsaved.

The basic problem with the theory of the Carnal Christian is that it is an anomaly. It is like talking about a Heavenly Devil. If a Christian is both carnal and spiritual because he has two natures then who confesses sin and who walks in righteousness? The carnal nature will not confess sin for it is against its nature to do so, the spiritual nature does not need to confess sin. And who is this third entity in the soul that is directing the carnal nature or the spiritual to act in a given manner? It all gets confusing. By trying to make a dramatic distinction between the “standing” of the believer and his “state” the dispensationalist teaching has moved to antinomianism.

Confirmation of incipient antinomianism is reflected in the writings of J.N. Darby, C.I. Scofield and even Harry Ironside. An extract from each is set forth to illustrate this sad reality.

- **Commenting on 1 John 1:7** (*But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin*) John.N. Darby explained that this text deals with where the believer walks, not how.
- **Commenting on Matthew 6:12** (*Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors*) Scofield has this note. “*The sin of the justified believer interrupts his fellowship; it is forgiven upon confession, but always on the ground of Christ’s propitiating sacrifice.*” Dr. Gerstner observes that “*One can see from this note that forgiveness is not necessary for a person’s salvation; it is necessary only for fellowship. I may refuse all my life to forgive. God will, however, forgive this and all my other sins in*

*which I may choose to persist. I will lose fellowship with Him and fellow Christians, but my salvation is an accomplished fact because I once professed faith in Christ. It is obvious that one could go on lying, blaspheming, fornicating, and murdering for a lifetime with no threat to one's salvation. The Christian's 'disobedience does not affect his salvation, but fellowship, peace and growth,' he [Scofield] wrote in his Question Box."*

- **H.A. Ironside.** Because of his commitment to the Carnal (Backsliding) Christian doctrine even Ironside does not avoid being charged with Antinomianism. Dr. Gerstner points to the following teaching by Ironside.

Backsliding there may be—and, alas, often is. But the backslider  
Is one under the hand of God in government. And He loves him  
Too well to permit him to continue the practice of sin. He uses the  
Rod of discipline; and if that be not enough, cuts short his career  
And leaves the case for final settlement at the judgment seat of Christ  
1 Corinthians 3:14; 11:30-32 ; and 2 Corinthians 5:10).

All of this is too much for Dr. Gerstner. *"If the Christian had the principle of holiness in him, he could not 'continue the practice of sin' until God actually 'cuts short his career' because he has nothing but bad works."*

In contrast to the Dispensational teaching of the two natures of the Christian allowing for carnality is the Reformed doctrine. *"The Reformed doctrine, which recognizes that the man himself is regenerated (that is, that the old nature is given a new principle of life and this new principle, though it does not eradicate the other, becomes dominant over it), states that this regenerated person will strive after holiness without which no man shall see the Lord (see Hebrews 12:14). If he does not do so, it is manifest that he has not had the new birth at all. He does not rest his new birth or his justification on the excellence of the life he lives, but he rests the ascertaining of the presence of a new nature on the life he lives. He does not establish his election on his works, but by them he makes it sure to himself. He does not work out his justification, but he does work out his sanctification if God is working in him to will and to do. If he is not working out, he knows that God is not working in. There is no possibility, on the one hand of legalism; nor, on the other hand, of carnal security. As Luther, Calvin, the Reformation, and all sound teachers, we are justified by faith alone, but not by a faith that is alone"* (JHG).

### **The Agony of Antinomianism**

The end of the matter is that Dispensationalism clearly teaches Antinomianism. *"That is to say, it begins by teaching that men may be saved without the good works which bear witness to a living faith. It concludes, when pressed to its logical conclusion, by teaching that men may be saved with non-faith, with dead faith, and salvation without dead faith, with no faith, without faith. Justification without faith, and salvation without grace is its false gospel. It is ironic that Dispensationalism prides itself on its claim to exalt the free grace of God. The "grace" which allows the sinner to wallow endlessly in his sin on his way to heaven is certainly not grace at all."*

## Chapter 13: The Lordship Controversy

In a final chapter Dr. Gerstner deals with current history of monumental importance. *“The church is presently faced with a struggle equal in importance to the fourth-century Nicene battle for the deity of Christ and the Reformation struggle for the doctrine of justification by faith” (JHG)*. The doctrine that crystallizes the debate is the Lordship of Christ. The terms of the debate is whether or not a dramatic distinction can be made between salvation and sanctification, between receiving Christ as “Savior” and then, subsequent to salvation, accepting His Lordship.

### The Simplicity of Scripture

While Dr. Gerstner does a masterful job framing the various positions on the Lordship controversy the simplicity of Scriptures on this matter is helpful.

- **Statement.** Recognizing the Lordship of Christ pleases Jesus. John 13:13 *Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am.*
- **Question.** *“Can a person be truly converted without recognizing the Lordship of Christ?”* Luke 6:46 *And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?*
- **Question.** *“Will heaven be the reward of anyone who continues in evil?”* Rom 2:8 *But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath,*
- **Question.** *“If the Lordship of Christ for salvation is not important then why was Paul so alarmed with the professing saints.”* Gal 3:1 *O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you? Gal 5:7 Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth?*
- **Statement.** In apostolic preaching the Lordship of Christ is emphasized.

Acts 5:29-31 *Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men. 30 The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. 31 Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.*

- **Statement.** Unless a person sees Christ as Lord they will never appreciate Him as Savior for true salvation is always accompanied by gospel obedience. Acts 9:6 *And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.*

### A Final Observation

In reading *Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth* it seems that time and again when the various doctrinal positions of Dispensationalists are set forth they claim misrepresentation when someone like Dr. Gerstner exposes the fallacy of their teaching. But what if the teachings of Dispensationalist are not misrepresented.



What if Dispensational theology really does teach

- that God has two people, one earthly (Israel) and one heavenly (the Church)?
- that man has two natures, one carnal (fleshly) and one spiritual so that he can practice sin and still have a hope of heaven but without the rewards?
- that the Lordship of Christ is not essential to salvation?
- that the Church is not a continuation of spiritual Israel?
- that the totality of the Moral Law is not binding on the Christian today?

What if Dispensational theology advocates

- a spurious Calvinism
- a dubious evangelicalism
- and a doctrinal anti-nomianism?

What if Dispensational theology has robbed the Christian message of its essential meaning by substituting new concepts upon the faith once and for all delivered to the saints? What if...? Dr. Gerstner admits that he may be wrong in defending Reformed theology and opposing Dispensational theology which is why he pleads with the dispensationalists to show him the error of his way. Some have tried to do just that as the second part of the book demonstrates. But, as Dr. Gerstner notes, his critics only manage to engage in *Wrongly Dividing, Wrongly Dividing*. And so the debate continues. As the debate continues let God's people be fully persuaded in their own minds. In the end all the redeemed shall say together, "*To God be the glory!*"

***Soli Deo Gloria!***

## *Appendices*

### **The Strange Vision of Margaret MacDonald**

1. Margaret MacDonald was a young Scottish girl who had a private revelation in Port Glasgow, Scotland, in the spring (March) of 1830. Margaret was born, January 14, 1815, and was baptized on January 22, 1815. This means she was only 15 years old when she had her revelation that was hidden from all God's people for almost 2000 years! Margaret died on September 14, 1835, having lived a short life, but one full of Christian graces all the while longing for more of the Spirit of God.
2. In her revelation Margaret came to understand that a select group of Christians would be caught up to meet Christ in the air BEFORE the days of Antichrist.
3. An eye and ear witness, Robert Norton, MD, preserved her handwritten account of her pre-tribulation rapture revelation in two of his books, and said it was the FIRST time anyone had ever split the Second Coming of Christ into two distinct parts, or stages (The Restoration of Apostles and Prophets; In the Catholic Apostolic Church; Memoirs of James and George MacDonald of Port-Glasgow, 1840).
4. Margaret's new revelations were well known to those who visited her home, among them John Darby of the Brethren.
5. In the September 1830, issues of THE MORNING WATCH, the new revelations of Margaret were being presented. The early disciples of the pre-tribulation interpretation often called it a new doctrine. For example, one of the earliest Brethren leaders, Robert Gribble, confessed in the early 1830's that he had adopted "*a new view of unfulfilled prophecy*" (***The Origins of the Brethren***, Harold H. Rowdon, p. 149). John Darby advocated a subtle introduction of the doctrine of the new pre-tribulation rapture view. "*I think we ought to have something more of direct testimony as the Lord's coming, and its bearing also on the state of the church: ordinarily, it would not be well to have it so clear, as it frightens people. We must pursue it steadily; it works like leaven, and its fruit is by no means seen yet; I do not mean leaven as ill, but the thoughts are new, and people's minds work on them, and all the old habits are against their feelings....*" (***Letters of John N. Darby***, pp.25-26).
6. It is important to realize that this whole doctrine is new, as Darby admitted not just rediscovered truth. What was not new was the setting of dates. Darby himself was a date setter at one time. In his ***Etudes sur l'Épître aux Hébreux***, published in Lausanne, Switzerland, about 1835, Darby writes on page 146: "*There are excellent brethren in all countries who have sought to calculate these dates...some have fixed 1844, others 1847; I myself have made several calculations in the times past, and in the same sense.*"

## The Pre-Tribulation Revelation in the Words of Margaret MacDonald

It was first the awful state of the land that was pressed upon me. I saw the blindness and infatuation of the people to be very great. I felt the cry of Liberty just to be the hiss of the serpent, to drown them in perdition. It was just 'no God.' I repeated the words,

*Now there is distress of nations, with perplexity,  
the seas and the roaring, men's hearts  
failing them for fear—now look  
out for the sign of the Son of man.*

Here I was made to stop and cry out,

*O, it is not known what the sign of the  
Son of man is; the people of God think  
they are waiting, but they know not  
what it is.*

I felt this needed to be revealed, and that there was great darkness and error about it; but suddenly what it was burst upon me with a glorious light.

I saw it was just the Lord himself descending from Heaven with a shout, just the glorified man, even Jesus; but that all must, as Stephen was, be filled with the Holy Ghost, that they might look up, and see the brightness of the Father's glory.

I saw the error to be, that men think that it will be something seen by the natural eye; but 'tis spiritual discernment that is needed, the eye of God in his people. Many passages were revealed, in a light in which I had not before seen them.

I repeated,

*Now is the kingdom of Heaven like unto ten virgins,  
who went forth to meet the Bridegroom, five wise and five foolish;  
they that were foolish took their lamps, but took no oil with them; but they that  
were wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps.'  
'But be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the  
Lord is; and be not drunk with wine wherein is excess,  
but be filled with the Spirit.'*

This was the oil the wise virgins took in their vessels—this is the light to be kept burning—the light of God—that we may discern that which cometh not with observation to the natural eye. Only those who have the light of God within them will see the sign of his appearance. No need to follow them who say,

*See here, or see there, for his day shall be as the  
lightning to those in whom the living Christ is.*

*Tis Christ in us that will lift us up—he is the light—  
'tis only those that are alive in him  
that will be caught up to meet him in the air.*

I saw that we must be in the Spirit, that we might see spiritual things. John was in the Spirit, when he saw a throne set in Heaven. —But I saw that the glory of the ministration of the Spirit had not been known. I repeated frequently, but the spiritual temple must and shall be reared, and the fullness of Christ be poured into his body, and then shall we be caught up to meet him. Oh, none will be counted worthy of this calling but his body, which is the church, and which must be a candlestick all of gold.

I often said,

*Oh, the glorious inbreaking of God  
which is now about to burst on this earth;  
Oh, the glorious temple which is now  
about to be reared, the bride adorned for her husband;  
and Oh, what a holy, holy bride she must be, to be  
prepared for such a glorious bridegroom.*

I said,

*Now shall the people of God have to do with  
realities--now shall the glorious mystery of God in our  
nature be known--now shall it be known what it is for man to  
be glorified.*

I felt that the revelation of Jesus Christ had yet to be opened up—it is not knowledge about God that it contains, but it is an entering into God—

I saw that there was a glorious breaking in of God to be.

I felt as Elijah, surrounded with chariots of fire.

I saw as it were, the spiritual temple reared, and the Head Stone brought forth with shouting of grace, grace, unto it.

It was a glorious light above the brightness of the sun that shone round about me. I felt that those who were filled with the Spirit could see spiritual things, and feel walking in the midst of them, while those who had not the Spirit could see nothing—so that two shall be in one bed, the one taken and the other left, because the one has the light of God within while the other cannot see the Kingdom of Heaven.

I saw the people of God in an awfully dangerous situation, surrounded by nets and entanglements, about to be tried, and many about to be deceived and fall. Now [after this] will The Wicked be revealed, with all power and signs and lying wonders, so that if it were possible the very elect will be deceived.

This is the fiery trial that is to try us. It will be for the purging and purifying of the real members of the body of Jesus; but oh it will be a fiery trial. Every soul will be shaken to the very center. The enemy will try to shake in every thing we have believed--but the trial of real faith will be found to honour and praise and glory. Nothing but what is of God will stand. The stony-ground hearers will be made manifest--the love of many will wax cold. I frequently said that night, and often since, now shall the awful sight of a false Christ be seen on this earth, and nothing but the living Christ in us can detect this awful attempt of the enemy to deceive--for it is with all deceivableness of unrighteousness he will work--he will have a counterpart for every part of God's truth, and an imitation for every work of the Spirit.

The Spirit must and will be poured out on the church, that she may be purified and filled with God--and just in proportion as the Spirit of God works, so will he--when our Lord anoints

men with power, so will he. This is particularly the nature of the trial, through which those are to pass who will be counted worthy to stand before the Son of man.

There will be outward trial too, but 'tis principally temptation. It is brought on by the outpouring of the Spirit, and will just increase in proportion as the Spirit is poured out. The trial of the Church is from Antichrist. It is by being filled with the Spirit that we shall be kept. I frequently said, Oh be filled with the Spirit—have the light of God in you, that you may detract Satan—be full of eyes within—be clay in the hands of the potter--submit to be filled, filled with God. This will build the temple.

*It is neither by might nor by power, but my Spirit,* saith the Lord. This will fit us to enter into the marriage supper of the Lamb. I saw it to be the will of God that all should be filled. But what hindered the real life of God from being received by his people, was their turning from Jesus, who is the way to the Father. They were not entering in by the door. For he is faithful who hath said, by me if any man enters in he shall find pasture. They were passing from the cross, through which every drop of the Spirit of God flows, to us.

All power that comes not through the blood of Christ is not of God. When I say, they are looking from the cross, I feel that there is much in it--they turn from the blood of the Lamb, by which we overcome, and in which our robes are washed and made white. There are low views of God's holiness, and a ceasing to condemn sin in the flesh, and a looking from him that humbled himself, and made himself of no reputation. OH! it is needed, much needed at present, a leading back to the cross.

I saw that night, and often since, that there will be an outpouring of the Spirit on the body, such as has not been, a baptism of fire, that all the dross may be put away. Oh there must and will be such an indwelling of the living God as has not been--the servants of God sealed in their foreheads--great conformity to Jesus--his holy image seen in his people--just the bride made comely, by his comeliness put upon her. This is what we are at present made to pray much for, that speedily we may all be made ready to meet our Lord in the air—and it will be. Jesus wants his bride. His desire is toward us. He that shall come, will come, and will not tarry. Amen and Amen. Even so come Lord Jesus.

### **A Summary of Margaret's Vision**

1. Margaret MacDonald believed that the catching up or Rapture would be seen only by believers filled with the Spirit. This would be a secret coming.
2. When Margaret spoke of "*one taken and the other left*" it was not a separation of believers and unbelievers but rather of Spirit-filled believers being taken while non Spirit believers are left to endure tribulation.
3. The major point to recognize is that Margaret believed some Christians are to be taken in Rapture *before* the Wicked One or Antichrist is revealed.

## The Very Interesting Edward Irving

1. Edward Irving was born on August 4, 1792, in Annan, Scotland.
2. He entered Edinburgh University when he was thirteen years old and received an MA in April 1809, when he was sixteen.
3. Irving was licensed a Presbyterian minister in June of 1815 at age twenty-three. Four years later he was the assistant to Dr. Thomas Chalmers in his parish in Glasgow, Scotland.
4. In 1822, at age thirty, Irving became pastor of the Caledonian Chapel (Presbyterian) at Hatton Garden in London. His fame as a great orator spread throughout the entire region.
5. During these early years of the 1800's there was a revival of pre-millennialism. Interest in prophecy was acute.
6. It was during this period that Irving discovered Manuel de Lacunza's book, *The Coming of Messiah in Glory and Majesty* (1812), and in 1826 translated this Spanish work into English.
7. Lacunza had written the book under the pen name of Juan Josafat Ben-Ezra. He believed that the coming Antichrist would not be a person but a corrupted Roman Catholic priesthood.
8. In addition to prophecy, Irving also came to believe as early as 1828 that the spiritual gifts of the apostolic age belonged to the church of all ages. If they were not being used it was because of lack of faith.
9. Combining the two major thoughts Irving began to write in a prolific manner that the coming of Christ was imminent and would be preceded by the end time outpouring of the apostolic gifts.
10. Irving, who has been called "*The Father of Modern Pentecostalism*," would not have been amazed to learn that a charismatic revival had broken out in some small towns in western Scotland.
11. A delegation from Irving church was sent to investigate. The delegation returned and gave a glowing report, which created much excitement.
12. Throughout the autumn of 1830 prayer meetings were held in London to seek an outpouring of the Spirit.
13. One such meeting was held in the home of J.B. Cardale, the leader of the Albury delegation to Scotland. There was a measure of success as the first known case of speaking in tongues in London was recorded.
14. The person who spoke in tongues on April 20, 1831, was Cardale's wife and this is what she said: "*The Lord will speak to His people--the Lord hasteneth His Coming--the Lord cometh.*"

15. Speaking in tongues and prophesying became regular features in the Regent Square church until finally the Trustees of the Church filed a complaint against Irving with the Presbytery of London.
16. The church trial of Edward Irving began on April 26, 1832. Irving was found guilty of violating the order of services allowed by the Presbyterian structure and was removed from his church.
17. On Sunday morning, May 6, 1832, the Trustees locked Irving and a large part of his congregation out of the building. The minister and his people began to meet in a building in Gray's Inn Road. The Catholic Apostolic Church had been born.
18. Irving himself never prophesied nor spoke in tongues. He was finally deposed from the ministry altogether by his hometown presbytery of Annan for teaching that when Christ became incarnate he fully assumed sinful nature so that his sinless life depended on the power of the Holy Spirit, not on an innately sinless human nature. This trial took place March 13, 1833.
19. On December 7, 1834 Edward Irving died and was buried in a crypt in Glasgow Cathedral. He was forty-two years old.

His recent book, *Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth*, is a trenchant assault on Dispensationalism in general and Grace theology in particular. The latter he flatly labels as Antinomianism. I welcome this book. Gerstner's criticisms of Dispensationalism are certainly severe. But given his own position, they must be seen as his frank and candid assessments of an opposing theology. Perhaps the last paragraph of his conclusion expresses his spirit as well as anything else that he says: My plea to all dispensationalists is this—"show me the fundamental error in what I teach or admit your own fundamental error. We cannot both be right. One of us is wrong—seriously wrong. If you are wrong (in your doctrine, as I charge), you are preaching nothing less than a false gospel. Dispensations, *Wrongly Divided*. While we all easily agree on dispensationalism and the distinction between Israel and the Church, self-proclaimed "Right Dividers" reject Classical Dispensationalism in favor of either a Mid-Acts or Post-Acts view. The Mid-Acts view places a dividing line at Acts 9 or 13, instead of at Acts 2. The Post-Acts, Ultra-Dispensational, Hyper-Dispensational view, places a dividing line at Acts 28, instead of at Acts 2. How much does this matter, or does it matter? I hope you can see that where the dividing line for the Age of Grace is positioned affects more than just a flexible start point. It affects the gospel itself.