

**17<sup>th</sup> Annual Council on Dispensational Hermeneutics**  
**Faith Baptist Bible College and Theological Seminary**  
**September 18 & 19, 2024**

*Does Dispensationalism Teach Two Ways of Salvation?*

PAUL J. SCHARF, M.Div.  
Church Ministries Representative  
The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry  
pscharf@foi.org

**Introduction**

Is salvation free for some—but purchased by law-keeping for others? Does God offer different paths to justification in the various administrations of His rule? Furthermore, has such teaching been a hallmark of classical or traditional dispensational theology?

If you have moved in the realm of dispensational theology for any length of time, you have likely heard the charge that dispensationalism teaches two or more ways of salvation. These may be one for the Old Testament and one for the New Testament—or even the concept that each of the seven traditional dispensations are marked by a different means of salvation.<sup>1</sup>

In fact, any such teaching flies completely in the face of Biblical dispensationalism. We must admit, however, that some of the blame for this controversy lies at our own dispensational doorstep, the result of imprudent statements by some of our brightest historical lights, as well as a lack of consistent and unified teaching in our movement.

This paper will make it clear that Scripture does not support multiple ways of salvation in the diverse dispensations, and that this strain of teaching is therefore antithetical to the nature of traditional dispensationalism.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> See the comments in Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2007), 121-122. This issue is also identified as “Myth 1” in Michael J. Vlach, *Dispensationalism: Essential Beliefs and Common Myths* (Los Angeles: Theological Studies Press, 2008), 35. See the discussion on pp. 35-38. Vlach does an excellent job of surveying the history of this controversy, including the allegations (and concessions) of leading covenant theologians. See also the discussion by Glenn R. Kreider, “SOLA FIDE: Salvation is by Grace Through Faith Alone in Every Dispensation,” in Christopher Cone and James I. Fazio, gen. eds., *Forged From Reformation* (El Cajon, CA: Southern California Seminary Press, 2017), 426-436. Kreider skillfully handles alleged “misstatements” by “Darby, Scofield, and Chafer” (434)—dealing with them in light of the historical development and broader context of dispensationalism. The issue of such “misstatements” will be taken up later in this paper.

<sup>2</sup> The scope of this paper does not allow for a complete exposition of all aspects of salvation in every dispensation. It will deal specifically with the issues of sacrifice and obedience to the law, both in the Old Testament and in the

I will strive to demonstrate through Biblical exposition that salvation is always—in the language of the Reformation—*by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone*. By referencing the leading voices of mainstream dispensational thought over the last century, I will demonstrate that this has been the consistent position of those who have preserved our dispensational heritage.

### **One Way of Salvation**

Dispensationalism purports to be the result of a consistent literal, grammatical, historical hermeneutic of Scripture. And faithful students of God’s Word, through the centuries, across the theological spectrum, have agreed that there is but one ultimate means of salvation.<sup>3</sup>

In fact, the basic understanding of Biblical teaching regarding the means of salvation can be summed up in this simple statement: “Salvation has never been by deeds, or works....”<sup>4</sup> Few accusations will put one’s evangelical credentials at greater risk than an allegation of teaching salvation by works or law-keeping, even in the Old Testament—thus making the charge that dispensationalism teaches more than one way of salvation all the more acute.

### **Salvation in Both Testaments**

Is the idea of one way of salvation simply a truism that we have based on a cursory reading of proof texts? I contend that it is not—but rather that it is a doctrine woven throughout Scripture from Genesis to Revelation, and one that stands up under intense scrutiny.

In using the term “faith” 24 times, the great *Hall of Faith* chapter, Hebrews 11, sets out to make its premise undeniably clear: “Without faith *it is* impossible to please *Him*” (v. 6).<sup>5</sup> The examples that follow throughout the chapter demonstrate unambiguously that Old Testament saints, both before and under the law, were never attempting to earn salvation by works, nor was their function ever simply cold or perfunctory. They lived their lives in devotion to the Lord, built upon their foundational trust in Him. They desired t

---

future millennial kingdom—attempting to demonstrate that these never were and never will be means of salvation. The overarching theme of the paper is to offer an apologetic for salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in every dispensation—which undergirds a proper understanding of the nature and purpose of a dispensation.

<sup>3</sup> Here, for instance, is a statement from Herman A. Preus, *A Theology to Live By* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1977), 43: “Luther saw the theology of the cross in the Old Testament as well as in the New. For to him the Bible was one book. Old and New Testaments alike bear witness to Christ.”

<sup>4</sup> John MacArthur, gen. ed., *The MacArthur Study Bible*, 2nd Edition, ESV (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2021), 1,732, note on Tit. 3:5.

<sup>5</sup> J. Dwight Pentecost commented on this verse noting that it “is not a principle limited to this age, but is true in every age.” J. Dwight Pentecost *Things to Come* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1964), 270.

o please Him, and were ultimately willing to risk all that they had for Him, “by faith” (vv. 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 11, 17, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31).<sup>6</sup>

But there is something even more fundamental here which must not escape us. The writer to the Hebrews grounds this entire treatise in a citation from Habakkuk 2:4, as he quotes it in 10:38: “Now the just shall live by faith.”

As we turn to that pivotal text, where it was initially declared by the prophet around the seventh century B.C., its original context is very instructive.

God was sending the Babylonian armies against Jerusalem in judgment for Judah’s sin (Hab. 1:5-11). The defiant prophet, dismayed that God would use this wicked empire to chasten His own beloved people (Hab. 1:12-17), established a “watch ... on the rampart” (v. 1)—waiting to hear God’s response to the many questions he posed.

On the basis of further revelation, Habakkuk could immediately see two very different types of responses to this most desperate situation. The first was from “the proud,” whose “soul is not upright in him” (v. 4a). This is the wicked man, whose shortsighted view is based entirely on the availability of temporal comfort and security.

But there was a second alternative. It was to be numbered among “the just” (v. 4b; cf. 2 Pet. 2:7). Though, like Habakkuk, these righteous ones would not look forward to the chastisement the nation would receive under the oppression of Babylonian rule, they maintained a God-centered view—“by faith.” Indeed, it was that faith that was at the very core of their justification. They had come to spiritual life, and would continue to operate in a hostile world, by faith.

The New Testament quotes this principal statement three times. The first is in the passage that revolutionized the world at the time of the Reformation, when the signal text on justification became the central passage of all church history. Of course, I refer to Romans 1:16-17, which Martin Luther came to understand as the nucleus of his teaching on justification by faith:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ.... For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, “The just shall live by faith.”

It has well been noted that the emphasis on the quotation in this passage is on the words “the just.” This becomes the foundation for Paul’s majestic exposition of the doctrine of justification in Romans 1-5.

In Paul’s next usage of the quote (Gal. 3:11), the emphasis shifts to the middle of the verse—“shall live.” This is the challenge that Paul is addressing in this contentious epistle, likely the first he ever wrote—living by faith, as opposed to law, both for

---

<sup>6</sup> Pentecost stated: “Hebrews 11:1-40 makes it clear that the only individual who was ever accepted by God was the individual who believed God.” *Things to Come*, 269. Allen P. Ross wrote: “That salvation was through faith in the OT is clearly affirmed in Hebrews 11.” Allen P. Ross, “The Biblical Method of Salvation: A Case for Discontinuity,” in *Continuity and Discontinuity*, John. S. Feinberg, ed. (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1988), 167.

justification and for sanctification. Paul maintains the integrity of Habakkuk's original statement when he bases his wider application on the concept that we must continue to live in the energy of that faith by which we were first justified.

Finally, as we have seen, the author of Hebrews uses the quotation in Hebrews 10:38 to introduce his great faith chapter. The emphasis, of course, is upon the words "by faith"—and the writer builds on that theme so eloquently.

### **Salvation Through the Dispensations**

No one can deny that, in the progress of revelation, the inspired text continually enhanced mankind's understanding regarding the object of saving faith.

The classic example comes from the Apostle Peter. Immediately following his incredible confession of faith in Christ (Matt. 16:16), he sought "to rebuke" Jesus and preempt His teaching on His impending crucifixion and resurrection (Matt. 16:22). Peter was surely regenerate at that moment—and he was not standing on his works, but on a relationship with the "Father who is in heaven" (v. 17). Yet he did not comprehend such truths that would later be realized as intrinsic to the gospel message (see 1 Cor. 15:3-4).

How could a saved disciple, in the presence of Christ Himself, deny these very foundational elements of the gospel?

Charles Ryrie supplied the classic statement which answers that question:

The basis of salvation in every age is the death of Christ; the *requirement* for salvation in every age is faith; the *object* of faith in every age is God; the *content* of faith changes in the various dispensations. It is this last point, of course, that distinguishes dispensationalism from covenant theology, but it is not a point to which the charge of teaching two ways of salvation can be attached. It simply recognizes the obvious fact of progressive revelation.<sup>7</sup>

Berkhof, the highly esteemed covenant theologian, must essentially concur here: "In the earlier portions of the Old Testament there is but little in the line of abstract statement respecting the way of salvation."<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 134. Emphasis in original.

<sup>8</sup> Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1941), 498. The scope and limitations of this paper do not allow for a full analysis of covenant theology, or its interactions with dispensationalism. Suffice it to say that covenant theologians are to be commended for teaching consistently that all human beings who have been saved, beginning with Adam, have been saved by faith alone. Berkhof stated: "Faith is never treated as a novelty of the new covenant, nor is any distinction drawn between the faith of the two covenants. There is a sense of continuity, and the proclamation of faith is regarded as the same in both dispensations....." *Ibid.*, 498. Yet, it must also be pointed out that such continuity is rooted in the belief that all believers throughout history are united in the one covenant of grace. This is incongruous with dispensational theology. Interestingly, it is also true that, according to covenant theology, God once instituted a covenant of works. Thus, as I initially heard Dr. Myron Houghton point out in class, it is ironic that those who have so often accused dispensationalists of teaching multiple ways of salvation, or salvation by works, have officially taught such things themselves! As Kimbro states, "In his unfallen state, Adam was given the promise of life for perfect obedience to God." Reginald C. Kimbro, *The Gospel According to Dispensationalism* (Toronto, Canada: Wittenberg Publications, 1995), 53.

Sweetnam amplifies Ryrie's words, writing:

In spite of what has been suggested by some critics of dispensationalism, God's plan of salvation has not changed throughout the ages. ... It is vital that we do not lose sight of the fact that salvation, in every dispensation, is possible only through the death of Christ.<sup>9</sup>

In the New Testament, the primary passage which intends to discuss this issue is Romans 4. Here the Apostle Paul draws on the experiences of Abraham and David (who lived in distinct dispensations) to show that salvation is never "by works" (v. 2), but rather by the imputation of "righteousness apart from works" (v. 6). This is the case for each one who "believes on Him who justifies the ungodly" (v. 5).

Furthermore, Paul makes it doubly clear that the blessings of salvation through justification by faith do not come through circumcision (vv. 9-12) or the law (vv. 13-16).

Abraham's experience, in particular, is an example for all to whom Paul writes in this church age (vv. 23-24a), showing how our faith in the gospel of Christ yields the same result as Abraham received: a righteous standing before God that is "imputed" on the basis of faith alone (vv. 24b-25).

Myron Houghton commented:

Dispensationalism recognizes the progressive character of revelation – e.g. the gospel is in Genesis 3:15 but not in detailed or focused form: thus, the content of saving faith in any early dispensation may not have been as detailed or focused as ours – e.g. Romans 4:1-3 uses Genesis 15 to illustrate that Abraham was justified through faith, but the Genesis reference shows the message Abraham believed was far less detailed than the gospel message today.<sup>10</sup>

Thus, as Arnold Fruchtenbaum explains: "... the church is the spiritual seed of Abraham (Gal. 3:29). This seed includes Jews who are physical descendants of Abraham and Gentiles who are not physical descendants of Abraham but who have Abraham's faith."<sup>11</sup>

So, while the content of the gospel has come into sharper focus, the concept of the gospel has been present since Genesis 3. In fact, the New Testament Scriptures make it clear that "the gospel of God" was "promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures" (Rom. 1:1-2). Christ's death, burial and resurrection were all "according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:3-4). It is "the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 3:15). In each case,

---

<sup>9</sup> Mark Sweetnam, *Understanding Dispensationalism* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2020), 72-73.

<sup>10</sup> Myron J. Houghton, "The Status of Dispensationalism Today," Systematic Theology IV Class Notes (Ankeny, IA: Faith Baptist Theological Seminary, Spring 1996), 2. Emphasis in original.

<sup>11</sup> Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, "Israel and the Church," in Wesley R. Willis and John R. Master, gen. eds., *Issues in Dispensationalism* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 126.

Paul makes reference to the *Hebrew Scriptures*. By the close of its canon, in hindsight, one could incontrovertibly find the underpinnings of the gospel.

Peter is also clear in informing us that “the prophets” were channels to broadcast the Spirit’s prophetic witness of “the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow” (1 Pet. 1:10-11),

MacArthur and Mayhue write instructively about the connection between salvation before, during and after the earthly ministry of Christ, based on Jesus’ words to Nicodemus in John 3:

... Jesus expects Nicodemus, the teacher of Israel, to understand his teaching on the new birth (John 3:10). ... He was declaring that regeneration was a truth revealed throughout the Old Testament (e.g., Deut. 30:6; Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 11:18-20) and thus a truth with which Nicodemus should have been familiar. Against this Old Testament backdrop, Christ’s point was unmistakable: without the spiritual washing of the soul, a cleansing accomplished by the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5) and solely by means of the word of the gospel (Eph. 5:26; 1 Pet. 1:23-25), no one can enter God’s kingdom.<sup>12</sup>

Traditional dispensationalists are united on this point: Ever since the fall, God has provided salvation only through the death of Christ, and only by grace, through faith. This teaching has been refined and made abundantly clear within the movement for more than a century.<sup>13</sup>

### **What About the Mosaic Law and Sacrifices?**

Two issues, in particular, pose a real challenge as we attempt to understand salvation in the Old Testament. Those are the Mosaic Law and the elaborate sacrificial system contained within it.<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, gen eds., *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2017), 584.

<sup>13</sup> Hyperdispensationalists, or ultradispensationalists, offer a variety of views, some of them contradictory with the others, but many of them divide the church between Peter and Paul, Jewish and Gentile believers, etc. They have also divided the gospel, teaching that some have been saved by keeping the law, presenting themselves for baptism, etc., until at least the time of the Apostle Paul. See, for instance, Cornelius R. Stam; “Part 3: The Twelve Apostles and Us;” Berean Bible Society; n.d.; <https://bereanbiblesociety.org/our-great-commission-part-3-the-twelve-apostles-and-us/>; Internet; accessed 22 August 2024. For instance, Stam stated that Peter (as opposed to Paul) “demanded repentance and baptism for the remission of sins.” The hyperdispensational division of the gospel is based on the premise that Peter was providing a kingdom offer to the people of Israel in his preaching in Acts 2 and 3. For a convincing rebuttal of that view, see Andrew M. Woods, *The Coming Kingdom* (Duluth, MN: Grace Gospel Press, 2016), 69-76. For an excellent response regarding Peter’s gospel message in Acts 2, see Tony Garland; “Q17: Mid-Acts Dispensationalism;” *Spirit and Truth*; Dec. 2 2023; <https://www.spiritandtruth.org/questions/17.htm?x=x>; Internet; accessed 28 August 2024.

<sup>14</sup> C.F.W. Walther stated: “... the proper distinction between the Law and the Gospel is a difficult and high art to the minister in so far as he is a Christian. Indeed, the proper distinction between the Law and the Gospel is the highest art which a person can learn.” C.F.W. Walther, *God’s No and God’s Yes: The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel*, condensed by Walter C. Pieper (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1973), 20. Ross, dealing with the

Here the Bible is explicitly clear: The law could never save (Rom. 3:20; Gal. 3:11), and the sacrifices that it called for were wholly powerless to “take away sins” (Heb. 10:4).<sup>15</sup>

Obedience to the law certainly provided for an extension of temporal life (Lev. 25:18; Deut. 4:1) and the enjoyment of the blessings of God under the provisions of His covenants with Israel (Lev. 26:9). But obedience could never produce eternal life—unless it was a perfect obedience (Rom. 2:7; Js. 2:10), without even so much as the need for “an offering for sin” (Heb. 10:18). As McClain (referencing Lev. 18:5; Ezek. 20:11, 13, 21; Matt. 19:17; and Rom. 10:5) stated concisely: “Hypothetically, the law could give life if men kept it.”<sup>16</sup> Such obedience is, of course, impossible for anyone with a sinful nature—which is to say, anyone but Christ Himself (Gal. 4:4-5).

Commenting on Romans 3:19-28, Houghton stated, therefore: “Being seen as righteous in God’s sight comes apart from law-keeping, and this truth is found in the Old Testament as well as in the New (v. 21).”<sup>17</sup> He had earlier established, “The law of God does not save, nor can it save. Its purpose is to show us our sinfulness.”<sup>18</sup> He went on to state emphatically: “*God never intended the law to be a means of salvation. All true believers recognize this principle (Rom. 3:20a).*”<sup>19</sup> Elsewhere, he added forcefully: “[T]he Law (10 Commandments) cannot save, help to save or keep one saved (Romans 10:4-13).”<sup>20</sup>

Renald Showers concurred, stating:

... it is important to note that the Mosaic Law never functioned as a means of eternal salvation. No person has ever been justified through the Law (Rom. 3:28; Gal. 2:16, 21; 3:11). In fact, instead of saving people, the Law was a ministry of condemnation, death, and wrath (2 Cor. 3:7, 9; Rom. 4:15) to those who were under it.<sup>21</sup>

---

issue at hand, as his title suggests, stated: “... the discussion of the matter necessarily involves the complicated issues of the purpose of the law and the nature of the sacrifices.” *Continuity and Discontinuity*, 161.

<sup>15</sup> A group of confessing Lutheran theologians aptly state: “The proper distinction of Law and Gospel enables us to rightly hear God’s truth. It is ultimately about the certainty of one’s salvation and one’s eternal relationship with God. When the Law causes us to despair of our own works as a cause of a right relationship with God, we are driven to look to God alone for hope and salvation. The comfort of the gospel is precisely that it brings real forgiveness, hope and life where there was only despair.” Steven P. Mueller, ed., *Called to Believe, Teach, and Confess: An Introduction to Doctrinal Theology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2005), 58-59.

<sup>16</sup> Alva J. McClain, *Law and Grace* (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1973), 17. This overarching teaching of Scripture must be kept in mind when we consider passages like Luke 1:6, which tells us that Zacharias and Elizabeth “were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.” Does this mean they had never sinned? Hardly—no more than Paul considered himself sinless before his conversion (see Phil. 3:6); or than Paul exhorted believers to become sinless in Phil. 2:15 or 1 Thess. 3:13. Paul uses forms of the word *blameless* in each of these texts.

<sup>17</sup> Myron Houghton, *Law & Grace* (Schaumburg, IL: Regular Baptist Books, 2011), 43.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 14. Emphasis in original.

<sup>20</sup> Myron J. Houghton, “Dispensationalism: Living Under Grace Rather than ‘under Law,’” *Systematic Theology IV Class Notes* (Ankeny, IA: Faith Baptist Theological Seminary, Spring 1996).

<sup>21</sup> Renald E. Showers, *There Really Is a Difference* (Bellmawr, NJ: The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, 1990), 170.

These quotations echo the teaching of Luther, as we learn in this comment from Preus:

This is the right use of the Law according to Luther: to bring a man to see and confess his sin, so that he throws himself on the mercy of God offered him in the Gospel. There is a wrong use of the Law, namely, when men preach that we must obey the Law and do good works in order to be saved.<sup>22</sup>

Thomas Ice explains how the Reformed wing of the Reformation also had major influence on the development of dispensational thinking:

It may be surprising for some to learn that dispensationalism was exclusively developed and spread during its first 100 years by those within a Reformed, Calvinistic tradition (1825-1925). ...

Dispensationalism is a theology about what God is doing through His plan for history and beyond.<sup>23</sup>

And these very streams of teaching that flowed from the Reformation came to us through John Nelson Darby. Crawford Gribben explains:

[Darby's] soteriological claims were—and continue to be—misunderstood. Despite the claims of many antagonists, he did not claim that Old Testament believers were saved by law while New Testament believers were saved by grace. His soteriological scheme made much less dramatic claims, representing a variant, rather than an alternative, account of the Calvinist doctrine of salvation. For Darby's proposals represented nuanced intervention in Reformed divinity. Always a careful student of historical theology, he found precedents for his views more often than his followers or critics were willing to acknowledge.<sup>24</sup>

Perhaps looking deeper into the significance of the sacrificial system will help us to understand the dynamic of the Old Covenant law more clearly—for the sacrifices are indeed the inverse of obedience to the law, and provide a means for the lawbreaker to make amends for his sin.

What was the specific function of the Old Testament sacrifices? I believe that the answer to that question is fourfold.<sup>25</sup> I will list them, in order, from their most earthly purpose up to their ultimate purpose:

- 1) Offering a sacrifice served to pay the societal penalty for transgressing against the theocratic nation and government.<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup> Preus, 47.

<sup>23</sup> Thomas Ice, "The Golden Years of Dispensationalism: Scofield to Lindsey (1900-1980)," in Cory M. Marsh and James I. Fazio, eds., *Discovering Dispensationalism* (El Cajon, CA: SCS Press, 2023), 309.

<sup>24</sup> Crawford Gribben, *J.N. Darby and the Roots of Dispensationalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2024), 36.

<sup>25</sup> Ryrie deals with the purposes of the sacrifices in a similar fashion, although he concludes with only three divisions of thought. See his discussion in *Dispensationalism*, 136-139.

<sup>26</sup> John C. Whitcomb wrote: "Animal sacrifices could never remove spiritual guilt from the offerer (Hebrews 10:4, 11). One major purpose of these sacrifices (as teaching symbols) was to prepare the people of Israel for their Messiah and His infinite atonement. Another purpose was to provide a temporal, finite, external, and legal 'forgiveness' through an 'atonement' (a ritual cleansing—Hebrews 9:10, 13) made by a priest (Numbers 15:25-26). ... However, such sacrificial blood could never cleanse the conscience or save the soul (Hebrews 10:1-2), so God repeatedly sent prophets to call His people to love and obey their God from the heart. Apart from such genuine



- 2) Offering a sacrifice provided a covering—a temporary resolution—to the issue of sin and its forgiveness, until the time when Messiah would come.<sup>27</sup>
- 3) Offering a sacrifice gave evidence of the faith and obedience of the one who presented it.<sup>28</sup>
- 4) Offering a sacrifice pictured the ultimate sacrifice that would be presented by the coming Messiah.<sup>29</sup>

McClain makes an excellent point regarding the entire sacrificial system when he states:

The question has been raised: Did not the law provide for failure to keep it? The answer is: Yes, in a certain sense, through the ritual of animal sacrifice. But here we must be careful to remember two things: First, the smallest failure meant that the law was broken. Second, the blood of animal sacrifices could never take away sins. The sacrifice prescribed by the law did indeed bear witness to a way of salvation, but that way was wholly outside and apart from all law (Rom. 3:21).<sup>30</sup>

Thus, the sacrifices did not remove sin, but only afforded an atonement, or covering, for them. With regard to the fourfold nature of the sacrificial system outlined above, it covered them completely in terms of the first, societal, aspect of sacrifice, but only temporarily in relation to the second, spiritual, aspect. It had the potential to demonstrate a true heart for God (number three), and definitely pointed to the coming of Messiah (number four).

Certainly, not every Israelite would have been cognizant of all of these levels of significance each time they brought their mandated offerings to be sacrificed. Yet, as Pentecost stated, “It is thus evident that the salvation offered in the Old Testament was an individual salvation, accepted by faith, based on blood sacrifice, which sacrifices were the foreshadows of the true sacrifice to come.”<sup>31</sup>

---

faith, all the ceremonially ‘kosher’ animals in the whole world would avail nothing in the spiritual realm (Psalm 50:7-15; Isaiah 1:12-20; Jeremiah 6:20; 7:21-23; Hosea 5:6; Amos 4:4-5; 5:20-27; Micah 6:6-8).” John C. Whitcomb, “Millennial Sacrifices,” in Tim LaHaye and Ed Hindson, gen. eds., *The Popular Encyclopedia of Bible Prophecy* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2004), 227. Ryrie stated: “Under the law, God provided a way whereby people could be eternally acceptable before Him. ... He also provided ways whereby people could be temporarily acceptable before Him. ... Therefore, it is entirely harmonious to say that the means of eternal salvation was by grace and that the means of temporal life was by law,” *Dispensationalism*, 135, 136.

<sup>27</sup> The nature of this benefit was indeed temporary (see Heb. 10:1). As Alva J. McClain noted emphatically: “no animal sacrifice in the Bible has ever had any expiatory efficacy.” Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom* (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1974), 250.

<sup>28</sup> Ryrie stated likewise: “... the sacrificial system ... served as a way for the redeemed Israelite to show his obedience to and love for God.” *Dispensationalism*, 139. Ross also wrote: “The sacrifices were never intended to be a mechanical ritual; rather, they were to be offered in faith. If faith was not present as the motivation for the sacrifice, then offering the sacrifice would avail nothing.” Ross, 175.

<sup>29</sup> Houghton writes, “Salvation, in the mind of God, always has been based upon the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ.” Houghton, “Law and Gospel in the Dispensational Tradition,” Systematic Theology IV Class Notes (Ankeny, IA: Faith Baptist Theological Seminary, Spring 1996).

<sup>30</sup> McClain, *Law and Grace*, 18.

<sup>31</sup> Pentecost, 265.

Perhaps the concept is easier to grasp if considered, by way of illustration, in light of the coming millennial kingdom. The sacrificial system will surely resume (see Ezek. 40:38-43; 42:13; 43:13-27; 45:13-46:15), with all but their second purpose, as outlined above, still in place.<sup>32</sup>

In that kingdom age, there will be many believers, but also a countless number who will be shown by the end of the 1,000 years to be unbelievers (Rev. 20:8). Presumably all of them will have brought sacrifices to fulfill their obligations to the theocratic system throughout that entire time. Yet, here at the end, many of these will be shown to be eternally lost. They had offered sufficient sacrifices to escape temporal chastening, but they were not truly believers in their hearts.<sup>33</sup>

Likewise, we might surmise that some true believer during those 1,000 years will, at some point, neglect to bring the proper sacrifice. He may receive a temporal punishment for such neglect—perhaps even the premature loss of life (see Isa. 65:20). But if he were truly a believer, he would not lose his salvation. We might expect, however, that the majority of those trusting the Lord by faith during that age will bring the proper sacrifices out of a heart of obedience.<sup>34</sup>

But the point is clear—the simple outward act of bringing a sacrifice will not save anyone spiritually or eternally. And failing to do so—while it may indicate a heart of unbelief—would certainly not, by itself, condemn a person to eternal perdition.

Pentecost explains how such future salvation will be very much like salvation in the Old Testament, and differentiates between what he terms “*individual* salvation”<sup>35</sup> and “national salvation.”<sup>36</sup> He wrote, “It should be borne in mind that, while the emphasis is placed on the national salvation, that national salvation must be preceded by individual salvation.”<sup>37</sup>

Pentecost went on to comment on the Spirit’s ministry following the church age, in the days when God will bring Israel to repentance and prepare them for life in that kingdom:

---

<sup>32</sup> McClain (*The Greatness of the Kingdom*, 251) compares the sacrificial system in the millennial kingdom with the physical elements in “the Lord’s Supper,” as we experience them during this church age, to show aspects of similarity. See also Whitcomb, 227-228.

<sup>33</sup> Whitcomb stated: “Even though outward submission to these religious forms will not necessarily demonstrate a regenerate heart, it will guarantee protection from physical penalties and temporal judgments.” Whitcomb, 228,

<sup>34</sup> McClain wrote: “Old Testament sacrifices ... were simply a ‘remembrance’ of the sins committed, and pointed forward to the one sacrifice which would take them away. What could be wrong, therefore, with a pattern of symbols in the future to remind the worshipper not only of his sin but also of an expiation which at Calvary was accomplished once for all, for all who believe?” *The Greatness of the Kingdom*, 250. Note that I shared this extended comparison of salvation in the Old Testament and the millennium for the sake of illustration and application—not intending to stress every point of it. For instance, it appears likely to me that no believers will actually die during the 1,000-year kingdom, but that death will occur only among the unregenerate as a judgment for sin.

<sup>35</sup> Pentecost, 264. Emphasis in original.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 267.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

“So, in the tribulation period, the Holy Spirit, who is omnipresent, will do the work of regeneration as he did when God was previously dealing with Israel, but without an indwelling ministry.”<sup>38</sup>

So, amazingly, salvation during the coming tribulation and millennial kingdom—well after the first coming of Christ, and even the completion of the church age, will be remarkably similar to salvation as it was in the Old Testament, before the first coming of Christ.<sup>39</sup>

As dispensationalism developed, its adherents did not seek to form new interpretations of fundamental Biblical concepts simply for novelty’s sake. They did not look for mysterious or expanded definitions of basic spiritual realities. Rather, they accepted the Biblical teaching they had received from the Reformers, then built upon it in those areas in which it was lacking.<sup>40</sup>

Early dispensational teachers, as well as those who came behind them, were not trying to concoct a dazzling new construct that would shock the imaginations of those who heard them. Rather, they sought to be faithful in understanding and accurately transmitting the truth revealed in Biblical history. Some of those truths had been hidden, and needed to be restored in terms of the church’s understanding. But these did not include condemnation by the law and salvation by grace. Here dispensationalists clearly agreed with the teaching of the Scriptures and those who had followed it for centuries.

### **Dispensational Missteps**

Covenant theologians assert that dispensationalists indeed espouse that there are different ways of salvation in various eras. We must admit that there have been unfortunate statements made by notable dispensationalists that have poured fuel on this fire—encouraging those who hold to aberrant views of dispensationalism. But were those statements ever indicative of the dispensational movement as a whole?

In the history of the development of dispensationalism, two of the leading lights of classical dispensationalism made classic missteps that have fueled such accusations. I refer here, of course, to C.I. Scofield and Lewis Sperry Chafer.

It is important to keep in mind that these men were indeed speaking in the period of the development of institutional dispensationalism. Feinberg described the setting

---

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 271.

<sup>39</sup> “Salvation in the tribulation will certainly be on *the faith principle*.” Pentecost, 269. Emphasis in original.

Regarding the millennium, Whitcomb wrote: “Believing Jews will experience regeneration and sanctification just as Christians do today—by the grace of God through faith in the Lord Jesus.” Whitcomb, 228.

<sup>40</sup> Kreider submitted the following in the “Conclusion” to his chapter: “Dispensationalism is a Christian tradition rooted in the Protestant Reformation, and nourished within British and North American Evangelicalism. Thus, it holds to salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. Although some early dispensationalists spoke of the outworking of the divine plan of redemption in confusing ways, when confronted, all insisted that salvation is a gracious gift of God. In recent years, dispensationalists have been more careful and clearer in affirming this conviction.” Kreider, 454-455.

succinctly: “earlier Dispensationalism never held multiple ways of salvation. However, various unguarded statements from dispensational works made it appear that multiple ways of salvation were advocated.”<sup>41</sup>

What were the controversial statements? The first comes from the note on John 1:17 in the 1909 and 1917 editions of the *Scotfield Reference Bible*.<sup>42</sup>

As a dispensation, grace begins with the death and resurrection of Christ Rom 3:24-26[;] 4:24,[ ]25. The point of testing is no longer legal obedience as the condition of salvation, but acceptance or rejection of Christ, with good works as a fruit of salvation.... The immediate result of this testing was the rejection of Christ by the Jews, and His crucifixion by Jew and Gentile Acts 4:27. The predicted end of the testing of man under grace is the apostasy of the professing church....<sup>43</sup>

If only Scofield had used the word “evidence” instead of “condition,” the statement would have been innocuous. As written, however, it is at best ambiguous—and at worst legalistic in the most deadly sense of that term.<sup>44</sup>

Critics also point to a list of quotations from Volume IV of Lewis Sperry Chafer’s *Systematic Theology*, such as the following:

Whatever may have been the divine method of dealing with individuals before the call of Abraham and the giving of the Law by Moses, it is evident that, with the call of Abraham and the giving of the Law and all that has followed, there are two widely different, standardized, divine provisions, whereby man, who is utterly fallen, might stand in the favor of God.<sup>45</sup>

What can we say about these kinds of missteps of such historic magnitude? First, some adherents question whether they were truly blunders at all. Apologists of Scofield and Chafer maintain to this day that these men—as each of them would go on to attest—did not ever believe in salvation by works. It is, in fact, possible to interpret their words more

---

<sup>41</sup> John S. Feinberg, “Systems of Discontinuity,” in *Continuity and Discontinuity*, John S. Feinberg, ed. (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1988), 337, note 28.

<sup>42</sup> For a non-dispensationalist’s survey of the history and importance of the 1909 and 1917 editions of the *Scotfield Reference Bible*, see Daniel G. Hummel, *The Rise and Fall of Dispensationalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2023), 132-139.

<sup>43</sup> “John 1 – Scofield Reference Notes,” *Bible Hub*;

n.d.; <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/sco/john/1.htm>; Internet; accessed 27 August 2024.

<sup>44</sup> For an extended response from a non-dispensationalist, see John H. Gerstner, *Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth: A Critique of Dispensationalism*, second ed. (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 2000), 171-175. For an attempt to explain Scofield’s statement as being unproblematic, see Micah Martin, “Did Scofield Teach Multiple Ways of Salvation?,” *Contending Earnestly*; July 12, 2019; <https://contendingearnestly.wordpress.com/2019/07/12/did-scofield-teach-multiple-ways-of-salvation/>; Internet; accessed 27 August 2024.

<sup>45</sup> Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. IV (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1948), 14-15. Examples of Chafer’s critics include Gerstner, 181-183; and Kimbro, 99-109. Kimbro deals with 13 separate quotations of Chafer, including the one on pp. 14-15 of *Systematic Theology*, Vol. IV (see Kimbro, 99). Perhaps the most egregious quote by Chafer is found in *Systematic Theology*, Vol. VII, 219 (“According to the Old Testament men were just because they were true and faithful in keeping the Mosaic Law.”).

generously, in light of other clear statements and the contexts of their whole ministries, and come up with such a conclusion.<sup>46</sup>

To the extent that such great and godly men could make such unclear statements and mislead others, their actions serve as a reminder and warning to all of the care that must be taken by teachers of God's Word, especially, to manifest "integrity, reverence, incorruptibility" in our teaching ministries (Tit. 2:7; cf. Js. 3:1).

We must also remember that these men were trailblazers—the leading lights of a new movement in their generation. They were dynamic leaders with tremendous influence. Yet, we could only wish that they might have sought guidance from "a multitude of counselors" (Prov. 24:6) before writing words that we are still answering for today.

Another contemporary of these two men, who had a similar level of influence as each of them, was H.A. Ironside—known as the "archbishop of fundamentalism." Notice what Ironside wrote in his treatise called "Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth"—his classic rebuttal of "ultra-dispensationalism," which remains authoritative to this very day:

Let one point be absolutely clear: No one was ever saved in any dispensation on any other ground than the finished work of Christ. In all the ages before the cross, God justified men by faith; in all the years since, men have been justified in exactly the same way. Adam believed God and was clothed with coats of skin, a picture of one becoming the righteousness of God in Christ. Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness. Nevertheless, afterwards he was circumcised; but that circumcision, the apostle tells us, was simply a seal of the righteousness he had by faith. And throughout all the Old Testament dispensation, however legalistic Jews may have observed the ordinance of circumcision and thought of it as having in itself some saving virtue, it still remained in God's sight, as in the beginning, only a seal, where there was genuine faith, of that righteousness which He imputed. ... No one was ever saved through the sacrifices offered under law, for it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sin. Nevertheless, wherever there was real faith in Israel, the sacrifices were offered because of the instruction given in the Word of God, and in these sacrifices the work of Christ was pictured continually.<sup>47</sup>

### **The Nature of Dispensational Change**

The confusion surrounding this entire issue really disappears with the proper understanding of the nature of the dispensations—and the change that each new dispensation ushers in. That does not include bringing any change in the manner of

---

<sup>46</sup> See Ryrie's defense of Scofield and Chafer, based on their own quotations, in *Dispensationalism*, 124-125. I believe personally that the statements in question were at least unwise, perhaps dangerous, even if well-intended, or simply bypassed in the editing process. However, it also appears to me that these men deserve to be judged in their wider historical context—in the same way we would approach, for instance, the great figures of the Reformation, such as Luther—who was also known for his ability to make statements that were less than cautious.

<sup>47</sup> Harry Ironside; "Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth;" *Rapture Ready*; n.d.; <https://www.raptureready.com/wrongly-dividing-word-truth-harry-ironside/>; Internet; accessed 26 August 2024.

salvation, and the teaching that it does is not intrinsic to dispensationalism, nor has it ever been taught within the mainstream of dispensationalism.<sup>48</sup>

What exactly is the change that comes with each new dispensation? It does not deal at all with the nature of justification by faith. Tangentially, at least, we might say that it does relate to issues involving sanctification. Ultimately, the changes are fundamental to obedience and the rule of God by which one is to function as a steward. Each dispensation, after all, offers a revised set of laws under which God's household is to run.

Houghton makes this clear:

... the essence of Dispensationalism is that Israel and the Church, as well as God's program for each, are clearly and consistently distinguished. The revelation concerning God's program for each are not ways of salvation but ways of managing one's life.<sup>49</sup>

Houghton also wrote: "Thus, dispensationalism does NOT teach that people have been saved in different ways throughout human history but rather that God has given new revelation concerning the living of their lives."<sup>50</sup>

Jesus ushered in a new era of grace at His first coming (John 1:17), and grace therefore became the key element in the sanctification of all church-age believers, according to Romans 6:14: "For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace."<sup>51</sup>

I believe that this system of grace may be understood to be "the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2) or "the perfect law of liberty" (Js. 1:25). It is basically composed of the content found in the New Testament epistles, which were written to govern the church and the life of the believer during the age of the church. As Houghton notes: "The New Testament epistles possess the highest authority for a believer today."<sup>52</sup>

Showers elaborated as follows:

Freedom from the moral aspect of the Mosaic Law does not involve freedom from the eternal, unchangeable, moral absolutes of God. It only involves freedom from one way of God's

---

<sup>48</sup> This point should be evident on the basis of the documentation listed here, and by the sheer volume of testimony from many outstanding dispensational teachers, representing all major corners of the movement.

<sup>49</sup> Myron J. Houghton, "Law and Gospel in the Dispensational Tradition." Emphasis in original.

<sup>50</sup> Houghton, "Dispensationalism: Living Under Grace Rather than 'under Law.'" Elsewhere, Houghton wrote that "dispensationalism today is ... A viewpoint that divides Bible history according to differences in ways of ordering one's life, NOT a viewpoint that teaches more than one way of salvation." Myron J. Houghton, "The Status of Dispensationalism Today," 2. Emphasis in original.

<sup>51</sup> For an excellent, extended dispensational treatment of the relation of the church-age believer to the Mosaic Law, see John F. Hart, "Released From the Law for Sanctification," in Christopher Cone, gen. ed., *Dispensationalism Tomorrow & Beyond: A Theological Collection in Honor of Charles C. Ryrie* (Ft. Worth: Tyndale Seminary Press, 2008), 397-417.

<sup>52</sup> Houghton, "Law and Gospel in the Dispensational Tradition."

administering His absolutes—namely, through the Mosaic Law. ... if one is under God's grace in administering His eternal, unchangeable, moral absolutes, one will not be lawless.<sup>53</sup>

Showers referred to this concept as the “teaching function of grace.”<sup>54</sup> He based it on Titus 2:11-14, where “the grace of God” is “teaching us.”<sup>55</sup>

## Conclusion

When one considers the historical evidence fairly, the truth becomes abundantly clear. No mainstream traditional dispensationalist—for decades, when attempting to speak to the issue—has communicated any indication that dispensational theology teaches multiple ways of salvation across the dispensations, or that anyone ever has been, or ever will be, saved by works. If more evidence were needed, it could easily be displayed.<sup>56</sup> What has been shared here represents the major schools, teachers and influences within the movement—past and present.

The teaching that there are different means of salvation in different dispensations flies in the face of true dispensational theology. Yes, God has more than one people (Israel and the church) and they are not merely subsumed into one covenant of grace. Yet His nature and character still only allow for one means of approaching Him—by faith, ultimately in the death of His Son. It is also unthinkable that the church itself could be divided into historical or ethnic segments, with varying gospels for each, as it is one body that has been bound together by the baptizing work of the Holy Spirit since the day

---

<sup>53</sup> Renald E. Showers, *There Really Is a Difference*, 165.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 172. See also Renald E. Showers; “The Grace Administration of God’s Moral Absolutes;” *Israel My Glory*; December-February 1987/1988; <https://israelmyglory.org/article/the-grace-administration-of-gods-moral-absolutes/>; Internet; accessed 22 August 2024. I recall Showers discussing the concept of “teaching grace” at our Bible conference at Faith Baptist Theological Seminary in Ankeny, Iowa, held Jan. 30-Feb. 1, 1996.

<sup>55</sup> Houghton presents the same concept in different terminology, differentiating *grace* (which includes commands for the saved) from *gospel* (which is purely good news). Both of these, of course, are different than *law*. See Houghton, *Law and Grace*, 12-18.

<sup>56</sup> “Dispensational theology rejects the idea that there is more than one way of salvation. In the mind of God, salvation has always been based on the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:19-20). Salvation has always been by grace, that is, undeserved. The animal sacrifices show that this is true. Salvation has always been through faith (see Hebrews 11) although because the message was less clear in some of the Old Testament passages, the content of that faith may have also been less developed in the Old Testament (compare Romans 4:1-3 with Genesis 15:5-6).” Myron J. Houghton, “Dispensational Theology” (Ankeny, IA: *Faith Pulpit*, March 1988), 1. See also this most excellent article: Anthony C. Garland; “Does Dispensationalism Teach Two Ways of Salvation?”; *The Conservative Theological Journal*; March 2003; <https://www.spiritandtruth.org/teaching/documents/articles/4/4.htm?x=x>; Internet; accessed 28 August 2024. See also David M. Levy; “How Were People Saved in the Old Testament?”; *Israel My Glory*; September/October 2024; <https://israelmyglory.org/article/how-were-people-saved-in-the-old-testament/>; Internet; accessed 22 August 2024. See also Ross, 161-178 (note especially his “Conclusion” on p. 178). See also “Article V—The Dispensations” in “Essential Doctrinal Commitments;” Dallas Theological Seminary; <https://www.dts.edu/about/doctrinal-statement/>; Internet; accessed 22 August 2024. See also Ryrie’s commentary on this article in *Dispensationalism*, 134. See also Mike Stallard; “Myths About Dispensationalism;” *2021 Chafer Theological Seminary Pastors’ Conference*; March 9, 2021; <https://www.deanbibleministries.org/conferences/message/myths-about-dispensationism>; Internet; accessed 28 August 2024. Stallard points to Arno C. Gaebelein as an example of doctrinal clarity on this issue during the days of Scofield and Chafer.

of Pentecost (see John 7:37-39; John 14:17, 20; 16:7; Acts. 1:5; 2:4; 8:17; 10:44; 11:15-17; 15:7-9). Such a division would hopelessly fracture the integrity of the body of Christ.

Finally, then, to inject multiple ways of salvation into God's dispensational arrangement of history is to sensationalize the system and corrupt the nature of dispensational change.

This succinct statement from Ryrie sets forth a fitting culmination of this study:

That there are two ways of salvation appears to be a conclusion that nondispensationalists have tried for decades to force on dispensationalists, for even earlier dispensationalists did not teach what they are charged with. Nevertheless, the attack persists despite repeated denials on the part of dispensationalists.<sup>57</sup>

Scripture taken from the New King James Version®.

Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

---

<sup>57</sup> Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 122.