

**Averting Dispensational Departure:
Corrective Suggestions for Colleges and Seminaries**

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Doctor of Ministry Thesis-Project

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Introduction

In 2015, I wrote a PhD dissertation evaluating and critiquing the theological movement known as “New Calvinism.”¹ This movement has become so popular among contemporary evangelical Christians that in the March 12, 2009, issue of *Time*, David Van Biema identified “New Calvinism” as one of the “10 Ideas Changing the World Right Now.”² A working assumption of the dissertation was that “New Calvinism is a theological movement that has significantly impacted evangelical Christianity and has served to weaken the influence of Dispensationalism.”³ As a PhD dissertation, it was primarily theological and philosophical in its perspective. As such, that dissertation functions as part of the research phase of this Doctor of Ministry Thesis-Project.

I should say at the outset of this Thesis-Project that while I believe firmly that Dispensationalism reflects the truth of the Scriptures and should be vigorously promoted and defended, rejection of Dispensationalism does not disqualify one from being a child of God, a brother or sister in Christ. If some of the discussion in this Thesis-Project is couched in terms of opponent versus proponent, it is only intended to reflect the spirit of an earnest, albeit spirited, debate among brothers and friends. It is my firm intention to support the truth, but to “speak the truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15).

¹ George Gunn, “New Calvinism: A Theological Evaluation” (PhD dissertation, Tyndale Theological Seminary, 2015).
https://www.academia.edu/30594975/NEW_CALVINISM_A_THEOLOGICAL_EVALUATION_A_DISSERTATION_SUBMITTED_TO_THE_FACULTY_OF_THE_BIBLE_AND_THEOLOGY_DEPARTMENT_IN_CANDIDACY_FOR_THE_DEGREE_OF_DOCTOR_OF_PHILOSOPHY

² David Van Biema, “10 Ideas Changing the World Right Now,” *Time Magazine*, March 12, 2009.

³ Gunn, “New Calvinism,” vi.

The Doctor of Ministry Thesis-Project seeks a practical examination of the various influences – whether New Calvinism, or other – that lead graduates from dispensational colleges and seminaries away from a dispensational position. The Thesis-Project to benefit these theological institutions in the training of ministers. Specifically, the Thesis-Project proposes to aid institutions that subscribe to Dispensationalism.⁴ This required an addition to the PhD research, going beyond the theory of that dissertation. The additional research of this Doctor of Ministry Thesis-Project consisted of three parts: First, academicians and scholars who attended the 2017 annual session of the Council on Dispensational Hermeneutics⁵ were polled to determine which educational institutions they considered to be “solidly dispensational” in their theology. The poll resulted in a list of eighteen such “solidly dispensational” schools (colleges, seminaries, and universities). Second, deans and vice presidents of these schools were then contacted, and permission was requested to conduct a survey of their alumni. The survey of alumni⁶ was designed to determine five things: (1) their level of commitment to Dispensationalism when they began training at their school, (2) their level of commitment to Dispensationalism at the time of their graduation, (3) whether that commitment had changed since their graduation, (4) if they had changed, to what theological persuasion had they changed? and (5) what were the major influences that brought about that change? Third, a final step in the research phase of this Thesis-Project consisted of selecting seven individuals who had completed the survey to be personally interviewed and given an opportunity to narrate the story of their migration away from Dispensationalism.

⁴ By “Dispensationalism” I refer specifically to “Classical” and “Revised” Dispensationalism. I have excluded Progressive Dispensationalism from this definition.

⁵ The council was held September 13-14, 2017 at Baptist Bible Seminary, Clarks Summit, PA.

⁶ See Appendix 1.

One of the chief reasons for conducting the survey was to determine what percentage of graduates from dispensational institutions end up defecting from a dispensational theology to some other theology. While the PhD dissertation assumed that significant numbers of dispensationalists were defecting to a New Calvinist or reformed position, a question remained as to whether that assumption was supported by the data. Another major reason for conducting the survey was to determine the major influences leading some alumni to defect from a dispensational position. Finally, the survey sought to understand what those who defected perceived to be the strengths and weaknesses of their alma mater.

The personal interviews that followed the survey were designed to allow those who had changed their theological persuasions significantly to narrate the story of their departure from Dispensationalism. These kinds of personal interviews allow for elaboration and nuance of personal feelings, motives, aspirations and hopes that cannot be measured reliably with True/False questions and Likert scales.

The final product of this Thesis-Project seeks to evaluate the data collected from both the survey and the personal interviews and make recommendations to dispensational ministry training institutions as to how they might prevent future departures from a dispensational position and provide a more consistent, coherent and defensible theological foundation for their alumni.

Data Collection

Data collection for this Thesis-Project consisted of three phases: (1) Polling attendees at the Council on Dispensational Hermeneutics to determine ministry training schools that were “solidly dispensational,” (2) conducting a survey of alumni from solidly dispensational schools to determine their level of commitment to Dispensationalism, and (3) interviews with selected individuals who had defected from a dispensational theology to determine what factors were significant in contributing to their departure.

Polling Attendees at the Council on Dispensational Hermeneutics

The Council on Dispensational Hermeneutics was founded in 2008 and met on the campus of Baptist Bible Seminary in Clarks Summit, Pennsylvania. The council consists of academics who meet annually to read papers and discuss issues related to Dispensationalism. Membership in the council requires adherence to either classical or revised Dispensationalism. This seemed to be the ideal group to poll in order to discover which ministry training institutions should be considered as “solidly dispensational.” The council met on the campus of Baptist Bible Seminary from September 13-14, 2017. Members in attendance were asked the following question: “Would you please list below those schools (colleges, seminaries, universities) that you consider ‘solidly dispensational’ in their theology?” Eight attendees submitted poll results from which a list of the following eighteen institutions was compiled:

- Appalachian Bible College, Mount Hope, West Virginia
- Baptist Bible Seminary, Clarks Summit, PA
- Calvary University Kansas City, MO
- Central Baptist Theological Seminary, Plymouth, Minnesota
- Chafer Theological Seminary, Albuquerque, NM

- College of Biblical Studies, Houston, TX
- College of Theology and Evangelism, Lautokaj Fiji Islands
- Davis College, Johnson City, NY
- Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, Allen Park, MI
- Grace Biblical Seminary, McDonough, GA
- Faith Baptist Bible College and Theological Seminary, Ankeny, IA
- Jackson Hole Bible College, Wilson, WY
- Maranatha Baptist University and Seminary, Watertown, WI
- Shasta Bible College and Graduate School, Redding, CA
- Southern California Seminary, El Cajon, CA
- The Master's Seminary, Sun Valley, CA
- Tyndale Theological Seminary, Hurst, TX
- Virginia Beach Theological Seminary, Virginia Beach, VA

Surveying Alumni of Solidly Dispensational Institutions

Deans and Vice Presidents of the eighteen solidly dispensational institutions listed above were contacted, seeking permission to conduct a survey of their alumni.⁷ Eight institutions agreed to participate in this survey. These institutions were asked to send an email to their alumni containing a link to an online survey.⁸ The survey ran during the month of December, 2017, and a total of 174 results were collected.

⁷ Appendix 2 contains the script that was either read over the phone or pasted into an email communication with these Deans and Vice Presidents.

⁸ Appendix 1.

Interviewing Selected Alumni of Solidly Dispensational Institutions

Based on the survey results, seven individuals were selected based on the following criteria:⁹

- Identified as “strongly opposed to” or “have serious questions about” Dispensationalism (survey question 9).
- Evaluated as either agreeing strongly or agreeing somewhat with a dispensational position upon graduation from their alma mater (survey questions 1-8).
- A geographical distribution among the interviewees was to be sought (survey question 46).
- A variety in sociological areas was to be sought (survey question 47).
- Those who were either in full-time ministry or part-time ministry were to be preferred (survey question 50).

Data Analysis

This section of the Thesis-Project consists of an analysis of the survey that was conducted of alumni from the dispensational institutions that participated. Following a description of the survey itself, the statistics will be analyzed from several perspectives—first, from the perspective of their present level of commitment to, or departure from, Dispensationalism, then, from the perspective of how they responded to various groupings of questions (at various chronological markers in their lives, in relation to specific theological influences in their lives, and in terms of how they viewed the effectiveness of their alma mater’s educational approach).

⁹ The seventh interviewee did not complete the survey, but was suggested by my doctoral advisor after the survey had been conducted as one who had formerly been dispensational, had departed, and then had returned. This seemed like an ideal interviewee to complete the study.

Explanation of Survey Questions

The survey was intended to discover to what extent graduates from strongly dispensational institutions have departed from dispensational teaching. The survey sought to determine four things: (1) alumni's level of commitment to Dispensationalism at the time of their graduation, (2) whether that commitment had changed since their graduation, (3) if they had changed, to what theological persuasion had they changed? and (4) what were the major influences that brought about that change?

Of primary concern to this study was how the respondents answered question #9: "What is your own present level of commitment to Dispensationalism?" Respondents could answer on a Likert Scale from the following choices:

- Strongly committed
- Somewhat committed
- No opinion
- I have serious questions
- Strongly opposed

Those who answered "Strongly opposed" are of the greatest concern, but those who listed "I have serious questions" are also quite significant for this study. In each case it was important to compare and contrast their current opposition to their views at the time of their graduation. The amount of time that had transpired between each respondent's graduation and their actual taking the survey varied from respondent to respondent. However, since each respondent was an "alumnus" (i.e. graduate), each one had graduated at some point prior to taking the survey. The survey was open only during the month of December, and since most graduations occur in May or June, a minimum period of about a half a year had likely transpired since their graduation. In

many cases, this period of time could be measured in terms of years or even decades. In light of this, it was deemed important to determine what had influenced those respondents who developed views opposing Dispensationalism since their graduation. For some respondents, their journey away from Dispensationalism may have begun even before they graduated.

Questions 1-8 of the survey were designed to gauge the respondents' level of commitment either to Dispensationalism or to Reformed Theology at three different stages of their life (entering school, graduating from school, presently). Contrasting Dispensationalism with Reformed theology can be difficult, since they are not truly opposite systems. Instead they are systems with different focuses. Reformed Theology has a principally soteriological focus which sees the dispensations as administrations by which the Covenant of Grace is revealed at different times.¹⁰ As such, God's primary purpose in history may be said to be the salvation of the elect.¹¹ Dispensationalism, on the other hand, holds that "God not only has a program for the elect but also a program for the nonelect [sic] (Rom. 9:10-23)."¹² This disparity between Reformed Theology and Dispensationalism made the wording of Questions 1-8 particularly challenging. These questions fall into two groupings. A positive answer to questions 1-4 should reflect a position supportive of Dispensationalism. The first two questions focus on two of the three features identified by Charles Ryrie as the *sine qua non* of Dispensationalism.¹³ Questions 3-4 focus on eschatological issues that, while not part of the *sine qua non* of Dispensationalism,

¹⁰ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997). 2:366-377.

¹¹ Renald Showers, *There Really is a Difference* (Bellmawr, NJ: Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, 1990), 16, 20.

¹² Showers, 20.

¹³ Charles Ryrie, *Dispensationalism* (Chicago: Moody), 38-41.

are, nevertheless, necessary conclusions drawn by dispensationalists. A positive answer to questions 5-7 should reflect a position supportive of Reformed Theology. Question 5 is the direct counterpart to Question 2. Questions 6 and 7 relate primarily to the Calvinistic doctrine of the Perseverance of the Saints, a doctrine that, while affirmed by many dispensationalists is, nevertheless, generally defined differently by dispensationalists than by reformed theologians.¹⁴ Question 8 relates not so much to a distinction between Dispensationalism and Reformed Theology, but specifically to the emergence of New Calvinism. New Calvinism, as opposed to a more traditional expression of Reformed Theology, generally looks favorably on current expressions of sign and revelatory gifts.¹⁵ This question, therefore, may serve among those opposed to Dispensationalism to make a distinction between traditional Reformed Theology and the New Calvinism.

Questions 9-18 seek to gauge the responder's opinion of their alma mater's commitment to Dispensationalism. The institutions participating in the survey have all been identified by knowledgeable, well-informed theologians as "solidly dispensational" schools. These questions represent an attempt to determine whether the alumni have the same opinion.

¹⁴ I devoted the entirety of chapter 4 to the Perseverance of the Saints in my PhD dissertation. Most dispensationalists tend to define this doctrine in terms of "preservation" (i.e., eternal security, Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 379); whereas, most reformed theologians tend to focus on "perseverance" (i.e. persevering to the end, maintaining a life of holiness throughout one's Christian life). In my opinion a "Free Grace" soteriology is more consistently dispensational than is a "Lordship Salvation" soteriology (see Grant Hawley, *Dispensationalism and Free Grace: Intimately Linked* [Taos, NM: Dispensational Publishing House, 2017]), though not all dispensationalists would agree with this opinion. What is sometimes termed "Lordship Salvation" is tightly connected to the reformed doctrine of the Perseverance of the Saints.

¹⁵ Driscoll, Mark. "Time Magazine Names New Calvinism 3rd Most Powerful Idea." March 12, 2009, <http://theresurgencereport.com/resurgence/2009/03/12/time-magazine-names-new-calvinism-3rd-most-powerful-idea>. Accessed 2/2/2018. Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2004), 358-61, 1033-34, 1050-51, 1071-74. John Piper, "What Is the Gift of Prophecy in the New Covenant." David Matthews interviewing John Piper, Jan. 17, 2013. Audio recording of interview. <http://www.desiringgod.org/blog/posts/piper-on-prophecy-and-tongues>.

Questions 19-42 present twenty scholars and four web sites representing leading influences for either Dispensational theology or New Calvinist theology. Eight represent traditional Dispensationalism (Jeremiah, Feinberg, Ice, McClain, Ryrie, Walvoord, and Whitcomb), two (Blaising and Bock) Progressive Dispensationalism, nine New Calvinism (Carson, Chan, DeYoung, Driscoll, Grudem, Keller, Piper, Sproul, Stott, Washer, Gospel Coalition, Desiring God, Together for the Gospel, and Redeemer City to City), and one (MacArthur) partially New Calvinist and partially dispensational.

Question 43 seeks a qualitative response, whereas questions 1-42 had sought quantitative data. It was anticipated that the quantitative questions would put the respondent in the right frame of mind to answer this qualitative question. It was also anticipated that the answers to question 43 would prove helpful in formulating questions for the later interviews.

Questions 44-50 seek to select standard demographic information that may be helpful in determining whether geographical or social location might have any influence on the respondents' theological persuasion. Questions 51-52 were necessary for the drawing. Names and e-mail addresses were not required to assess the data from the survey, and confidentiality of personal names was promised to all respondents. However, in the case of the follow up interviews, it was necessary that some specific respondents be contacted. Questions 51 and 52 aided greatly in this task, since most of the respondents did provide name and e-mail (37 respondents skipped these two questions).

The Respondents

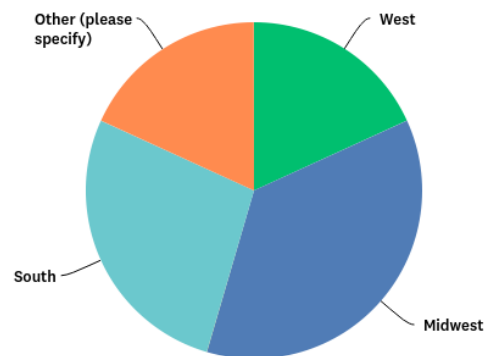
Based on Question 9, the respondents may be separated into five categories: (1) Those who are strongly opposed to Dispensationalism, (2) those who have serious questions about Dispensationalism, (3) those who have no opinion about Dispensationalism, (4) those who are

somewhat committed to Dispensationalism, and (5) those who are strongly committed to Dispensationalism. Summarized below are statistics regarding how many respondents belong to each of these categories, and basic demographic information.

Alumni who are currently strongly opposed

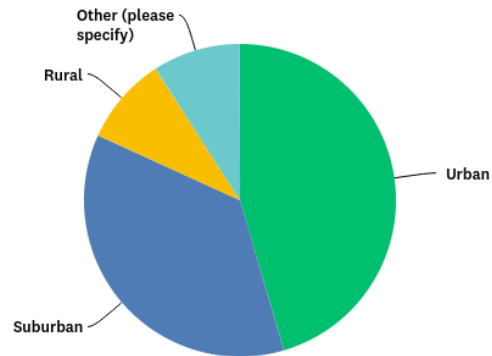
- Total: 6.32% (11 respondents)
- Geographical distribution

Q46 Geographical region of the US where you currently reside



- Sociological distribution

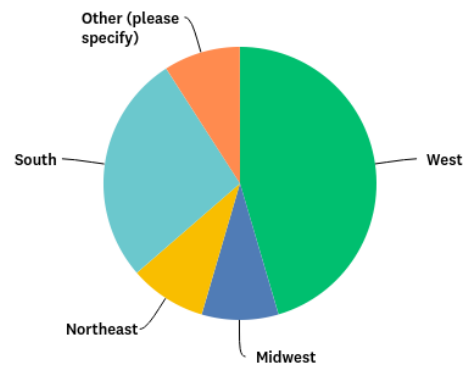
Q47 Sociological area where you currently live or minister



Alumni who currently have “serious questions”

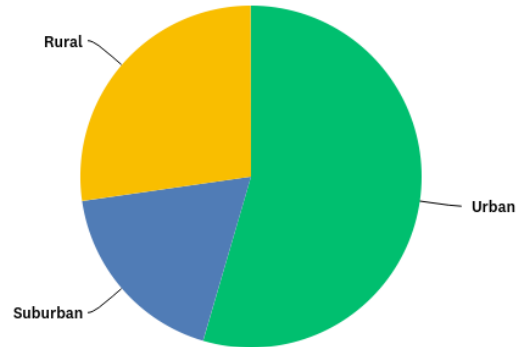
- Total: 7.47% (13 respondents)
- Geographical distribution

Q46 Geographical region of the US where you currently reside



- Sociological distribution

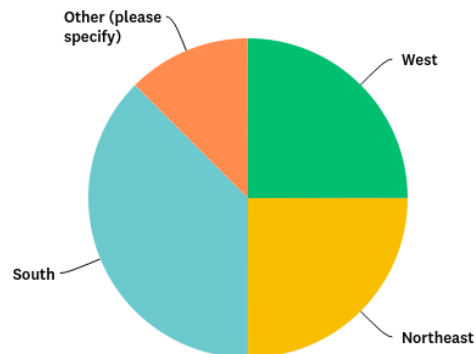
Q47 Sociological area where you currently live or minister



Alumni who are currently with no opinion:

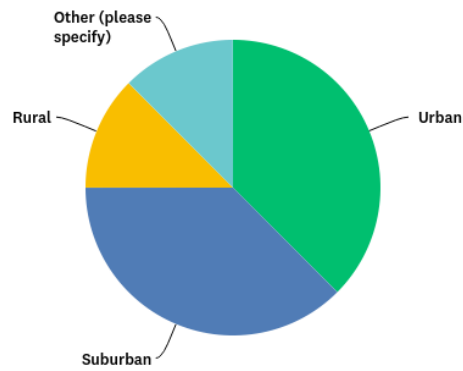
- Total: 7.47% (8 respondents)
- Geographical distribution

Q46 Geographical region of the US where you currently reside



- Sociological distribution

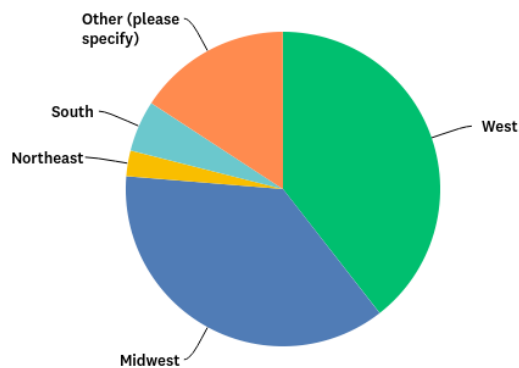
Q47 Sociological area where you currently live or minister



Alumni who are currently “somewhat committed”:

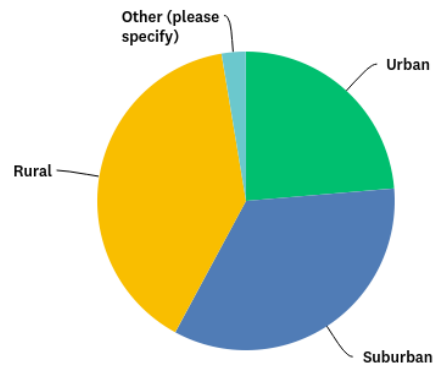
- Total: 7.47% (40 respondents)
- Geographical distribution

Q46 Geographical region of the US where you currently reside



- Sociological distribution

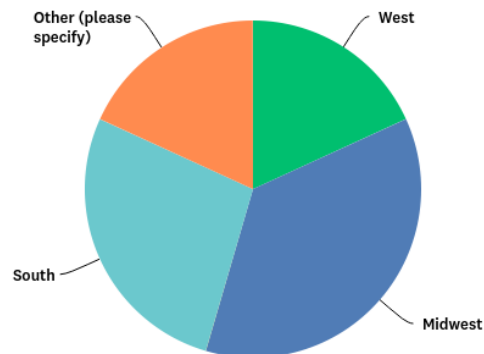
Q47 Sociological area where you currently live or minister



Alumni who are currently “strongly committed”

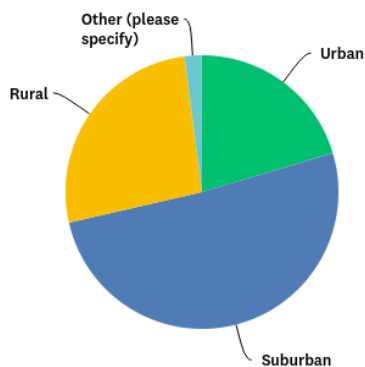
- Total: 58.62% (101 respondents)
- Geographical distribution

Q46 Geographical region of the US where you currently reside



- Sociological distribution

Q47 Sociological area where you currently live or minister



Analyzing Questions 1-8

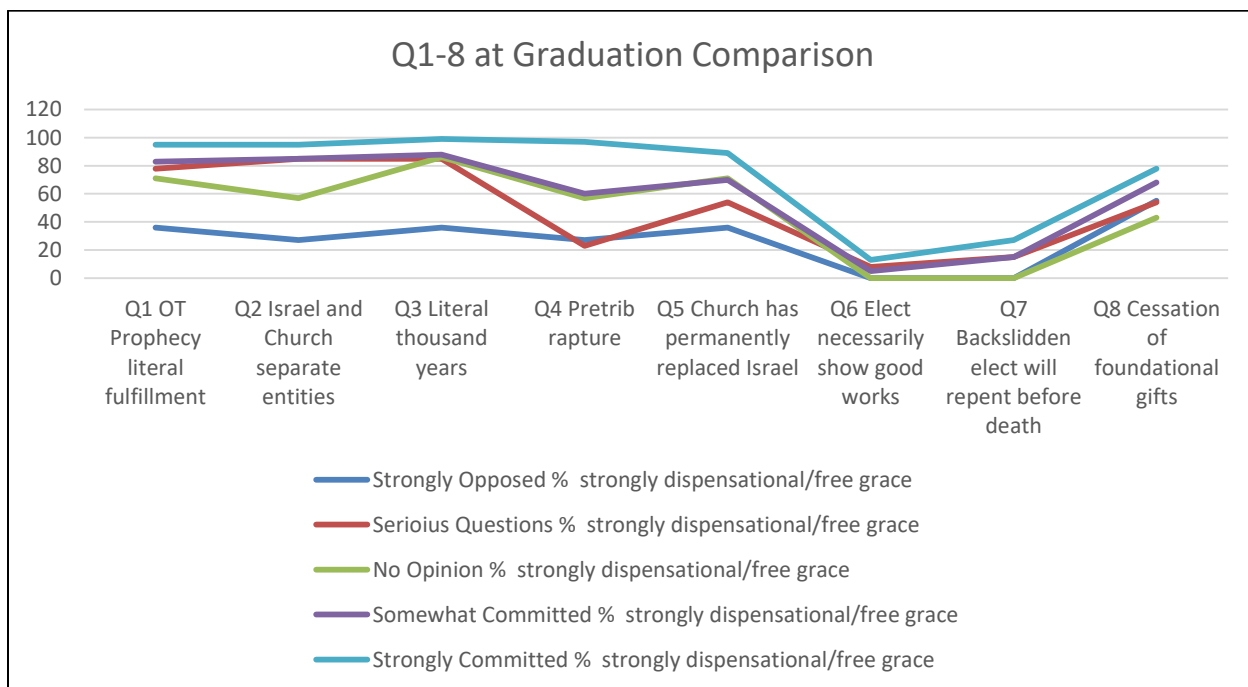
In the following analyses, answers to survey questions 1-8 were weighted to reflect agreement with a dispensational/free grace theology. In this way, the graphs in the following analysis will show 100% as representing the following:

- Question 1 “All unfulfilled Old Testament prophecy will have a literal fulfillment in the future.” Answer: Agree Strongly
- Question 2 “Israel and the Church are separate entities with separate promises, even though they may share in some of God’s blessings.” Answer: Agree Strongly
- Question 3 “The thousand years of Revelation 20 refer to a future, literal thousand-year reign of Christ on the earth. Answer: Agree Strongly
- Question 4 “The rapture of the church will occur before the seven-year Tribulation Period.” Answer: Agree Strongly
- Question 5 “The Church has permanently replaced Israel as the chosen people of God.” Answer Disagree Strongly
- Question 6 “A truly elect saint will necessarily show his salvation by his good works.” Answer Disagree Strongly
- Question 7 “A truly elect saint might backslide, but will necessarily repent of backsliding before death.” Answer Disagree Strongly

- Question 8 “Certain spiritual gifts - such as miracles, signs, wonders, and revelatory gifts - were designed for the apostolical foundation of the church and are no longer normative in the Christian's experience.” Answer Agree Strongly

Comparison of Respondents' Current Belief with Belief at Graduation

The graph below illustrates the relative comparison between the respondents' current position vis-à-vis Dispensationalism and what their beliefs were at the time of their graduation.¹⁶



As expected, those who are currently strongly committed to Dispensationalism were also strongly dispensational at the time of their graduation. A bit surprising is the slight statistical dip for Question 5. Not all who were strongly dispensational were strongly opposed to supersessionism. In fact, 4% of these respondents, at the time of their graduation, indicated strong support for the church having permanently replaced Israel. However, by the time they took the survey, this number had dropped to only 2%. Also surprising was the relatively low

¹⁶ The scale on the left hand side indicates percentage of agreement with a dispensational/free grace position. The answers for all the respondents belonging to one group (either Strongly Opposed, Have Serious Questions, No Opinion, Somewhat Committed, or Strongly Committed) were averaged together to establish a mean for that group at the time of their graduation. This is why there are no data above 100%.

percentage holding to cessation of the foundational gifts (only 78% agreed strongly, 13% agreed somewhat, 6% disagreed somewhat, and 3% disagreed strongly). Survey statistics indicate that opposition to the cessationist position continued slightly between the time of graduation and the time the survey was taken (“Agree strongly” decreased from 78% to 76% and “Disagree strongly” increased from 3% to 5%). The majority also did not hold to a free grace position on the perseverance of the saints.

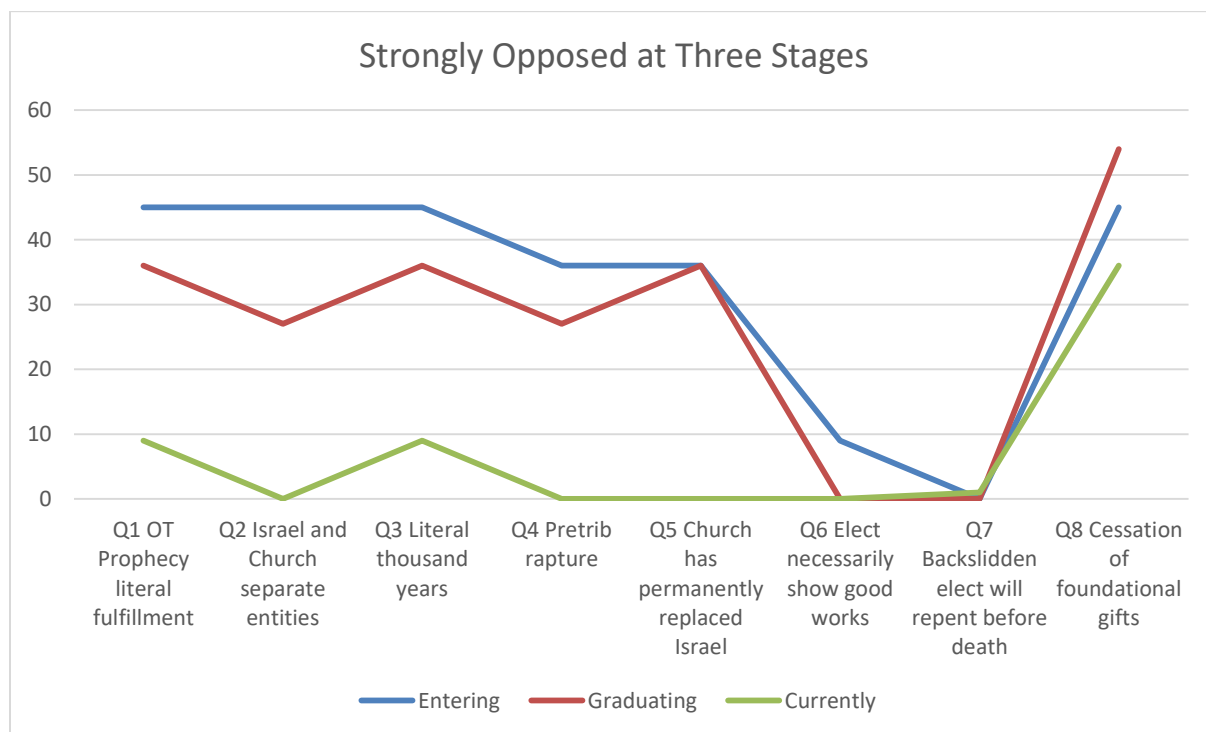
Strongly Opposed

Also as expected, those currently strongly opposed to Dispensationalism were consistently less dispensational and less committed to a free grace soteriology than those who were strongly committed. Of particular interest in this group was their response to Question 8 regarding cessationism. A slight majority of these (54%) agreed strongly with the cessationist position at the time of their graduation. Survey results indicate that this number decreased (to 36%) at the time they took the survey. The numbers who disagreed strongly with the cessationist position also increased dramatically (from 9% to 27%) between the time of their graduation and the time they took the survey. This appears to be a strong indicator of the influence of New Calvinism on this group.

For those having serious questions about Dispensationalism, it is noteworthy that, though largely sympathetic with the dispensational positions on Questions 1-3, there was a significant downward trend in commitment to both the pretribulation rapture and supersessionism (Questions 4 and 5). Regarding the pretribulation rapture, this group also increased in strong disagreement between the time of their graduation and the time they took the survey (from 8% to 23%). Those who agreed strongly with supersessionism increased between graduation and survey taking (from 0% to 8%).

Comparison of Strongly Opposed Respondents' Beliefs at All Three Chronological Phases:

The graph below illustrates the relative comparison between the respondents' position vis-à-vis Dispensationalism at three chronological phases: (1) upon entering their school, (2) upon graduating from their school, and (3) currently.

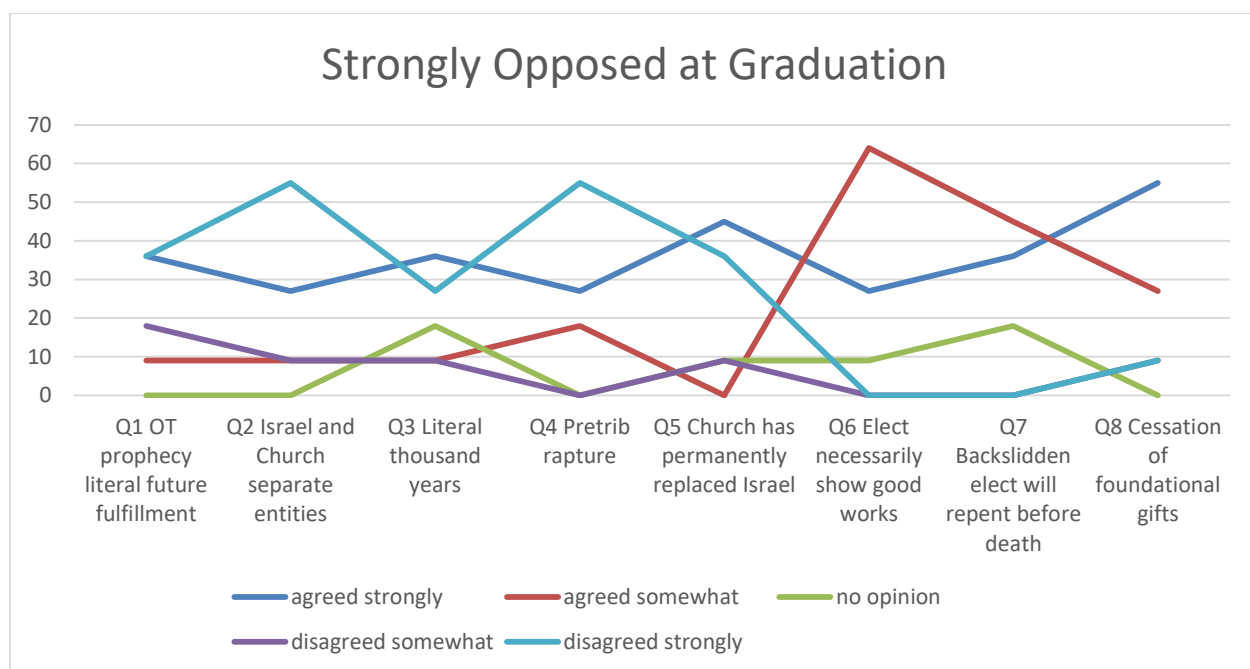


It is no surprise that upon entering their school, those who are currently strongly opposed to Dispensationalism were likewise generally non-supportive of Dispensationalism. There was less than 50% agreement with the dispensational position at the time of entering their school for every single question in the survey. At graduation, these students generally had even less agreement with the dispensational position than they did at entrance, with the exception of question 5. From the results of question 5 it appears that none of these had any greater commitment to replacement theology than they did at entrance. However, by the time they took the survey, they were all firmly committed to replacement theology. This group was firmly

committed to the perseverance of the saints at graduation and remained so up to the time of taking the survey. Somewhat surprising is that this group was more firmly committed to cessationism at graduation than they were at entrance. However, gains here were entirely lost by the time the survey was taken, and, in fact, the group was less committed to cessationism than at any other time. This may in some cases reflect New Calvinist influence.

Strongly Opposed at Graduation

The following chart shows the responses to survey questions 1-8 given by those who are strongly opposed to Dispensationalism reflecting their belief at the time of their graduation.¹⁷



Despite completing a program at a solidly dispensational school, these respondents graduated with strongly anti-dispensational beliefs. With the exception of question 8, fewer than 50% of this group agreed strongly with a dispensational, free grace position on any of the other questions. Question 2 (Israel Church distinction) and question 4 (pretribulation rapture) both

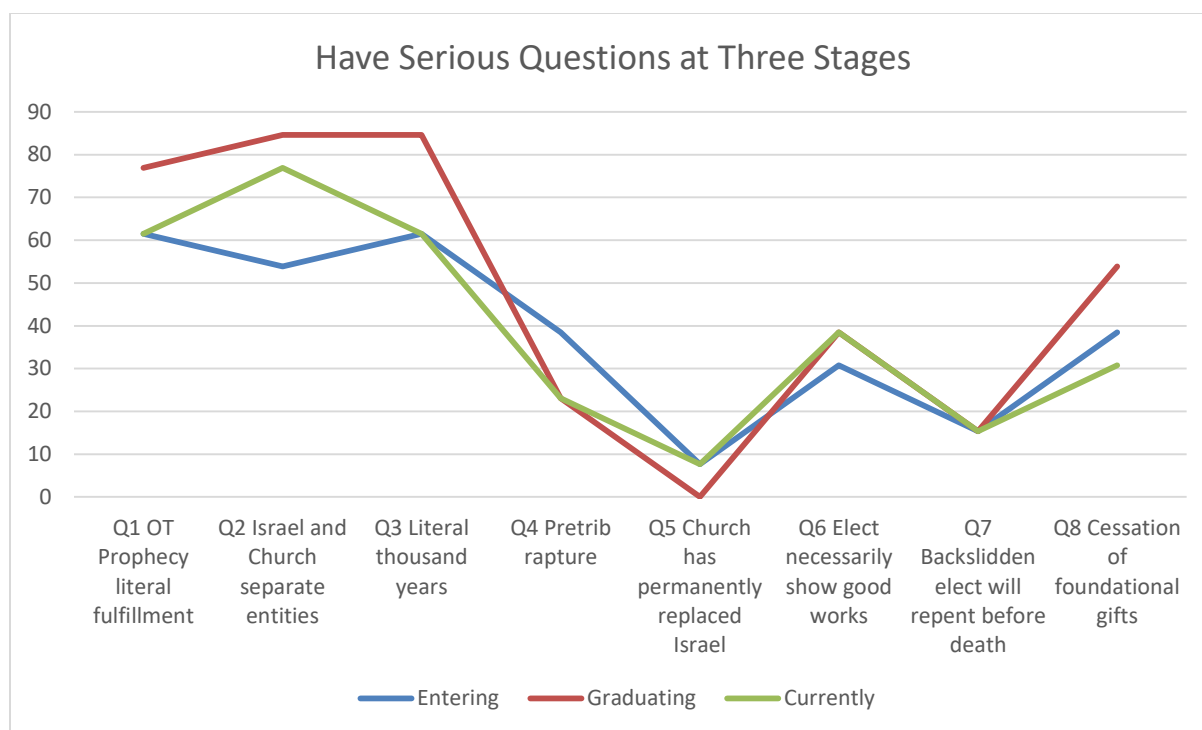
¹⁷ Data in Appendix 3.

garnered the strongest disagreement at graduation among this group. These two questions represent probably the most definitional and characteristic points of Dispensationalism. Coupled with the issue of a distinction between Israel and the Church is the issue of supersessionism. The chart shows that along with strong disagreement with the distinction between Israel and the Church is a strong agreement with the position that the Church has permanently replaced Israel. This is to be expected, and demonstrates the importance of clearly teaching and strongly supporting these fundamental truths if Dispensationalism is to be successfully passed on to the next generation of Christian leaders.

Have Serious Questions

Comparison of “Have Serious Questions” Respondents’ Beliefs at All Three Chronological Phases

The graph below illustrates the relative comparison between the respondents’ position vis-à-vis Dispensationalism at three chronological phases: (1) upon entering their school, (2) upon graduating from their school, and (3) currently.



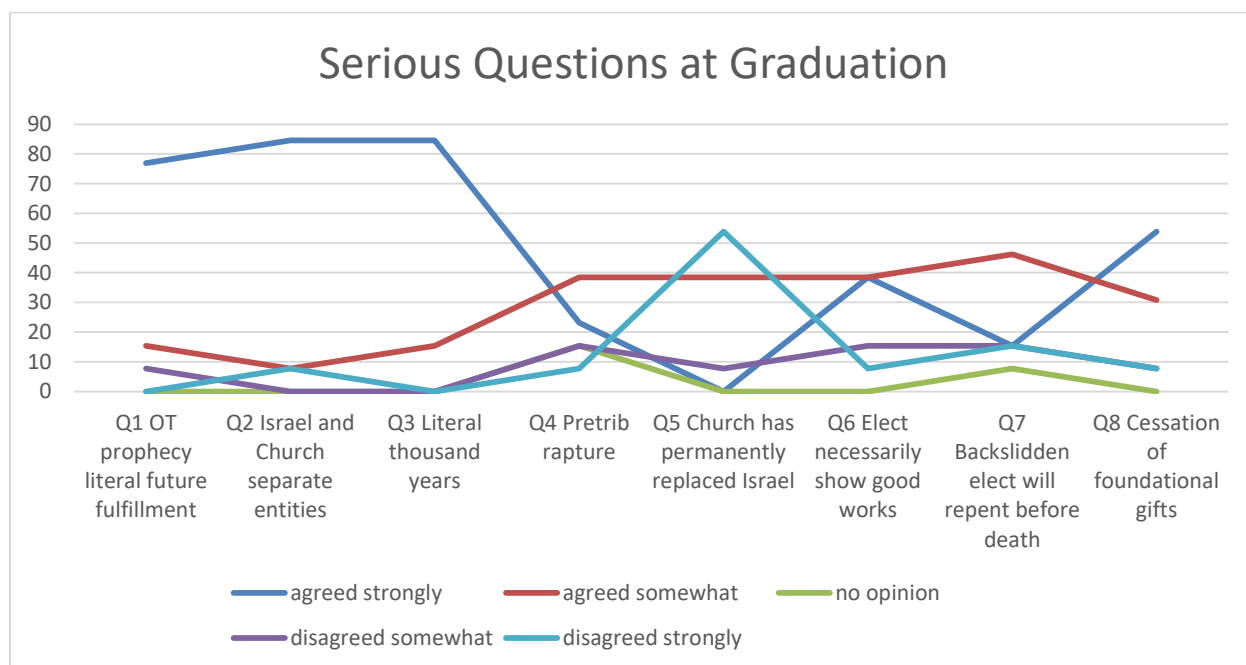
Among those having serious questions about Dispensationalism, the schools were successful in gaining ground on questions 1, 2, 3, and 8 by the time these students graduated. However, for questions 1, 3, and 8, the ground that had been gained had all been lost by the time the survey was taken. This indicates the importance of a commitment to alumni for continuing education. The relative responses to question 8 may reflect New Calvinism's influence in promoting the continuation of charismatic gifts.

The responses to question 4 indicate that commitment to a pretribulation rapture has significantly fallen. Very few in this group (less than 40%) were committed to a pretribulation rapture position at the time they entered their schools. But at graduation, this number fell to almost half that. This means that the students in this group not only were not convinced by their instruction that the pretribulation rapture is correct, but some were more strongly convinced by other views. Possible explanations include: Influence of professors who do not hold to the institution's doctrinal statement, influence of peers, influence of resources such as books,

journals, social media, blogs, etc. It is possible that some of the professors teaching a pretribulation rapture have not kept current with contemporary arguments against the position, and thus, their classroom presentations are not answering the questions these students are asking.

“Have Serious Questions” at Graduation

The following chart shows the responses to survey questions 1-8 given by those who have serious questions about Dispensationalism reflecting their belief at the time of their graduation.¹⁸



Questions 1-3 are fundamental dispensational issues. These statistics indicate that the schools are succeeding in convincing this group of these truths (78-85%). However, question 4 on the pretribulation rapture, also significantly indicative of a dispensational position, shows an unexpected low figure (22%). This seems to indicate that students who fall into this category are not making the connection between a pretribulation rapture and other fundamental dispensational

¹⁸ Data in Appendix 3.

issues. This suggests that perhaps the mode of teaching about the pretribulation rapture is not taking place within the context of a cohesive theological system.

Question 5, addressing the issue of supersessionism, is nearly as fundamental to Dispensationalism as are questions 1-3; although, for question 5 a negative answer is compatible with Dispensationalism. It would be anticipated that the “disagreed strongly” to question 5 would parallel the “agreed strongly” to questions 1-3. However, this is not the case. There is a significant statistical difference between them. Some 25-30% fewer respondents in this category were opposed to supersessionism than agreed with questions 1-3. This phenomenon is similar to what was seen above in the observation about the pretribulation rapture. Here, it is also likely that the mode of teaching about supersessionism is not taking place within the context of a cohesive theological system.

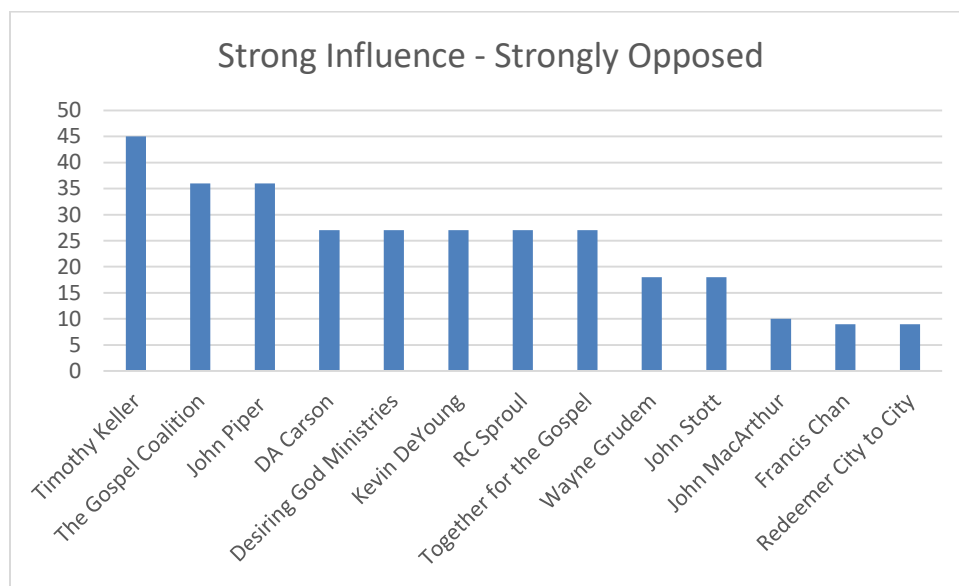
Concerning the cessation of charismatic gifts, about 85% of those in this category either agreed strongly, or agreed somewhat, with the cessationist position at the time of their graduation. This positive statistic should be encouraging for the dispensational institutions; however, the positive is obviated by the ground lost by the time the respondents took the survey (see previous section, “Comparison of ‘Have Serious Questions’ Respondents’ Beliefs at All Three Chronological Phases”).

Analyzing Questions 19-42

Questions 19-42 presented the respondents with a list of prominent teachers and web sites that teach either a New Calvinist or Dispensational position.

Strongly Opposed

The chart below shows the major influences reported by those who were strongly opposed to Dispensationalism. The chart presents the data representing only the response of “Strong influence” to these questions.¹⁹

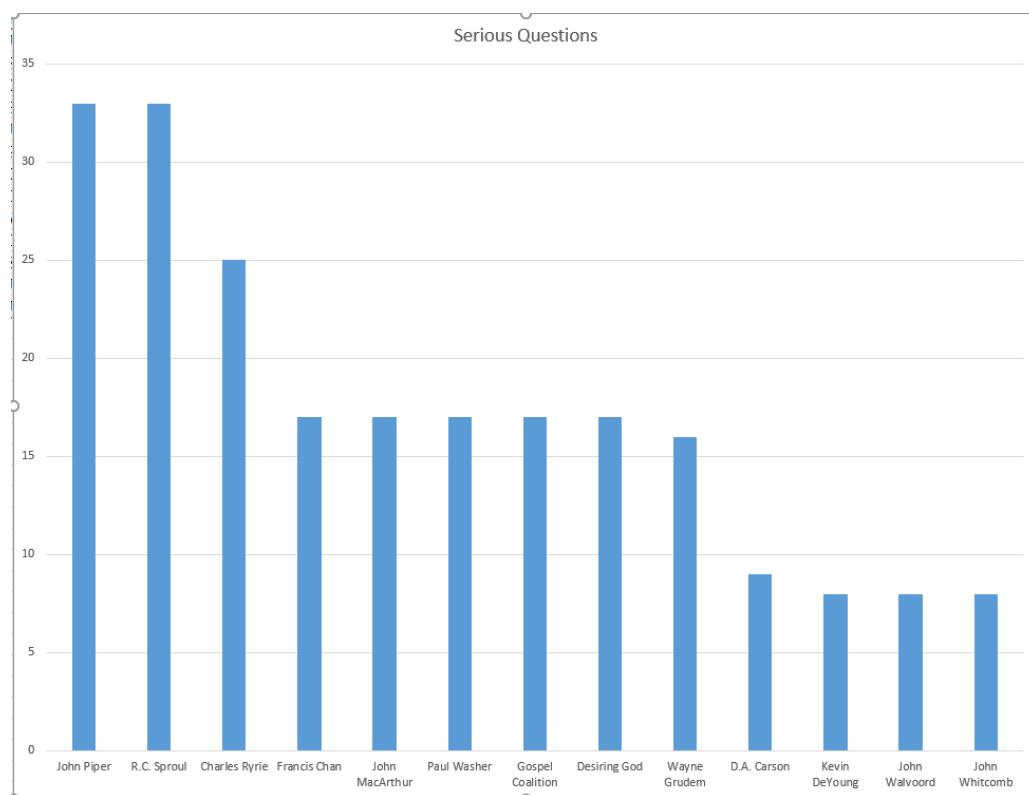


As expected, the strongest influence for this group comes from some of the strongest proponents of New Calvinism. That Timothy Keller was significantly higher than either the Gospel Coalition or John Piper seems to indicate that this group tends to be more thoughtful, scholarly, and philosophical than merely going with the crowds. None of the proponents for Dispensationalism received a response of strong influence among this group. It is perhaps a bit surprising that dispensational teachers did not even receive one response of “Some Influence” from this group, even though many well-known, respected, and abundantly published scholars are among this group of teachers, including: David Jeremiah, Charles Feinberg, Thomas Ice, Alva McClain, Charles Ryrie, John Walvoord, and John Whitcomb.

¹⁹ Data in Appendix 4.

Have Serious Questions

The chart below shows the major influences reported by those who had serious questions about Dispensationalism. The chart presents the data representing only the response of “Strong influence” to these questions.²⁰



As with those who were strongly opposed to Dispensationalism, the top influences among this group were New Calvinists (Piper and Sproul). However, the influences in this group, unlike those among the strongly opposed, also contain some dispensationalists (Ryrie, Walvoord, MacArthur²¹). Charles Ryrie actually scored much higher than many other New

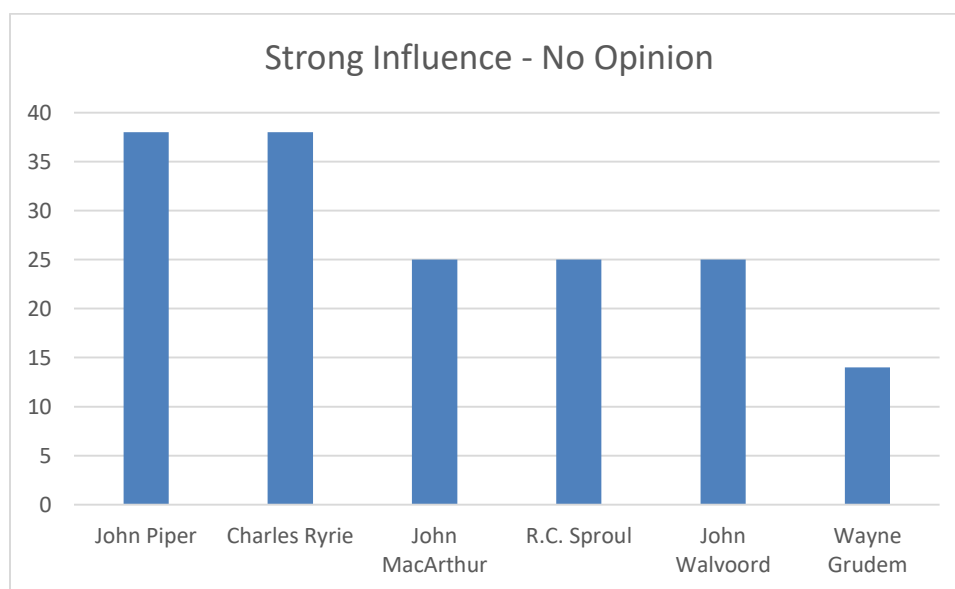
²⁰ Data in Appendix 4.

²¹ John MacArthur identifies himself as a dispensationalist; however, he has also been associated with New Calvinists and other reformed theologians and teachers. MacArthur has described himself as a “leaky dispensationalist,” and has said in an interview that he finds more in common with reformed theologians and teachers than he does with dispensationalists. Justin Taylor, John MacArthur, and John Piper, “A Conversation with John Piper and John MacArthur,” *Desiring God* (September 28, 2007), <http://www.desiringgod.org/conference-messages/a-conversation-with-john-piper-and-john-macarthur> (accessed June 20, 2015).

Calvinists. This may indicate a greater willingness on the part of this group to be open minded and to consider contrary views than those falling in the category of strongly opposed.

No Opinion

The chart below shows the major influences reported by those who had no opinion with regard to Dispensationalism. The chart presents the data representing only the response of “Strong influence” to these questions.²²

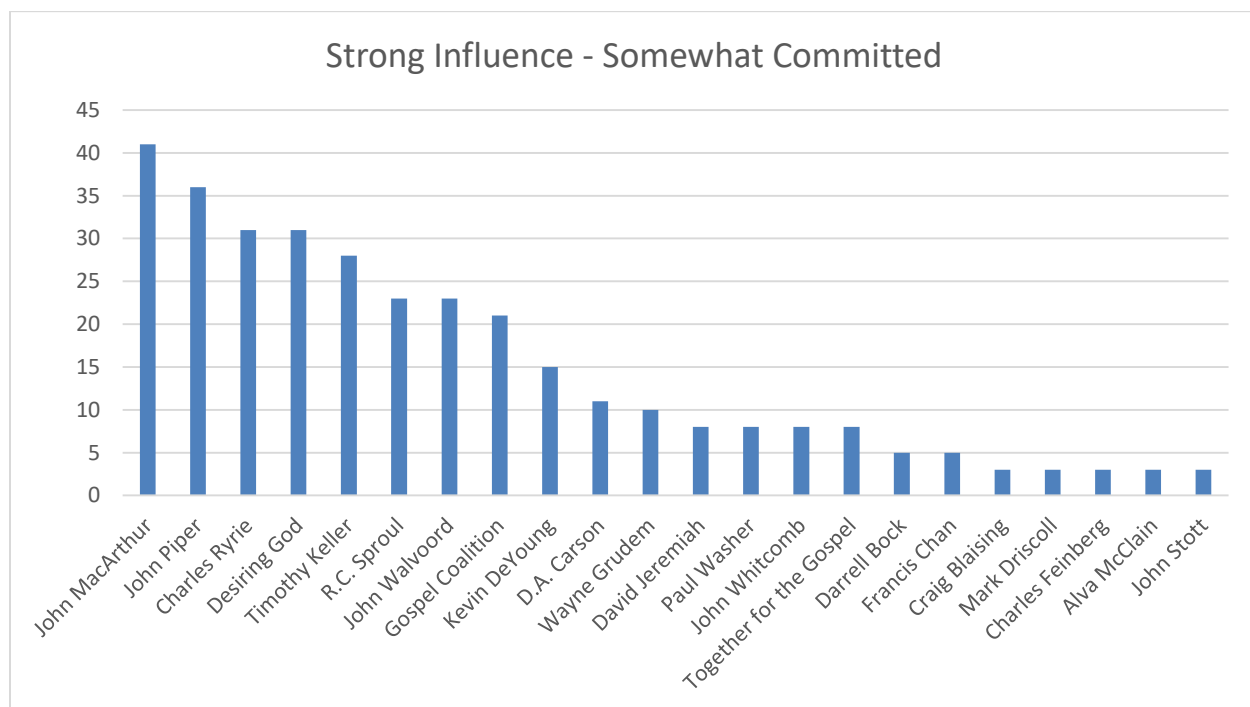


As one might expect from those in this group, there is a fairly even split between New Calvinist influences and dispensationalist influences. John Piper (New Calvinist) and Charles Ryrie (dispensationalist) scored equally strong and at the top of the list. Wayne Grudem, author of a systematic theology from a New Calvinist perspective was at the bottom of the list among those who had a strong influence. One might expect those who have no opinion on this matter to be less theologically inclined. But if this is the case, then Ryrie’s high rating is somewhat surprising.

²² Data in Appendix 4.

Somewhat Committed

The chart below shows the major influences reported by those who were somewhat committed to Dispensationalism. The chart presents the data representing only the response of “Strong influence” to these questions.²³



These respondents were “somewhat committed” to Dispensationalism, but for some reason held back from saying that they were “strongly committed” to Dispensationalism. This appears to be reflected by the fact that the strongest influence in this group was the self-described “leaky dispensationalist,” John MacArthur.²⁴ Next was the decidedly non-dispensationalist, John Piper. And third most influential, still with a relatively strong showing, the quintessential dispensationalist, Charles Ryrie. The influences on this group appear to be fairly evenly

²³ Data in Appendix 4.

²⁴ Taylor, MacArthur, and Piper, “A Conversation.”

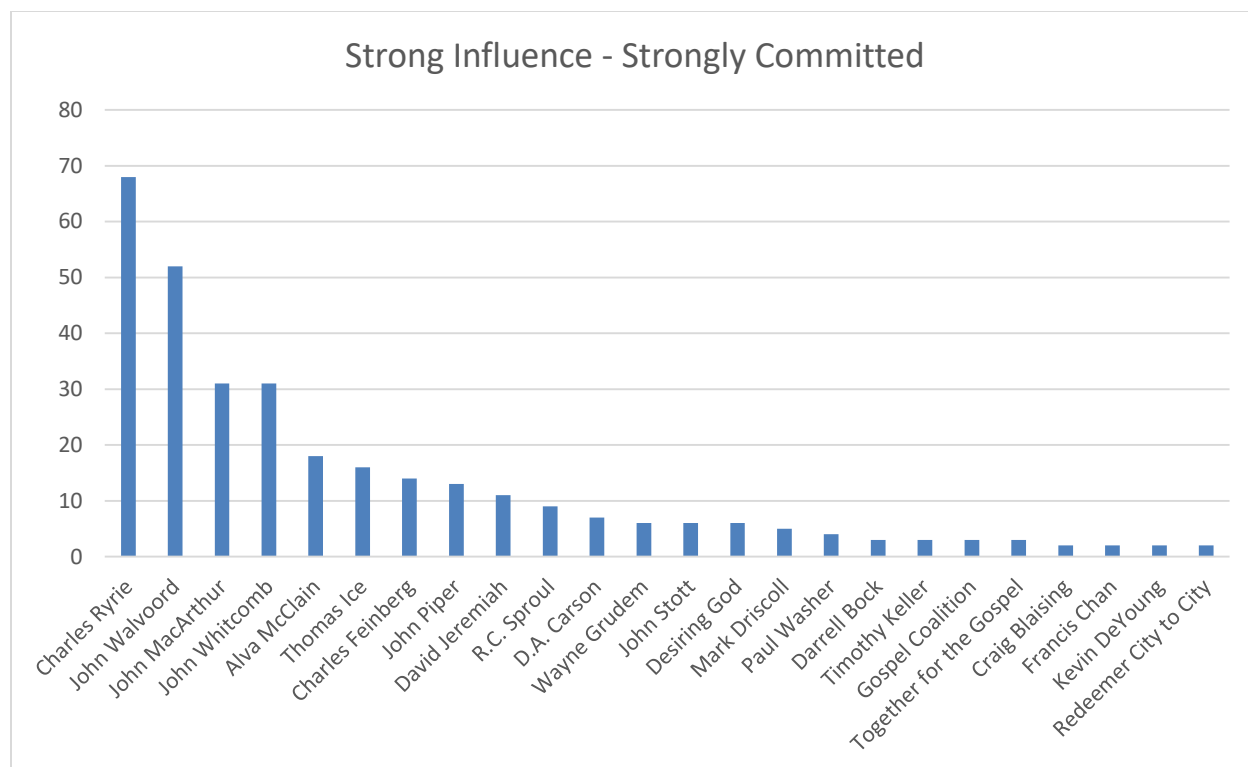
distributed between dispensationalists and New Calvinists. This category also appears to be influenced by a wider range of teachers and web sites than any of the previous categories (strongly opposed, have serious questions, and no opinion).

Of interest here is the fact that for this group, Progressive Dispensationalists, Darrel Bock and Craig Blaising, had very little influence. Compared with the previous categories, this is the first group that reported any strong influence from these two scholars at all. Progressive Dispensationalism may be seen as a moderating position between Dispensationalism and Reformed Theology. Therefore, one might have expected these two scholars to have a greater influence on this group. It may be that these two are simply not as well-known as the other teachers listed.

Strongly Committed

The chart below shows the major influences reported by those who were strongly committed to Dispensationalism. The chart presents the data representing only the response of “Strong influence” to these questions.²⁵

²⁵ Data in Appendix 4.



As expected, the most influential teachers are the solidly dispensational Ryrie, and Walvoord. John MacArthur was as influential as John Whitcomb, despite the fact that MacArthur has described his Dispensationalism as “leaky,”²⁶ while Whitcomb is as solid a dispensationalist as either Ryrie or Walvoord. This elevation of MacArthur relative to Whitcomb is likely attributable to the fact that MacArthur has more print titles in his name, has a popular study Bible in publication, and is heard regularly on many Christian radio stations.

This category, by far, is influenced by a broader and larger group of scholars than any other group in the study. This may be due to the fact that many of those identifying as strongly committed to Dispensationalism, also hold to some form of Lordship Salvation.²⁷

²⁶ Taylor, MacArthur, and Piper, “A Conversation.”

²⁷ See the chart above in the section, “Analyzing Questions 1-8.” Regarding the relationship of Dispensationalism and Reformed Theology to the Lordship Salvation, see the section above explaining the answers to Questions 6 & 7 (including footnote 14).

Analyzing Question 43

Question 43 was the qualitative dimension of this survey. All the other questions were quantitative in nature. Question 43 asked, “Please describe what you think were your school’s greatest weakness and greatest strength resulting in either a failure to support their dispensational position or a success in supporting it.”

Strongly Opposed

Criticism of their alma mater by those strongly opposed to Dispensationalism generally falls under six classifications:

1. *Missing or inadequate presentation of opposing views.* Those who expressed this criticism felt that their professors had simply ignored non-dispensational views and scholars, offering only a positive presentation of Dispensationalism. For example, one respondent said, “I did not get enough serious interaction with opposing views on a variety of issues.” Professors may believe that if they present a strong enough positive presentation of Dispensationalism, it will stand on its own merits. However, if Dispensationalism is falling into the minority opinion, at least among academics, then it may be important to present the opposing views and offer solid reasons in the classroom as to why Dispensationalism offers a more biblical, logical, and consistent view. This criticism may reflect a failure on the part of some professors to keep up to date with current issues related to reformed and dispensational theologies. The apostle Paul, when describing his methodology of combatting Satanically inspired false doctrine, could say “We are not ignorant of his [Satan's] concepts” (2 Corinthians 2:11). If Paul admitted the need to be familiar with false doctrine, in order to refute it, then it should also be true that we should be

well informed about the errors of our believing brothers if we are to put forth a corrective to such errors.

2. *Straw man argument.* Respondents expressing this criticism felt that the professors had offered a straw man argument of non-dispensational views. For example, one claimed that his professors, “characterized opposing viewpoints without giving ear to the actual people that believe those views.” Yet another asserted that his school’s greatest weakness was in “not giving a fair representation of the Reformed position on matters of covenant and end-times matters.”

3. *Ungracious attitude toward those advocating opposing views.* This, perhaps, is something of an ad hominem argument, criticizing the perceived attitude of the dispensational professors. Said one, “They could at times be graceless, hypocritical and not helpful when others where [sic] either different than them or struggling with sin.” According to another, these professors showed “no heart, meaning they are all intellect and close minded, they do not have any of God’s compassion in them.” It is hoped that such perceptions are ill formed, and possibly due to the student’s own bias against the position held by the professor. On the other hand, it is possible that some professors exhibit such over confidence in their own position that they demean the character or academic qualifications of reformed scholars. In a postmodern era, such attitudes will not likely win many converts from either the Millennial Generation or Generation Z.

4. *Failure to deal adequately with the use of the Old Testament in the New.* The use of the Old Testament in the New Testament has frequently been cited as a justification for non-literal interpretation of the Bible. Due to Dispensationalists’ heavy reliance on a consistently literal interpretation, some may see this issue as a legitimate challenge to Dispensationalism. Dispensationalists have defended a literal interpretation vis-à-vis the use of the Old Testament in

the New Testament.²⁸ It may be that such literature was not discussed or not made known to the students. One respondent said the key issue for him was “the use of the Old Testament in the New. I said that this was my biggest concern in my exit interview. I simply wasn't convinced by how they treated this issue.”

5. Incomplete presentation of Dispensationalism as an entire, cohesive system. In particular, this criticism had to do with the complex issue of the New Covenant as seen in the book of Hebrews from a dispensationalist point of view. The respondent said, “The professors [had an] inability to adequately explain ‘problem passages’ like the explanation of the New Covenant in Hebrews 8-10 from a Dispensational point of view.”

6. Ignoring the historical view of the church. This criticism is based on two assumptions: (1) That Dispensationalism does not reflect the historical position of the church, and (2) that the historical position of the church is preferable to a more recently developed position. One respondent wrote, “I am (small c) catholic, in that I want to read the Bible in the great tradition of the Spirit's work in the church (cf. guys like John Webster, Michael Allen, Scott Swain, etc.).” Another expressed his opinion as follows, “The school neglects the established theological majority views which were established by the early church fathers.”

Have Serious Questions

Criticism of their alma mater by those who have serious questions about

Dispensationalism generally falls under three classifications:

²⁸ Roy B. Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation: A Practical Guide to Discovering Biblical Truth*, (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 1991), 250-78. Homer A Kent Jr., 1964. “Matthew's use of the Old Testament.” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 121, no. 481: 34-43. Tracy L. Howard, “The use of Hosea 11:1 in Matthew 2:15: an alternative solution.” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 143, no. 572 (October 1986): 314-328. Darrell L. Bock, “Evangelicals and the Use of the Old Testament in the New: Part 1,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 142 (1985): 210-211. H. Wayne House and Forrest S. Weiland, ed., *The Theory and Practice of Biblical Hermeneutics: Essays in Honor of Elliott E. Johnson* (Silverton, OR: Lampion Press, 2015).

1. Incomplete presentation of Dispensationalism as an entire, cohesive system.

Opposition to Dispensationalism came initially from Covenant Theology, and much that has been written in support of Dispensationalism is presented against the foil of Covenant Theology. However, in more recent years, alternate covenantal views (such as New Covenant Theology and Progressive Covenantalism), and even alternate dispensational views (such as Progressive Dispensationalism) have arisen. Professors who rely on old arguments in supporting Dispensationalism may be neglecting these newer positions. One respondent acknowledged this when he wrote, “The weakest part I would say, was an in depth look at more covenantal views.”

2. Straw man argument. Somewhat similar to the first criticism, this problem does not neglect the opposing point of view, but rather presents it unfairly. One respondent wrote, “I think that my school built a lot of straw men out of other viewpoints, and once I ventured out into the world I realized that everyone doesn’t just have simple, easily refuted arguments about the world.” The use of straw man argument in the classroom may be either witting or unwitting. If the former, this is a very unwise tactic. While the straw man argument may win the battle, it is sure to lose the war. A professor’s argument may seem compelling if the opposing point of view is shown to be absurd, scripturally unwarranted, or logically fallacious. However, when the student later learns that there is more to the non-dispensationalist’s position than was presented in the classroom, he is likely to become a sympathetic hearer. On the other hand, the use of straw man argument may be unwitting. This may happen when the professor was fed these same straw man arguments by his own professors, years earlier, and he has simply failed adequately to research opposing views. Such lack of research on the part of teaching faculty is inexcusable.

3. Failure to address problems. These respondents felt that, though a strong positive defense was made for Dispensationalism, non-dispensationalists’ arguments against the system

were not adequately addressed. One respondent said that their school “did not address exceptions and discrepancies.” This may reflect a one-sided approach to teaching that can later appear to alumni to have been ill informed and poorly researched.

No Opinion

Criticism of their alma mater by those who have no opinion about Dispensationalism was generally lacking. Most comments were fairly supportive of their school’s teaching of Dispensationalism.

Somewhat Committed

Criticism of their alma mater by those who were somewhat committed to Dispensationalism generally falls under two classifications with two additional specific criticisms:

1. Missing or inadequate presentation of opposing views. This criticism has been referred to above, coming from other categories of respondents. The need for professors to be well acquainted with opposing views and to discuss those views intelligently in class is of great importance to successfully communicating the truth. One respondent said, “The weakness may have been not discussing all sides more openly and thoroughly.” Another indicated, “Weakness: Lack of teaching on other positions so that one can draw their own conclusions based on the arguments.” This criticism also includes the idea that without mentioning opposing views, students were left without cogent arguments against such views. As one mentioned: “Though my professor was very committed to the dispensational view, he could have done better at defending it against those who were of a different view.” And another said, “their greatest weakness was that it was taught in a more indoctrinating way. What I mean is, while the professors were

fantastic men and several of them dear mentors and friends, they generally taught dispensationalism strongly and failed to accurately represent other theological approaches.”

2. *Straw man argument.* As with the preceding criticism, this one has been referred to above, coming from other categories of respondents. It is not necessary to repeat what has been said above in response to the use of straw man argument in the classroom. Here is what one of the respondents had to say: “They painted a caricature of other views, most seriously of reformed theology, rather than representing those views in the ways the proponents of those views think of them. It was often a bit of a straw man.”

In addition, two individual criticisms were made quite pointedly. These do not represent any kind of a trend, but are worth mentioning:

3. *Futurism of the book of Revelation questioned.* Apparently one respondent felt that the way the futurist interpretation of the book of Revelation was presented allowed for no application of that book to the Christian life in this present age. This respondent wrote, “I feel though that some of the explanation for Revelation is not as accurate that they do not take into consideration that Revelation was also written to the believers at the time and therefore had to have relevance for them at the time, that not everything could be futuristic.” It may be that this respondent did not understand the distinction between interpretation and application (or “meaning” and “significance”). It may also be that the professor this respondent had in mind simply omitted to comment on the application of futurist passages to the Christian life. Of course, in a class in, say, eschatology, one would not necessarily expect such a discussion.

4. *Ungracious attitude toward those advocating opposing views.* One respondent felt that the professors’ attitudes were unchristian. The specific comment was as follows: “Greatest weakness: being so dogmatic about it and not presenting other views. I got a bad grade on my

cessationism paper because I didn't agree. Also, the character of teachers could be harsh and prideful. But mostly we were taught theology and quick answers but not compassion or how to care for hurting.” This was uncharacteristic of most comments. Most respondents commented on the high quality of teaching, the knowledge of their professors, and the commendable adherence to the Word of God. To be sure, this respondent’s criticism is a reminder that the messenger’s character may either help or hinder the message itself. However, this specific criticism does not appear to reflect any trend.

Strongly Committed

This category of respondents has the highest degree of agreement with their alma mater. Thus, they may be viewed as the most supportive of their alma mater. As such, their criticisms should be granted great weight. These criticisms should be seen as “the faithful wounds of a friend” (Proverbs 27:6). Criticism of their alma mater by those who are strongly committed to Dispensationalism generally falls under five classifications:

1. Missing or inadequate presentation of opposing views. Though many comments from this category of respondents testified of the adequate presentation of opposing views, several respondents did feel that only the dispensational viewpoint was presented. For example, with reference to the issue of cessationism, one respondent commented, “The biggest weakness was not discussing the tongues passage in class or providing a defense of their view of it.” Similarly, with reference to reformed theology are the following comments: “Greatest weakness- not exposing us better to Reformed Theology” and “Really did not discuss Covenant Theology, except to say it's ‘wrong.’” One felt that views of the rapture other than pretribulationism were omitted – “The school's weakness is the lack of conversation from those that do not believe in pretribulation.” Other respondents were more general in their description of this criticism, such

as: “It seemed that they proclaimed their stance without much reference to others stance,” “Greatest weakness – providing little opposition to the subject,” and “The greatest weakness is the school avoids teach other eschatological views in defense of Dispensationalism.”

2. Incomplete presentation of Dispensationalism as an entire, cohesive system. In some cases, these respondents appreciated the fact that a dispensational perspective was consistently presented in all classes, but at the same they felt that a unified, cohesive presentation of Dispensationalism was lacking. One respondent felt his school failed in an “adequate explanation of the different dispensational views.” Another thought that he finally understood Dispensationalism as a system a bit too late in his program. His comment was: “Weakness: not connecting the dots about what Dispensationalism was early on. My senior year things began to connect. I would suggest a second year course on Theological Systems which would favor and promote Dispensational systems.” The need for a single class committed to Dispensationalism was noted in the following comments: “... there was no one class at my time of enrollment fully devoted to dispensationalism and how it can be applied to one’s system of interpretation and life application,” and the following very insightful observation:

Except for a session or two in eschatology and hermeneutics, dispensationalism *as a system* was not really presented. I know some schools have devoted a full class to the issue of dispensational vs. covenant theology, and I tend to think that something along those lines (comparing, contrasting, and evaluating the two approaches as theological systems, rather than just dealing with dispensational/covenant conclusions in this or that passage) might be helpful.

3. Outside influences. This criticism is not truly directed toward the schools themselves, but as several respondents mentioned this, it is worthy of mention. It was felt that influences from outside the school sometimes worked against the teaching offered by the school’s professors. In one case, these influences came from pastors of churches located within the same geographical area as the school. This respondent commented:

A weakness in my opinion was that some of the local churches in the area of my school were starting to drift and certain pastors had a strong influence in many of my peers. I do not fault the school for not intervening or removing those churches from the approved list. In my observation the shift occurred in the local church pastors who had a stronger influence than the college professor. That is just my observation and opinion.

In this case there may be little that a school can do about such outside influences. And a ministry school in particular may be reluctant to criticize a local pastor. However, such influences do need to be recognized by administration and faculty and due consideration given to the influence they may have among their student body. Another respondent thought that even some of their own professors were being unduly influenced away from a free grace position by outside influences. He said, "... there were a number [of professors] being influenced by John MacArthur, who had at the time published 'The Gospel According to Jesus.'" One way to meet this kind of influence is for a school to have an active faculty association that sponsors discussions of current theological trends.

4. *Ungracious attitude toward those advocating opposing views.* This weakness has been noted above from almost all other categories of respondents. But it is even more significant when voiced by those who are most supportive of their alma mater's theological position. Even those who are strongly committed to Dispensationalism did not approve of intolerant or demeaning attitudes toward non-dispensational scholars and their views. For example, one respondent said, "I believe a weakness was vilifying theological systems other than Dispensationalism. A weakness was a failure to engage Covenant Theology in its modern forms." The negative influence of this attitude on scholarly investigation was noted by another respondent: "At times this zeal has stifled the legitimate discussion of other positions in the classroom." While such negative attitudes may at times be found in some classrooms, it does not seem to be the norm. As one respondent observed, "[The] greatest weakness might lack of charity with Christian

opponents. But this was not common.” Even worse, at least one respondent felt that this attitude was also shown towards students who held an opposing view: “Other opinions were left to feel less than or stupid. I think it would have been good to know that if you disagreed you would still feel respected in your opinion.”

5. *Disagreement among the faculty.* Many respondents from all categories of responses lauded the fact that their school presented a unified agreement among the faculty on Dispensationalism. This was counted as a strength by respondents from all categories. However, there were a few responses that testified of some disagreement among faculty members, and this was considered a weakness. One respondent said, “A weakness would be in not having all of the professors agree and present a unified view of eschatology.” Whether a diversity of views among the faculty is a positive contribution to education or a negative force contrary to a healthy educational environment may be a matter of debate among educators. But from the student’s perspective, at least among those who were strongly supportive of Dispensationalism, disagreement among the faculty on matters of dispensational teaching was seen negatively and encouraged some students to defect from the school’s official position. In some cases, such dissent among the faculty was suppressed in the classroom, but became known among the students as the private position of these dissenting faculty. As one respondent reported: “The dissenters were not vocal and had to be asked before they would give an opinion, but they were known to the students. Other than having a few dissenting teachers, however quiet about their position, I can think of no [other] specific weaknesses.”

Summary of Weaknesses

Respondents reporting weaknesses in their institutions come from eight different schools. Not every weakness is necessarily found in all eight of these schools, and some may have been

reflections on past practices that are no longer seen in today's classroom. Nevertheless, it should be beneficial for all schools to review these weaknesses and seek to determine whether they are present in their classrooms today. Of the nine total weaknesses cataloged above, four were the most commonly reported. The four most commonly reported weaknesses were:

- Missing or inadequate presentation of opposing views;
- Straw man argument;
- Ungracious attitude toward those advocating opposing views;
- Incomplete presentation of Dispensationalism as an entire, cohesive system.

The Interviews

The preceding analysis of the survey was helpful in determining causes and influences in departure from Dispensationalism. However, these largely quantitative measures do not always give the full picture of all factors involved in changing a person's theological persuasion. There may be sociological, psychological, emotional, and relational factors that can only be discovered by means of a qualitative research interview. The qualitative interview seeks to gain a fuller understanding of the respondent's entire worldview.

The interviews were designed to be of the "Standardized, open-ended interview" type in which "the same open-ended questions are asked to all interviewees."²⁹ These interviews should be of special significance to dispensational educational institutions. These are the voices of those who graduated from these colleges and schools, but departed from the school's position. A commitment to serving one's alumni will lead to one's listening carefully, thoughtfully, and with reflection to these voices.

Interviewee #1, Sean

Introduction:

For this report, this interviewee will be referred to as "Sean." Sean is a 27-year-old young man, single, living in the urban Midwest. He graduated from a one-year program at a Bible College in 2009. Sean is not in full-time Christian ministry, but seriously witnesses to others as a believer. He is a full-time artist. Judging by his answers to the survey, Sean fits the profile of a New Calvinist very strongly. Strong influences in his life include: Francis Chan, Timothy Keller,

²⁹ Dapsury Valenzuela and Pallavi Shrivastava, "Interview as a Method for Qualitative Research." Southern Cross University and the Southern Cross Institute of Action Research (SCLAR), <http://www.public.asu.edu/~kroel/www500/Interview%20Fri.pdf>. Accessed 3/6/2018. Questions prepared in advance for these interviews may be found in Appendix 6.

John Piper, John Stott, and The Gospel Coalition. He indicated on the survey that he is currently strongly opposed to Dispensationalism.

The Interview:

To start with, tell me a little bit about yourself, your family, where you live, and your ministry.

I'm from [a Midwestern city]. I'm the third of six kids. I grew up in a Christian home. I've done a lot of ministry over the years. I went to a Bible College. I served in a bunch of different capacities. I lived overseas, serving overseas with several different organizations.

Where were you overseas?

I lived in Israel for two years. So, I currently am not in technical ministry. I'm a full-time artist. But I see ministry as everything that I do, such as hospitality through having Christian brothers and sisters into my house, or interactions with my roommates, or various secular people that I meet with art. It looks like a bunch of different things. That's a little bit about me.

You were you raised in a Christian home. So were your home and church dispensational? premillennial? confessional? or something else?

I grew up in dispensational churches and my parents were *very* dispensational. And they were a step further dispensational than even the churches we were in.

Was there a time in your life when you felt there was a specific call to the ministry?

There were multiple times when I felt that. Ironically, it came prior to my becoming a believer.

Coming from a Christian home, I think that happens sometimes.

Yeah, sure. Um, I think that I didn't become a believer until after Bible College, which is why it's ironic. That might throw you for a loop there, yeah.

Well, not necessarily, I mean, I can understand that from some perspectives. Now, when you say your Bible College, that was [name of college omitted], wasn't it?

It was, yeah.

Yeah, that's what I thought. That was a one-year program, right?

Yes. It was.

So, even before you became a Christian – a believer, or however you want to characterize that – you did sense at some point some call of God on your life to the ministry. Is that right?

I don't know that I would put it that way; I think that I would put it more like, I saw what God was doing in the world, whether I understood that from a place of personal faith and conviction and how the gospel related to me. I saw what God was doing and I think that really excited me. I had the desire to be a part of that. I wouldn't say that the gospel had penetrated my heart.

Would you describe yourself as being "dispensational" when you entered college?

Oh, yeah.

And was that a big reason for choosing that school?

Um, yeah, I would say that it was. I would say that I probably wouldn't have gone to a school that wasn't dispensational at that time. And I would also say that that was partially due to the influence of my parents, as well.

Do you think that at that time, since Dispensationalism was an important part of your choice, how would you have defined "Dispensationalism" at that time? If someone had asked you back then, "What is Dispensationalism?" How would you have answered it at that time?

I think, at that time, I wouldn't have been thinking through the actual terminology. But, having grown up in a home that had very, very dispensational parents, I would have been able to fairly adequately articulate for you what Dispensationalism was, and what it was not. I wouldn't have used that term, though - Dispensationalism.

What term *would* you have used?

Um, what would I have used? That's a good question.

Well, give me a brief description, rather than a term or another label. How would you have described the position at that time in your life.

I would have said, Premillennial, Rapture-believing, Israel and the Church have a distinct place. That's how I would have explained it.

While you were enrolled at college, did you change your mind about Dispensationalism while attending your school?

No

So, when you graduated, you were in basic agreement with their position?

Yeah.

And would you say that your professors accurately and faithfully presented and defended Dispensationalism?

That's a good question. So, the teacher that spoke the most on dispensational thought was actually my favorite professor. But I wouldn't say it was a *defense* of Dispensationalism. I wouldn't say "a defense of," because I don't think there ever was much respectful time given to any other viewpoint. So, I don't know that that could be an adequate defense of, if you haven't heard the other argument. Does that make sense?

Sure, Yeah, it does make sense. How about, if not *defending* it, a *presentation* of Dispensationalism, explaining what it is.

Yeah.

Was that done faithfully and accurately?

Yeah, absolutely. And I would say that it was done *ad nauseum*, as well! A *lot* of focus on Dispensationalism.

Do you mind my asking who that favorite professor was?

Gosh, I've got to remember her name. She was connected with Kay Arthur. And I think her name was [name omitted].

Ok, I'm not familiar with that name. But, thanks for answering that!

So, after graduation, what, or who, have been the chief influences in your thinking leading you to a non-dispensational position?

I finished school in 2009. So that was quite a while ago – nine years ago. A lot has happened in those nine years. Since then, I had gone to Israel for three years. And I would say that was a very pivotal, formative experience in causing me to think through dispensational thought.

Expand on that a little bit. I'm very interested in hearing about your experience in Israel.

So, I would say that that was the beginning of me asking very difficult questions about what I believe. In that time, I began to ... There's a huge difference between saying, "Oh, I believe in Dispensationalism" and then, "What does that mean? How does that affect my life?" Well, Israel brought that a lot closer because some of the theologies are actually more in your face. So, thinking through what role *does* Israel play, we could even go as far as what role does

political Israel play, Israel as a political entity? What effect should that have on the church?

What effect should that have on a predominantly Jewish church with an Arab minority? And vice versa – a predominantly Arab church with a Jewish minority. And I think that was where the rub really began to pop. I was constantly bombarded and perplexed by this context of a religious, politicized nationalism – a fusion of faith and nationalistic fervor, intermixed, as being in a Jewish-Christian community – a community where that was perpetually the biggest block between Jew and Arab as Christians dwelling in unity. Politics aside, what did it look like inside the church? What does it look like inside the Body of Christ? Do we see the unity that was being spoken about in Ephesians? And I didn't see that unity, because over and over, in so many conversations that I had with people, what kept getting in the way was, a right to the land, like I said, a very politicized, nationalistic faith. And so, that's where I began to think through what exactly is going on here. How shall I begin to understand all this stuff? That was just where I began to ask the questions. I would say that I was still holding on to dispensational beliefs.

I see. Would it be fair to say that some of the positions of Dispensationalism were more closely associated with political positions than they were with spiritual positions? Is that what was bothering you?

Well, I think, in one sense, yes, but I think, more than that, there were more occasions where somebody who held to a dispensational belief, that would determine the way they thought through church life. That would determine the way they thought through how the church should look. You know, that passage in Ephesians, what that should look like, because of their Dispensationalism. So that Dispensationalism seems to be coloring the way they thought everything was, so it led them to certain conclusions about, be it politics, be it the way that they treated different people groups, interact in Christ. The reason I'm fussy on that is that it wasn't a

starting place of politics, it was a starting place of Dispensationalism that seemed to be determining everything else.

So, was it more like you were seeing them being driven by a theological system, instead of being driven just purely by the Bible?

Yeah. And when you would bring up passages, like Ephesians, they would have to constantly go back to Dispensationalism – like, “That doesn’t agree with my Dispensationalism.” And so, it was like they needed to hold on to that doctrine to make everything else work.

Yes. I see. And I think that’s a big problem with many people – not only dispensationalists – you know, a prior commitment to a theological system, rather than to just an exegesis of the Scriptures. That can be a problem. Do you agree with that?

Oh yeah. Oh yeah.

So what do you perceive, today, to be the chief problems – either inconsistencies, or unbiblical teachings – of Dispensationalism?

That’s a really good question. I think that I could handle that question in two different ways. I think we have just the practical level, and then a more theological level. Do you mind if I answer that question in two parts?

That’s fine. Go right ahead.

Great. So, I would say the first problem is just on a very, very practical level. It’s something that all of us do in our very postmodern age. We’ve kind of lost the ability to listen, and listen well to another person’s viewpoint. And so, something I saw over and over again with Dispensationalism was the idea that they had a good grasp on what non-dispensationalists were thinking. And it had to do with the terms that were used – like “Replacement Theology.” I don’t think that anyone uses that term, except for dispensationalists. And so that was just over the

years of really thinking it through and inevitably changing my belief. It was just the realization that everything that I was told about non-dispensationalism wasn't quite true. There wasn't this malicious intent to kick out Israel. That was not at all what was going on. There were just so many things that I was told, that once I actually started interacting with non-dispensationalists, I realized that, Oh, these people really have thought through this stuff. They *are* making good arguments, and they're using Scripture, too. That was just on a practical level.

So, was it kind of a use of a straw man argument?

Exactly! And you're right, in using that straw man argument, without the actual main faces and personalities behind the non-dispensationalism. It's not just the nameless, faceless "those people," these are actual people with names and faces, and they love Christ; they're seeking Christ; they want to honor Him. And they're thinking it through, too. And they're not less smart; they're desirous to honor and know the Lord more.

So, would you say, then, that the way dispensationalists have taught shows a lack of respect toward the non-dispensational brothers?

Absolutely! And you know what's funny, Dr. Gunn? I've noticed that sometimes non-dispensationalists will talk about dispensationalists that way, too. And I'll have to correct them, and be like, "Hold on, I grew up in this." I'm like, "Don't pigeon-hole them. Don't do that." I think it's innate within our human nature. I would definitely say that it was ugly for me to hear that. And even after that, with myself, too!

Thank you for being honest in your answer about that. Especially in reflecting on how that happens on both sides. And I think it does.

Absolutely! It does, it does!

So, that's sort of the practical reason. You said there was a Biblical reason as well.

Would you like to go down that road now?

Yeah, and I think this is a big area that I could expound for a very long time. But I'll keep it brief. I would just say a failure to teach an overarching Biblical worldview. An example of that would be something like in a particular of Babylon as spoken of in Daniel. One of the things I've benefitted so much from the non-dispensationalists is that – the ones that I know – they take it back to what is the overarching narrative of Scripture. What is the story that God is telling through the Scriptures? There's man's way of doing things; there's Christ's way of doing things. And He is in this mission to redeem mankind. And how He's interweaving everything, and so the sovereignty is so pivotal within that story. And all of our brokenness – be it the most cleaned up moralist, or the most pagan heathen, we're still inundated with our own corruption. But this story line is happening throughout. My personal experience with Dispensationalism just did not give me that narrative, didn't give me that story line. If anything, their story line was just this spiral downward, and saying, "Oh, mankind is getting so bad," and that just didn't line up with the reformed theology of the depravity of mankind as being – I don't know; I was just always hearing dispensationalists talk about how "those people are destroying the U.S.; those people are destroying the world," and "It is so much worse today than it was in the past." And I just couldn't make that line up with Scripture, because mankind is completely depraved, we've been completely lost in our thinking – be it the pharisaical Christian, who is not a real believer, or be it the pagan. And so, lacking that overarching narrative, it didn't seem that many dispensationalists were able to ... what was happening today. And their eschatology in an overarching theme of the Bible, and what God is doing on this grand theme and His plan for all of human history. It just seems very narrow of them.

So, you saw Dispensationalism, then, as lacking an overall, comprehensive worldview that encompasses all of history?

Exactly! And how that links in with a reformed understanding of soteriology. How that links in with an understanding of grace, the doctrines of grace.

So, today, as you think about where you stand in your theological beliefs, how would you label your current theological position?

I would say that I'm "Reformed." I would say that I'm "New Covenant, New Covenant Theology." And I would say that I am non-dispensational to the degree that I'm amillennial or postmillennial. I haven't fully decided yet. I feel that I need to do more studying to decide which one. I'm either "A-" or "Post-".

Are you familiar with either of the labels, "New Calvinism" or "Young, Reformed, Restless"?

The second one, absolutely, yes. The first one, I've heard it, but I can't tell you what New Calvinism is.

Would you identify with either of those movements?

I will say that I've had people try to categorize me as that. "Oh, you're just 'young, restless, and reformed.'" Yeah, I've heard that. But to be quite frank, I'm not comfortable using that term until I study it enough to really know. I don't want to put myself in a camp that I'm not really familiar with.

Is there anything else you'd like to add to this discussion about Dispensationalism?

I think that I would just say, at the time of my Bible College – and as you say, it was just a one-year program – and it obviously was not my only exposure to more intensive Biblical study, and it wasn't my only exposure to a more academic level of the study of

Dispensationalism. I would say that at the time of concluding those studies, I didn't give much thought to them. It was just like, "Oh yeah, sure, I believe that." In retrospect, in looking over them, I think it's been an issue of great frustration for me. Because of the fact that there was such emphasis put on speculation, and things that were not clearly defined in Scripture. Looking at that in retrospect, especially because I didn't become a believer until after Bible College, it has been an issue of great frustration for me because I felt that there was so much time wasted with speculative theology, rather than knowing and digging into the core tenets of the gospel. And so that has been a sore issue for me, because I *want* to know the gospel. And I think it's one of those things that the more we study it, the more we realize, I want to believe this more, but I feel the limits of my own human understanding. It's something the Holy Spirit has to enlighten to us, but I could spend the rest of eternity just studying the gospel. So, as we think about that, in comparison with how much time was given to just speculative theology, I think it really frustrates me, because there was so little time given to chewing on the gospel. I spent a lot of frustrating hours thinking through how there can be such disparity between the two.

Would you say it's safe to say that you could wish that at [your Bible College] you had been exposed more fully to a reformed theological perspective, at least to see what they were saying, to think about, be exposed to, to investigate what reformed theologians had to say?

Absolutely! And I would say, even more than that, yes, studying the academic side of it, but then also studying the more practical side of it. This is what these beliefs actually look like in the person. This is the story behind these beliefs. This is how the doctrines of grace can affect your everyday thinking. I'm thinking more along the lines of writers like John Piper, Jerry Bridges ...

Tim Keller?

Absolutely! Tim Keller! They dig into the more practical side of life. They're very academic, but they do a very good job of bringing it back to the practical element – especially Tim Keller and Jerry Bridges. And I think there is just very little, if any, relevance given to thinkers like that.

O.k. I have just one loose end I want to tie up here, before we conclude. You mentioned several times that you were not saved until after Bible College. Is that because you came to a fuller understanding of the doctrines of grace and a more reformed approach to the doctrine of salvation?

This is going to sound a bit like a cop-out answer, but I would say that it's because Jesus opened my eyes.

Sure, I understand that. But I guess, what I'm wondering is, you grew up in a Christian home, and you were at a Christian college, was there an earlier time in your life when you thought you got saved, and then later, afterwards, you *really* got saved?

I would say, up until that point, a lot of my faith had been in the praying of the mantra of the sinner's prayer being a device of saving. And so, it was one of those things that when you reached times of doubt, what's your fallback? You say the sinner's prayer again. And so the object of saving is more in the act of doing that than anything else. And so it was a long and very painful process of Christ just revealing to me that I didn't know Him, and that I didn't trust Him. I didn't trust Him; there were great inconsistencies in my life, but I didn't even see those inconsistencies. And Him humbling me, and Him showing me that I didn't understand the supremacy of knowing Him, as Paul says in Philippians 3, I consider all things to be rubbish in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ. I didn't understand that. And through Him just

making a wreck of my life, I just careened with this reality of, “Wait, That’s who you are? I don’t know you like that!” And, it was really jarring. Up until that point it had been all about saying the sinner’s prayer, and then it was just a simple unveiling of the simple person of Christ. I didn’t trust Him, because I didn’t *know* Him. My trust was still in me, and me trying to make sense of my life.

I understand what you’re saying, perfectly. I’m just curious, before Christ opened your eyes, you said that in times of doubt, you would have looked back at the time when you said the sinner’s prayer. If you have doubts now, what’s your source of assurance?

I love that question! That is such a good question. I go back to Romans. I love the book of Romans. I go back to Romans, because I do face times of doubt. Just being a thinker; just being aware of the fact that I can think, sometimes makes me doubt. And so, I think it really comes down to the work all along is Christ’s. It was Christ that died on the cross. I was not even born when He died on the cross and was resurrected. And so this work that’s being done is far bigger than my own ability to make any sense of that. So the onus doesn’t lie on me to cognitively understand that God; the onus lies on God helping me understand Him. So, I’m a firm believer that faith itself is a grace. I don’t even have the ability to have faith unless He gives me that ability. So, those moments of doubt are a very definition of prayer that He will give me the faith. “I can’t even believe without You giving me faith.”

So then, assurance comes in answer to your prayer that God will give you more faith? Is that what you’re saying?

Yeah, um, but “assurance” is a tricky term, because I wouldn’t even say that I’m looking for an assurance in that moment. Moments of doubt are not, “Give me some assurance; give me some assurance.” The moments of doubt are a simple realization of, “Wait, I can’t do this.” And

then, just a returning to, “Wait, what is this all about?” And then, inevitably, through that, you get the assurance, but I wouldn’t say that I’m looking for assurance.

That’s a good explanation. Thank you for that. And I think that this pretty much brings the interview to a close, unless you have anything else that you wanted to add.

That’s it!

Reflections:

Sean felt that his college gave inadequate exposure to non-dispensational thought. This may be due in part to the fact that his was only a one-year program. With more time available, greater exposure to other beliefs is more practicable. However, with a limited amount of time in a program, institutions must understandably focus on giving a positive presentation of their tenets. Nevertheless, some accommodations should be made to help the students feel they are not being given a straw man argument.

Sean left college fully convinced of their teaching. It was only after he left the college that he encountered non-dispensationalists who were not quite the villains they had been portrayed as. Two observations here: First, in teaching, professors should not demonize those who disagree with their positions, particularly if those who disagree are brothers in the Lord. Second, the goal of teaching should not just be agreement at the time of graduation, but there is also a need to prepare alumni to face non-dispensational teaching in the future.

Sean began having questions about Dispensationalism when he saw political friction between Arab Christians and Jewish Christians in Israel. Possibly, a better scriptural foundation in how Israel’s land rights are not in conflict with either spiritual values or the unity of Jew and Gentile in the church would have better equipped him to handle what he perceived as a

contradiction. Sean may have benefited greatly by reading Alva McClain's *Greatness of the Kingdom*, or possibly Andy Woods' new book, *The Coming Kingdom*.

Sean was critical of dispensationalists who interpreted the world through the lens of their own theological system. However, he seemed to be unconscious of the fact that he, and other non-dispensationalists, likewise, interpret the world through their own theological system, even if he could not quite define the system that had become part of his worldview. Sean would have been benefitted by having had a course in theological systems, comparing and contrasting Dispensationalism with Covenant Theology, New Covenant Theology, Progressive Dispensationalism and Progressive Covenantalism. Such a course should present Dispensationalism, not merely as a way of viewing prophecy, but as a worldview that consistently ties together the whole fabric of history, philosophy, society, and theology.

Sean was of the opinion that only dispensationalists used the term "replacement theology." However, this is not true. In fact, many non-Christian Jews use the term as well. However, the term "supersessionism" may be a better term to use here; although, covenant theologians equally disapprove of this term. However, the point is well taken, that professors should avoid the use of disparaging or demeaning terminology. Such terminology may drive our point home forcefully in the short-term, but in the long-term it sets the stage for alumni to take a positive attitude toward those who were thus disparaged.

Interviewee #2, Samuel

Introduction:

For this report, this interviewee will be referred to as "Samuel." Samuel is a 27-year-old male, and like the previous interviewee, is a graduate from a one-year program at a Bible College. He lives in the urban west of the United States and serves as a volunteer in his church.

Samuel was saved at the age of 4 and raised in a Christian home that held to dispensational beliefs. After graduation from Bible College, he went on a mission trip with Cru (formerly Campus Crusade for Christ) to Lake Tahoe. His experience on this mission trip did much to change his attitude toward Dispensationalism. He found that academic matters, such as dispensational distinctions, did not really help him practically in ministry to others. He came to see Dispensationalism as something that may be true, but not really meaningful in terms of either ministry to others or in terms of his own spiritual walk of loving God and loving his neighbor. On the survey, Samuel indicated that he had serious questions about Dispensationalism.

Unfortunately, most of the recording of this interview was lost due to a computer crash. The substance of the initial, lost portion of the interview is summarized below from my own recollection and brief notes. This summary was reviewed by the interviewee for accuracy.

The Interview:

To start with, tell me a little bit about yourself, your family, where you live, and your ministry.

I was raised in a Christian home and Saved at the age of 4. Both home and church were dispensational but didn't use the term "Dispensationalism."

Was the home you were raised in dispensational, premillennial, creedal, or something else?

Dispensational

Would you describe your call to the ministry?

I often felt when listening to missionaries or pastors that I would love to be involved in that kind of ministry, but then thought that it must not be God's will for me, because it would be too easy!

Would you describe yourself as being “dispensational” when you entered college/seminary?

Yes

Did you change your mind about Dispensationalism while attending your school?

No

What do you perceive to be the chief problems – either inconsistencies, or unbiblical teachings – of Dispensationalism?

It was too technical, not dealing with salvation issues. Divisive. The most important thing is to love God with all your heart and to love your neighbor.

How would you label your current theological position?

I still believe that Dispensationalism is correct theologically, but not important in either spreading the gospel or in fellowshiping with other believers.

Are you familiar with either of the labels, “New Calvinism” or “Young, Reformed, Restless”?

No.

That’s o.k. Some have. Some haven’t. It all depends on what sources of information you rely on.

The final 10 minutes or so of the interview were reestablished by phone and were recorded separately as follows:

Samuel: Let’s see, where did I cut off in the last question you asked me?

We were discussing the fact that there were things that are important, but may not be relevant to matters of salvation or talking to people about the Lord. In other words,

there are some truths, for example, you mentioned baptism by immersion – you believe in baptism by immersion, and I do, too – but a person doesn’t have to believe in that in order to be saved, in order to be a brother, to be in good standing and to be in fellowship. And I would agree with that. So would you see Dispensationalism as something kind of like baptism by immersion – something that’s true, but maybe just not relevant or important to everyday Christian fellowship or determining of salvation.

What I was saying is that you can meet someone who is not a dispensationalist, who still loves God with all their heart, and is still a brother or sister in Christ. And you should still be able to work with them and treat them as a brother in Christ. But if you put up this wall that says, “You have to be a dispensationalist for me to conduct ministry with you...” I mean, different kinds of ministry are different, right? So, teaching is going to be different from a ministry of serving, right? But I think that the more you put up walls that say, “Ok, Dispensationalism is what we believe and we can’t work with you if you don’t believe that,” you’re going to be missing out; it’s going to be creating divisions where it shouldn’t be creating divisions. You could say, “Dispensationalism, I believe, is really important,” but I feel like, as a Christian I can still see that you worship God and that you care about people, and that you love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and strength, and you love your neighbor as yourself. Those are the two things that really matter to me.

Ok. And that’s what Jesus identified as the two most important commandments, right?

Exactly, yeah. So, if Jesus identifies that as the most important, that’s what I’m going to say is the most important. And then everything else is pretty much tertiary to that – or secondary.

Ok. I think that pretty much summarizes your position fairly well. And I think that's a good position. So, would you, then, classify yourself as "dispensational," but just not wanting to push that on people?

I think I would classify myself as ... I don't know, it's weird, because I really don't like classifying myself with terms like that."

I know; I understand that.

I mean, there's nothing in Dispensationalism that I necessarily disagree with. Because, like I said, it's such broad strokes [ed. He is referring here to an earlier discussion we had about Dispensationalism being defined by Ryrie's threefold *sine qua non*.] that it's hard to say you disagree with that, right? No, I don't disagree with it; it's kind of hard to disagree with it. It's like, let's say I'm a truist. I'm going to make up something. I'm a truist, and the main position is that the Bible is true. It's like, O.k., do you identify yourself as a biblical truist? Sure, I guess. You know what I'm saying? I feel like Dispensationalism is a word that describes my ideas, but I wouldn't necessarily describe myself as a dispensationalist. But that's also an issue in semantics.

Yes, it is.

Let me finish up with a couple of final questions.

On the survey, you indicated that there was only one individual in the list offered that was a "strong influence" in your thinking. That was John Piper. Would you say that he has a strong influence over your beliefs?

Yeah. I mean, I've read some of his works, and I've listened to some of his sermons. There were a lot of characters I didn't recognize on that list, but John Piper was one that I had read some of his books, and appreciated what he had to say. I remember, there was an interview I

found with him. Do you remember when I told you I had moved into a house with a bunch of brothers in Christ?

Yes.

We called that house, “The Big House.” It was owned by a pastor in town. His brother owned New Saint Andrews College, and was the head pastor there. John Piper had a conversation with his brother, and it was really interesting to me to hear John Piper’s reaction to their kind of pseudo-intellectual Christianity. John Piper was very respectful, but at the same time, I kind of felt that he was thinking, “Ok, well you’re kind of getting focused on things that don’t really matter.” Like, they had this word for the way that you speak, so that you sound more intelligent to other people. And, John Piper’s like, “Uh huh, ok,” and in that way, it’s like I really appreciated John Piper because at the time, I was like, “You know, these guys are really getting focused on sounding smart without actually loving people.” That’s what I felt like that guy and his brother kind of did. So, seeing John Piper’s reaction to that was very refreshing to me.”

We talked about labels, and you talked about not really liking to label yourself any particular way. Let me ask you about a couple of labels. Are you familiar with either of these: (1) “New Calvinism” or (2) “Young, Reformed, Restless”?

I’m not familiar with either one of those.

Ok. That’s fine. The reason I ask is that John Piper has been strongly associated with both of those labels, those movements. But not everybody who likes John Piper is part of that. I’ve listened to endless hours of John Piper’s sermons, and I like his preaching. But I obviously have some differences of opinion with him.

Well, we have differences of opinion with everybody, right?

Absolutely. So, it all kind of depends on which sources of information you rely on as to whether you are familiar with those particular labels or not.

Well, this has been a good, helpful interview. I just wonder if there's anything you want to add to this discussion about Dispensationalism?

I guess, I would say, if I had to identify with a movement, the movement would be one that is immediately apparent to me in my own life. Because God put me in this position. And so, the people that He's put in my life are the people that I feel responsible to minister to. That's everybody from my family to my acquaintances to my bosses, and anything like that. So, when it starts to go beyond what God's put in front of me, it's kind of like, "Yeah, sure, that's fine, but we're all people." I try to have a very practical and sound way of doing ministry, if that makes sense.

That makes perfectly good sense.

One that focuses more on other people. That's a conclusion I came to a long time ago. I was very much focused on that intellectual – you know, knowing exactly where I fell on that TULIP and DAISY scale. And so, it's just kind of through my life experiences that I've decided that what's important is loving God and loving your neighbor.

Well, Samuel, I want to thank you for doing this interview with me. My apologies for the technical problems I had earlier.

That's fine. You don't have to apologize. Those things happen whether you want them to or not, right?

Right. That does happen. It just happens. But you've been a very good interviewee, and I thank you for that.

Reflections:

Though raised with dispensational beliefs, and having completed a one-year Bible program at a Bible College, Samuel has “serious questions” about Dispensationalism. He graduated from his Bible College program still committed to Dispensationalism, but during a short-term missionary trip with Cru, he began to have doubts about the relevancy of Dispensationalism. Samuel appears to hold the opinion that the supreme spiritual issue is salvation, and anything that does not contribute directly to communicating the gospel message – or more broadly, to expressing love for God and men – is somewhat irrelevant. Samuel still believes that dispensational truths likely correspond to biblical teaching; however, he fails to see the relevance to holding to, or defending, these truths. For Samuel, it was important to see how a theological system related to his practical life and ministry. It may be that in a one-year program, he was not able to develop a comprehensive enough understanding of Dispensationalism to see how it relates to the spiritual life and to evangelism. Possibly, if Samuel had taken a full four-year program, or even continued on to seminary, he could have developed a greater appreciation and understanding of the nexus between Dispensationalism, the spiritual life, and evangelism. It has been observed before in this study that there is a need in biblical and theological education for teaching a comprehensive worldview that is thoroughly dispensational. It may also have been helpful for Samuel to have taken a course in theological systems that compared and contrasted Dispensationalism with Covenant Theology, Progressive Dispensationalism, New Covenant Theology, and Progressive Covenant Theology. Samuel also seems to have developed the notion that ministers who are dispensational are generally intolerant of non-dispensational ministers. This attitudinal issue has come up frequently during this study. One can disagree with covenant theologians, but still appreciate their commitment to Christ and love them as brothers. They may be “opponents” in the sense of a debate, but not “opponents” in the fellowship of God’s family.

Perhaps in a postmodern age such an attitude is even more important than in previous generations.

Interviewee #3, Neal

Introduction:

For this report, this interviewee will be referred to as “Neal.” Neal is a graduate of a four-year Bible College and completed a ThM program at a seminary. While the seminary was not included as part of this study, both schools are considered by most to be dispensational. He has been married, but is now divorced. Neal lives in the southwest and has three children, one of whom is still at home. Neal was previously in full-time pastoral ministry, but is currently about to enter a PhD program at a major university pursuing a degree in archaeology. Neal indicated on the survey that he was “strongly opposed” to Dispensationalism.

The Interview:

Tell me a little bit about yourself, your family, where you live now, and your current ministry.

I live in [a southwestern city]. It’s a very large city, but I live on the west side, in an unincorporated area. I’ve been here since 2009. Prior to that I lived in the [another southwestern city] area, but after graduating from Dallas Theological Seminary, I was seeking employment and I found I was able to come down and serve as acquisitions librarian for a school down here that’s very similar to the college from which I graduated. Built very much on almost the same model, and same doctrines, as well. It’s an inner city school, and I was there from 2009 to 2012. After which time I was accepted to the University of [university named]. I was able to go there and was hired right away as a teaching assistant and eventually as a lecturer, teaching as part of their adjunct faculty. Our family experienced personal tragedy a few years back, between my

wife and I. As a result, we divorced in 2015. Part of the fallout from that was, I'm still here in the home, but she left. My oldest daughter was out of high school but she still lives here. One of my boys is in the Navy, the other went into the Marine Corps. And now, we're about to fully disperse as I head to Florida and my daughter heads out to California to live with my parents. In 2009, right after I graduated from seminary, there was a perfect storm of circumstances at that time, right as I was graduating from seminary, that left me there without a church home. So I found myself for the first time wondering, "What church context actually fits me best in my walk with Christ now." So, it was shortly after I graduated from seminary, I really was one of those that Robert Webber would call "Evangelicals on the Canterbury Trail," in terms of what you're looking for in your experience as a Christian. So, my family and I converted to the Anglican tradition. The Reformed Episcopal Church – I remember in Bible College, we learned that "Episcopal" and "Anglican" were practically synonymous terms. Now, I've learned that those are fightin' words if you say them to people, because the Episcopal Church has completely apostatized – gay bishops, the denial of Scripture, and everything else they've got going on. But those churches that self-identify as "Anglican" in North America typically stand in stark rejection of that. They maintain an episcopacy; they maintain the right of succession of bishops; they maintain the historic offices of deacon, priest, bishops, and so forth; they maintain liturgy; and they seek continuity to the first five centuries of the church. But they're very evangelical in their outlook. They're committed to the inerrancy and authority of Scripture. And they also juxtapose themselves to the Episcopal Church in their commitment to sexual ethics, as well.

Right. I'm very much aware of the distinctions between the Anglican Church and the Episcopal Church. And, for sure, the Episcopal Church has wandered a long, long way from its foundation.

So, in 2009 we became part of the Reformed Episcopal Church. My family and I were serving there, and then a year later they began asking me, “Neal, you’re not continuing in your ministry interests. Would you ever consider it again?” Yes. I was a senior pastor of a church when I was in seminary, I’ve done all these things, but I didn’t just assume that I would do that in the Anglican Church. But they said, “We honor all your experience, and all your ordination, and everything you’ve done up until now. We would just like to move you over laterally into the Anglican tradition as a deacon.” So in 2011 I was ordained as a deacon. In the Anglican tradition a deacon is an ordained position that pretty much does just about everything, except that there’s just a few official rites that are reserved for the presbyterate or priests. Those are: consecrating the elements of communion and pronouncing absolution. You don’t *offer* absolution of sins, you *pronounce* absolution. And that’s a rite that is reserved for the priests in the Anglican tradition. Pretty much everything else, since I’ve been a deacon – I’ve officiated weddings, served priests, and served in church, as well. It’s all in an avocational manner sometimes. Vocationally, I’m academic.

Great! Thank you for that. The next question relates to the fact that you were raised in a Christian home. Were the home and church you were raised in dispensational, premillennial, confessional, or something else?

The home and church I was raised in ... my home was not necessarily one of theological sophistication, but unwavering piety. Whatever the pastor [ed.: This pastor was dispensational.] said was considered true. We didn’t discuss the details of those things. If it came from the pulpit, it was definitely the case.

And would you consider your church to have held to Dispensationalism?

Yes. Very much.

So then, sort of by default, would you say that your family went along with the dispensational views of the church?

Uh huh. Yes.

Could you tell me a little bit about how you first received any idea about being called to the ministry? Did you receive a call to the ministry at some point in your life?

I'm still studying this question. It makes for very interesting conversation, because I've come to be very cynical about some of the jargon I was raised with. So, for me, often times when someone says, "Are you called," I typically give the same annoying answer I got from some of my professors, "I don't know what that means. You're going to have to be more specific." Because "calling" ... There have been times when I have said, "Yes." In a subjective, undefinable way, it seemed as though the internal promptings from circumstances, the Lord was moving me towards ministry. But there were other times when there were certain ministry opportunities that I engaged in, that it's difficult to attribute to anything other than youthful exuberance and recklessness. So, "calling" is still something that I think requires someone to pour volumes of ink on. It is so subjective. So it's difficult to define. I will tell you that there is a compulsion that all of my attempts to be away from it have failed.

All right. Fair enough. That's a good enough description. I thank you for that. When you entered Bible College, would you have considered yourself to have been dispensational?

Yes. Very much. Again, that was the faith of my household, the faith of my father, whom I revere highly, and that was the faith of every church that I ever attended until I enrolled in Bible College. There weren't any internal or external challenges to that.

Would you have considered that as an important reason for choosing your Bible College?

No. The reason for choosing that Bible college, I would have to say was 98.37% relational, and the other less than 2% would have been proximity.

Did you change your mind about Dispensationalism while you were a student in Bible College?

No.

How about while you were a student in seminary?

No. Well, as is often the case, significant migrations don't happen in a moment. But if you're going to try to span that moment, or tease it out over a course of time, you can say that something begins rumbling for you at one point and it culminates at another point. So, I would say that the early challenge to my dispensational assumptions, or stalwart defense of it began at seminary.

Ok. Can you describe those beginnings for me? What first got you to having doubts or suspicions?

When I started at seminary, I had just graduated from Bible College, and at that time there were some things that had started chipping away at my thinking about, "How much do I want to push..." Well, at that point, it wasn't, "How much am I committed to Dispensationalism?" it just begins to erode how much of an apologist are you for it. So, it may not be that you're going to abandon something, it's just that you're not its best spokesman any more. Some of the early things were ... Well, there are two things: (1) there's the doctrine itself, (2) there's the perception of it. So, a person may have a popular perception of a doctrine, but others might say, "That's actually not what it says at all." Unless you stay up on your reading,

you can be brought into the popular perception of a thing. So, my popular perception of Dispensationalism at the time seemingly was that there was always prophecy that was set to the times. And I had difficulty explaining the Hal Lindsey's of the world who were saying, "This is that generation." Like, Dude, come on, you're killin' us! Then, also, to me, there always seemed to be this eschatological ethnocentricity to it. The prophecies of the end times all seemed to be couched in geopolitical overtones. Such as the Great Bear of the Soviet Union versus the Christian hope of the U.S. Then, the collapse of the Soviet Union really undercut a lot of the popular assumptions that I had been swimming in with respect to what to expect of the end times. We were all convinced that the scar on Gorbachev's head was the mark of the beast! And so, for me, the collapse of the Soviet Union ... what WWI did for 19th century positivism, the end of the Cold War did to 20th century apocalypticism for me. And the other thing was, we had been hearing all of our lives that "this generation will not pass away before all things come to pass." Well, what was a "generation"? A generation must be 30 years, so right around 1978 you got *Late, Great Planet Earth*, 30 years after the United Nations forms the geopolitical state of Israel. Late 70s, early 80s you got a crop of different books – "Whoops, it didn't happen, so it must be 40 years," push the generation back to 40 years. So, more of the late 80s we started seeing more of Walvoord's books and others, and Tim LaHaye was arguing for this in the late 80s and early 90s. And it seemed like the "generation" kept getting pushed back to the point where we don't discuss that verse anymore, because now it's embarrassing. And then, for me, I paid a lot of attention to popular preaching, because I always had the television preacher on Sunday morning, getting ready for church, because that's just what you do. And so, when you pay attention to preaching you get kind of like a geopolitical aspect of preaching: With the Democrats in the White House, Christ is about to come, now. But when a Republican's in the

White House, the Lord must seemingly be going to tarry a little longer! So there's what I call an "ethnocentricity" to it. It's too tied to the current political happenings of the day. And so, with these, there comes a confusion of specificity. We can't keep on playing pin-the-tail-on-the-donkey with a blind fold on. There's got to be something reassuring about our eschatology that doesn't suffer the folly of over-definition. For me, it got to the point where I felt like ... in seminary we talked a lot about Aquinas and how the Roman church killed us with the mechanizing of grace and what it did to soteriology, and how scholasticism just killed us with over-definition on how one is saved. I got to the point where I felt that what Aquinas did to soteriology, Darby did to eschatology.

So, would it be fair to say, then, that a big part of your early questions and problems you had, maybe dealt with over speculation on the part of many dispensationalists?

Absolutely! As an Anglican, I've come to the point where I'm very staunch on maintaining a positive affirmation of mystery. Which means, when I look at church history, I see the great heresies as being a product of the inability to deal with mystery and the addiction to over define. So, if we're going to stay Christian about this, we've got to deal with mystery and not try to over define things, which Scripture seems to lead us to some ambiguity in things.

Ok, well, that's part of the epistemological side of this. And that's an interesting side of it. So then, while you were at seminary, you started getting some of these questions, maybe dissatisfaction about over-speculations, and inconsistencies?

Uh huh. And then you could say that kind of a great leap forward involved a seminary class I had in eschatology. There was a prof that I love very much, but he used to frustrate me to no end, because he was one of those kind of professors who would ask you questions that you couldn't answer. And that's when these questions just enter into the back of your ear and won't

let you go, because you're just curious. In this class on eschatology, we were discussing issues of chiliasm, premillennialism, Dispensationalism, and he held firmly to that view. The professor affirmed that seminary is a confessional, premillennial, pretribulational school, and we hold to that. But that doesn't mean he couldn't ask good questions. So a student asked, "Is there a future for Israel?" And his response was, "What do you mean? You're going to have to be more specific." And he went through about nine different things you could mean when you say, "Israel." Are you talking about Jacob, whose name was changed to Israel? Are you talking about Jacob's biological descendants? Are you talking about the current secular, political state on the eastern end of the Mediterranean? So, what are you specifying there? As I continued to ponder that, I came up with even *more* questions. The questions, over time, resulted in irreconcilable confusion – irreconcilable confusion if you mean anything other than "a contiguous people of God." That's where I arrived at.

So, that's where you are today? "Israel" is the people of God, always has been the people of God, and always will be the people of God. Whoever the people of God is, that's "Israel." Is that what you're saying?

Exactly. And so, that prof didn't tell us to think that. He raised questions and I just ran with that. So, for me it resulted in my own curiosity of saying, this really raises more questions than it answers. And the only way for me on my own to be at peace with it is to arrive at a point which is to see that Israel is a contiguous people of God. You've got "peoples," but you've got a turning of – some people call it "replacement theology," I prefer to call it "fulfillment theology." It is, in like manner, that Christ says, "I've not come to abolish the law but to fulfill it," you see the current people of God as a fulfillment of everything the older Israel was supposed to be. So, that's how I reconciled that. That was my great leap forward while at seminary.

So then, at the time that you graduated from seminary, would you have still considered yourself to be dispensational at that point, or would you have said that you had already moved away from that position?

By the time I graduated, I had really set it aside. I still don't consider myself a great apologist for covenantal theology. I think that the very last class that I took at seminary was very satisfying, because they asked, "Are you dispensational?" And the prof that was there – you were asked to give a summary statement of what you believe – and the prof said, "You have to give a description of where you are in terms of Dispensationalism." And he saw me kind of lose color in my face, and he said, "Don't worry, Neal, I'm not going to ask you describe any more than three." So, my response was, "Ok, the way things were, the way things are, and the way things will be." And he said, "That does it for me."

I want to move on, to the time after your graduation from seminary. At the time of your graduation you were not yet identifying yourself as Anglican. Is that right?

No, that came just a little bit later. I mentioned earlier that there was a kind of perfect storm of events that happened to me. The last year and a half I was in seminary, I was senior pastor for a church in a small suburban town. It was one of those things where it was the first time I had been a pastor, and there are certain things that you just don't know to ask the first time you pastor a church, because you're interviewing them, and they're interviewing you, and you want to put your best face forward. What I didn't realize at the time was that this was a church plant that had been trying to get off the ground for four years prior to me, and it just wasn't getting off the ground. Their view was: Get a young guy, full of juice, and possibly he'll be able to wake up as you go on. What I didn't realize was, that when you find yourself in a situation like that, you'll find people that are already on the verge of church-plant fatigue. So, within a

short amount of time, I had family after family telling me, “Neal, we love you, we think you’re great; we appreciate everything you’re trying to do, and we’d like to be more involved in the community and bring people in, but we’re out. We need to go down to the local mega-church and rest for a while.” Very supportive people, as they’re leaving to go get some R and R at the local mega-church. So, my first time being a senior pastor, it closed its doors a year and a half into that.

So, what happened then, after the church closed its doors and you found yourself without a ministry, I assume without a job at that point?

Well, I was without a job, but I had some funding that came in, the family was supported, but simultaneous to that – and there are a number of things that all happened at once – it was at the end of 2008, and as the church was closing down, I got a call (This is one of the reasons I’m such a skeptic), to chaplain ministry in the Navy. While I was a pastor, trying to lead by example, being out in the community, trying to have this missional focus, I was the chaplain for the local fire department. I was well received in the community. It was such a small town, and they were so proud of the fire department that they absolutely loved the fire department chaplain! They had me do everything. They asked me to do the invocation for any official city event – either city council meetings, park dedications, anything that occurred. Some even referred to me as the bishop of the town! I can’t tell you how fulfilling it was to be basically the pastor of a town! That was absolute joy. I loved it very much. I took to it so naturally. And it had all those internal confirmations, and external confirmations that people throw into this word “calling,” that when it came to the church closing, I considered, “What job would you like now?” There was no doubt in my mind; there was no doubt in my family’s mind; there was no doubt in the community’s mind; there was no doubt in anybody’s mind; and because of the timely nature of

my meeting a Navy officer recruiter – there was no doubt in his mind – that I was called to be a Navy chaplain. And so, I began that process to become a Navy chaplain at the end of 2008. There was a six-month application process, including physical fitness training, getting your endorsements from the Southern Baptist Convention, completing my Th.M., getting letters of recommendation. All these things seemingly came together in a timely and miraculous way. And so, at every step along the route, it seemed as though everything was falling miraculously into place. It wasn't just internal, it was circumstantial. It was the testimony of others. Everything you could possibly throw into the stew called, "calling," came to bear. Now, you know that there's a punchline to the story, because I'm not currently a Navy chaplain. What happened was, I graduated from seminary, I was expecting to become a Navy chaplain. I was told that I was one of the most qualified candidates to come through their office in years. Two days after graduation, I went to the Navy recruiter's office in May, because they said that there was one last preparatory meeting before they would fly me up to the Pentagon, because the last step in the process is your oral examination at the Navy annex to the Pentagon. So, I went to the office in north Dallas, and they took me into the office and said, "Oh, by the way, we have some bad news. You know when you were in the Navy as an enlisted person in 1988, and you were medically discharged? That resulted in a reenlistment code that said, 'Don't readmit this person.' And that can't be erased." I said, "I understand, but I've just gone through six months of psych evals and medical evals. I jumped through every hoop, everything you told me to do." And he said, "Yeah, I know, but it's a bureaucratic process that cannot be undone."

Wow! Well, I guess that's how regulations work in the armed services, isn't it?

Exactly. But, what's so important to that story is, how much the "kitchen sink" of all our assumptions about calling were thrown into it. And how it could be derailed by a code on the

bottom of my discharge papers. It cannot be overstated how strong the belief was, compared to how epic the disappointment was. That can't be overstated. What happened was – you know, sometimes great change happens through great emotional moments – I was sitting, basically, in shock in their conference room, and the other Navy chaplain came in the office and said, "I'm so sorry this happened. I can't believe that this happened. It's such an injustice. What do you believe now?" I looked at them, and I said, "I believe in God, the Father, Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ His only Son, and our Lord who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin, Mary, suffered and was buried, He rose again for our salvation, will come again to judge the quick and the dead." I basically recited to them the Apostle's Creed, and I said, "All else beyond that seems meaningless speculation to me." For me, my faith was so shaken, that it leaves only those things that can't be shaken. You find out how all your buildings are built during a big earthquake in L.A., because they'll shake down everything that's not built well. And, there was just a lot of speculation about God's will, about confirmation of this or that I felt really worked over. That was my self-teaching moment where I took stock of my own reaction. In the time of great distress and unbelievable shock, I reverted to something creedal that transcends any given moment. And it wasn't long after that, I turned to a friend of mine, who I had known throughout seminary, who himself was in the Reformed Episcopal Church. And I said to him, "Would it be ok with you if I visited your church this Sunday?"

You don't know why you came up with the Apostle's Creed on that moment, do you? That came to you, somehow.

It came to me because I had actually heard a song in the course of seminary – it was a theology class. Again, it was that annoying theology prof who was always hitting me with things I hadn't thought about. One of the things he came up with one time was that, we were talking

about doing theology in culture, and he used this U2 song as an example of faith in culture. Well, he got me thinking about faith in culture and he would ask things like, “What’s Christian music? Is it something that’s sung by a Christian? Or is it something that has Christian lyrics? Or is it something that is sung by a Christian? What is Christian music?” And he gave an example of a song by an artist by the name of Rich Mullins, who set the Apostle’s Creed to music. The song is called, “Creed.” What’s so important about that is that the verses of the song are the Apostle’s Creed, but the chorus of the song is, “I believe what I believe, is what makes me who I am. I did not make it; it is making me. It is the very truth of God, not being invention of any man.” You know, something like that just gets stuck in your head, and you’re not going to get it out. So, what happened is, that, in that moment, that song was stuck in my head. And when I said the Apostle’s Creed – I mean, I just about sang it – take some of your favorite old hymns and try to say them in prose. You’re not going to be able to do it. You’re going to wind up singing it. So, when I looked at them and said, “I believe in God, the Father, Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth,” I didn’t say the chorus, but in the back of my mind I was thinking, “I didn’t make it. It is making me.” So what is it that’s so strong and solid, built on rock, that it won’t shake with the circumstances of life like this? That’s what stuck in my head, and it was a combination of this creed that stuck in my head because of a song, but then I revert back to that as something that I take comfort in. I take comfort in the things that predate my own circumstances. I take comfort in things that predate my culture. I take comfort in things that predate my continent. So, basically, I developed a real appetite for things older and older and older, that aren’t tied to the times. By that time, I felt very much like what Robert Webber describes as Evangelicals on the Canterbury trail. I was very much looking for things that predate anything that’s current. It doesn’t just predate the current headlines about Israel. It doesn’t just predate what’s been going

on with the Evangelical movement of the 20th and 21st centuries. It doesn't just predate even my own country. It predates Rome! It predates the schism of 1054! It predates – I mean, how far back can we go before we say, I have the faith now of people that held it together during the Diocletian persecution.

Ok, now that raises an interesting question I'd like you to talk about. You were attracted to the Anglican Church. In some respects, you could say that the Anglican Church is of more recent origin certainly than the Apostle's Creed. What was it that attracted you to the Anglican Church more than, say Eastern Orthodoxy or the Roman Catholic Church, as you're talking about hungering for something that's really *ancient*?

Well, I just can't go to Rome. It just can't happen. There are a number of different issues there. Their innovations since the schism are just indefensible. And, I've developed a passion for Martin Luther while I was in seminary. The kids and I, every year, would celebrate Reformation Day on October 31, because we loved all things related to the Reformation. So, I just couldn't do it. The Eastern Orthodox Church has a bit of attraction to it – I actually visited a couple of Orthodox Churches (you practically need a passport to visit an Orthodox Church. So often, they exist because of immigrant communities. I went to a Coptic Church, and it's like, you have to know in advance that you're going into a Christian group, otherwise, you're going to worry that you've wandered into a mosque!). So, for me, as someone who has developed a love of culture, my early anthropological appetites were being developed in seminary, too, so I loved culture. I loved studying the culture in the Scriptures. So, for me, anything that seemed to have a lot more culture to it, I really enjoyed that. But Orthodoxy is really a severe conversion. So, there's a couple of things: (1) I had a friend who was already Anglican in seminary. So, I had that personal connection. (2) When I went to the Anglican Church, I was struck by how gracious they

were at validating everything I had already gone through. Like, Rome would never have acknowledged that the Baptist tradition was anything but a fake. For them, in order to be saved you have to be taking all the sacraments, administered by a priest that's tied into the bishop of Rome. Whereas, I went to the Anglican Church and ... You know, you have that new conversion feel, where you say, "Everything I've been doing up to this point is invalid." But my bishop said, "That's not true. You've been taking communion. That's valid. You're taking the symbolism of Christ in communion. That's valid. Maybe you had a different viewpoint about it then, but you're still engaging in that common union. You've been participating in the sacrament of the Word, the preaching of the gospel. That is the chief sacrament of the church." And I'm like, "Really?!" He was really very much validating everything that I had gone through. And I was amazed by that, because I expected something different. I mean, in the catholic (small "c") tradition, we don't throw the baby out with the bath-water.

So, would you find that kind of a tolerant attitude in the Anglican Church something that attracted you?

Very much. It really struck this balance of continuity with history, and yet conviction about most things in the present that you cannot compromise on. In many Anglican groups there is still something of a debate about whether to ordain women. In God's providence, I stumbled upon an Anglican group that absolutely is not going to compromise on that, because it undercuts the sacramental nature of responsibilities appointed to men and women in the church. So, they absolutely will not budge. At the same time, there is this idea of, We're not going to budge on this, but we try to find areas of cooperation with other churches where we can. So, in their mind, there's biblical separation there, but there's also Christ's prayer that we be one. We feel that

there's a tension here that we have to maintain. Don't let one side of the rope go. You have to keep it tight by pulling on both ends.

So, they had a good balance between being tolerant in spirit, on the one hand, and yet committed to right principles, on the other hand. Is that what you're saying?

To transition back to the dispensational conversation, for me, anything that you're not an expert in, you trust others about. For example, my father, where there is not theological sophistication; but there is unwavering piety. My father and I have had conversations like this often, where he'll call me and say, "I was in a meeting the other day, and people are debating some theological issue. Can you help walk me through why people would get so worked up about that?" In his mind, you follow Christ, you worship Jesus, and why is it any more complicated than that? And I say, "Well, Dad, guys get worked up over the following, because in the view of some, if you start yanking on the thread hanging from that old sweater, it'll come unraveled." And he'll say, "Ok, I can see that." And so, it's one of those things where, there's no expectation for him to be an expert in all those things where others happen to be an expert on. He's a master delegator. So, he always had master engineers under him in his profession, or people who were smarter than him, or knew things he didn't. That wasn't his job to know everything that everyone else knows. His job was to make sure everyone could stay under one roof. So, he's pastoral in that sense, but in an engineering sense. And, I'm like that, too, where I'm like, you know, there's some things that I'm called to know, but I don't feel called to be an expert on everything. So, those things that you're not an expert in, you trust others about. What happened to me in the dispensational area was, it had eroded in me enough not to be a barrier to entering into the Anglican arena. Since being in the Anglican arena ... you know, a lot of theology comes from a sense of loyalty. So, since being in the Anglican arena, I have come to

find myself seeing their point of view. And as is often the case, don't we always see the group that we've chosen as always seeming more reasonable than the other? The phrase I use all the time is, "You make your decision, and then your decision makes you." You pick a group, and then, as a result, that group seems reasonable. Others have deviated from that. And it goes back to the chorus of that song that got stuck in my head. I believe that what I believe is making me who I am. I didn't make it. No, it is making me. For me, it was, the dispensational commitment had eroded to the point that it was not a barrier to me entering into the Anglican arena. Now, in that Anglican arena, there are those who really can speak fluently about covenant theology. And they juxtapose covenantal and dispensational thought a lot. And I find myself in those conversations saying, "Whoa, Buddy! Remember, that anyone who's not sacrificing in the temple in Jerusalem is a dispensationalist to one degree or another." So, let's not overstate this. So, I'm certainly not a covenantal apologist, either. But I am fully immersed in the Anglican arena, such that I fit well there. And as a result of having gone past the dispensational view, that's actually shaped my thinking to look for the rise of Christianity in new areas, where previously I would not have looked for it, thinking that the rapture is imminent, anyway. Once upon a time, I thought Gorbachev probably was the antichrist. Now I realize that Russia, in some respects the roles are reversed, and Russia is more Christian than we are. Because the Orthodox church has maintained a remnant there. They survived the soviet years, and now you can't get a gay marriage or abortion anywhere in Russia. Previously, I held to a kind of eschatological ethnocentricity; now, I look at what's the church doing throughout the world, and how is it making inroads? And, what victories do we see? We have no idea when Christ is going to come back. And it may be a while, who knows, but right now, the Great Commission is still very much in play. That's where my mindset is now. Now, being in that arena, it changed my mind for what

I look for in the world. I don't look for signs that the world is about to end. I look for signs that the Church is on the march.

So, if I can summarize what you're saying, would I be correct in labeling your current position as "Evangelical Anglican"?

Yes.

And "Amillennial"?

Yes.

Ok, is there anything else that you would throw into that theological mix that would describe your current position?

The only thing I would say about "Amillennial" is that "eschatologically agnostic" overstates it, but there's also when someone is amillennial, that also seems to suggest a certain degree of specificity, as though someone would defend that, as well. For me, the great creeds of the Church – The Apostle's Creed, the Nicene Creed, the Athanasian Creed – these specify the return of Christ, and they offer no more detail than that.

Thank you for that clarification. Now, let finish up with just a couple of final questions. The first is, are you familiar with either of the labels: (1) "New Calvinism," or (2) "Young, reformed, restless"?

I'm not.

And, that's fine. Some have, and some haven't. It all depends on what sources of information you rely on.

Is there anything else that you'd like to add to this discussion about Dispensationalism?

Not really. My only thought was that, I always felt that the doctrine of the imminent return was reflective of Scriptures. And, therefore, could be preached. But, somehow, it seemed like there was more that got attached to it that seemed to undercut it. As a result, even in my current situation in the Anglican communion, even if I thought to preach on Christ's imminent return, I would have so much baggage in it that it would get me in trouble. Not that it would get me in trouble with others, but that I could easily get into beliefs where I wouldn't want to go. That was the challenge I faced. I haven't rabidly abandoned everything that I knew. In fact, there are some areas where it would be kind of cool to retain, without some of the John Hagee, Hal Lindsey baggage that goes along with it.

So, is it kind of like, earlier in your Christian life, when you got interested in Dispensationalism, you were then led deeply into a thicket from which you felt you could not extract yourself without holding on to any part of it?

Right. Exactly. I mean, it's a challenge to decide what to retain and also untangle yourself at the same time. That's probably one of the chief reasons why I retreat to the creedal simplicity. Even among my other Anglican acquaintances, who are very passionately covenantal, they want to engage the covenantal/dispensational debate. I don't. Because that goes into greater specificity than I really need in order to accomplish what I'm called to do. And I see my calling as rather simplistic by comparison, because the gospel is not complicated. Most of what we do in theology is try to undo the complications that humanly we want to add to the gospel. It's just human instinct. So, we're constantly trying to combat these complications, or add to the free grace of Christ.

So, would you say that both Covenant Theology and Dispensationalism are overly complicated, more complicated than they need to be in order to explain what the Bible is really all about?

I do. One of the things I often say is, “Those are the things which suffer from the folly of our over-definition.” And I see this in various different doctrines. In the Aquinas spectrum, in the presence of Christ in the sacraments. You know, you’ve got transubstantiation on the one end, and you’ve got Zwingli’s view on the other end. So, where do you go? Real presence? Or real absence? Well, the Anglican view is, Yes. The Anglican view maintains a mediating view, because something’s going on there that we really don’t know, so I’ll treat it with greater reverence than if it were nothing. And it even goes into areas of bibliology. In seminary I learned the incarnational view of bibliology. Is this a work of God or is it a work of man? Well, of course. As a result, it can be entirely a work of God – the Word of God – and yet, you don’t fear looking at all the human agencies in its composition and preservation. So people ask, “How does it all work?” It’s a mystery. I don’t have to explain that.

Reflections:

In contrast to the previous two interviews, Neal had a full four-year Bible College education, as well as a seminary education. Though Dallas Theological Seminary was not included in this study as a “solidly dispensational school,” it is, nevertheless, quite significant in the history of Dispensationalism. Neal completed his graduate studies at Dallas and is in the process of pursuing doctoral studies elsewhere.

Neal has maintained a conservative theology, but has departed from his dispensational upbringing and education. His departure from Dispensationalism was triggered, not so much by academic issues, but by a life-crisis that he faced. To be sure, there were academic issues that

had been lingering in his mind for some time, but it was the crisis in his life that triggered his departure into a creedal tradition that is consistent with amillennialism. This crisis involved loss of a ministry, the departure of his wife, and the dashing of his hopes for a new ministry. In the midst of his depression, he found acceptance, encouragement, and ministry opportunity within the Anglican tradition.

Some of Neal's issues with Dispensationalism came not from well thought out representations of Dispensationalism by qualified academics but rather from popular preachers and authors who may have presented a somewhat skewed representation of Dispensationalism. It is possible that Neal would have benefitted from a well-structured course that presented Dispensationalism, not merely as an approach to eschatology, but as a comprehensive worldview involving all areas of theology, spiritual life, and all of God's creation. Such a comprehensive approach should compare and contrast theological systems, but also present a well thought out biblical worldview from a dispensational perspective. It is tempting for dispensational scholars to speculate at times on the significance of biblical prophecy in light of current events. This is inevitable, and not necessarily an undesirable practice; however, when professors engage in such speculation, it should be done so with full admission that it is, in fact, *speculation*, it may prove at some point to have been misdirected, and that future events may give rise to refinement and modification of these specific speculations.

As is the case with many, Neal's understanding of Dispensationalism seems to be principally of a system of eschatology. While eschatology is certainly an important dimension of Dispensationalism, it was not explicitly named by Ryrie as part of the *sine qua non*. As mentioned above, a presentation of Dispensationalism as a comprehensive worldview may go a long way towards avoiding its misidentification as merely an eschatological scheme.

A significant feature in Neal's departure into Anglicanism was epistemological. His treasuring of "ambiguity" and "mystery" in the interpretation of Scripture no doubt facilitated his ability to identify "Israel" as the people of God throughout all ages, including the Church. It also likely facilitated his viewing of the "millennium" as non-literal. Courses in both Bibliology and Hermeneutics need to affirm and defend an epistemology that supports propositional truth in the Scriptures, as well as the perspicuity of the Scriptures. Holding to this position is swimming against the tide in a postmodern world, so it is imperative that students be equipped with a firm apologetic for objectivism, foundationalism, and propositional truth. Pedagogically speaking, some professors prefer to coach students through asking leading questions (Socratic method). This is a proven and valuable technique; however, such a professor may want to exercise care to ensure that important questions are not left unanswered in a student's mind. Certainly, there are some things that are "secret things," belonging only to the Lord God, but things that are "revealed" "belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law" (Deut. 29:29). Thoughtful questions left unanswered in the student's mind leave him open to influence from other quarters that may profess to have the answers.

Ultimately, Neal came to find peace by affirming the Apostle's Creed. The strength of Dispensationalism is its detachment from historic creeds and dependence on the Bible, alone, as the source of authoritative truth. While there is much of value in the historic creeds, there is also some falsehood to be found in some of them. They simply represent a portrayal of a portion of the church's history and should be seen as descriptive, not prescriptive. No doubt, this is how most dispensational schools do present the creeds; however, in Neal's case, he still felt that the Apostle's Creed was a source of truth, strength, and comfort for him in his time of need. Would that he had called to mind Scripture, rather than the creed, in his hour of need!

Finally, as with others who were interviewed, Neal was of the opinion that defenders of Dispensationalism were less tolerant of other Christians than were those he encountered in the Anglican tradition. Tolerance can be a slippery slope. Nevertheless, professors in Dispensational schools need to find a way to express grace and love toward non-dispensational Christian brothers, without giving into non-dispensational teaching. It is a delicate balance to maintain, but it must be maintained.

Interviewee #4, Douglass

Introduction:

For this report, this interviewee will be referred to as Douglass. Douglass is a graduate of a dispensational Bible College (four-year program), dispensational seminary (MDiv), as well as doing coursework at Dallas Theological Seminary, and is currently ABD on his PhD from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. He is 35 years old, married with three children, and lives in a Midwestern town where he is involved in both church and teaching at a school of theology. He indicated on the survey that he is strongly opposed to Dispensationalism.

The Interview:

To start with, tell me a little bit about yourself, your family, where you live, and your ministry.

I live in [Midwestern town was named] with my family. I'm married with three girls – 7, 5, and 2. We've been living here about a year, but we've been kind of all across the country. Before that, I was at Dallas Theological Seminary for two years. And previous to that for eight years here in in this area. For the past year I've been part-time as a fund-raising coordinator and assistant to the lead pastor at my church. But I've been really working full time just finishing my

dissertation draft. So, now I'm about 80% with the school of theology and 20% on the pastoral staff, related especially to pastoral care and things like that.

Were you raised in a Christian home?

Yes, I was.

Tell me a little bit about your salvation experience.

It all starts with our family history. My great grandparents were Finnish immigrants; they were Lutherans, and my grandpa wouldn't have confessed to believe – maybe he was a nominal Lutheran, I'm not sure – but my dad was converted in high school, and ended up going to Florida Bible College through the influence of my grandma's parents who became warned about evangelical Lutherans. So, they had an influence, but I think he was saved through an evangelical ministry while he was in high school. Eventually, the whole family came to Christ, with the exception of one brother. My grandpa became a believer in his 40s. So, my dad went to Florida Bible College, which at the time was a fairly large school of almost 2,000 students. It was kind of cut out of the Jack Hyles mode with a Florida twist to it. It was a soul-winning school and had a strong Dallas Theological Seminary influence. So, he came back and was looking for a denomination that sort of aligned with him doctrinally, and ended up joining the GARBC as a pastor – largely because it was a denomination where everybody affirmed eternal security. So I was raised in a GARBC church. My dad was just an excellent communicator of the gospel, and I remember hearing it at a very young age and understanding it. I don't have a lot of recollection of my first response to the gospel. I think I was, like, five years old. My parents tell me that I actually walked down the aisle at a camp meeting. But I don't recall that. But I do remember probably a dozen times that I was making professions of faith. I was baptized around the age of 10. So, my faith was a huge part of my life. When I got into my teens, I had some pretty serious

doubts about my faith. I've always had pretty strong epistemic doubts about my faith. We had a strong sense of the antithesis growing up. It seemed to me odd that I existed on those – a narrow slice of land with a couple other thousand other people knowing the truth, and nobody else did. So, there was even a time in high school when I'm not even sure I would have said that I believe in God. It was a time of depression for me. There was kind of a turning point in my senior year, at a rally at my future Bible College. I just sort of cut ties with a lot of the high school friends that I had. And, I really felt like God was calling me to ministry. In some ways it was just sort of a reclamation of the gospel. I remember in the next few years really being impacted by the very beginnings of the Young, Reformed, Restless movement, which it came to be called later. I read John Piper's *Desiring God* around that time, and was deeply influenced. I don't think I ever actually finished that book, but it got me listening to his sermons and reading C.S. Lewis around that time, too. C.S. Lewis was a huge influence during those three or four years that I really began to reawake, especially understanding how the gospel colors all of life, and the problems that a materialistic worldview has. So, it was kind of a reacquaintance of what the gospel meant for daily life for me. It was also sort of an integration of my life. I really hadn't encountered much of a holistic worldview growing up. My dad is an excellent soul-winner and really a great man of God. But the philosophy that he explicitly taught about how to approach life and pleasures and those things was somewhat stoic. But he didn't necessarily live that way. He was a man of just profound laughter and joy, and he loved to play sports with me, and all those things. I couldn't really reconcile what he was saying with what he was doing. But I actually think that was a happy accident; it wasn't that he was saying one thing and living hypocritically. His intuitions were good about how you should approach life. But he didn't have a philosophy that necessarily made sense of all of that.

As far as the theological perspective is concerned, you said that your dad had gone to Florida Bible College, and they were influenced by Dallas' theology, so would you describe your upbringing at home as being in line with Dispensationalism?

Yes, very much so; although, Dispensationalism wasn't a front-burner concern. It was just sort of the backbone for everything. I remember being taught dispensational concepts, but Dispensationalism was never an issue that people got angry about, within our church, anyway.

Now, with regard to this turning point in your life, when you started reading John Piper and C.S. Lewis and others, you were in high school at that time, weren't you?

Yeah. I think that my senior year in high school was when I first started, but the process took about six years through which I really started being a reader. I wasn't much of a reader before then.

So, you were going through this process, then, around the time that you entered Bible College, is that right?

Yes. That would have been about the year 2006.

So, you were raised in a dispensational background, going to a dispensational school, was Dispensationalism a big reason for choosing that school?

No it wasn't. My dad wanted me to go to at least a year of Bible College. Two of my older sisters had gone to that Bible College. So, the biggest reason was probably just familiarity, it was close to home, and I had heard some good things about a few of the professors. But I didn't put a ton of thought into that decision. And, going to some Youth Days rallies between my Junior and Senior years was instrumental, too. A friend and I sort of both had a moment when we wanted to recommit ourselves to being faithful Christians in school – she was going to be a junior, I was going to be a senior. That was also instrumental.

At the time you started Bible College, would you describe yourself as being dispensational in your outlook?

Yes. I would; although, part of the reason why John Piper appealed to me was that he was a very rational and reasonable person, but also very emotional. And I mirrored him in terms of personality. But the other part of my personality is that I'm a very creative and open person. So, I'm not protective against "idea contamination." I like to bring ideas together, compare them, see how they work, see where they're consistent and whether they're inconsistent. I had always been bothered by what I perceived to be a tendency to avoid reading certain things or listening to certain people on the grounds that they would contaminate our ideas, or that they were dangerous ideas. I felt like, at some points, conservatism tended to maintain itself by what it avoided. I've always actually wanted to be a theological conservative, but I wanted to be the type that does the hard work of really understanding other views. So, I've always been really leery about not getting on the inside of an opposing view. I had a long-standing frustration – I think it really started with practical rules that would be put on us growing up, especially not in our own church context, but in more of a cooperative context, like camp. A lot of the things they told us that we needed to do made absolutely no sense to me. And I would argue with them at length with different people.

Things such as what?

Well, at our camp, we had a rule against mixed bathing; you couldn't swim with girls. But you also had to wear t-shirts. Or, like at Bible College, they had a rule against facial hair, but you could grow mustaches. It just felt like people wouldn't even engage in conversations about these things, because they wanted to avoid them in order to maintain some sense of protection against new things. That irritated me, and it also made me really nervous epistemologically,

because if they're doing that about practical things, they might also be doing that about other issues – like, for instance, creationism; I was worried about that. I get all this stuff from the young earth creationist groups. All the materials seemed aimed at me as a teenager, like it's understandable to me. And that worried me. It seemed packaged, but not seriously dealing with the counter-arguments, and the stuff I was hearing in my public schools. And it just felt like there was a failure really to engage the other side.

Once you were at Bible College and attending classes, at the academic level, was the same thing was happening, that is, a failure to interact with opposing positions?

It was a mixed bag. At a small seminary, my experience has been that it's not an issue of instructor quality. The best instructors that you have will often be as good as anybody, anywhere. But the issue is consistency. I had professors that I still have deep respect for, who taught us how to do exegesis. But then I had other professors that were among the worst I ever had. Along that dividing line, there was, on the one hand a willingness to enter into deep and well-considered conversations with people who disagree among the best professors, but not among the worst. I was actually overall pleased with the instruction that I got, because I just tried to avoid the professors that I didn't think were capable, and just take whatever I could from the ones that were. For example, I took Syriac, just because I wanted to be in another class with that professor.

At both at college and seminary, would you say that your professors accurately and faithfully presented and defended Dispensationalism?

Yes. I do.

So, by the time you graduated from seminary, at that time, would you still have considered yourself as being dispensational?

I think so. I mean, if I'm being really honest, I think one of the big problems at seminary at the time was, they made you sign their entire doctrinal statement to graduate. So, when I knew that coming in, I said to myself, "Look, I'm not going to waste \$60,000 by coming to a firm conclusion on these questions right now." I had a friend of mine who was dispensational when he entered, went two years, and then decided that he was a historic premillennialist, and they didn't allow him to graduate. So, I said, "Look, if you're going to make signing the doctrinal statement a condition of graduation, then I'm not going to read anything beyond what you require me to read about this issue." What it did for me was, it said, I need to be able to graduate; I really love what I'm getting in biblical exegesis. It made me much less intellectually curious about Dispensationalism. I just did not care about it, because I knew that if I did care about it, I'd have to be intellectually honest and go further than the class texts would require me to. It was a matter of protection for myself. I couldn't get myself to the point where I had serious doubts about it, and not graduating.

So, you kind of adopted that mindset that you now think was not good, that of kind of living in a bubble, and not venturing outside of that bubble?

Yes. And the only reason I felt o.k. doing that was I knew I wouldn't always do that. It was a practical expedient, because they said I couldn't graduate if I ended up disagreeing with them. Especially in view of the way they had treated my friend, Caleb. I felt what they did was unconscionable. They took all his money and gave him nothing for it. He had to go to two additional years of Southern Seminary to get an MDiv.

But, in all fairness, didn't he know from the outset that he would have to agree with their statement in order to graduate?

Sure. But my complaint is in not distinguishing levels of agreement for graduation. It seems to me that their scope was too limited. I think they would do better to allow different levels of agreement for graduation, but I also think that their policy has unintended consequences, which is forcing people not to take the question seriously.

After graduation, then, at some point you had a change in your views about Dispensationalism. What, or who, have been the chief influences in your thinking leading you to a non-dispensational position?

That's a tough question for me, because I tend to think whole cloth about things, so I kind of forget who my influences are. They asked me on my exit interview what my big concerns with Dispensationalism were. The first thing that I brought up that came to mind was the use of the Old Testament in the New. I was already a bit bothered by that at the time

What, specifically, about that issue was a big issue to you in the use of the Old Testament in the New Testament?

We were often told that the way the New Testament writers used the Old Testament was a matter of apostolic privilege of some sort. That they were authorized to use it in ways that we weren't. That didn't seem quite right to me. There was actually an article I remember about this. If I'm sitting in chapel and listening to the apostle Paul speak – well, maybe the apostle Paul's not a great example – I mean Peter speak, and he's citing something from Joel, I wouldn't want to be back there saying, "Ahh ... like that" [implication: my dispensational training would have me laughing or perhaps deeply critical of how he used the OT].³⁰ You know? I think that was around the time when Carson's commentary on the use of the Old Testament in the New was coming out, and I remember thinking to myself, "That's a book I'm going to buy."

³⁰ This point was clarified in a follow-up email.

And did you get Carson's book and read it?

I did get it, and I ended up consulting it over the years as needed. I'm just saying that was sort of a seed issue for me. I was like, I need to pay more attention to that seriously. But the other thing was, I was already a bit skeptical about dispensational charts, and I think an argument for simplicity was powerful for me – Occam's razor. There were texts, too, that were ... the way that I was taught through the Sermon on the Mount was unsatisfying to me.

And what was that way that you were taught to read it?

Well, I don't remember exactly how it was always phrased. It's just that there was always a lot of discussion about how applicable that was to the church, whether that was kingdom teaching. I don't remember specifically which professors or who brought this idea to the table. But we certainly took it seriously that that was one way of reading the Sermon on the Mount. It was teaching for the kingdom and that a genuine offer of the kingdom was rejected, so you couldn't read the Sermon on the Mount straightforwardly.

And that was a concern to you?

Yeah. It felt exegetically contrived.

Oh, I remember what the other one was. The other one was, I found Alva McClain's *The Greatness of the Kingdom* – I didn't read all the way through the book, I just made reference to it from time to time – I found that sort of argument a bit troubling, because it seemed to me like what was happening was he was trying to make the kingdom more important and diminish the church age as less important in order to sustain dispensational ways of reading the Old Testament. That felt strange to me. It feels odd to think, Why, within the scope of the biblical narrative, within the scope of biblical theology, why you would need to have what seems on the

surface to be a step backward into temple practices, rather than just linearly moving forward into the New Jerusalem.

So, you would see a future kingdom where there is a temple and sacrifices, and so forth, as a step backward? Is that what you're saying?

Yes. It felt like a metanarrative digression. And it seemed like what he was trying to do in that book was to paint it in a different light, but it didn't feel like that was possible for me, to paint that in a different light. But all of these things that I'm describing now are just sort of seed questions that I had, not settled opinions. These were just questions.

So, then, when I moved to Dallas Theological Seminary, Dallas is an evangelical school, so it's not as invested in the sort of fundamentalism that I was used to. It's a sociologically different context. And I think that can't be underestimated. I think that just coming into a different context that was sociologically distinct, a lot of what makes sense in terms of the internal logic has to do with who you are talking to. And that's a big reason why I finally felt the freedom to say, "O.k., yeah, actually that doesn't make any sense to me, and I need to face it and ask questions about it." But then, interestingly, Gordon Johnston, the Old Testament prof., I tested into a later Greek and Hebrew, because I already had my MDiv. So I ended up taking Gordon Johnston's Hebrew class, and it was about narrative, and we talked about Genesis. Our exegetical project was actually about Genesis 15. Basically, the exegetical project was, in my opinion, aimed towards unsettling typical dispensationalist reading through Genesis 15, which I found really odd, but actually quite helpful, too. It attacked the ideas that the walking through the pieces was a unilateral covenant. He was trying to say, "Listen, there's really just one covenant." I think he called it the "Patriarchal Covenant." It was just sort of reaffirmed and re-ratified in different terms. That sort of fit within that desire for more simplicity hermeneutically. His

arguments made a lot of sense. So, Gordon Johnston, the Hebrew prof. was a big factor for me in reassessing. But I would say, by the time I was done with Dallas, I was probably a progressive dispensationalist. But I also didn't see much difference between Progressive Dispensationalism and New Covenant Theology. In fact, I still don't really see much difference between them.

**Is there anything else that was influential in moving you away from
Dispensationalism?**

Two things: (1) Gordon Johnston also talked quite a bit about the nature of fulfillment. And one of the things that I found helpful and interesting was to look at prophetic fulfillment that's already happened, and to learn from how fulfillment happens, and then apply that to future fulfillment. I came to be convinced that there's often a multiple, typological arch of fulfillment, where you can have a near, lesser fulfillment, with a far greater fulfillment. He pointed out some things about Jewish history, about, for instance, the statue that was made of the four materials in Daniel, and the way that they read that, and then the way that they read some of the Old Testament prophecies that were applied to Christ. How they often saw those as being fulfilled already with the restoration of the priesthood and the king who was anointed in the intertestamental period. At that time, a lot of Jews had split the empires of the Medes and the Persians. He had introduced me to other ways of reading it, but also reconfigured ... like in eschatology class, I did a project on the hermeneutics of Isaiah. And part of what I was trying to do was to look at how in Isaiah 65 there was a strong collation both of a heightened and, for lack of a better term, "un-heightened" prophetic expectation. Like, this language of "everlasting kingdom," and then things that are like someone who dies at a hundred will be considered young. So, it seemed like there was language that you almost had to take hyperbolic on a literal reading, or language that had to be taken as contextual, if you took the opposite. So, I remember at the

time working through this idea that perhaps what Gordon Johnston had written about types and fulfillment could help us understand what was going on in Isaiah 65. I left Dallas as a Progressive Dispensationalist, but still wrestling. Also, the questions just didn't seem as prominent to me, and my interest in the questions has fallen off since then – partly because my academic interests have focused so much on my dissertation.

So, as somebody who's been brought up in Dispensationalism, went to a dispensational college and seminary, and even at Dallas Theological seminary, from your current perspective, as you look back and reflect on Dispensationalism, what do you identify as the chief problems – either inconsistencies, or unbiblical teachings – of Dispensationalism?

I think you could answer the question in a couple of different ways. On the one hand, I don't find myself convinced of the truth of Dispensationalism, but then there's also practical consequences if it's not true.

Such as what?

Hermeneutical consequences, especially. But also, sorts of things that happen because of the hermeneutical consequences. Is the question geared to why I think Dispensationalism is not convincing, or is it geared towards why I would think that it is a big deal?

Let me put it this way: If somebody was to ask you – perhaps somebody was at a crossroads, maybe somebody who was anticipating going to a school and trying to choose between a dispensational and a non-dispensational school, what would you point out to a person like that as the problems constituting a reason not to choose a dispensational school, or reasons to discourage them from following a dispensational theology?

I haven't put my most sustained thought into my active concerns with Dispensationalism as a theological system, because I associate dispensational schools with particular sociological groups. And I think I have bigger problems with the sociological groups than I do about the theology. I think the school that I've been a part of, I really like some of the guys there and have a lot of respect for them, but on the whole, I think that their priorities are quite a ways out of balance. In the same way, I think that the people at Westminster have priorities out of balance. I'm not a fan of Westminster Theological Seminary, and I've known a few students who have done MDiv's there throughout my time. I remember having a strange conversation with a guy named Camden Bucey who does the reformed forum, and does a podcast. I had gone to his conference, and they gave me a J. Gresham Machen challenge coin when I went to his conference. And it said, "Machen's warrior children" on it. I remember being there and feeling, "This feels familiar." And then, I had lunch with him afterward, and I mentioned how I had come out of a fundamentalist background. And he looks at me and goes, "Oh, yeah, I'm a fundamentalist." And I was like, "Oh, I guess you are, aren't you?" [laughs] And so, part of the issue to me is that I think people don't tend to know what the limits of theology are, and how practice needs to accompany theology. We were taught that we ought to love God with our minds, but we weren't taught how putting our thoughts and our faith into practice reinforces and energizes that love.

So, you're saying that's an area where the dispensationalist schools have failed, but then, at the same time, some of the covenant theological seminaries have failed in that same area. Is that what you're saying?

Yes. So, I don't feel like I've rejected Dispensationalism, as much as I've rejected the sociological context that I was taught Dispensationalism in. Some days I'm still inclined towards

Progressive Dispensationalism; although, right now I think that amillennialism makes more sense. I'm not convinced by the covenantal reading of how the law works. I think some of that is linguistic difference, but I essentially have a dispensational way of approaching the Old Testament law. I don't think in a rigid sense it applies to us, because, if it were to apply, the stipulations would have to apply as well.

How would you label your current theological position?

The closest thing in a general sense, is that I'm a reformed Baptist. But that hardly means anything. By "reformed" I'm simply referring to the fact that I can find a way to affirm the five elements of TULIP. The Limited Atonement, I think, is actually incoherent, depending on who's describing it. But I do think that it's capturing something true. So, there's a sense in which I can affirm that. So, that's what "reformed" means to me. But, by and large, in the sort of evangelicalism that I've been a part of for the last six to eight years at least, where someone falls eschatologically, is not as crucial as other doctrinal positions. The bigger issue of agreement is the hermeneutical question. At least on that front, that's where there's quite a bit of difference between me and a traditional dispensationalist. When I read, "This is being fulfilled before your eyes," I tend to think, "O.k., yes, that's a fulfillment." And when Paul says that he's a "minister of the New Covenant," I think, "Oh, yeah, that's the New Covenant." I was always taught at Bible College and Seminary that it was *a* New Covenant, not *the* New Covenant. Hermeneutically, I'm predisposed to see how the New Testament authors used the Scriptures and say that's appropriate, because the Spirit is teaching in His Church as He always has for the last 2,000 years.

Darrell Bock speaks of a "complementary hermeneutic" when speaking about how things are fulfilled. Is that something that's meaningful to you, or significant to you?

Remind me what he means by “complementary hermeneutic.”

He sees the New Testament authors interpreting more broadly than just in terms of the original author’s intent, and seeing a progressive fulfillment of things in various stages.

Yes. So, I would be very sensitive to the fact that Old Testament Scriptures have a dual authorship, and that the Divine intention might actually go beyond what the human authors were explicitly aware of. Not that it contradicts in any way. I would actually probably want to say that the human authors at some level were aware of it in a mysterious way. But it might not have been what they could have said explicitly was the intention behind what they wrote.

Thinking back to your reading of John Piper, earlier, and how that was influential in getting you to think about some things that you wouldn’t otherwise have thought about, would you identify with either of the labels, “New Calvinism” or “Young, Reformed, Restless”?

I guess so. But it seems to me that in academic theology there are fewer and fewer people who are as willing to affirm that without qualifications. Am I happy about the movement? Yeah, I think so. I think it did a lot of good. Do I have concerns about it, where it has gone, where it is going? Yes, I also have concerns.

What are your concerns about the movement and where it’s headed?

Some of this is modulated through my dissertation work. I’ve come to be more sympathetic to my parents’ generation – especially how they talked about emotions, than I was when I was in my early twenties.

What was the thesis of your dissertation?

Essentially what I’m trying to do in my dissertation is add nuance to how reformed theologians talk about emotions by incorporating bodily plasticity. Especially a bodily element

into theological psychology. Theological psychology was a thing, and should still be a thing. Essentially what happened was, psychology was a part of philosophy since Plato, and even before. But it got separated out as an empirical discipline in the early nineteenth century. It was almost as if theologians froze their psychology then. They stopped talking at length about the powers of the soul, and how the body and the soul related to each other. So, theologians have essentially given up much sustained thinking on that. Part of that is that it's a relational term, and the inability to talk about the soul, and there is a host of scientific issues with neuro-science, mind-mapping, brain-mapping, etc. There are reasons. But, my point is emotion in the middle ages was a movement of the soul accompanied by bodily changes. It was Galenistic medicine, but it was actually a better theory formally. It accounted for heating and cooling, expansion and withdrawal. It turns out all these things were false, but they actually capture real things that happen. So, my dissertation is trying to point out the extent to which our emotions aren't under our control, because they're physiologically involved. I'm trying to step back and look at the broader scope of what God is doing in the world as a God who planted a garden, and put under-gardeners in it, and what responsibilities we have to our bodies in that metaphor. So I think managing emotions is a bit like tending a garden. I think it's helpful because it accounts both for depravity morally, and naturally. So, you can have a view of emotional states that incorporates the influence of both of those things. But what I tend to see when it comes to reformed guys on emotion is what I call emotional voluntarism, which is the idea that you could sort of think your way out of emotion, repent your way out of emotion. I think that confuses action with emotion. The previous generation helpfully distinguished between emotion and action, and said, "You don't have to follow your emotion." This is how my dad and mom talked to me about it. Your emotions aren't what dictate truth.

So, there are a lot of complexities to be ironed out there, but my assessment of young, restless, reformed theology is that it's often "cool," but that it hasn't always been deeply informed by the entire Christian tradition. I think that the Spirit has been teaching the church throughout, so that church history operates as a sort of guard rail, which is another reason why I'm skeptical of Dispensationalism. Not that Dispensationalism *has* to be false because it's relatively new. I don't think that at all. But my presumption is going to be what has been taught everywhere and always, and then the Bible is going to norm that norm. History is not a norming norm; the Bible is the only norming norm. But the benefit of the doubt goes to what's well represented in Christian history. It's just been a different starting point for me. But I don't see the young, reformed, restless movement as always being theologically aware. It's almost as if they've gotten to a position of privilege, where a lot of people are excited about it, and then they sort of started assuming that this is what we think about this and that.

Is there anything else you'd like to add to this discussion about Dispensationalism?

Yes. For one, to go back to the question you asked a few minutes ago, my concern with Dispensationalism is that it's seeing too much in terms of how God is governing the world. And, it makes hermeneutical assumptions that position us in the wrong place. I see the whole of Scripture on the drama metaphor of my mentor Vanhoozer. There are ways in which you can see practical ramifications of the hermeneutics when it comes to, "What should we do right now?" I'm not upset about Dispensationalism, and I don't think it necessarily would be a cancer to someone's faith, or anything like that. I actually tend not to value theology as highly as other theologians. That's not a statement about theology's being unimportant; I think that theology is always cultivated within a tradition of practice, and they're going to work off of each other and make sense of each other. I felt, both with Dispensationalism and with certain forms of Covenant

Theology, that the obsession to get things right has often been correlated with an obsession to see what's wrong in people. For me, when I was teaching, I remember giving another teacher the following advice: "Listen, if you don't love the students, you can't even start." So, that strong sense of antithesis with the world is also the social thing that I've come to reject. I still see people as lost and needing a Savior, or they're going to hell. But I think I'm much more alive to common grace and the need for common ground with people in order to witness for Christ.

Have you seen, then, in Dispensationalism more of a negative attitude in approach to people in general, and also to theological opponents?

Yeah. That's right.

Reflections:

Douglass, like Neal, has a very full educational background. Raised in a Christian and dispensational home and school, he also attended a dispensational college and seminary, and is now pursuing a PhD from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. Similar to Neal, the trigger in Douglass' departure from Dispensationalism was not principally academic, but more sociological. Still, academics did play an important part in his departure. Even before entering Bible College, Douglass held some negative views of Dispensationalism due to a focus he saw on external rules. At this time, he was introduced to John Piper and found some attraction to the incipient "Young, Reformed, Restless" movement with its holistic, soteriocentric, worldview, and with its attachment to the affections (à la Jonathan Edwards, or "emotions" as he attributed to John Piper). It may be that he perceived dispensational leaders in his life to be somewhat stoical, as compared with non-dispensational leaders. Clearly, he would later discern a lack of compassion on the part of seminary leaders toward a friend of his who was not allowed to graduate over doctrinal issues.

During his Bible College and Seminary years, Douglass found that, while some of his professors were well-informed about the views of non-dispensationalists, others were not so well-informed, or, at least, they did not present in class views that were contrary to Dispensationalism. Pedagogically speaking, some professors may be of the opinion that if truth is presented positively and allowed to stand on its own strength, falsehood need not be presented, as it will simply fall before the strength of the truth. Sometimes the illustration is used of FBI agents trained to detect counterfeit by handling only real currency. It is maintained that they never handle counterfeit money in their training, but will recognize it, since they have intently studied the real thing. However, this illustration is not altogether true. FBI agents do, in fact, handle some counterfeit money in their training. The apostle Paul wrote of his methodology in confronting falsehood, “We are not ignorant of his concepts” (2 Corinthians 2:11). How much more should it be true that we should be well informed about the errors of our believing brothers if we are to put forth a corrective to such errors.

The hermeneutical issue of the New Testament’s use of the Old Testament was perceived by Douglass as an area of weakness for the dispensational position. Much study has been done in the past few decades on the New Testament’s use of the Old Testament.³¹ The question of how New Testament authors saw “fulfillment” of certain Old Testament texts leads some to assume that the New Testament authors employed a non-literal interpretation. If true, this certainly militates against Dispensationalism. A clear and convincing treatment of how this issue conforms to a literal, grammatical, historical hermeneutic is certainly needed in the academy.

Douglass’ reaction to McClain’s *The Greatness of the Kingdom* was surprising to me. He felt that McClain was “trying to make the kingdom more important and diminish the church age

³¹ See footnote 29.

as less important in order to sustain dispensational ways of reading the Old Testament.” This may be due to Douglass’ failure to realize the *The Greatness of the Kingdom* was originally intended to be only one volume of a larger work on systematic theology. As such, Douglass may have concluded that this single volume represented McClain’s comprehensive view of theology, rather than merely a portion of his eschatology. Regardless of what the reasons were for Douglass’ disapproval of McClain’s book, it may represent his view that Dispensationalism fails to reflect a comprehensive approach to theology and life. In his Bible College and Seminary education, Douglass may have been presented only with piecemeal presentations of Dispensationalism, rather than a comprehensive worldview that encompasses all of theology and spiritual life.

It is disappointing to hear that Douglass learned a non-dispensational view of the covenants at Dallas Theological Seminary. This seminary was a former stalwart for the support and defense of Dispensationalism. Dispensationalism is rooted in a literal interpretation of the Old Testament covenants. Contemporary biblical scholarship has examined Ancient Near Eastern Covenants copiously,³² and professors in Dispensational schools need to be current in

³² See, for example, Zafra Ben-Barak, 1979. "The Mizpah covenant (I Sam 10:25): the source of the Israelite monarchic covenant." *Zeitschrift Für Die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 91, no. 1: 30-43; Pierre Berthoud, 2005. "The covenant and the social message of Amos." *European Journal Of Theology* 14, no. 2: 99-109; Ray F. Chester, 1966. "Covenant types." *Restoration Quarterly* 9, no. 4: 285-289; F Charles Fensham, 1962. "Malediction and benediction in ancient Near Eastern vassal-treaties and the Old Testament." *Zeitschrift Für Die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 74, no. 1: 1-9; Fensham, 1963. "Clauses of protection in Hittite vassal-treaties and the Old Testament." *Vetus Testamentum* 13, no. 2: 133-143; Edward McGlynn Gaffney, 1984. "Of covenants ancient and new: the influence of secular law on biblical religion." *Journal Of Law And Religion* 2, no. 1: 117-144; Erhard S. Gerstenberger, 1965. "Covenant and commandment." *Journal Of Biblical Literature* 84, no. 1: 38-51; Gerhard F. Hasel, 1981. "The meaning of the animal rite in Genesis 15." *Journal For The Study Of The Old Testament* 6, no. 19: 61-78; Moshe Held, 1970. "Philological notes on the Mari covenant rituals." *Bulletin Of The American Schools Of Oriental Research* 200, 32-40; Kenneth A Kitchen, 1989. "The fall and rise of covenant, law and treaty." *Tyndale Bulletin* 40, no. 1: 118-135; Jacob Lauinger, 2016. "Approaching Ancient Near Eastern Treaties, Laws, and Covenants." *Journal Of The American Oriental Society* 136, no. 1: 125-134; Nathan Mastnjak, 2014. "Judah's covenant with Assyria in Isaiah 28." *Vetus Testamentum* 64, no. 3: 465-483; Matthew McAfee, 2015. "The good word: its non-covenant and covenant significance in the Old Testament." *Journal For The Study Of The Old Testament* 39, no. 4: 377-404; Dennis J. McCarthy, 1965. "Covenant in the Old Testament: the present state of inquiry." *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 27, no. 3: 217-240; Saul M. Olyan, 1996. "Honor, Shame, and Covenant Relations in Ancient Israel and Its Environment." *Journal Of Biblical Literature* 115, no. 2: 201-218;

their knowledge of such scholarship, and able to refute erroneous conclusions about the biblical covenants.

Finally, Douglass was of the opinion that Dispensationalism sees “too much in terms of how God is governing the world.” In light of his proclivity to reformed theology, Douglass may be looking for a theology that is soteriocentric, or Gospel-centered. A key distinction between Covenant Theology and Dispensationalism is that the former tends to be soteriocentric, due to its view of the overarching nature of the Covenant of Grace, while the latter prefers to view the glory of God as the primary focal point (doxocentric). So, Douglass’ criticism is not so much a criticism as it is an accurate portrayal of what Dispensationalism teaches. A dispensational view will see in the Bible a revelation of God’s will with respect not only to salvation, but also with respect to other subjects, such as human government, the family, human relationships, the angels, etc.

Interviewee #5, Clarence

Introduction:

For this report, this interviewee will be referred to as Clarence. Clarence is 56 years old, living in suburban Southwest. He is divorced and has two grown daughters. Clarence was saved

Robert Polzin, 1969. "Hwqy' and covenantal institutions in early Israel." *Harvard Theological Review* 62, no. 2: 227-240; Ada Taggar-Cohen, 2011. "Biblical covenant and Hittite išhiul reexamined." *Vetus Testamentum* 61, no. 3: 461-488; J A. Thompson, 1960. "Non-biblical covenants in the ancient Near East and their relevance for understanding the covenant motif in the Old Testament." *Australian Biblical Review* 8, no. 1-4: 38-45; Thompson, 1963. "The significance of the ancient Near Eastern treaty pattern." *Tyndale House Bulletin* 13, 1-6; Thompson, 1964. "Near Eastern suzerain-vassal concept in the religion of Israel." *The Journal Of Religious History* 3, no. 1: 1-19; Thompson, 1959. "Covenant patterns in the ancient Near East and their significance for biblical studies." *The Reformed Theological Review* 18, no. 3: 65-75; Gene M. Tucker, 1965. "Covenant forms and contract forms." *Vetus Testamentum* 15, no. 4: 487-503; Eva Von Dassow, 2016. "Treaty, law and Bible in literalist theory." *Ancient Near Eastern Studies* 53, 287-298; Noel Weeks, 1993. "Covenant and Treaty: A Study in Intercultural relations." *Lucas* 16, 10-22; Moshe Weinfeld, 1975. "Berit - covenant vs obligation." *Biblica* 56, no. 1: 120-128; Weinfeld, 1976. "The loyalty oath in the ancient Near East." *Ugarit-Forschungen* 8, 379-414; Charles Francis. Whitley, 1963. "Covenant and commandment in Israel." *Journal Of Near Eastern Studies* 22, no. 1: 37-48; D J. Wiseman, 1982. "Is it peace': covenant and diplomacy." *Vetus Testamentum* 32, no. 3: 311-326.

at the age of 20. After two years of attendance at a community college, he entered a degree completion program at a dispensational Bible College in order to prepare for pastoral ministry. After two years, he graduated with a bachelor's degree. On the survey he indicated that he is strongly opposed to Dispensationalism, though he is premillennial.

The Interview:

To start with, tell me a little bit about yourself, your family, where you live, and your ministry.

I've been around. I've done a lot of things. I'm retired from the army reserves. I did twenty years of service there. I was the pastor of a community church for ten years for Village Missions. I'm a military brat. I grew up in Hawaii. I've been to Germany two times for a total of nine years. I've lived in many different states. I was hired in 1986 by the Army & Air force Exchange Service. That's when I was sent overseas as a manager for Burger King in Germany. I did that for six years until I got a call to the ministry. That's when I quit, dropped everything, and came back to California with my family to go into the ministry. That's when I went to Bible College. They had a degree completion program. That was where I got a B.A. in that. And I went from there to working on my Cross-cultural education with National University. Everything's completed there, but it's a teaching degree. I've just got to do the student teaching for that. I've got several credits through Luther Rice Seminary. So, I'm kind of well-rounded. I'm presently volunteering here at my church. It's a Wesleyan Church. To me they teach all the doctrines that I see the Bible as saying. I was ordained in 2002 by the Evangelical Church Alliance International. The Wesleyan Church has accepted my ordination, but they wanted me to take a couple of classes at Wesleyan Oklahoma

University. I've got two of those to do, and then I can be fully accepted, but for now, I'm an acting assistant pastor at the church.

Thank you for that. And, could you just tell a little bit about your family background and situation?

Like I said, I was a military brat. My dad was in the air force. So I was pretty much all over the place. My parents divorced when I was eight. I have a half-brother. I have sister and stepbrother and stepsister and one full-blood sister. I'm the oldest of all of them. As far as my own family, I was married for twenty-three years. I have two daughters who are both in Fresno. They're grown and doing very well – a lot better than me!

And, are you currently married?

Negative. My divorce ended in 2011. There were issues there. As I look back, I can tell that they were mental health issues. We didn't see that at the time. But we couldn't do anything about it, not knowing what was going on. She decided that she didn't want to be a pastor's wife anymore.

And can you give a brief description of your salvation testimony?

When I graduated from high school where I grew up in Germany, I came back before my family to go to school. I went where my uncle was in Illinois. I went to a community college there. Something was wrong with the family there, and so, I told them, in order to make things work, I'd have to move out. So, I stayed at a hotel that was set up for students to live in. So, there were some girls I met who said, "Hey, we're going to go for pizza Sunday night." And I said, "O.k., great." So, they took me to pizza, and they said, "Well, we're going to church first, before we go to pizza." And I said, "O.k." I was already Catholic, and I thought, "O.k., I know God." So, we went to church, and I don't know what church it was. I

can look back now and see that it must have been a Pentecostal church. The pastor gave a sermon on the Great Commission out of Matthew 28, and it just struck my heart, and I broke down and followed their lead in asking Christ into my heart. I was age 20 then, and I've been living for Him ever since.

So then, you wouldn't actually say you were raised in a Christian home, would you? You were raised as a Catholic, but probably not born again?

Correct. My mom was not practicing, but she sent me to a Catholic school off and on whenever it was available on the military post. I had a head knowledge of God, but I was not saved until age 20.

Would you describe your call to the ministry?

The first time I knew I was called was while I was a Burger King manager in Germany. There was a Baptist mission to the soldiers overseas. It was an independent thing. I don't even know who they were connected to. It was in the community of Baumholder. They were civilian; they weren't attached to the military at all. I found them, went there, and just started serving there. Then, about a year after that, I did get a call to go into the full-time ministry. That was the one thing that started the downfall of my marriage, I think. I shared that with my wife, and she knew it was true, too. But she was afraid that we wouldn't make enough money, afraid for the family, and all that kind of stuff. Finally, back in the United States, after I had quit my job, and all that business, I became a trucker, because I couldn't get a job over in Northern California. And I ended up going over a cliff in my truck, because my company did not do their brakes correctly on my truck. I survived that. I do have a titanium plate in my neck. But, I knew, while I was trapped in that truck – they had to cut me out with the Jaws of Life, it took two hours – after that, that's when I ended up going. I knew

that God was telling me, “Go straight into the ministry, or I’ll take you home.” So, I told my pastor, who was in a Village Missions church. He said, “Someone came in about two weeks ago and gave me a check for \$1,000 and said, ‘If anyone comes in for school, give it to them.’” That’s what happened! And then, at the end of school, I had a \$5,000 school bill, and I get this check in the mail for \$5,000, because my company was sued by the State of California, and that was what they sent to me. So I just passed that right along to the Bible College.

Wow! So, I guess that was kind of like confirmation from heaven that you were headed in the right direction!

I know. It makes me well up just thinking about it.

That’s a wonderful testimony. Thank you for sharing that with me.

From the time of your salvation through your involvement with a Baptist mission and your membership in a Village Missions church, would you describe your Christian training as being “dispensational”?

I didn’t have any real theological understanding. I knew about the Bible. I think the best way to answer your question is, I ended up doing most of my own study. I had been reading the Living Bible; I had just been going from front to back, reading continually every night. After I got saved at 20, I started getting convicted about learning more. I think things were going on in my life that I wasn’t understanding, and I wanted answers. So, I was just kind of self-taught.

And were you using any materials to supplement your study of the Bible? Any books, or radio programs?

No. The most influence in theology, I would have to say, of trying to dig deeper, was with the pastor at that Baptist mission. So I was really influenced by Baptist teaching. I was Baptist, but I really didn't know what I was. I didn't know about theology. I learned that I was saved by grace alone. That's where I got into the theology of things that I thought I believed in. Some things have changed, but not very much.

So you were reading and studying your Bible, and you were studying about the things of salvation, but would you say that other items that are distinctive of Dispensationalism didn't really fit into your thinking or learning?

It did. It went through the Baptist Church. That's where I can look back and say, "That must have come mostly from Dispensationalism." And then, at Bible College, there was a whole lot about Dispensationalism, off and on in each class that we got.

Was the doctrinal position of the school an important feature of your decision to go to that school?

No. My decision was due to the suggestion of my pastor. His theology was what I knew to be true, so I thought it must be a great school. It was Baptist basic, so I thought, "That's where I want to go."

Did you change your mind about Dispensationalism while attending your school?

Yes.

What caused you to first doubt the truth of Dispensationalism?

Of course, when you're in Bible school, you're doing a whole lot of different studying for sermons and for everything else. My personal struggle was to seek out the truth. I realize that there are different understandings and different points of view that people see,

but basic theology was what I wanted to focus on, for sure. I did study the entire theology. I do have a position. I have a position with Dispensationalism, and that's what I *only* knew at the time. Looking back, I didn't even know it was called "Dispensationalism." But I can look back and understand that's what I was being taught; I understood it; and it made sense. As I kept reading the Word, I got – I don't know if it's because of my attraction to the Old Testament – but for some reason I just really started liking the Old Testament. And as I was reading that and going through the different studies with Romans and all the other classes... I understand the difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament, but I look at it as *The Testament*. They're both one. They go together. It's God's story to us. It starts from the beginning and it continues through to the New Testament, and we're told about what happens at the end. Does that make sense? It's like *The Testament*. To me, it's together; you can't pull it apart, because it's the same God; there's one Spirit, one salvation, and there's one church, and He's been talking about it the whole time. I guess the answer to your question is, it was at Bible College that I learned that, really, even though the heavy teaching was basically on Dispensationalism.

So, in your mind, were you thinking that Dispensationalism divided the Bible up too much?

Yes. It divided up God's Covenant of Grace. That's His church. It forced a division between the physical and the spiritual reality. And I don't see where that's backed up with the things that God told us through the Holy Spirit in the New Testament. Specifically, being all one: there is no Jew, there is no Greek. We're all Abraham's seed through the Spirit. We're adopted into the same family to receive the same promises that God gave way back in the beginning, because of the Seed, Christ.

So, already while you were at Bible College, you were having issues and problems with the dispensational approach, is that correct?

Not the first year. Probably just in the second year of studying, because I had been in that mode the whole time. And that's what I was reading. I understood the concepts behind it, and the backing and the Scripture that people were using to support it. But I saw Covenant Theology backed more by verses in the Bible and the stories in the Bible.

So by the time you graduated, you were already of the conviction that Dispensationalism had some problems, and that Covenant Theology had a better representation of what the Bible taught. Is that what you're saying?

Correct. That's exactly how I would say it.

After graduation, what, or who, have been the chief influences in your thinking supporting that doctrinal persuasion? Are there things that you've read, or people that you've been exposed to, maybe preachers that you've heard or teachers on the radio that have been influential in the development of your theological thinking since you graduated?

No. Even to this very day, I don't really like going to books, and reading books *about* the Bible. Like the teaching that I do in my current ministry, it's called "Solid Food Discipleship," and we go through the Bible for the purpose of learning (the meaning of "disciple," learner). We want to get into it deeper, because of what Paul said, "We're done with milk; we're ready for solid food." So, pulling the Bible apart, and referencing it across, back and forth is what I do there. And the reason I brought it up is that people now tell me, and they tell the lead pastor, that it helped them – the same way that I had developed spiritually and theologically, to be able to see what the Bible says, allowing the Holy Spirit to

be the Teacher, and showing them the connection to the whole Bible, from the Old Testament to the New Testament, and allow the Holy Spirit to give them their own revelation – of course, by guidance – and to keep them from accepting a non-truth, or heresy. That's come up every once in a while, and I'm able to go to the Bible and show them different Scriptures that show that something is not true. So, we constantly go to the Bible and stay in the Bible, and that's the whole idea.

You mentioned that, while you were at Bible College, one of the problems you had with Dispensationalism was the discontinuity...

That's the word – discontinuity – that's the word I was looking for.

Would that be the only problem that you see with Dispensationalism? Not to minimize the importance of that, but I'm wondering if there are other things that you see about Dispensationalism, besides discontinuity, that you think are problems with it.

Well, I think that anything else would be connected to that. I see Dispensationalism as requiring a third coming of Christ for those saved during the Tribulation, but the Bible supports only a second coming; a coming for His Bride the Church. It doesn't explain what happens to those who are saved after He comes to take the Church with Him the first time to meet Him in the air. After that, I guess during the Tribulation, there's the two witnesses and they go around and then there's people again. He's going to have to come back, according to the Word, to get them. And it doesn't explain what you do with this second group of people.

And, like you said, that's really connected with this issue of continuity. If there's only one church throughout the ages, then a pretribulation rapture really doesn't make any sense.

Right. And I think the strongest Scripture for that, that I can think of, is in Ephesians where it talks about one church, one salvation, one God, one Spirit

So, if you could put a label on your current beliefs, how would you label your current theological position?

I'm a Biblican. I've never heard that word used before, it just came to my head.

You did mention "Covenant Theology" earlier.

I wouldn't say that, because it seems to be that it's the only title for that side of it. I never really thought about what this is called.

In the spectrum of things, if we set Roman Catholicism aside, within the Protestant side of things, there's Dispensationalism and Covenant Theology, and then a couple of other things: Progressive Dispensationalism ...

I did read a book on Progressive Dispensationalism, maybe 10 years ago, and it explained what some of the differences were from mainline Dispensationalism.

Did you feel at that time that Progressive Dispensationalism was more in line with what the Bible teaches than Dispensationalism?

I did, actually. It came closer.

Are you familiar with either of the labels, "New Calvinism" or "Young, Reformed, Restless"?

Negative.

That's o.k. Some have. Some haven't. It all depends on what sources of information you rely on.

Is there anything else you'd like to add to this discussion about Dispensationalism?

I guess with my new church and everything, a Wesleyan Church, my convictions are more focusing on not just having the head knowledge of theology and what the Bible says, but live it out. It's what James was saying, if you have your faith, live it out, or else it's dead. That's the focus. That's why we're here. We're here to be God's hands and feet. It's like I heard from Howard Hendricks so long ago: "It's good to study. But be careful about being so heavenly studied that you end up no earthly good." He was saying, it's good to study, but don't get so into the study ... it's like what the Jews were doing. They were worshipping the religion, instead of the God of the religion.

So, would you say, then, that from your perspective, making a big deal out of theological systems, like Dispensationalism, or even Covenant Theology, is secondary, or even irrelevant, to actually living the Christian life, preaching the Gospel, and doing the work of God?

That's a good question, and I'm glad you asked it. I would say it is not irrelevant. I guess "secondary" would be the best word, because it's not a salvation issue to me. Let your "yes" be "yes," and your "no" be "no." So, when you talk about the truth, give the truth. And, what that person does with their free will is up to them. Amongst the church, bickering about the end times, and this and that, to me is a waste of time, when you could be out there using that energy to write something, or talk or speak about your witness of Christ.

Would you say, then, that matters of salvation are the most important thing?

Absolutely!

Reflections:

Clarence represents someone who has had two years of Bible College on top of a two-year community college education. Educationally, he lies somewhere between the first two

interviewees (one-year Bible programs) and the third and fourth interviewees (Bible College and Seminary educated). However, being raised in a non-Christian home, he was virtually unaware of dispensational distinctives before attending Bible College.

Like many believers, Clarence tends to view all of life as centered around salvation. This was evident in his early life as a Christian, and continued on through his Bible College years and on into ministry. This kind of a soteriocentric view tends to comport well with Covenant Theology. On the other hand, he seemed to sense that his earliest training at the Baptist mission in Germany corresponded more or less with Dispensationalism.

The chief problem Clarence had, and continues to have, with Dispensationalism involves the area of continuity between the Testaments and between the peoples of God. Influenced by the way he has read certain New Testament books, particularly Ephesians, Clarence is convinced that there could not be two separate peoples of God – Israel and the Church – that are separate and distinct from each other. Clarence specifically referred to Ephesians 4:3-6, “Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all.” He also alluded to Ephesians 2:12-13, “At that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ,” and such verses as Galatians 3:28, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” These verses do not actually prove his point, but if one approaches them with a presupposition of a single people of God, then they appear to be supportive. If one begins with a reading of such New Testament texts and attempts to read their teaching back into the Old

Testament, one might easily arrive at a non-dispensational view of the people of God. On the other hand, if one begins by establishing a definition of Israel based on the Old Testament, and then moves into an exegesis of the relevant New Testament texts, a dispensational definition is much easier to understand.

Clarence also had difficulty correlating a pretribulation rapture with biblical teaching. For him, a pretribulation rapture would require some sort of a second rapture (third coming) at the end of the Tribulation Period in order to rapture the Tribulation saints. This, of course, would only be necessary on the presupposition that there is a single people of God (continuity/discontinuity issue), since the promise of a rapture is only made to the church. On a dispensational reading, there is no rapture promised to the Tribulation saints. But this can be confusing to students. So, there must be absolute clarity in teaching how various peoples of God relate to Jesus' promise to "come again." Clarence's satisfaction with Progressive Dispensationalism likewise confirms his preference for seeing greater continuity between Israel and the Church.

Interviewee #6, Clark

Introduction:

For this report, this interviewee will be referred to as Clark. Clark is a 30-year-old living in the suburban southwest. He graduated from a four-year program at a dispensational Bible College in 2010 and is now in full-time Christian ministry as a senior pastor. Clark fits the profile of a New Calvinist well, though he does not identify with that term. Strong influences in his thinking include DA Carson, Kevin DeYoung, Wayne Grudem, Timothy Keller, John Piper, RC Sproul, John Stott, The Gospel Coalition, Together for the Gospel, and Redeemer City to City. One area of disagreement with some New Calvinists is in relation to the foundational gifts

of the church. Clark is a committed cessationist (as are some New Calvinists, but the trend in New Calvinism is toward continuationism). Following graduation from his dispensational Bible College, Clark pursued a graduate degree at Reformed Theological Seminary in Jackson, Mississippi. Clark reported on the survey that he was strongly opposed to Dispensationalism.

The Interview:

To start with, tell me a little bit about yourself, your family, where you live, and your ministry.

I live in [city in the southwest named], which is right outside of [large city named]. It's a suburb. I have three children – 5, 3, and 1. I've been married to my wife for eight years. We both became Christians pretty early on in life. She lived a few miles away from me, but we never met each other until we went to college. She and I worked at a church in our town. I convinced her to fall in love with me and marry me. I grew up in a Christian home; she grew up in a Christian home. She became a Christian early on; I became a Christian pretty early on, and then about half-way through my sophomore year of high school, is when I really wanted to pursue what it would look like to become a pastor. That was my calling. I love people. I love sharing the gospel with people. I love all things Bible and theology. I've had some really great mentors who have steered me in that direction. Then, when I graduated – the problem was, I was not very good, academically, so I didn't really want to go to school. I'd rather just work and do the bi-vocational pastor route. So, I joined the blue collar crowd. Very quickly, I learned that maybe school is not such a bad thing. The church I was working for at the time was a very rural church outside of our town, a very small church. The pastor was connected with a Bible College in our area. He said, "I want you to take a class." I said, "No." He said, "Well, you work here. If you don't take a class ..." I said, "O.k., I'll take a

class.” So, I wound up taking a class at the Bible College, and it was the most outstanding, phenomenal experience of my life!

What was that class, just out of curiosity?

It was “Old Testament,” which I, literally, went into it thinking I knew everything about the Old Testament, and probably seven minutes in, I realized I knew nothing about the Bible; I know nothing about Christianity; I didn’t know anything! It was fantastic!

So, I started that semester with three hours, and I ended it with eighteen hours. I became obsessed with studying theology and studying the Bible. In fact, I felt like, at the time, my calling had changed degree-wise from pastoral ministry to academic ministry. I was really very much consumed with academics. I was not strong academically in high school, but at Bible College, I was beginning to do very well. Over the course of the next three and a half years – I graduated a little bit early because I had taken so many classes – I graduated from there right when my wife and I got married. And then, the recession hit in 2008. Although in our area, we didn’t feel the repercussions that other places in the country did. There were certain repercussions. The church I was working in at the time had to let me go, and I was looking for somewhere to serve. I was involved in youth ministry at the time. The only youth ministry available to me was at a Presbyterian church. Theologically, throughout my time at Bible College, I had really struggled with what I grew up with, which I now know is called Dispensationalism. I really had no idea what that term meant.

I wonder if we can kind of pause that thought for a moment, because what you’re getting into now is really what I want to focus on, but first I want to get just a little more background, if I can. You mentioned a little bit about how you were brought

up. Can you describe a bit about your home and early church life? Were you raised in a Christian home? And what kind of a church?

I was brought up in a Christian home. I don't really remember a time when I wasn't aware that Jesus has died for me, that He was the Son of God. I don't remember a time when those truths were not very well connected with my upbringing. Now, I denied them for a long time, but in high school was when I figured out my own faith. And, when I met my wife, she had a very similar story. I got married when I finished Bible College. Then, I started taking classes from Reformed Theological Seminary in Jackson, Mississippi. That is where we did our seminary training.

Would you say that you were saved in high school?

Yes, sir. I would say, I was a Christian. I was very uninformed. My knowledge of Christianity on a whole was very weak. But as far as the basic tenets of the gospel, yes.

Was there exposure to dispensational teaching in the church you attended as a young person?

I primarily went to two different churches in my growing up. I went to First Baptist Church in our town, which I would say was more dispensational than maybe most. Now, granted, at the time, I had no idea what that term even was. But, looking back, yes, it was incredibly dispensational. And I went to another church after I felt my call to the ministry, primarily because they were letting me be involved in the ministry. And that church was a little bit less dogmatic on its dispensational views. And, this is all looking back; I'm kind of interpreting.

So, would you say that the second church was less dogmatic, but still essentially dispensational in their approach?

Yes.

You mentioned your call to the ministry. Would you describe that call?

I remember being very skeptical about Christianity in general during my early high school years. A lot of my friends were not Christians. So I had this constant bombardment of, “What do my peers think?” “What are my parents are telling me at home?” So, reluctantly, I joined a small group of guys where the listeners in that group began to challenge me with some apologetics. I was very torn, and at the same time I felt pulled trying to maintain the group. And, as I began to grow in my own faith, at the same time my teacher was helping me grow in what he saw as some of my own giftings. He allowed me to teach in certain areas. It was really in that, that I developed a passion and love of teaching the Bible. As I began to learn it, digest it, believe it – and then I was able to teach it, which was even more ... I just had this uncontrollable desire that began to develop within that group (and there were only three of us in there). That was paramount in God beginning to reveal some gifts and certain vocational things that He had planned for me. A year or two after that, it just dawned on me that certain people are called to do this full-time. I think that was huge for me, learning that. And then, talking it over with some other men who were wise and mature in the faith. They were confirming what I was feeling internally, confirming externally, telling me, “Hey, you have some gifts in this area.” That’s really all it was. From that point on, I could look back on that.

Now, was this while you were still in high school?

It was. I was sixteen years old.

So, after you graduated from high school, did you go right to Bible College?

I took a semester off. The spring semester was my first semester at Bible College.

What were some of the reasons you chose that particular school?

To be honest with you, I didn't really choose that one at all. I wasn't even aware of it. When I was graduating from high school, my mom had gone to Houston Baptist University. She did her nursing degree there. So, I was considering that school. But, because I was so poor academically in high school, there were some huge hoops I had to jump through in the admissions process. Eventually, I did get admitted, but I didn't go, because I was doing plumbing and construction labor, and I was making so much money, I thought that I didn't want to go to college at all. Also, I was engaged in ministry. I was already doing ministry. As an eighteen-year-old, I was making a lot of money – more than any eighteen-year-old should have! So, I waited. It was the pastor of that little, bitty, church I was at, that was connected to the Bible College through a radio program that he did through a partnership with them. He said, "I know of this little college. It's fun to do. You don't have to do math." And I said, "O.k. I'll try it." So, I didn't really choose it. If I was choosing anything, I was choosing to keep my job. That's how I got connected with the Bible College.

So, the fact that the Bible College was a dispensational school wasn't really an important factor in your going to that school?

No. But I will say this, if the Bible College had said things that were contrary to what I already held very dear, I think that may have been a deterrent early on. I think the college was taking what I already knew growing up, and expounding on that – giving me words like "Dispensationalism," giving me people to read like Ryrie and referring to Dallas Theological Seminary, and things like that. It broadened my understanding and gave me terminology related to what I really did believe already.

Did you change your mind about Dispensationalism while attending your school?

It occurred during my sophomore year. I remember verbatim almost. All my Christian life, one of the tensions I had problems trying to resolve was the sovereignty of God and the freedom of man, which I still struggle with. I remember getting very satisfactory answers to those questions from my professors at Bible College for the first time ever in my life. Those particular professors were more in line with the reformed camp than some of my other professors. So, I got my toes wet with reformed theology for the first time ever in my life in my sophomore year in college. It was in a New Testament class. And I remember the semester after – the spring semester – I took a course in systematic theology, in which they basically do an overview of theology. I remember for the first time reading about Calvin, and other reformers, and I realized that they were answering questions to a satisfactory level that I had been looking for over a very long time. At this point, I was not at all persuaded by the covenantal system. However, soteriologically speaking, I found a lot of comfort and solace in the reformed camp.

So, was it more of the soteriology itself, than the covenantal system?

Hands down! Yes. Early on, yes.

Do you still feel that way about the covenantal system?

I do not. If I wasn't persuaded soteriologically from the reformed camp, I probably wouldn't have delved in deeper into their systems and the alignment of the Bible. When I started getting those early questions answered more readily and palatable, I became very curious about what they said about other things. I will say this about my Bible College: They are a dispensational school, hands down. The covenant that the teachers sign prior to their

being a professor there, they affirm classical Dispensationalism, and they all believe it. So, all the extra studies that I was doing, I had to do it on my own. Which, looking back on it, I'm so thankful for, because I learned a ton. It started with soteriology, but it turned into more of how these two Testaments work together. Now that much time has passed, I've really gone the whole gambit. I would say I went into Bible College as a classical Dispensationalist, hands down, and over time I progressively (no pun intended) kind of shifted all the way to where I am today.

What were the some of the first problems you saw in Dispensationalism?

My first hesitation, first cognitive inconsistency, was reading through Ryrie's *Dispensationalism* when he goes over the *sine qua non* of Dispensationalism. The second one was the two different people of God. That was probably my first hesitation.

Can you clarify? What did you feel was wrong with that?

What I felt was weird about that was, as I read the New Testament, number one, I felt like there was more of a continuity in the people of God than there was a stark discontinuity. Number two, I had a hard time reconciling what the reason was for the Old Testament for the church today, other than just a glorified history book. Number three, and, again, all of the professors affirmed Dispensationalism, but all of them were on different parts of the spectrum. We had a few of the professors that were of kind of the "ultra" mind-set. It was almost as if there were two different ways of salvation, and our salvation was dependent upon that particular age. And, to me, that was rough. To me, it was a tough sale.

So then, by the time you graduated from college, had you pretty much said, "Good bye" to Dispensationalism? Or were you half-and-half, or something else?

No. Actually, I was hanging on. For me, the big hang up with covenantalism was they held to infant baptism. That was reason enough to try my hardest to find some kind of my own Dispensationalism. And, as I look back on it, that's the fruit of a lot more reasoning and studying. I felt very much at home with a book I found in the library, Craig Blaising and Darrell Bock's book on *Progressive Dispensationalism*. I found *a lot* of comfort in that.

They argue for much greater continuity.

Yes. And they also reduce the ages. There were a lot of really good things about that book. And, when I started working at the Presbyterian church, I told them in the very first interview, "I'm not a covenantal guy." I told them I was PD. In a nice way, I told them, "You're going to have to deal with this."

Were they o.k. with that?

They were. They were o.k. with that. I don't know why. They were a very conservative Presbyterian denomination. I don't think they knew what it was. They hired me anyway. I think I found a lot of comfort in that position. That was in 2008. So, about ten years ago, on the internet, there was a really big push prompted by John Piper in the Neo-Covenant Theology position, and I began to shift that way. Some of my mentors at the Bible College began trying to steer me back towards a more classical view. There was a little bit of friction there.

Would you say that the professors who were trying to steer you back were well versed in New Covenant Theology? Did they understand New Covenant Theology?

To be honest, No. What I got was, "Any variation of classical Dispensationalism was Covenant Theology." I remember hearing that verbatim. Like it was a slippery slope. And

they were not even thrilled about the Bock and Blaising portrayal. So I would agree that they were not incredibly versed with the nuances of that whatsoever.

What about with Progressive Dispensationalism. Do you think they were well versed in Progressive Dispensationalism? Could they discuss it intelligently?

No. I don't. I think that they were all Dallas Seminary grads from a very particular time period, prior to Bock. It was one way or nothing.

You mentioned 2008, didn't you graduate from college in 2010?

Yes, sir.

That's what I thought. So, this was still a couple of years back from your graduation. Was there anything else that happened while you were at college that's relevant to this discussion?

Other than my job at a Presbyterian church ...

Let me ask you about that. Do you feel that having a job at the Presbyterian church – they were very accepting of you; they weren't critical of you being identified as PD, or having gone to this college – did that give you a sense that maybe outside of classical Dispensationalism, there's a welcome there for you? Was that encouraging to you?

Sure. Yeah. I think so. I think that they were incredibly hospitable. Looking back on it, I would say that they were very comfortable in their own position. I think they saw something in me that was somewhat teachable and malleable. And they just weren't worried about that, because it would get resolved in the wash. But at the same time, I'll say this: They never forced anything on me. It was never, "My way or the highway." And, part of that was

that I wasn't coming in as a teaching pastor. I was working with youth. But, yes, very hospitable, very patient, very kind.

Now, there are all different stripes of Presbyterian churches. Is this a typical, Westminster Confession, Covenant Theology all the way along, or are they of a different stripe? Or what?

This is a Westminster affirming denomination. We're EPC, Evangelical Presbyterian Church. We're not the liberal kind of PCUSA, but we're also not the conservative PCA. We are a moderate, in the middle denomination. Part of the tenets are in the non-essentials, there's often liberty. That's how they were able to justify hiring me and bringing me on and getting me on staff. From their perspective, this was not an essential, even though, it didn't fly with all of the Westminster standards.

So, coming back to the time of your graduation, you hadn't yet finally said, "Good bye" to Dispensationalism, but you might have identified more as a Progressive Dispensationalist. Is that right?

Right.

So, after graduation, what, or who, have been the chief influences in your thinking leading you to a non-dispensational position?

I was reading a lot of Calvin. I was reading a lot of the reformers. Book-wise, I would say most of the reformers, Calvin being the king, influenced me. For me, what put the nail in the coffin finally was reading O. Palmer Robertson, his *The Israel of God* book, and then his *Christ of the Covenants* book. Those were probably the nail in the coffin for me. That was the first time I was exposed to the supreme unity of the Testaments, and really defining Israel, defining what a Jew is. Those were probably my biggest influences post-college.

What do you perceive now, as someone who has fully embraced a form of Covenant Theology, to be the chief problems – either inconsistencies, or unbiblical teachings – of Dispensationalism?

I have a hard time calling it “problems” per se, only because – I think, because I’ve made the journey, how we work through this Old Testament/New Testament thing – I think, because of that I have an appreciation for Dispensationalism. I really do. I’m usually the foreground defender of it! Especially in my own circles who read Gerstner’s *Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth*. I think first, and foremost, I remember Dispensationalism as the protector of inerrancy and infallibility in a time period in which that was all on the table. I’m ever appreciative of that. I think some of the conundrums, or some of the problems are maybe in Ryrie’s *sine qua non*, looking at the literal/literalistic interpretation of some of the particular texts. Using that consistent hermeneutic I think sometimes can run into complications, especially looking at past, historical interpretations. I think the second one, the separation of the two peoples of God, in my own context here in my town, that’s been probably some of the most difficult ground, because the church that I did go to growing up – I’d consider him kind of an ultra-dispensationalist – just the triumphing of Israel to the point which they don’t need the gospel, because they’re Israel. I know that doesn’t define Dispensationalism. But, at a popular level, that’s what I deal with on a daily basis. That’s the perspective that we’re getting here a lot. I also think that the view of the millennial kingdom as the “end all, be all,” the goal of history, often times can deter from the here and now. I wouldn’t necessarily say those are “problems,” but I would definitely say some of the “complications.”

Can I come back to what you were saying about the hermeneutical issue? What are some of the areas of Bible interpretation where you think the dispensational, overly literal approach falls short?

Probably the fascination with national Israel. I see that as, not necessarily agreeing with how I read the New Testament. At the popular level, it almost seems as if a lot of the time the church is riding on the coattails of Israel, which makes interpreting the Old Testament messy and involves the question of what's the purpose of the Old Testament for the church today? Also, on an aesthetic level, I think it robs people of experiencing the joy of knowing that their faith, that the history of redemption that's been taking place for so long, is also *their* history, that they're experiencing those things as well, and they can trace it back to Old Testament people.

How would you label your current theological position?

I'm very much a covenantalist.

Would that be a traditional covenant theology à la Hodge, Berkhof, etc., or more like New Covenant Theology, or Progressive Covenantalism?

Definitely in line with Calvin and in line with Hodge.

Are you familiar with either of the labels, "New Calvinism" or "Young, Reformed, Restless"?

No. Not really. I've heard the terms.

Is there anything else you'd like to add to this discussion about Dispensationalism?

Only that, I have abandoned the camp, but, at the same time, I'm very appreciative of Dispensationalism. I'm a part of a group of pastors here, and I'm the only person who's not

dispensational. We get along, and we do ministry together. And, no, we probably don't preach the book of Galatians the same way. But, at the same time, it's a very important issue, because this is the means by which we teach our people how to read the Bible. So, I'm always very much aware of that, and I'm very passionate about that.

Reflections:

Clark was raised in a dispensational tradition (home and church), though he was not familiar with the term, "Dispensationalism." From his teen years, Clark had some serious questions about the Christian faith, specifically regarding the relationship between the sovereignty of God and the freedom of man. While attending Bible College, he first became attracted to reformed theology when some of his professors there, whom he described as "more in line with the reformed camp than some of my other professors," provided meaningful answers to some of these questions. Clark perceived these answers as coming from "the reformed camp," rather than from a dispensational framework. Clark may have benefited by a course that offered a comprehensive dispensational worldview that addressed a broad spectrum of issues related to theology and life from a uniquely dispensational perspective. Such a course may have demonstrated to him that Dispensationalism offers a meaningful outlook on much more than eschatology, and provides answers related to soteriology, as well as other important areas.

Clark's interest in soteriology became his door of entry into reformed theology. In the teaching of soteriology at a dispensational school, it is imperative that the connection between Dispensationalism and soteriology be clearly demonstrated. When Dispensationalism is treated primarily as a system of eschatology, it is too easily segmented from other categories of systematic theology. Clark may have benefited from a course in soteriology that clearly

presented the doctrine of salvation from a dispensational perspective, indicating the contrasts with the soteriology of Covenant Theology.

Beginning with a systematic theology class in his sophomore year, Clark was introduced to Calvin and other reformers. He found in these theologians satisfying answers to some of his theological questions. Indeed, Calvin and the reformers have much positive theological reflection to offer. Nevertheless, the reformed system of theology that emerged from them (Covenant Theology) has both assumptions and deductions that run contrary to Dispensationalism. If Clark had been made aware of how various theological systems compare and contrast with Dispensationalism, he may have been able to accept the positive contributions of the reformers, while recognizing the faults of the covenantal system. Instead, he became so enamored of the reformers, that he eventually underwent a complete theological conversion into Covenant Theology.

The chief problem that Clark has with Dispensationalism is its lack of continuity between the peoples of God. It is troubling to him that God could have a people called “Israel,” a national and ethnic entity that is separate and distinct from the church. A course in theological systems, or in a dispensational worldview, might address such an issue. Is there an inherent injustice, or is it illogical, that God should have two separate and distinct peoples? This issue has troubled more than one who has defected from Dispensationalism. Along with this issue is the related matter of how the Old Testament and the teachings of Jesus in the Gospels relate to the church. This matter needs to be addressed in hermeneutics. If “all Scripture is ... profitable,” then it needs to be demonstrated how the New Testament believer can properly apply the Old Testament and such portions of the Gospels as the Sermon on the Mount to his own life and ministry.

Interviewee #7, Max

Introduction:

In this report, this interviewee will be referred to as Max. For this final interview an individual was selected who did not participate in the survey. His contact information was made known to me after the survey was conducted. Max was selected because, though he defected from a dispensational position, he later came back. His life narrative is an encouragement, demonstrating that departure from Dispensationalism is not a one-way street.

Max is a young, married man of twenty-seven, raised in a dispensational home and church in the western part of the United States. As a teenager, Max became interested in theology and became enamored with the writings of reformed theologians. He spent a semester at a small, reformed college, but had to quit due to lack of funds. After completing a program at his local community college, Max entered an undergraduate baccalaureate program at a Christian college that many would consider to be dispensational, though it was not a part of this paper's study. He began to question some of the reformed positions he had earlier held, and eventually came to a position of Progressive Dispensationalism. His seminary work was done at an institution that was dispensational at one time, but today is no longer committed to that position; although, some of the professors there are still dispensational. Fortunately, the good foundation he had received at his dispensational college caused him to continue to grow in his commitment to Dispensationalism, even at this seminary. Today, Max still sees himself as a progressive dispensationalist, but he is open to the possibility of his becoming more in line with classical Dispensationalism as he continues to study.

The Interview:

You were recommended to me as an interviewee because you left a position of Dispensationalism, but then you then came back. Is that correct?

I would only question the fact of whether I am really fully pretrib. I would definitely call myself a “Dispensationalist” in the sense of progressive dispensationalists à la Darrel Bock and those guys. And in terms of a future national Israel and a millennial kingdom – historic premil. and then some. Definitely an emphasis on the future fulfillment of the Old Testament promises to Israel as part of the consummation of God’s kingdom. And I may even become more classically dispensational as I study.

Thank you. I’ll want to come back to some of this in more detail, but first, can you just tell me a little bit about your background, your family, where you live, your ministry, and where you were educated.

I grew up in Oregon in a Christian home, a very traditional, evangelical, Christian home. Most of my childhood I grew up in a conservative Baptist church, a GARB church – General Association of Regular Baptists – went to AWANA and VBS. I can remember trusting in Christ at a really young age, and my mom explaining to me the story about Adam and Eve, and how Christ was obedient for us, was a perfect sacrifice to take away the curse of our sin. As a little kid, I thought, “Oh, wow!” And then, growing up in the church. I remember when I was about fourteen was when God really started instilling in me a love of Scripture, a love for His Word in my heart, and also a love for theology, which is why I went on to go to Bible College and Seminary. But that also leads to why I wasn’t a dispensationalist for a long time. When I was fourteen, I read a copy of R.C. Sproul’s book, *Chosen by God*. And the world became open to me in terms of theology in general, and Calvinism, and reformed thought. Then, after reading

other books, Covenant Theology and stuff. In the short term, I was fascinated with Reformed Theology.

And this all happened when you were pretty young, as a teenager?

Oh, yeah. I was a freshman in high school. I just loved reading theology in high school – especially reformed theology. The negative side of that is that, as a teenager, you're reading these people, and you sort of follow them blindly. It's natural. That would be, I think, the first reason that I rejected Dispensationalism, because at that age, these reformed scholars had a lot more credibility. At seventeen the notes from the *Scofield Reference Bible* didn't seem to be more credible than John Calvin. I respected their study and insights more than dispensational writers that I had heard of. When you grow up in a dispensationalist church, you hear the general description of the doctrines and you see the charts. Now, I would say that it was the study of the Scriptures that eventually brought me back around to a sound understanding of the interpretation of prophecy. The other thing that attracted me to Covenant Theology was a greater sense of identity in the purposes of God, a greater sense of participation in God's plan, and a greater sense of unity with Israel. Because dispensationalists can sometimes talk about how covenant theologians hate Israel, but people reading Covenant Theology feel a greater sense of unity with Israel. They feel cut off from Israel as dispensationalists. At least, that's their perception.

Would you say that the way some dispensationalists portray covenant theologians amounts to a straw man argument, that is, falsely portraying the covenant position?

Somewhat. I think some of them will make accusations of anti-Semitism and that kind of stuff, which is not helpful.

We're getting into some the specifics here, and I did want to get something of your general bio before we did that.

Sure. I really wanted to study theology. As a later teenager, I was very much adopting, lock, stock, and barrel, Presbyterian theology. I started out college going to a small, private, Christian, reformed school in Idaho for a semester, until I ran out of money. Then back at home I went to a Community College for two years, and then I transferred to a Christian college. And all this time, I'm still reading and studying. Then, at college, I learned more about exegesis.

Can I back you up just a little bit, and ask you to describe a little bit about your upbringing in a Christian home? Were your home and church reformed or were they dispensational, or something else?

I would describe my parents as loosely dispensational, generally affirming Dispensationalism, but not emphasizing it. They emphasized more the historic tenets of Christianity, as held more universally by all Christians: the gospel and a high view of Scripture. My church was a GARB church, so they were very dispensational. But it definitely scared me as a little kid, the emphasis on the rapture and the tribulation, it just seemed confusing. I can remember being at Bible camp, at probably ten or twelve years old, and the camp counselor was just going on about how you need to make sure that you're a Christian, because if you don't, when you're in the Tribulation, Satan's going to torture you, and all that kind of stuff. So, I never read the *Left Behind* books as a kid. But also, while I was growing up, I felt like I was free to become convinced of any eschatological position, aside from denying the bodily resurrection. If anything, I would have been encouraged to study the Bible by myself and learn as much as I could. I think the big thing about both dispensational and reformed churches is, when they start to rate eschatology to the level of dogma, people go somewhere else much of the time. But my church was just a great, Baptist church. I was not someone disillusioned by the church. I had a

great time, except for just maybe one or two times when I was confused by the presentation of the events in a classical dispensational presentation.

So, after you went to community college, then you went to your Bible college. What were some of the reasons you chose to go to that Bible college, rather than to some other school?

I still wanted to do theology, so there weren't that many options financially. I could live at home and commute to school, which was really nice. And the church that I had grown up in had lots of connections with the college. One of the elders in the church was the provost there for a long time. There were also lots of people from my church that went to that college and were friends of our family. Also, growing up I went to drama camp there.

In light of the fact that you had earlier been somewhat enamored with reformed theologians, and had gone to a reformed school, did you have any hesitancy about going to a school whose theology was not reformed?

Somewhat. But that was probably more just a stance of theological pride than reluctance to actually go. I still felt that I was right, but I also wanted to go there.

So then, at the time you started at Bible college, would you still describe your theology as reformed?

Definitely. I held to infant baptism, postmillennialism, partial preterism, and five-point Calvinism.

Earlier, you said that one of the things that appealed to you was that you were learning to do exegesis. Is that one of the things that really struck you as a positive at college?

Yes. There were great hermeneutics classes. Presuppositionally, I would say there was a shift, which indirectly led me to not have this blind obedience to reformed theology. And that shift was a renewed love for simply the evangelical. And, having professors and fellow students who, while not necessarily all Baptists, were still evangelical, and that broadened my horizon – just being around a lot of Christians of different denominations. We were all united to Christ, and we were all seeking to grow in our spiritual understanding and wisdom as fellow believers. The professors had a lot of credibility in my life. I had known at least one of them for years, and he was really instrumental in bringing me around.

Perhaps you can expand on that a bit. You mentioned “being brought around.” What transpired? What was the journey you went through theologically at college in bringing you around? How did that develop?

Well, not all of my positions have changed. I would say that I’m still holding to five-point Calvinism.

And, in all fairness, I think one could safely say that there are many dispensationalists who would say that they hold to five-point Calvinism. I don’t think that the two are necessarily mutually exclusive at all.

No. I don’t either.

Although, I think that you’d find some that would say, “You’ll have to let me define those points carefully.” And there is not universal agreement on how those points are defined, even, I think, among reformed theologians. But, I’m interrupting your train of thought. Please continue.

The two areas that really shifted were: firstly, my view of baptism, because I saw baptism as the sign of New Covenant membership. I saw continuity in terms of unregenerate ... In the

covenant community there are both regenerate members and unregenerate members, everyone's in the covenant initially. And I saw the same thing in the New Covenant; I saw regenerate and unregenerate covenant members. And I saw all the warning passages in Hebrews just working beautifully with that. They're in the covenant, objectively speaking, and if they fall away, they're cut out of the covenant. But then, I just started reading those passages more carefully and came to some better conclusions. My professors were very gracious, loved to talk about these things, wanted to hear what I had to say, and expressed their traditions in a very merciful tone. I think that was the initial thing, too; I was a lot more antagonistic. And that melted away. And I think that was a big part of it, too. A lot of it was God working in me and humbling me. I don't know how much of it was a specific discussion with a professor. It was a lot of intangible development and maturity, where I cared less and less about being "right" and "reformed," but more and more about being faithful to Scripture. Bible college was an environment that encouraged that. So, everywhere I turned there was a willingness to adjust my position in light of the data. And that's what the theology classes really emphasized. They said, you need to account for all of the data, and you need to synthesize it into your theology; otherwise, you're not accounting for everything. One of my professors who was probably the most instrumental helped me realize that I didn't have all the answers, and that Baptists had a biblical theology that was just as rich as any other tradition. And I just kind of rediscovered a lot of the theology I had grown up around, and developed a commitment to go wherever Scripture led me. That was the biggest thing, and that's still where I'm at.

So, if I can try to summarize what you've just been telling me, it seems there are three or four things: infant baptism, as you studied the Scriptures, seemed to be a big problem; the approach to the covenants needed a more biblical presentation in your mind;

and, thirdly, being open to Scripture, and allowing Scripture to be the judge over your theology, rather than the opposite way around.

Definitely.

And then, the other thing that I'm hearing you say is that the openness of your professors, their willingness to let you be inquisitive and ask questions without their being judgmental. That seems to have been important. Is that right?

Definitely, yes. I changed my view on baptism, even before. It was really until I started at Western Seminary that I changed. When I first went to seminary I realized that there was totally, absolutely, still a future for national Israel, God's going to fulfill all these promises. The land promises don't apply to the church. But I was pretty close by the time I graduated from college. It's because I had been steeped in a literal hermeneutic. And then, I went to Western Seminary, and it's a little more all over the map. And that's what really kind of galvanized my position. While there's probably no real amillennialists at Western, there's definitely an emphasis among some professors on a very Christo-centric hermeneutic – finding Jesus in every passage – in the sense that they want to find Him, which is just untenable. So, I found myself disagreeing with my text books at Western, and with one professor (most were more measured in their approach). Also, my relationship with Wayne House, who might be the most dispensational person on the planet! I worked with him for about four or five years. His whole thing on meaning and significance was really a watershed, a lightbulb – this text might have multiple significances, but it has one meaning. And that is something I should have been asking ten years ago. I had always learned that, but seeing the implications of it has helped. So I graduated with an M.A. in Biblical and Theological studies from Western in April after three years.

That's great! Do you have any future educational plans?

Not right now. I'll be teaching in the fall at a Christian school. I'll be teaching sixth to twelfth grade in Bible, history, and language arts. I got to do quite a bit of subbing at my former college, which was quite a special opportunity.

Thinking back to the time you spent at your college, you were becoming more and more open to Dispensationalism. You talked about some of the professors that were important in your life. Were there any books that you can name that you read that were formative, or that were helpful in your thinking?

I think people understate how much baptism and ecclesiology are a hinge point for Covenant Theology. Calvinism was this thing that kind of had a snowball effect in my life. Then, eight years later, baptism was kind of the opposite, and it worked the same way. I read the book *Believer's Baptism* by ... I think Thomas Schreiner is one of the authors.³³ It's part of a theology series. It just dismantled the degree to which covenant theologians equate the biblical administrations. It's just really great. Even as I was reading it, I probably would have still called myself a postmillennialist, but the foundation was cracking.

Is there anything else that you read that was influential?

I haven't really read a lot of dispensational writers, which is the problem from the beginning. I need to read more. You know, you get exposure to people and their ideas without reading their books. You might cringe at this, but I was influenced by George Ladd. *The Gospel of the Kingdom* by George Eldon Ladd. While I was still at college, that was the equivalent of the *Baptism* book. It still took me more time, but George Eldon Ladd, talking about the two views on

³³ The book is Thomas Schreiner and Shawn Wright, edd. *Believer's Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ*, NAC Studies in Bible & Theology, (B&H Academic, 2007). Contributors include Thomas Schreiner, Shawn Wright, Timothy George, Andreas Köstenberger, Robert Stein, Stephen Wellum, Steven McKinion, Jonathan Rainbow, Duane Garrett, A.B. Caneday, and Mark Dever.

this age and the age to come, which I know doesn't go nearly far enough for a classical dispensationalist... In my view, we were in the age to come, as a postmillennialist, and that age ended in 70 AD. And, the way Ladd talked about it was just more premillennial. George Eldon Ladd wrote in simple terms. When covenant theologians start talking about what dispensationalists write, talking about three months of this, and six months of that, they're like, "Yeah, you don't know for sure, so I'm not going to trust what you're saying." I know that's not fair, but Ladd really just does a good job of showing how we're still in this age. He does have somewhat of an inaugurated eschatology, but he's very adamant that we are not fully in the age to come, and that more has to happen for the kingdom to be consummated.

You mentioned the need to read more. If I can recommend something, if you've never read Alva McClain's *The Greatness of the Kingdom*, that is a real classic; it's very well done, and I think you'd benefit greatly from it.

So, if you had to label your current theological position, you mentioned Progressive Dispensationalism earlier, is that the label you would use?

I will qualify this by saying that, as of right now, I need to come back to eschatology. A lot of what I have been writing about recently, both at seminary and in my own reading, is dealing with the Trinity, and the doctrine of God, and baptism. So, my thoughts on those two things are more developed. There was a time when I would just read and read about postmillennialism and eschatology, but I would definitely say that I am mostly a progressive dispensationalist at the very least.

Are you familiar with either of these two labels: "New Calvinism" or "Young, Reformed, Restless"?

I hear them a lot. And I hear various definitions of them. People throw them around, and I tend to be a little incredulous, or skeptical that they're actually bona fide movements. Are we talking about a four-point Calvinist? I can definitely see how New Calvinism has drawn young people away from Dispensationalism. I can remember accepting Calvinism, and then thinking that Dispensationalism was very Arminian in its mindset, like "God proposes, man disposes." And I was like, "No! Man proposes, and God disposes." So, I saw it as somewhat undermining Calvinism, but I never really thought like, "Oh, I'm a Calvinist, therefore, I cannot be a Dispensationalist."

Is there anything else that you'd like to add to this discussion, before we bring it to a conclusion?

I don't say this with any sort of happiness. But I would say that in the church at this time, through a lot of factors, the term "Dispensationalism" has become a problem that is not going away. If dispensationalists are going to pass on the key elements of their theology intact for generations to come, their chief concern cannot be that they pass on the term "Dispensationalism." It can be a lot of other things, such as the importance of literal interpretation, and a fulfillment of the promises to Israel, the irrevocable call of God – and that says a lot about the character of God – and a dispensational theology. But neither Covenant Theology nor Dispensational Theology ... they're doctrine, they're not dogma.

Reflections:

Early influences in Max's life were R.C. Sproul and John Calvin. The Scofield Reference Bible, by comparison, did not seem to be academically on a par, to him. Of course, one of the things that makes Dispensationalism so attractive is that it is so easy for the common man to understand. Other non-dispensationalists have had a similar reaction as the young Max did.

Reformed devotees have been known, for example, to belittle the academic qualifications of Dr. Ryrie, despite the fact that he had two earned doctorates (Th.D. from Dallas Theological Seminary; and Ph.D. from the University of Edinburgh). I am not sure that there is a proper response to this attitude, other than for dispensationalists simply to continue to produce good quality, understandable literature that satisfies the needs of both the academic community as well as the general public.

As with other interviewees, the issue of the continuity between the peoples of God was one that caused Max to see Dispensationalism as falling short of biblical teaching. This perception comes from reading the New Testament back into the Old Testament, resulting in interpreting the term “Israel” as simply a broad term for “the people of God,” rather than as a term designating an ethnic and national entity comprised of descendants from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The way one reads the Bible will be largely determinative of how they understand this issue. When one forms his theology from the New Testament, and then reads that understanding back into the Old Testament, confusion between Israel and the church results. However, when one forms his theology by first laying a foundation in the Old Testament, and then building upon that theology by viewing the New Testament in the light of progressive revelation, it becomes less problematic to see two separate peoples of God, each working a separate purpose in the outworking of God’s glory.

Max also seemed to feel, along with some other interviewees, that the term “anti-Semitism” was unfairly attributed to covenant theologians. While it may be true that some covenant theologians are anti-Semitic, and that Dispensationalism lends itself to a philo-Semitic sentiment, there are, nevertheless, many covenant theologians who are not anti-Semitic. It is neither fair, just, nor wise to charge covenant theologians as being anti-Semitic. Not only may it

be false, but in this postmodern age, the use of derogatory language in describing one's opponent has become acutely offensive. Great care must be observed when using such labels as "anti-Semitism."

It seems the first crack in the armor of Max's reformed theology occurred when he began to learn practices of sound exegesis. He began, it seems, to understand that his theology had been determining his interpretation of Scripture, rather than the other way around. This can be seen particularly in Max's discussion about baptism. It appears that he had accepted infant baptism as "part of the package" of reformed theology, even though it was unsupportable scripturally. When he began to be more exegetical in his practice, his approach to theology also appears to have become more inductive, and less deductive. Such an inductive methodology lends itself well to Dispensationalism.³⁴ The importance of teaching sound exegetical skills cannot be overstated.

Max, along with others, clearly views Dispensationalism primarily as an eschatology. This is too limited a view. It is too easy to compartmentalize Dispensationalism and dismiss it at as an unneeded appendix when viewed as merely an eschatology. Instead, Ryrie's three-fold *sine qua non* provides a schema to which all of theology may conform. As such, Dispensationalism is really more of a foundation, a part of prolegomena, than it is any particular division of systematic theology.

Quite significant in Max's journey back toward Dispensationalism is his testimony that his "professors at college were very gracious, loved to talk about these things, wanted to hear what I had to say, and expressed their traditions in a very merciful tone. I think that was the

³⁴ C. Gordon Olson, *Beyond Calvinism and Arminianism* (Lynchburg: Global Gospel Ministries, Inc., 2012), 359–360; Rollin Chafer, "Relation of Logic to Interpretation," 94, no. 373: 77–79; Lightner, "A Case for Systematic Theology," 37; Mal Couch, "What Is Systematic Theology?" *Conservative Theological Journal* 8, no. 23 (March, 2004): 11; Paul Martin Henebury, "The Eschatology of Covenant Theology," *Journal of Dispensational Theology* 10, no. 30 (2006): 15.

initial thing, too; I was a lot more antagonistic. And that melted away. And I think that was a big part of it, too. A lot of it was God working in me and humbling me.” It has been noted earlier in this study that the use of harsh, critical language against non-dispensationalists has been instrumental in turning alumni away from Dispensationalism. Here, one can see this matter of attitude working in the opposite direction. The display of grace and an openness to honest, non-judgmental discussion had a very positive impact on drawing Max back to a more dispensational position.

The role of consistent, literal, grammatico-historical hermeneutics is vitally important. Foundational to the focus on exegesis, already mentioned above, is hermeneutical approach. Max found when he went to seminary that some of his professors departed from a literal hermeneutic in favor of a Christo-centric one. Without having had a solid foundation laid at college in literal hermeneutics, he may not have recognized the problems associated with a Christo-centric approach. While his Christo-centric professors at seminary may not have been strictly reformed in their theology, they nevertheless had adopted a hermeneutical approach that is characteristic of reformed theologians, and when he met this approach at seminary, his reaction drove him closer to Dispensationalism. Also, the ability adequately to distinguish between meaning and significance helped Max to appreciate the dispensational approach to hermeneutics over what is frequently found in reformed theology.

It is quite interesting to note that the two books Max read at college that influenced him to think more dispensationally were actually written by non-dispensationalists. Both *Believer's Baptism* (written by reformed Baptists) and *The Gospel of the Kingdom* (by G. E. Ladd) seem to have served as something of a bridge between Max's former reformed theology and his movement toward Dispensationalism. While I would not necessarily recommend either of these

books to many undergraduates, in Max's case they did serve as an important stepping stone. They were both written by reputable scholars that he trusted, yet they were critical of important aspects of reformed theology, relying on a more literal interpretation of certain passages of Scripture than is found prevalently in reformed writers.

As for his concluding remarks about the pejorative connotation associated with the label "Dispensationalism," I must say that I am somewhat in agreement. The term was first used nearly a century ago by non-dispensationalists as a term of contempt for those who followed the teachings of Darby and Scofield.³⁵ However, it is really a misnomer, since dispensations are as important to reformed theology as they are to Dispensationalism.³⁶ Unfortunately, I think we are stuck with the term, since it has been in use for well over half a century and is fairly well entrenched in Christian literature.

³⁵ Todd Mangum, of Biblical Theological Seminary in Hatfield, PA discussed the origin of the Label, "Dispensationalism" in his book, *The Dispensational-Covenantal Rift* (Paternoster, 2007), in which he addresses this issue on page 6. The short answer is, Philip Mauro seems to have been the first one to employ the term, and in a derogatory sense in his book, *The Gospel of the Kingdom with an Examination of Modern Dispensationalism* (Boston: Hamilton Brothers, 1928). Later, Allis and Murray took up the term. By 1936 dispensationalists started using the term of themselves as both Rollin Chafer and Lewis Sperry Chafer began responding to Allis, Murray and others, particularly in a number of Bib Sac articles.

³⁶ See, e.g., Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), 373-77.

Recommendations

The good news for dispensational institutions is that, overall, they are doing a good job. The survey found that only 6.3% of alumni are currently strongly opposed to Dispensationalism. This is a fairly low figure which suggests that the institutions are being largely effective. However, most institutions would likely agree that they would desire to see this figure be much smaller. 7.5% had serious questions about Dispensationalism. Combined, these two categories constitute nearly 14% of all graduates. So, though these figures are relatively small, dispensational institutions might be doing better at preventing dispensational departures. Below are seven pedagogical recommendations for dispensational institutions based on this study.

1. Do not demonize your opponent

One of the most common criticisms leveled by dispensational defectors against their alma maters was that some of their professors expressed harsh, ungracious, and unchristian criticism against non-dispensational theologians. Creating too negative an image of your opponent may be a winning strategy in the short term, but almost guarantees failure in the long term. While it is a biblical practice to “contend earnestly for the faith” (Jude 3), a distinction should be drawn between heresy and error. Amillennialists are not demons, heretics, or idiots. They love the Lord, are often serious and capable exegetes, and many are very intelligent. Professors should avoid the use of disparaging or demeaning terminology. Such terminology may drive our point home forcefully in the short-term, but in the long-term, it sets the stage for alumni to take a positive attitude toward those who were thus disparaged. When graduates encounter thoughtful, intelligent, non-dispensationalists who love the Lord and genuinely seek to understand His Word, earlier harsh criticism of such brothers may be interpreted as unchristian and evidence that

those who demonstrated such a harsh attitude are not walking in the Spirit. This can serve to drive alumni away from their alma mater's doctrinal position.

In the heat of argument and in the passion for truth, it is tempting to characterize the opponent's position as ridiculous, nonsensical, idiotic, a flagrant violation of Scripture, logically flawed, or heretical. This is usually hyperbole, and perhaps such accusations should be softened, or at least given with a caveat such as, "Now, granted the presuppositions of [name of individual or theological position], this position may seem logical; however, consider the flawed presupposition...." Even worse than demonizing the position, however, is demonizing the person who holds the position. One can disagree with covenant theologians, but still appreciate their commitment to Christ and love them as brothers. Perhaps in a postmodern age such an attitude is even more important than in previous generations. In a postmodern era, such attitudes will not likely win many converts from either the Millennial Generation or Generation Z. Granting that Dispensationalism is an important and true system, it is not the door of entrance into God's family. Many non-dispensationalists are precious brothers in the Lord and should be afforded the dignity, respect, and love appropriate for family members. This is not to say that their falsehoods should be ignored or excused. Truth needs to be maintained firmly, but graciously (Eph. 4:15). Tolerance can be a slippery slope. Nevertheless, professors in Dispensational schools need to find a way to express grace and love toward non-dispensational Christian brothers, without giving into non-dispensational teaching. It is a delicate balance to maintain, but it must be maintained.

2. Know your opponent well

Quite a few respondents to this study reported that some of their professors had either misrepresented non-dispensational views or had neglected to present non-dispensational views.

This may be due to various factors. In some cases, professors may believe that if a sufficient positive case for Dispensationalism is made, it is not necessary to present what they believe to be false system. In other cases, it may be that professors are simply not well-read on material defending non-dispensational systems, preferring to read only dispensational sources. In either case, presentations of non-dispensational systems will likely be lacking in accuracy. Somewhat akin to demonizing one's opponent is presenting a straw man argument of the opposing position. The use of straw man argument in the classroom may be either witting or unwitting. If the former, this is a very unwise tactic. Like demonizing one's opponent, presenting straw man arguments can be a winning strategy in the short term, but will surely guarantee failure in the long term.

Failure to be well-read in non-dispensational material should not be an option for professors in dispensational institutions. Lack of acquaintance with non-dispensationalists' arguments plants a seed for alumni's future departure. This has happened, for example, in the area of the pretribulation rapture. Some alumni reported on the survey that, though they believed in a distinction between Israel and the Church, they nevertheless had come reject a pretribulation rapture. They had apparently been persuaded by non-pretribulational argumentation that a pretribulation rapture was not biblical. It is possible that some of the professors teaching a pretribulation rapture have not kept current with contemporary arguments against the position, and thus, their classroom presentations are not answering the questions these students are asking. After students graduate and are confronted with "reasonable" arguments from the opposing side, they will likely sense that they have been betrayed by their alma mater. Another area where this problem emerged in the study was in the area of how we understand the biblical covenants. Dispensationalism is rooted in a literal interpretation of the Old Testament covenants.

Contemporary biblical scholarship has examined Ancient Near Eastern Covenants copiously, and professors in Dispensational schools need to be current in their knowledge of such scholarship, along with an ability to refute erroneous conclusions about the biblical covenants.

Pedagogically speaking, some professors may be of the opinion that if truth is presented positively and allowed to stand on its own strength, falsehood need not be presented, as it will simply fall before the strength of the truth. Sometimes the illustration is used of FBI agents trained to detect counterfeit by handling only real currency. It is maintained that they never handle counterfeit money in their training, but will recognize it, since they have intently studied the real thing. However, this illustration is not altogether true. FBI agents do, in fact, handle some counterfeit money in their training. The apostle Paul wrote of his opposition, “We are not ignorant of his devices” (2 Cor. 2:11); Paul had studied the opposition. The need for professors to be well acquainted with opposing views and to discuss those views intelligently in class is of great importance to successfully communicating the truth. Dispensational professors ought not to take the statements of non-dispensationalists out of context. They should keep informed. Either know the “other side” well, or do not undertake to critique it at all.

3. Provide a well-structured, comprehensive and cohesive system

This recommendation involves ensuring that college and seminary theological curricula include at least two foundational courses. It is apparent that most people identify Dispensationalism with a particular eschatology. While Dispensationalism certainly has some unique eschatological positions, it is surely much broader than merely an eschatological system. Ryrie likely had this in mind when he identified the three-fold *sine qua non* and excluded from it any explicit mention of either a pretribulation rapture, or even of premillennialism. The failure to see this broader picture of what Dispensationalism is, has caused some alumni to see it as

something that may be theoretically true, but not really important in the task of communicating the gospel or in living the Christian life. However, Dispensationalism, with its broad focus on the glory of God (contra Covenant Theology's focus on the Covenant of Grace) is well suited to afford a worldview that addresses every area of life. Dispensationalism views God as having purposes not only related to the salvation of the elect, but also related to creation, the family, human government and the nations, the future kingdom of God, and the angels. Alumni who have defected from a dispensational theology have generally failed to see how Dispensationalism relates to non-eschatological areas. Many New Calvinists have sought to promote a worldview that incorporates a gospel-centered approach to such things as the environment, social justice, and godly families. It is the conviction of this thesis that Dispensationalism is in a much better position to offer a biblical perspective on such matters. It is therefore recommended that dispensational institutions require their students to complete a course in "Worldview" that teaches this subject from a uniquely dispensational perspective.

A second area related to a comprehensive and cohesive approach addresses an adequate comparison and contrast of various theological systems. Many respondents to this study reported that they were not adequately presented with the positions of Covenant Theology. This shortcoming could be addressed by requiring students to take a course in "Theological Systems." Such a course would compare and contrast Dispensationalism, Covenant Theology, New Covenant Theology, Progressive Dispensationalism, and Progressive Covenantalism. It would also show how Dispensationalism has a unique view in all areas of theology, not just eschatology. One of the interviewees, for instance, reported that he first became interested in Covenant Theology because the covenant theologians were the ones giving satisfactory answers about soteriology. There should be a dispensational approach to theology that is satisfactorily

biblical and does not have to borrow from Covenant Theology.³⁷ Some of the alumni studied had failed to see a connection between an Israel/Church distinction, anti-supersessionism, and a pretribulation rapture. These all need to be tied together logically, but also with solid exegesis, and demonstration of how various passages relate to each other so there are no contradictions. Dispensationalism must not be defined simply as an eschatology. Institutions must show that there is a dispensational approach to worldview, epistemology, and hermeneutics.

4. Show the connection between theory and practice

Another problem arising from the popular perception that Dispensationalism is merely an eschatological option is that many alumni viewed it as impractical, offering no real help to the spiritual life, evangelism, etc. Is there a dispensational approach to the spiritual life? To evangelism? To raising a family? To being a good citizen? These are practical issues that are sometimes lost to a person who thinks of Dispensationalism as merely a theoretical and theological system of eschatology. Many colleges and seminaries offer courses in such topics as spiritual life, spiritual disciplines, evangelism, marriage and family. These courses should make a point of showing how a dispensational approach differs from, and is superior to, that of Covenant Theology.

In Bible classes, careful distinction should be made between meaning and significance (interpretation and application). On the one hand, those committed to literal interpretation may focus so minutely on the meaning contained within the context of the original writer and audience that they fail to note the appropriate significance for the twenty-first century reader. This can result in the impression that dispensationalists have an impractical approach to the

³⁷ An example of this approach can be seen in Grant Hawley, *Dispensationalism and Free Grace: Intimately Linked* (Taos, NM: Dispensational Publishing House, 2017).

Bible. As one of the interviewees said, “I had a hard time reconciling what the reason was for the Old Testament for the church today, other than just a glorified history book.” On the other hand, professors may be so overly enthusiastic about making practical application that they fail to do justice to a consistently literal exegesis. Balance is needed here.

5. Be both apologetic and polemic

It is not enough merely to present a positive, exegetical approach to what one believes is true (apologetic). In some institutions, particularly in those that offer a one-year certificate program, Dispensationalism is presented positively, without showing the deficiencies of Covenant Theology. Of course, time limitations in a one-year program necessitate restrictions on how much material can be presented to the student. Perhaps for this reason well developed critiques of Covenant Theology are minimized. Pedagogically, some educators may believe that a positive presentation is all that is needed, and if adequately presented, the falsehood of contrary views will be easily detected by students. As mentioned earlier, despite the often used illustration of FBI agents handling only real money to learn how to detect counterfeit, they really do have to study counterfeit money. The apostle Paul explained his methodology in facing error, “We are not ignorant of his concepts.” A polemic approach must be taken as well. A polemic approach will point out the weaknesses and errors of wrong teaching, but, in keeping with the first and second recommendations, the polemic must be well informed and accurate. It must also be done with grace and wisdom. Students enrolled in a one-year Bible program should be urged to go on in their studies and complete a more thorough program that will expose them to more rigorous and comprehensive studies.

6. Prepare students to face future challenges

A significant number of alumni in this study graduated with stronger dispensational convictions than they had at the time the survey was taken. Exit exams are fine, but they are not the end of the story. Alumni will be exposed to many different theological views and will continue learning after graduation. Dispensational institutions need to prepare students not only for exit exams, but for facing a world outside the bubble of their own limited academy. This could take the form of a recommended reading list of good books beyond those that were required during their studies at school, also recommending membership in solidly dispensational societies.³⁸

7. Be involved in continuing education

This final recommendation is similar to the previous one. Institutions should not be content with students simply graduating with beliefs that concur with the school's doctrinal position. Contrary forces will be at work in their lives after graduation. Good alumni relations need to be kept up. Newsletters with meaningful articles of doctrinal significance; seminars with free admission for alumni; significant discounts for alumni continuing education classes; active, engaging, significant blogs that reach out to alumni are all means that need to be developed as part of an ongoing continuing education program for alumni. Continuing education seminars for area pastors is another crucial area in which dispensational institutions should be involved, as well as encouraging continuing education for faculty.

³⁸ A couple of examples might be the Council on Dispensational Hermeneutics and the Pretrib Study Group.

Conclusion

This Thesis-Project has been undertaken with the desire to help dispensational educational institutions be more effective in producing graduates who will continue a strong, dispensational ministry in the years to come. Dispensationalism rose to great popularity in evangelical Christianity from the time of C. I. Scofield (early 1900s) through the 1970s. Recent years have seen a noted decline in the popularity of Dispensationalism, along with a concurrent rise in the popularity of Reformed Theology. This trend has taken its toll among the graduates of dispensational educational institutions. The Thesis-Project set out to determine what percentages of alumni from these institutions had, in fact, defected to a non-dispensational theology, and found that nearly 14% of these alumni were either strongly opposed, or had serious questions about, Dispensationalism. The Thesis-Project also sought to discover the causes of these departures. A survey of 175 alumni was conducted, and analysis of this data produced some preliminary findings that were quite informative. The final stage of this Thesis-Project involved in-depth interviews with seven individuals who had defected from a dispensational theology. The interviews gave a broader and more vibrant understanding of the causes of departure. The final product of the Thesis-Project offers seven pedagogical recommendations to dispensational educational institutions. These recommendations are:

- Do not demonize your opponent.
- Know your opponent well.
- Provide a well-structured, comprehensive, and coherent system.
- Show the connection between theory and practice.

- Be both apologetic and polemic.
- Prepare students to face future threats.
- Be involved in continuing education.

Appendix 1 – Alumni Survey

Your level of commitment to Dispensationalism

1. For each of the 3 time periods in your life, how strongly did you agree or disagree with the following statements:

1. All unfulfilled Old Testament prophecy will have a literal fulfillment in the future.

	Agree Strongly	Agree Somewhat	No Opinion	Disagree Somewhat	Disagree Strongly
Upon entering your school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Upon graduation from your school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Currently	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

2. Israel and the Church are separate entities with separate promises, even though they may share in some of God's blessings

	Agree Strongly	Agree Somewhat	No Opinion	Disagree Somewhat	Disagree Strongly
Upon entering your school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Upon graduation from your school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Currently	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

3. The thousand years of Revelation 20 refer to a future, literal thousand-year reign of Christ on the earth.

	Agree Strongly	Agree Somewhat	No Opinion	Disagree Somewhat	Disagree Strongly
Upon entering your school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Upon graduation from your school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Currently	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

4. The rapture of the church will occur before the seven-year Tribulation Period.

	Agree Strongly	Agree Somewhat	No Opinion	Disagree Somewhat	Disagree Strongly
Upon entering your school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Upon graduation from your school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Currently	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

5. The Church has permanently replaced Israel as the chosen people of God.

	Agree Strongly	Agree Somewhat	No Opinion	Disagree Somewhat	Disagree Strongly
Upon entering your school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Upon graduation from your school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Currently	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

6. A truly elect saint will **necessarily** show his salvation by his good works.

	Agree Strongly	Agree Somewhat	No Opinion	Disagree Somewhat	Disagree Strongly
Upon entering your school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Upon graduation from your school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Currently	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

7. A truly elect saint might backslide, but will **necessarily** repent of backsliding before death.

	Agree Strongly	Agree Somewhat	No Opinion	Disagree Somewhat	Disagree Strongly
Upon entering your school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Upon graduation from your school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Currently	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

8. Certain spiritual gifts - such as miracles, signs, wonders, and revelatory gifts - were designed for the apostolical foundation of the church and are no longer normative in the Christian's experience.

	Agree Strongly	Agree Somewhat	No Opinion	Disagree Somewhat	Disagree Strongly
Upon entering your school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Upon graduation from your school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Currently	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

9. What is your own present level of commitment to Dispensationalism? (select one of the following)

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="radio"/> Strongly committed | <input type="radio"/> I have serious questions |
| <input type="radio"/> Somewhat committed | <input type="radio"/> Strongly opposed |
| <input type="radio"/> No opinion | |

Your school's general level of commitment to Dispensationalism

Thinking about the school (college, university, or seminary) you graduated from, how strongly was that school committed to Dispensationalism?

10. In your opinion, compared with other ministry/theological institutions, how strong was your school's commitment to dispensational theology?

Strongly committed	Somewhat committed	Neither committed nor opposed	Somewhat opposed	Strongly opposed
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Your school's level of agreement with specific statements.

Thinking about the school (college, university, or seminary) you graduated from, how committed was your school on each of the following statements?

11. All unfulfilled Old Testament prophecy will have a literal fulfillment in the future.

Agree Strongly	Agree Somewhat	No Opinion	Disagree Somewhat	Disagree Strongly
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

12. Israel and the Church are separate entities with separate promises, even though they may share in some of God's blessings

Agree Strongly	Agree Somewhat	No Opinion	Disagree Somewhat	Disagree Strongly
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

13. The thousand years of Revelation 20 refer to a future, literal thousand-year reign of Christ on the earth.

Agree Strongly	Agree Somewhat	No Opinion	Disagree Somewhat	Disagree Strongly
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

14. The rapture of the church will occur before the seven-year Tribulation Period.

Agree Strongly	Agree Somewhat	No Opinion	Disagree Somewhat	Disagree Strongly
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

15. The Church has permanently replaced Israel as the chosen people of God.

Agree Strongly	Agree Somewhat	No Opinion	Disagree Somewhat	Disagree Strongly
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

16. A truly elect saint will **necessarily** show his salvation by his good works.

Agree Strongly	Agree Somewhat	No Opinion	Disagree Somewhat	Disagree Strongly
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

17. A truly elect saint might backslide, but will **necessarily** repent of backsliding before death.

Agree Strongly	Agree Somewhat	No Opinion	Disagree Somewhat	Disagree Strongly
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

18. Certain spiritual gifts - such as miracles, signs, wonders, and revelatory gifts - were designed for the apostolical foundation of the church and are no longer normative in the Christian's experience.

Agree Strongly

Agree Somewhat

No Opinion

Disagree Somewhat

Disagree Strongly

☐☐☐☐☐

Major influences in your life since graduation from school

From the following list of authors, teachers, and speakers, please indicate what level of influence the individual has had on your theological beliefs.

19. Darrell Bock

Strong Influence

Some Influence

Little Influence

No Influence

No Opinion

☐
☐
☐
☐
☐

Other (please specify)

20. Craig Blaising

Strong Influence

Some Influence

Little Influence

No Influence

No Opinion

☐
☐
☐
☐
☐

Other (please specify)

21. D.A. Carson

Strong Influence

Some Influence

Little Influence

No Influence

No Opinion

☐
☐
☐
☐
☐

Other (please specify)

22. Francis Chan

Strong Influence

Some Influence

Little Influence

No Influence

No Opinion

☐
☐
☐
☐
☐

Other (please specify)

23. David Jeremiah

Strong Influence

Some Influence

Little Influence

No Influence

No Opinion

☐
☐
☐
☐
☐

Other (please specify)

24. Kevin DeYoung

Strong Influence	Some Influence	Little Influence	No Influence	No Opinion
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Other (please specify)

25. Mark Driscoll

Strong Influence	Some Influence	Little Influence	No Influence	No Opinion
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Other (please specify)

26. Charles Feinberg

Strong Influence	Some Influence	Little Influence	No Influence	No Opinion
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Other (please specify)

27. Wayne Grudem

Strong Influence	Some Influence	Little Influence	No Influence	No Opinion
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Other (please specify)

28. Thomas Ice

Strong Influence	Some Influence	Little Influence	No Influence	No Opinion
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Other (please specify)

29. Timothy Keller

Strong Influence	Some Influence	Little Influence	No Influence	No Opinion
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Other (please specify)

30. John MacArthur

Strong Influence

Some Influence

Little Influence

No Influence

No Opinion

☐☐☐☐☐

Other (please specify)

31. Alva McClain

Strong Influence

Some Influence

Little Influence

No Influence

No Opinion

☐☐☐☐☐

Other (please specify)

32. John Piper

Strong Influence

Some Influence

Little Influence

No Influence

No Opinion

☐☐☐☐☐

Other (please specify)

33. Charles Ryrie

Strong Influence

Some Influence

Little Influence

No Influence

No Opinion

☐☐☐☐☐

Other (please specify)

34. R.C. Sproul

Strong Influence

Some Influence

Little Influence

No Influence

No Opinion

☐☐☐☐☐

Other (please specify)

35. John Stott

Strong Influence

Some Influence

Little Influence

No Influence

No Opinion

☐☐☐☐☐

Other (please specify)

36. John Walvoord

Strong Influence

Some Influence

Little Influence

No Influence

No Opinion

☐☐☐☐☐

Other (please specify)

37. Paul Washer

Strong Influence

Some Influence

Little Influence

No Influence

No Opinion

☐☐☐☐☐

Other (please specify)

38. John Whitcomb

Strong Influence

Some Influence

Little Influence

No Influence

No Opinion

☐☐☐☐☐

Other (please specify)

39. The Gospel Coalition

Strong Influence

Some Influence

Little Influence

No Influence

No Opinion

☐☐☐☐☐

Other (please specify)

40. Desiring God Ministries

Strong Influence

Some Influence

Little Influence

No Influence

No Opinion

☐☐☐☐☐

Other (please specify)

41. Together For The Gospel

Strong Influence

Some Influence

Little Influence

No Influence

No Opinion

☐☐☐☐☐

Other (please specify)

42. Redeemer City to City

Strong Influence	Some Influence	Little Influence	No Influence	No Opinion
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Other (please specify)

43. Please describe what you think were your school's greatest weakness and greatest strength resulting in either a failure to support their dispensational position or a success in supporting it.

Demographic Information

44. Your present age?

45. Your sex?

☐ Male

☐ Female

46. Geographical region of the US where you currently reside

☐ West

☐ Midwest

☐ Northeast

☐ South

☐ Other (please specify)

47. Sociological area where you currently live or minister

☐ Urban

☐ Suburban

☐ Rural

☐ Other (please specify)

48. From what ministerial training school did you graduate?

49. What year did you graduate from your ministerial training school?

50. Are you currently in full-time Christian ministry?

- ☐ Full-time paid ministry
- ☐ Part-time paid ministry
- ☐ Volunteer at church or parachurch
- ☐ No ministry involvement
- ☐ Other (please specify)

Amazon Gift Card Drawing

If you would like to be entered to my drawing for a \$50 Amazon Gift card, please fill in the contact information below.

51. Name

52. E-mail Address

Appendix 2 – Vice President/Dean Script

Hello, my name's George Gunn. I'm working on a D.Min. Project at Corban University in Salem, OR. I wonder if I could ask for your help with this project. This should only require a few minutes of your time.

This is a project that I think you will be interested in. I'm studying why some ministry graduates from Dispensational institutions later switch to a non-dispensational approach to theology. The end goal of this project is to help dispensational institutions understand how they might better prevent such departures from occurring and ensure the continuation of dispensational preaching and teaching from our nation's pulpits.

Your institution has been identified as one of the solid dispensational schools in our nation. Would you agree with that assessment?

Do you personally know of any ministry graduates from your institution who have or are departed from the school's dispensational theology to adopt a non-dispensational theology?

Is this issue of concern to you?

Here's where I need your help: Would you give me permission to conduct a survey of your alumni? This survey will seek to determine at least these five things: (1) their level of commitment to Dispensationalism when they began training at your school, (2) their level of commitment to Dispensationalism at the time of their graduation, (3) whether that commitment has changed since their graduation, (4) if they have changed, to what theological persuasion did they change? and (5) what were the major influences that brought about that change?

At the conclusion of this project, I plan to interview five to seven individuals who are graduates from a number of solid dispensational schools. These individuals will have an opportunity to elaborate on their migration away from Dispensationalism.

To facilitate the distribution of the survey, I have created an online link at which the survey can be taken. We could handle this either of two ways:

1. You could send me a list of your alumni emails. I promise to use this list only to conduct the survey, and to delete the list after the survey is complete in about a month.
2. I could send you a form email with a link to the survey, and someone from your institution could send it out to your alumni.

In addition to the initial emailing, I'd like to send 3-4 follow up emails as reminders. At the conclusion of the survey, each participant will have an opportunity to enter a drawing for a \$50 Amazon gift card.

Do I have your permission? Do you have any additional questions or concerns? If this plan is acceptable to you, what do we need to do to get the ball rolling on this survey?

Appendix 3 –Answers to Survey Questions 1-8 at Graduation

Strongly Opposed

- Q1 OT prophecy literal future fulfillment:
 - 36% agreed strongly (4 respondents)
 - 9% agreed somewhat (1 respondent)
 - 0% had no opinion
 - 18% disagreed somewhat (2 respondents)
 - 36% disagreed strongly (4 respondents)
- Q2 Israel and Church separate entities
 - 27% agreed strongly (3 respondents)
 - 9% agreed somewhat (1 respondent)
 - 0% had no opinion
 - 9% disagreed somewhat (1 respondent)
 - 55% disagreed strongly (6 respondents)
- Q3 Literal thousand years
 - 36% agreed strongly (4 respondents)
 - 9% agreed somewhat (1 respondent)
 - 18% had no opinion (2 respondents)
 - 9% disagreed somewhat (1 respondent)
 - 27% disagreed strongly (3 respondents)
- Q4 Pretrib rapture
 - 27% agreed strongly (3 respondents)
 - 18% agreed somewhat (2 respondents)

- 0% had no opinion
- 0% disagreed somewhat
- 55% disagreed strongly (6 respondents)
- Q5 Church has permanently replaced Israel
 - 45% agreed strongly (5 respondents)
 - 0% agreed somewhat
 - 9% had no opinion (1 respondent)
 - 9% disagreed somewhat (1 respondent)
 - 36% disagreed strongly (4 respondents)
- Q6 Elect necessarily show good works
 - 27% agreed strongly (3 respondents)
 - 64% agreed somewhat (7 respondents)
 - 9% had no opinion (1 respondent)
 - 0% disagreed somewhat
 - 0% disagreed strongly
- Q7 Backslidden elect will repent before death
 - 36% agreed strongly (4 respondents)
 - 45% agreed somewhat (5 respondents)
 - 18% had no opinion (2 respondents)
 - 0% disagreed somewhat
 - 0% disagreed strongly
- Q8 Cessation of foundational gifts
 - 55% agreed strongly (6 respondents)

- 27% agreed somewhat (3 respondents)
- 0% had no opinion
- 9% disagreed somewhat (1 respondent)
- 9% disagreed strongly (1 respondent)

Have Serious Questions

- Q1 OT prophecy literal future fulfillment:
 - 76.92% agreed strongly (10 respondents)
 - 15.38% agreed somewhat (2 respondents)
 - 0% had no opinion
 - 7.69% disagreed somewhat (1 respondent)
 - 0% disagreed strongly
- Q2 Israel and Church separate entities
 - 84.62% agreed strongly (11 respondents)
 - 7.69% agreed somewhat (1 respondent)
 - 0% had no opinion
 - 0% disagreed somewhat
 - 7.69% disagreed strongly (1 respondent)
- Q3 Literal thousand years
 - 84.62% agreed strongly (11 respondents)
 - 15.38% agreed somewhat (2 respondents)
 - 0% had no opinion
 - 0% disagreed somewhat
 - 0% disagreed strongly

- Q4 Pretrib rapture
 - 23.08 agreed strongly (3 respondents)
 - 38.46% agreed somewhat (5 respondents)
 - 15.38% had no opinion (2 respondents)
 - 15.38% disagreed somewhat (2 respondents)
 - 7.69% disagreed strongly (1 respondent)
- Q5 Church has permanently replaced Israel
 - 0% agreed strongly
 - 38.46% agreed somewhat (5 respondents)
 - 0% had no opinion
 - 7.69% disagreed somewhat (1 respondent)
 - 53.85% disagreed strongly (7 respondents)
- Q6 Elect necessarily show good works
 - 38.46% agreed strongly (5 respondents)
 - 38.46% agreed somewhat (5 respondents)
 - 0% had no opinion
 - 15.38% disagreed somewhat (2 respondents)
 - 7.69% disagreed strongly (1 respondent)
- Q7 Backslidden elect will repent before death
 - 15.38% agreed strongly (2 respondents)
 - 46.15% agreed somewhat (6 respondents)
 - 7.69% had no opinion (1 respondent)
 - 15.38% disagreed somewhat (2 respondents)

- 15.38% disagreed strongly (2 respondents)
- Q8 Cessation of foundational gifts
 - 53.85% agreed strongly (7 respondents)
 - 30.77% agreed somewhat (4 respondents)
 - 0% had no opinion
 - 7.69% disagreed somewhat (1 respondent)
 - 7.69% disagreed strongly (1 respondent)

No Opinion

- Q1 OT prophecy literal future fulfillment:
 - 71% agreed strongly (5 respondents)
 - 29% agreed somewhat (2 respondents)
 - 0% had no opinion
 - 0% disagreed somewhat
 - 0% disagreed strongly
- Q2 Israel and Church separate entities
 - 57% agreed strongly (4 respondents)
 - 43% agreed somewhat (3 respondents)
 - 0% had no opinion
 - 0% disagreed somewhat
 - 0% disagreed strongly
- Q3 Literal thousand years
 - 86% agreed strongly (6 respondents)
 - 14% agreed somewhat (1 respondents)

- had no opinion
- 0% disagreed somewhat
- 0% disagreed strongly
- Q4 Pretrib rapture
 - 57% agreed strongly (4 respondents)
 - 29% agreed somewhat (2 respondents)
 - 14% had no opinion (1 respondent)
 - 0% disagreed somewhat
 - 0% disagreed strongly
- Q5 Church has permanently replaced Israel
 - 0% agreed strongly
 - 14% agreed somewhat (1 respondent)
 - 14% had no opinion (1 respondent)
 - 0% disagreed somewhat
 - 71% disagreed strongly (5 respondent)
- Q6 Elect necessarily show good works
 - 43% agreed strongly (3 respondents)
 - 14% agreed somewhat (1 respondent)
 - 29% had no opinion (2 respondents)
 - 14% disagreed somewhat (1 respondent)
 - 0% disagreed strongly
- Q7 Backslidden elect will repent before death
 - 14% agreed strongly (1 respondent)

- 29% agreed somewhat (2 respondents)
- 57% had no opinion (4 respondents)
- 0% disagreed somewhat
- 0% disagreed strongly
- Q8 Cessation of foundational gifts
 - 43% agreed strongly (3 respondents)
 - 14% agreed somewhat (1 respondent)
 - 0% had no opinion
 - 43% disagreed somewhat (3 respondents)
 - 0% disagreed strongly

Somewhat Committed

- Belief at graduation (Q1-8)
 - Q1 OT prophecy literal future fulfillment:
 - 83% agreed strongly (33 respondents)
 - 15% agreed somewhat (6 respondents)
 - 0% had no opinion
 - 3% disagreed somewhat (1 respondent)
 - 0% disagreed strongly
 - Q2 Israel and Church separate entities
 - 85% agreed strongly (34 respondents)
 - 13% agreed somewhat (5 respondents)
 - 0% had no opinion
 - 3% disagreed somewhat (1 respondent)

- 0% disagreed strongly
- Q3 Literal thousand years
 - 88% agreed strongly (35 respondents)
 - 8% agreed somewhat (3 respondents)
 - 3% had no opinion (1 respondent)
 - 3% disagreed somewhat (1 respondent)
 - 0% disagreed strongly
- Q4 Pretrib rapture
 - 60% agreed strongly (24 respondents)
 - 30% agreed somewhat (12 respondents)
 - 8% had no opinion (3 respondents)
 - 3% disagreed somewhat (1 respondent)
 - 0% disagreed strongly
- Q5 Church has permanently replaced Israel
 - 3% agreed strongly (1 respondent)
 - 3% agreed somewhat (1 respondent)
 - 3% had no opinion (1 respondent)
 - 23% disagreed somewhat (9 respondents)
 - 70% disagreed strongly (28 respondents)
- Q6 Elect necessarily show good works
 - 45% agreed strongly (18 respondents)
 - 33% agreed somewhat (13 respondents)
 - 0% had no opinion

- 18% disagreed somewhat (7 respondents)
- 5% disagreed strongly (2 respondents)
- Q7 Backslidden elect will repent before death
 - 13% agreed strongly (5 respondents)
 - 35% agreed somewhat (14 respondents)
 - 10% had no opinion (4 respondents)
 - 28% disagreed somewhat (11 respondents)
 - 15% disagreed strongly (6 respondents)
- Q8 Cessation of foundational gifts
 - 68% agreed strongly (27 respondents)
 - 20% agreed somewhat (8 respondents)
 - 0% had no opinion
 - 8% disagreed somewhat (3 respondents)
 - 5% disagreed strongly (2 respondents)

Strongly Committed

- Q1 OT prophecy literal future fulfillment:
 - 95% agreed strongly (96 respondents)
 - 5% agreed somewhat (5 respondents)
 - 0% had no opinion
 - 0% disagreed somewhat
 - 0% disagreed strongly
- Q2 Israel and Church separate entities
 - 95% agreed strongly (95 respondents)

- 5% agreed somewhat (5 respondents)
- 1% had no opinion (1 respondent)
- 0% disagreed somewhat
- 0% disagreed strongly
- Q3 Literal thousand years
 - 99% agreed strongly (97 respondents)
 - 1% agreed somewhat (1 respondent)
 - 0% had no opinion
 - 0% disagreed somewhat
 - 0% disagreed strongly
- Q4 Pretrib rapture
 - 97% agreed strongly (98 respondents)
 - 2% agreed somewhat (2 respondents)
 - 1% had no opinion (1 respondent)
 - 0% disagreed somewhat
 - 0% disagreed strongly
- Q5 Church has permanently replaced Israel
 - 4% agreed strongly (4 respondents)
 - 1% agreed somewhat (1 respondents)
 - 0% had no opinion
 - 6% disagreed somewhat (6 respondents)
 - 89% disagreed strongly (90 respondents)
- Q6 Elect necessarily show good works

- 42% agreed strongly (42 respondents)
- 31% agreed somewhat (31 respondents)
- 1% had no opinion (1 respondent)
- 14% disagreed somewhat (14 respondents)
- 13% disagreed strongly (13 respondents)
- Q7 Backslidden elect will repent before death
 - 19% agreed strongly (19 respondents)
 - 22% agreed somewhat (22 respondents)
 - 6% had no opinion (6 respondents)
 - 26% disagreed somewhat (26 respondents)
 - 27% disagreed strongly (27 respondents)
- Q8 Cessation of foundational gifts
 - 78% agreed strongly (79 respondents)
 - 13% agreed somewhat (13 respondents)
 - 0% had no opinion
 - 6% disagreed somewhat (6 respondents)
 - 3% disagreed strongly (3 respondents)

Appendix 4 – Major Influences

Strongly Opposed

- Timothy Keller, 45%
- The Gospel Coalition, 36%
- John Piper 36%
- DA Carson, 27%
- Desiring God Ministries, 27%
- Kevin DeYoung, 27%
- RC Sproul, 27%
- Together for the Gospel, 27%
- Wayne Grudem, 18%
- John Stott, 18%
- John MacArthur, 10%
- Francis Chan, 9%
- Redeemer City to City, 9%

Have Serious Questions

- John Piper, 33%
- R.C. Sproul, 33%
- Charles Ryrie, 25%
- Francis Chan, 17%
- John MacArthur, 17%
- Paul Washer, 17%

- Gospel Coalition, 17%
- Desiring God, 17%
- Wayne Grudem, 16%
- D.A. Carson, 9%
- Kevin DeYoung, 8%
- John Walvoord, 8%
- John Whitcomb, 8%

No Opinion

- John Piper, 38%
- Charles Ryrie, 38%
- John MacArthur, 25%
- R.C. Sproul, 25%
- John Walvoord, 25%
- Wayne Grudem, 14%

Somewhat Committed

- John MacArthur, 41%
- John Piper, 36%
- Charles Ryrie, 31%
- Desiring God, 31%
- Timothy Keller, 28%
- R.C. Sproul, 23%
- John Walvoord, 23%

- Gospel Coalition, 21%
- Kevin DeYoung, 15%
- D.A. Carson, 11%
- Wayne Grudem, 10%
- David Jeremiah, 8%
- Paul Washer, 8%
- John Whitcomb, 8%
- Together for the Gospel, 8%
- Darrell Bock, 5%
- Francis Chan, 5%
- Craig Blaising, 3%
- Mark Driscoll, 3%
- Charles Feinberg, 3%
- Alva McClain, 3%
- John Stott, 3%

Strongly Committed

- Charles Ryrie, 68%
- John Walvoord, 52%
- John MacArthur, 31%
- John Whitcomb, 31%
- Alva McClain, 18%
- Thomas Ice, 16%

- Charles Feinberg, 14%
- John Piper, 13%
- David Jeremiah, 11%
- R.C. Sproul, 9%
- D.A. Carson, 7%
- Wayne Grudem, 6%
- John Stott, 6%
- Desiring God, 6%
- Mark Driscoll, 5%
- Paul Washer, 4%
- Darrell Bock, 3%
- Timothy Keller, 3%
- Gospel Coalition, 3%
- Together for the Gospel, 3%
- Craig Blaising, 2%
- Francis Chan, 2%
- Kevin DeYoung, 2%
- Redeemer City to City, 2%

Appendix 5 – Perceived Strengths and Weaknesses

Question 43: School's greatest weakness and greatest strength resulting in either a failure to support their dispensational position or a success in supporting it.

Strongly Opposed

- My school (Faith Baptist Theological Seminary) did an exemplary job defending dispensationalism, except that I did not get enough serious interaction with opposing views on a variety of issues. Dallas Theological Seminary--ironically--unhinged some of my dispensational readings, one of my professors advocating a single developing "patriarchal covenant," for example. But, the key for me was the use of the Old Testament in the New. I said that this was my biggest concern in my exit interview at FBTS. I simply wasn't convinced by how they treated this issue. Frankly, I have come to see dispensationalism as less conservative than ways of reading the Bible canonically, taking our hermeneutical cues from the Bible itself. Vanhoozer has also influenced me. I still have some dispensational leanings, on the law and still seeing some discontinuity between Israel and the church. The other major key for me was that I am (small c) catholic, in that I want to read the Bible in the great tradition of the Spirit's work in the church (cf. guys like John Webster, Michael Allen, Scott Swain, etc.). From where I sit, changing my view was inevitable. I had too many questions about hermeneutics that dispensationalism cannot seem to answer well.
- Cliquey, unwilling to listen to other's viewpoint, characterized opposing viewpoints without giving ear to the actual people that believe those views. They could at times be graceless, hypocritical and not helpful when others were either different than them or struggling with sin.
- They failed in taking a false eschatology and making it stomachable, as anyone who believes in a pessimistic defeated worldview like premillennial dispensationalism. It is deeply flawed and cannot be reconciled into practical, tactical, & influential Christianity that will never do anything but castrate the believer & his walk with the Lord.
- SBC was uncompromising in support of dispensational theology; maintaining a strong position.
- great weakness (no heart) meaning they are all intellect and close minded, they do not have any of God's compassion in them. The greatest strength is the depth and knowledge of the professors
- Greatest strength: presented an accurate view of the dispensational position, but allowed us to make our own decision as to whether or not we believe it BASED

ON SCRIPTURE. Pastor Don would always say, "this is what I believe, and you don't have to believe it, but you had better be able to defend what you believe from scripture."

- The greatest weakness was the professors' inability to adequately explain "problem passages" like the explanation of the New Covenant in Hebrews 8-10 from a Dispensational point of view.
- The school neglects the established theological majority views which were established by the early church fathers. The school fails to establish a divine inspiration for dispensationalism. The school has great professors however they are hamstrung in their teaching by the school's position as to dispensationalism and their required adherence to this doctrine.
- The greatest strengths by far was the uniform approach to classical dispensationalism from all my professors. While I disagree with their conclusions, their message was uniform.
- Weakness: Not giving a fair representation of the Reformed position on matters of covenant and end-times matters. Strength: Trying to remain biblical in its presentation of various doctrines.
- Greatest weakness in support of dispensationalism was the inability to explain with Scripture that this position isogetically forces three comings of Christ when there is only scriptural support for a first and second coming. The first to make a salvation from the fall for those who "so ever will believe" in this covenanted Good News that fulfills God's promise to His true spiritual children of Abraham identified by the Father as having a circumsized heart as evidenced in one's life. The greatest strength in the school's supporting Dispensationallism was the dogmatic approach of keeping the New and Old Testaments separated rather than allowing the Holy Spirit to teach both as "The Testament" or as one Testament from the Father.

Have Serious Questions

- greatest strength - consistent dispensational position greatest weakness - overly reliant on men, rather than Scripture in their dispensational position.
- My school was great at teaching biblical hermeneutics and instilling a desire to know God. Dispensationalism was secondary to knowing the truth. If they failed in supporting a dispensational position it is because other things were considered more important.

- Greatest weakness: did not address exceptions and discrepancies Greatest strength: totally committed to their theological system and went in depth.
- I think my school's greatest strength was the modular based program allowing students to delve in depth into a topic and focus all of their energy on one thing. I think the greatest weakness was the number of classes taught by the same professor which resulted in a lack of exposure to different arguments and strengths. All in all though, they definitely succeeded in presenting a well thought out and reasoned support for dispensationalism, and a solid biblical foundation for said position.
- I think that my school built a lot of straw men out of other viewpoints, and I once I ventured out into the world I realized that everyone doesn't just have simple, easily refuted arguments about the world. A strength was that they presented more than one viewpoint and allowed me to choose, but their weakness was in the way they presented them.
- Given to a strong, literal approach to interpreting scripture, this school, in my mind excelled, at illuminating and showcasing the facts from the Word. With the sections that are drawn from in the creation of the dispensationalist theory clearly presented and expounded with very little spin, this school presented this theology in a straightforward, well balanced manner, with albeit marginal emphasis on adopting this theology
- Shasta Bible College did a great job in supporting the Dispensational position, especially in their class, Last Things. It wasn't until I began writing my doctrinal statement that I poured over the Scriptures and came to a different standpoint on Eschatology, specifically the timing of the Rapture. I still believe that Israel and the Church are distinct, which the professors did a great job detailing the covenants between God and Israel.
- The school was strong in its dispensationalism and defended it well. But a strong defense does not mean that it is correct. They used Scripture well, and even invited well known guest speakers to teach on the subject as well. The weakest part I would say, was an in depth look at more covenantal views and generally used straw man arguments to defend against.
- The professors were very strong on the subject. The subject came up a lot; the more a person is exposed to the idea, the more they may be willing to adopt that theology.

No Opinion

- I don't remember much but some of the teachers that came in did not necessarily agree with the view of the president of our school.
- The seminary underwent a reorganization during my studies. Several professors of divergent viewpoints left and were replaced with those of a unified viewpoint. I feel this helped me learn to think for myself.
- The school followed dispensational thought to T and only allowed professor who shared the same thought to teach any kind of theological class. Greatest Strength is If you are a dispensationalist or in need a basic foundation of Bible, this is a good school. The school followed dispensational thought to T and only allowed professor who shared the same thought to teach any kind of theological class. Greatest Strength is If you are a dispensationalist or in need a basic foundation of Bible, this is a good school.
- All professors seem to be in agreement, as displayed in identical theologies presented from different professors at different times. I don't remember other opinions or viewpoints being presented in contrast with Dispensationalism, so the lack of breadth could be considered a strength (as a unifying message) or a weakness (students may be exposed to other perspectives after graduating that may persuade them to change their opinions).
- I only saw strengths in supporting their dispensational position, particularly through their annual Alpha and Omega Conference.

Somewhat Committed

- Greatest strength was the biblical support that different time periods were for different purposes, such as miracles, signs, wonders were used in old testament and in some of the new testament to show the validity and Truth of God and the disciples whereas now we have the Bible to show us the Truth about Him
- SBC supported the position well, and represented a deep commitment to dispensationalism, but in the end I remained uneasy about certain dispensational distinctions, that felt forced. Admittedly, I was immature and neglected to do some of the hard work necessary to arrive at strong convictions. At Northwest Baptist (Corban) the opposite seemed to be true. I was deeply committed to shoring up my faltering dispensationalism, but the school was less stringently dispensational, and in the end I feel that I am a strange (sometimes incongruous) amalgamation of dispensational and reformed thought.

- I felt that they did a good job breaking down the different time frames in Scripture and showing it well. The time of the law verses the Church. I also can agree with the view that God is breaking down each excuse of man for why they can achieve perfection without God, like a perfect environment or we can live by our conscience. God was showing by the dispensations that this was incorrect. I feel though that some of the explanation for Revelation is not as accurate that they do not take into consideration that Revelation was also written to the believers at the time and therefore had to have relevance for them at the time, that not everything could be futuristic.
- Not too deep, but definitely supported the dispensational position.
- Very well thought out and studied. Variety of references, yet used the Word as ultimate guide.
- Strength was in linguistics and exegesis. Definitely. Weakness was in overemphasizing our Baptist position, which often seemed to overshadow our commitment to Scripture.
- Greatest strength is that they could very strongly articulate their dispensationalism and the why of it. Though, the same is certainly true of viewpoints that disagree with it.
- Having John Whitcomb as a seminary module professor was a success because he knows so much about Dispensationalism
- My school was not at all weak in this area. This topic along with ecclesiastical separation (besides the standard M.Div. coursework) was the teaching most often emphasized and defended by multiple angles, by every teacher. Any weakness I would see in my post-grad studies have nothing to do with being weak in this area of theology. Their greatest strength was being able to interact with other points of view and still defend the dispensational position.
- Greatest strength - Dr. Myron Houghton focusing on the Israel/Church distinction as the essence of dispensationalism, rather than on the idea of dispensations themselves. Greatest weakness - see above, if you consider dispensationalism to necessarily hold to seven distinct dispensations.
- There was a strong clarity of teaching in support of dispensational theology. The weakness may be not discussing all sides more openly and thoroughly.
- They were very strong in their separation of the church and Israel, and making a distinction between the dispensations. Their support of dispensationalism was also further strengthened by presenting the Covenant and pointing out the hermeneutical and logical errors of it with grace. Although, the strongest support the school gave to dispensationalism was their overall yearly overview of the

Bible with classes like Old Testament Survey, Walk Thru the Prophets, Life of Christ, Prophecy and End Times, Galatians, and the like.

- CBS supported dispensational theology; and I believe it was strong in this by presenting more than one view, though the prof was clear that he supports dispensational thought. So this was a strength for me I cannot think of a weakness in this regard.
- I feel like the classes which stand out the most were all the creation classes as we learned the literal 6 day creation model and that it was not allegorical but something we could trust in. And that if genesis was literal, why shouldn't we interpret the rest of the Bible the same
- Weakness: Lack of teaching on other positions so that one can draw their own conclusions based on the arguments Strengths: Personal commitment to Dispensationalism
- Greatest weakness: being so dogmatic about it and not presenting other views. I got a bad grade on my cessationism paper because I didn't agree. Also, the character of teachers could be harsh and prideful. But mostly we were taught theology and quick answers but not compassion or how to care for hurting. Dispite the talk that salvation was a gift and not of works, the practice was that arguing with someone was evangelism and our view of things was obvious and the only barrier to other people believing was they just didn't get it or havn't been taught correctly. Strengths: Clear, consistent teaching. Enthusiasm for subject matter. Week long, one topic classes were great. Small format effective. It was a great, if incomplete, experience.
- Weakness- Though my professor was very committed to the dispensational view, he could have done better at defending it against those who were of a different view. Why a non-dispensational student would study at a dispensational seminary is another question, but there they were. Of course, he could have dealt with questions and assertions privately with the student, and I would have never known. Strength- The volume of material was "made easy" through handouts, slideshows, diagrams, scripture references, and lectures. Being an older student, this was material which I knew before taking the class, but I have probably never seen it presented so well and with such depth.
- Greatest strength includes in depth discussions and also laying solid foundation for hermeneutics before getting into more advanced subjects. Students at Jackson Hole are challenged to think critically about whatever view points they they have or end up with. Even though Jackson Hole is a 1 year program, I learned more in one year than 2 years at Moody Bible. I really like focusing on one subject per week then moving on instead of 5 subjects at once. It seems much easier to remember and understand material when you can concentrate in one subject per week.

- The school was really good about giving us the information and letting us decide what kind of stand we wanted to take on certain religious beliefs. I learned a lot about religious things I had no stand on when I first entered the school and was able to formulate my own opinions on them.
- The professors allowed the students to decide on what values to stand on while providing the truths from scripture so the students were not making ignorant decisions
- Explained views clearly and defended them well. Yet I appreciated that professors gave us the tools and freedom to study Scripture on our own and come to our own conclusions, which we were expected to be able to defend.
- Weak on in-depth study of the Word Very strong on dispensational teaching. Weak on chronological order of events
- In terms of the college's strengths in support of dispensationalism, at that time there were a fairly unified faculty and generally well informed. In other words, the faculty was not merely indoctrinated in dispensationalism, but had reasoned their way to that view. However, their greatest weakness was that it was taught in a more indoctrinating way. What I mean is, while the professors were fantastic men and several of them dear mentors and friends, they generally taught dispensationalism strongly and failed to accurately represent other theological approaches. Specifically, they painted a caricature of other views, most seriously of reformed theology, rather than representing those views in the ways the proponents of those views think of them. It was often a bit of a straw man.
- It was a big deal. I feel like it was over emphasized to an impractical way. I feel like I'm a "decaf dispensationalist."
- I believe that because of my school's small size there is no diversity in thought. All we hear about is positivity towards dispensationalism, and negativity towards any other position (save the professors that will have side comments in class but won't make a huge fuss). This makes sense due to the staff and faculty and what they believe, but it causes students to accept blindly that dispensationalism is the truth. This blind faith suffocates critical thinking, and so students know the "right" answers but have no idea why they are right. So, in one way, their greatest strength is their greatest weakness. Over all, I do believe that my school has done very well in expressing the truth.
- Greatest weakness...probably just laying out what dispensationalism is in general. Greatest strength was their agreement on the points of dispensationalism questioned in this survey.
- Dispensations thinking faculty who were able to defend their positions

- I believe a great strength my school had on the subject of dispensationalism was it had a biblical theology approach to scripture that allowed for its students to use good hermeneutics to come to their conclusion. This strength could be looked at as a weakness though because they don't draw specific lines to fall into as a dispensationalist. This causes a school to lean more as accosiating as dispensationalists but not directly difined as a blunt dispensational School.

Strongly Committed

- Capital Bible Seminary greatest strength was its stand on dispensationalism; its weakness was allowing students to attend that did not adhere to the dispensational distinctive.
- The literal plain sense hermeneutic was taught consistently along with an emphasis on languages and exegesis which support dispensationalism.
- The school's greatest weakness was its desire to attract a different type of student. It seemed as if the administration was inviting those who wanted little to do with the spirit of the school, (such as a desire to be in the pastoral or missions field.) I think this hurt the school because it attracted student with no real attraction or commitment to the doctrnal or dispensational stance of the school.
- I do not feel there were any weaknesses with the professors I had while at Shast Bible College and Graduate School. They were solid teachers, who taught me to interpret Scripture with Scripture, and to take God's Word literally, unless specifically stated in Sceipture as otherwise.
- The greatest strength was highlighting the importance of method, that is, of consistently applying a literal hermeneutic (grammatical, historical) to Scripture. The biggest weakness was not discussing the tongues passage in class or providing a defense of their view of it.
- It was consistently taught by all the faculty, helping us see how Dispensationalism plays out in every aspect of the Bible and its effects on how we minister today
- Myron Houghton is the greatest strength.
- My school had a strong supportive teaching and reinforcement to help the student to understand the dispensational position with confidence.
- It seemed that they proclaimed their stance without much reference to others stance

- Strength: original language studies and literal hermeneutics, dispute non-dispensational thinking.
- The professors were consistent in their teaching from class to class and professor to professor. Additionally, they majored on the Biblical text and not logical and theological deductions that may or may not be derived directly from the text.
- CBS, my second school, 35 years after beginning, greatest strength in my mind is it's selection of Pastor/Teachers as full and adjunct professors. Conservative, pre-mil, pre-trip, literal hermeneutic. Weakness???
- Strong theological foundation
- Greatest strength- concerted teaching on dispensationalism. Greatest weakness- not exposing us better to Reformed Theology
- The greatest strength was in demonstration of dispensationalism in exegesis. The greatest weakness was in teaching the philosophical, biblical, and theological integrity and superiority of the dispensational position.
- Faith Baptist Bible College and Seminary was faithful and consistent in presenting dispensationalism in their theology/doctrine. Consistency and Clarity would be their strengths
- Greatest strength - faculty that are passionate about their positions but open to dialogue/discussion Greatest weakness – none
- strength: one on one professor involvement and access to faculty and staff. Weakness: no real weakness. it was made pretty clear to me.
- Strengths - focused on Scripture, the Word of God, Biblical interpretation - literal interpretation and understanding the context of the Scriptures Weakness - putting God in a box, in other words focusing on certain ways God works because of who He is (His attributes/character) and not presenting other ways He works because of who He is. Not enough emphasis on God being infinite while we are finite and have a lot to learn about God even after we graduate from the school.
- I would say that most of my professors and the relationship with God they showed because of their own theological conclusions had much greater influence on my theological conclusions than many authors that crossed my path. So, I would say that was a major strength of SBC.
- There strongest strength was thorough teaching with a literal/normal approach to Scripture. Also, in the seminary, Dr Myron Houghton taught to think not just to accept.

- I think my school's greatest strength in supporting the dispensational position was its very detailed description of the different covenants that God had established with man over time (Abrahamic Covenant, Mosaic Law, Davidic Covenant, New Covenant under Jesus, etc.)
- Failure: adequate explanation of the different dispensational views Strength: showing the weakness of the opposing view, Covenant Theology
- Honestly, I can't remember now, it has been a while.
- I think the school's greatest strength was also its weakness at times. Taking a strong stance for Dispensationalism is one of the school's strengths but not exposing the students to anything else while saying other views were unbiblical were some of the school's weaknesses. Having a broader span of teaching, which still holding to a strong dispensational view would be ideal.
- Greatest strength is the Alpha Omega conference Greatest weakness is not enough O.T. coverage of prophetic sections.
- My school often argued a traditional or revised dispensational position. They do well to connect the importance of a good hermeneutic that naturally leads one to understand the text in a normal and literal manner. This is the groundwork which they argue their positions on dispensationalism. Dispensational thought is not a filter I must place on the text but rather a product of seeking to know and trust the text in a natural way. The motivation is found in the bias of seeing the Bible as God's authoritative word to me. The school always build on this foundation for any argument. I see it as the most valuable strength of my school. Some may see the narrow doctrinal position of my school and its faculty. as a weakness because one may not get opposing views from people who believe them. I do not agree with these students, because the research is well cited and proves to be accurate. My school teaches humbly and firmly their view in an honest and transparent manner. I cannot think of any other possible weakness related to your topic.
- They made what they believed clear but also encouraged students to dig into the Word and form their own positions.
- Philosophy could have been presented from a better point of view dispensationalky speaking. Good otherwise.
- Greatest strength were the professors. They were all consistent across the board and explained from scripture both covenant and dispensational theology. Their knowledge and explanation of scripture helped me understand the issues that were at stake. A weakness in my opinion was that some of the local churches in the area of my school were starting to drift and certain pastors had a strong influence in many of my peers. I do not fault the school for not intervening or removing those churches from the approved list. In my observation the shift

occurred in the local church pastors who had a stronger influence than the college professor. That is just my observation and opinion.

- A dispensational position was assumed. Little time was spent actually teaching it even though classes showed an obvious dependence on the position. A person could graduate thinking he understood dispensationalism without really having a deep understanding of it.
- Greatest strength - their dispensational position was foundational and evident in all of their classes and unanimous amongst the staff.
- My educational institution's greatest strength is its hermeneutical position, which results in a strong dispensational perspective. Both could be explained more clearly in the college (though not all college students are ready for such discussions), and are explained well in the seminary.
- I believe a weakness was vilifying theological systems other than disp. A weakness was a failure to engage Cov. Theology in its modern forms. Dispensationalists would be annoyed at best to be caricatured by Scofield's unfortunate statements on salvation in the OT or Chafer's view of the natures. So too much disp. theology is taught against a caricature of Cov. The greatest strength was a robustly Christocentric (rather than Israel-centric) view of the Bible, an avoidance of sensationalism, and the gospel as center for theology.
- Faith Baptist Bible College and Theological Seminary has a strong dispensational position and teaches it well on all levels. Regardless of what graduates believe after they leave Faith, I believe all graduates at least know and understand the Dispensational stance and arguments. The professors do an excellent job of not only teaching the facts of Dispensationalism, but also the reasoning and Scriptural proof behind it, while not belittling those who disagree.
- Strength: My school has taken notice of the progression of schools who have departed from a Traditional Dispensational or other long held view. In doing so, they have drawn healthy lines around the position a professor may hold to gain and retain employment. Weakness- At times this zeal has stifled the legitimate discussion of other positions in the classroom.
- Weakness: not connecting the dots about what Dispensationalism was early on. My senior year things began to connect. I would suggest a second year course on Theological Systems which would favor and promote Dispensational systems. Strength: profs evidenced a consistent Dispensational approach to Scripture in their interpretation.
- Strengths-many faculty were from "old" DTS; weaknesses-yet there were a number being influenced by John MacArthur, who had at the time published "The Gospel According to Jesus."

- didn't change, but always was open to discuss
- Southeastern Bible college: Calvinism was stressed more than dispensationalism was a weakness. Tyndale: Prolegomena and Hermeneutics courses were a strength. Also, differentiating between theological systems....
- Dispensationalism was taught in all classes and supported by all faculty members. This helped the students to see dispensationalism taught by various professors through the Bible and across doctrines.
- The school held to the beliefs that was at the core of the school.
- my school displayed a consistent adherence to dispensational hermeneutics, even to the point of drawing some unnecessary distinctions
- Strengths: Lots of Scripture and good hermeneutics to back it up/good bible based arguments by showing you through God's Word (as the authority). Weaknesses: Some professors lack of explaining their view clearly, or using terms without explaining what it meant, making them hard to understand their point.
- Dispensations Liam was a strong emphasis, this was assumed in undergraduate level, and heavily articulated in the seminary level
- Strength: Presented alternative positions fairly and acknowledged the strengths of those positions. Also were open to discuss the weaknesses of Dispensationalism, but always had good reason to hold their position despite the weakness.
- They had a good standing and were solid.
- Weakness : hobbyhorse of extent of free-grace. Strength: Focus on biblical languages.
- I wrote a long response but it disappeared due to cut and paste. In short, they taught me to study the Bible literally which was the greatest weakness and strength both simultaneously as it turns out. Instructors like Thomas Ice and Bob Wilkin reinforced literal dispensationalism. Arnold Fruitenbaum helped distinguish his people (Israel) from the Church as well as introduced me to my wife. My instructors especially taught me to go where the evidence leads. On instructor who left was eventually asked to resign from another school for changing his views; I learned courage to follow conviction and Scripture no matter what the cost of following Christ might be. For the school's doctrinal statement positions, however, the methods they equip me with caused me to reject their views such that now I see how the Scriptures teach the gift of prophecy is for today/end times, God can speak audibly to people, and the earth is a non-moving overall relatively flat surface over which God sits on a strong

snow globe like structure in the North.³⁹ Had they not taught me to value God's perspective over being a respect or of persons I would still hold to their views.

- Emphasis on the original languages strongly supports their dispensational position.
- Weakness - intolerance of small differences within dispensations/free grace theological positions. Strengths - commitment to exegesis over theology and use of Biblical languages.
- Their greatest weakness was in not evidencing the far reaching effects of ones beliefs on the subject. Their strength was in weaving it into the timeline of history.
- thier greatest strength is thier dispensationalist professors that are excellent teachers and examples.
- Strengths:Biblical supports Weaknesses: Did not spend enough time on difficult aspects
- I didn't know what dispensationalism was until coming to this school.
- Weakness: One professor, who also supported dispensationalism, attempted convincing from his own point of view instead of the source being Scripture. Strength: Most professors would work through the Scripture and come up with their dispensational position by coming to a logical conclusion from the source of Scripture.
- Weakness: In my case, I was at a tiny, overseas seminary satellite, so taking a class on Dispensationalism and having some brief discussion during class, a couple nights a month, during a two month course, I don't think really swayed classmates one way or the other. For classmates who came in with replacement theology, it maybe made them think hard about it, but not convinced anyone was won over. If anything, it may have been the good texts we had, like Dispensationalism by Charles Ryrie. The strength was having good texts and professors who were classic dispensationalists and not wading into Progressive Dispensationalism.
- Our professors were excellent in explaining the differences between opposing views. They also didn't shy away from noting the dangers of extremes of either side. Scripture, interpreted properly in its context, was always key.
- The school's weakness is the lack of conversation from those that do not believe in pretribulation. Strongest is the support of Scripture to validate their claims.

³⁹ This sentence pretty much invalidates the seriousness of this comment.

- During the time I went bible college, i believe their greatest strength was consistency in teaching and explaining classical dispensation among all professors. Their weakness was that there was no one class at my time of enrollment fully devoted to dispensationalism at jow it can be applied to one's system of interpetation and life application.
- Greatest strength – requiring students to look in currently into the subject. Greatest weakness – providing little opposition to the subject.
- It was rarely discussed/disclosed; primarily when current world tragedies were brought up!
- Their greatest strength is their fidelity to dispensationalism. Their greatest weakness is their outright rejection of Progressive Dispensationalism. By doing this they weaken the overall premillennial community.
- W. A. Criswell
- The greatest weakness is the school avoids teach other eschatological views in defense of dispensationalism The greatest strength is the school consistency in Revised Dispensationalism and opposition to Progressive Dispensationalism
- Greatest weakness is sometimes a too rigid adherence to tertiary ideas within dispensationalism or areas where it is more muddy. The greatest strength is the commitment to exegesis for theology rather than learning philosophically.
- Greatest weakness might lack of charity with Christian opponents. But this was not common. Greatest strength was a consistent literal hermeneutic.
- I'll refer to my undergraduate school here, what used to be Philadelphia College of Bible. Their greatest weakness has been setting aside Dispensationalism. This was a school that was started in part by C. I. Scofield. He's not even mentioned. Dispensationalism is completely downplayed and ignored. The school (now Cairn University) is essentially a liberal arts school that also has Bible majors and minors, whereas it USED to be primarily a Bible school. They now have faculty who are Reformed on staff. They basically jumped the shark some time ago.
- I think ,as a Dispensationalist, we fail when we allow ourselves to be baited into defending the historical nature of our beliefs. The only issue we should defend is that our theological position is based solely on Scripture. The fact that this truth was lost in the Dark Ages and was rediscovered recently does not negate its validity. As a matter of strength, in teaching Dispensationalism, the school does well in making the distinction between the fact of different dispensations found in the Scripture, and a systematic theology, which is only as complete as the revelation given to us in Scripture.

- I think it was taught and reinforced well.
- The greatest strength is they acknowledged a dispensational position. I really did not interact much in the theological department as my degree was in education and more classes educationally minded.
- They could have taught more strongly on Genesis 1 - 11, as literal real history.
- Made strong dispensational presentations. Really did not discuss Covenant Theology, except to say it's "wrong."
- Their success comes from the commitment to placing high value on consistent literal grammatical and historical hermeneutics
- Greatest strength is actual dedication to Dispensationalism not in "lip service" but in actual practice. Weakness is in getting the message out especially through publication of the teaching staff. Regarding this position (Pre-millennial and Dispensationalism) it is truly "Publish or Perish". Tyndale is not fulfilling this requirement but then again, who is?
- I think the unwavering commitment to classical dispensationalism - not even considering another view - has helped, along with the connections our administration has had with strong dispensationalists who wanted to continue teaching that position - Ryrie, Lightner, Toussaint, Ice, etc. Dispensationalism is a given here, not just one option.
- Adherence to the literal, grammatical, historical interpretation of God's word
- strong hermeneutics are the strengths. No failures or weaknesses
- A weakness would be in not having all of the professors agree and present a unified view of eschatology. A strength would be that a solid biblical foundation in hermeneutics was presented and taught.
- Shasta Bible College did an excellent job of demonstrating that the literal method of interpretation is the a Biblical method, and that consistently applying the literal method results in dispensational Theology.
- It's difficult to say, as I came in with an already largely dispensational theology, though I didn't know the term. My time at SBC served mainly to solidify and define my beliefs, and I felt the school was very strong in supporting the dispensational perspective.
- In terms of strength, the teachers who taught systematic theology and individual doctrines, supported dispensationalism as a united front. The dissenters were not vocal, and had to be asked before they would give an opinion, but they were

known to the students. Other than having a few dissenting teachers, however quiet about their position, I can think of no specific weaknesses.

- This topic was not a major influence in my studies as I was working on a degree that was education/Christian ministry related
- The school's greatest strengths were extremely knowledgeable and caring professors who taught a strong support of the dispensational position.
- My seminary always, faithfully taught us a literal, normal hermetic which is key to taking God's promises in the OT seriously and taking them for Israel. I would say Dispensationalism wasn't pushed as hard as some other seminaries I can think of, but my school did not push systems per se, but pushed for a Biblical theology.
- Strong dispensational position with Professors who were able to provide a strong exegesis of relevant Scripture passages.
- The Word of God was taught clearly and accurately. This was SBC's greatest strength. The dispensational position was presented in such a way that I have been able to teach powerful and impactful Bible Studies for the past 15 years. My students are grounded in truth because of the system of hermeneutics I was taught at SBC.
- Most of the professors agreed with the dispensations position. They all taught it strongly. But, they did not leave room for other opinions as an option. Other opinions were left to feel less than or stupid. I think it would have been good to know that if you disagreed you would still feel respected in your opinion.
- Success: Every single class in the Biblical/Theological Studies department was presented from a solidly dispensational point of view, so the dispensational emphases were well-represented and were sort of absorbed through osmosis over time. Insofar as SBC is strenuously exegetical in its approach, the strength of the dispensational system was able to be clearly perceived as we worked through various books of the Bible from a dispensational standpoint. Weakness: Except for a session or two in eschatology and hermeneutics, dispensationalism *as a system* was not really presented. I know some schools have devoted a full class to the issue of dispensational vs. covenant theology, and I tend to think that something along those lines (comparing, contrasting, and evaluating the two approaches as theological systems, rather than just dealing with dispensational/covenant conclusions in this or that passage) might be helpful. Full disclosure: In my role as an adjunct online instructor for SBC, I have attempted to rectify this with reading and assignments in Ryrie's "Dispensationalism" and Showers's "There Really Is a Difference" in the Survey of Christian Theology courses. So far, that seems to have been relatively well-received by students.

Appendix 6 – Interview Questions

Before we begin this interview, I want you to know that your personal identity will be kept confidential. In my final report, I will use a pseudonym instead of your real name, and I will not name your school, your church, or your hometown. These will all be generalized, so that no one should be able to trace back the interview information to you personally. Is this acceptable to you? Do you have any misgivings or hesitancy about this interview before we begin?

O.k. Good! This interview should last anywhere from 30 minutes to an hour. I will try not to take up any more of your time than that.

I will be recording this interview for my own use. No one else will have access to the recordings. Do I have your permission to record the interview?

Thank you.

1. To start with, tell me a little bit about yourself, your family, where you live, and your ministry.
2. Were you raised in a Christian home?
 - a. ***Yes:** Were your home/church dispensational? premillennial? confessional? etc.
 - b. **No:** When did you become a Christian? Who influenced you? What kind of church did you get involved in?
3. Would you describe your call to the ministry?
4. Would you describe yourself as being “dispensational” when you entered college/seminary?
 - a. **Yes:** Was that a big reason for choosing that school?
 - b. **No:** Was there some reason why you chose to attend a dispensational school?
5. Did you change your mind about Dispensationalism while attending your school?
 - a. **Yes:**
 - i. What caused you to first doubt the truth of Dispensationalism?
 - ii. What were the chief problems you saw in Dispensationalism?
 - b. **No:** Would you say that your professors accurately and faithfully presented and defended Dispensationalism?
6. After graduation, what, or who, have been the chief influences in your thinking leading you to a non-dispensational position?
7. What do you perceive to be the chief problems – either inconsistencies, or unbiblical teachings – of Dispensationalism?

8. How would you label your current theological position?
9. Are you familiar with either of the labels, “New Calvinism” or “Young, Reformed, Restless”?
 - a. **Yes:** Do you identify with either of these movements?
 - b. **No:** That’s o.k. Some have. Some haven’t. It all depends on what sources of information you rely on.
10. Is there anything else you’d like to add to this discussion about Dispensationalism?

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