

THE TRINITY REVIEW

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare [are] not fleshly but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. And they will be ready to punish all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled.

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Dispensationalism

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A few paragraphs above there was a reference to the "Covenant Theology" of the Presbyterian and Reformed churches. Though the aim here is to show that this theology is Biblical, as are the doctrines of the Trinity and two natures of Christ, yet in the history of Christendom none of these three doctrines were well understood for centuries after the apostles. Perhaps the credit of having discovered this doctrine [of the covenant] may be assigned to Zwingli. Calvin mentions the doctrine, but his emphasis is on other matters. Ursinus in Germany and a bit later Ussher in Ireland developed the idea. The Westminster Assembly gave it confessional status. In Holland, Cocceius popularized it—though he unfortunately added a few fanciful details. The Anabaptists denied the Covenant of Grace, as did some Baptists before John Gill; and naturally the Arminians, Wesleyans, and Methodists found no place for it. Its frequent mention in the Scripture, however, makes such denials or neglect a strange phenomenon among those who profess to accept the Bible.

More recently the opposite extreme of multiplying covenants or dispensations has given rise to Dispensationalism. The Scofield Bible enumerates seven dispensations. It defines *dispensation* in the subhead to *Genesis* 1:28: "A dispensation is a period of time during which man is tested in respect to obedience to some *specific* revelation of the will of God." In itself this definition is not particularly bad. Old Testament history describes several

occasions when God tested man by some *specific* revelation. This was true not only of Noah, Abraham, and Moses, but also of many others. There are several cases in Judges, such as the testing of Gideon by reducing his army as described in the seventh chapter. Then there is the case of Saul and Agag (*1 Samuel* 15:3, 8, 14); Saul failed the test, Gideon passed the test. Then too there is the case of David's numbering the people (*2 Samuel* 24:1, 10, 12). These, however, are not what Scofield means by dispensations, even though they are cases of God's testing men by a special revelation. Scofield enumerates seven dispensations. Even this, though somewhat fanciful, is nothing to cause great alarm. The description of the first dispensation in the footnote to *Genesis* 1:28 is quite good. The really serious error, the actually fatal error, of dispensationalism is the construing of these dispensations so as to provide, since the fall, two (or more) separate and distinct plans of salvation. Lewis Sperry Chafer wrote, "There are two widely different, standardized, divine provisions, whereby man, who is utterly fallen may come into the favor of God" (*Bibliotheca Sacra*, Vol. 93, 1936, 410). On *1 John* 3:7, "he that doeth righteousness is righteous," the Scofield Bible's note is in part, "The righteous man under law became righteous by doing righteously; under grace he does righteously because he has been made righteous." Thus instead of a covenant of grace—extending from Adam, through Abraham, into Galatians, and on to the

culmination—dispensationalism has two methods of salvation.

For example, Scofield's footnote to *Romans 7:56* speaks of "two methods of divine dealing, one through the law, the other through the Holy Spirit." Now, Paul before his conversion may have had a wrong conception of the Mosaic law, but this does not mean that in reality the Holy Spirit was inoperative in the Old Testament. Similarly the footnote to *John 1:17*, "Grace ... is constantly set in contrast to law, under which God demands righteousness from man." But God still demands righteousness from man, though this righteousness is a gift from God. The righteousness by which an Old Testament saint was saved was also a divine gift. Therefore Scofield is quite wrong in the following footnote, which says, "As a dispensation grace begins with the death and resurrection of Christ. The point of testing is no longer legal obedience as the condition of salvation." But the dispensation of grace did not begin with the crucifixion. God began dispensing grace to Adam. Furthermore, legal obedience was not the condition of salvation in the Mosaic "dispensation." The condition was faith in a future sacrifice.

This radical deviation from the doctrine that salvation in all ages can be found in Christ alone results in another amazing distortion of the Old Testament. In his note on *Matthew 4:17*, Scofield says—and to ensure against the charge of misrepresentation by omission the note will be reproduced in its entirety: " 'At hand' is never a positive affirmation that the person or thing said to be 'at hand' will immediately appear, but only that no known or predicted event must intervene. When Christ appeared to the Jewish people, the next thing, in the order of revelation as it then stood, should have been the setting up of the Davidic Kingdom. In the knowledge of God, not yet disclosed, lay the rejection of the kingdom (and King), the long period of the mystery-form of the kingdom, the world-wide preaching of the cross, and the out calling of the Church. But this was as yet locked up in the secret counsels of God. (*Matthew 13:11, 17; Ephesians 3:3-10*)."

This footnote should be carefully examined to see how fatally heretical it is. Whether "at hand" actually means what Scofield says is unimportant. What is important is that Scofield takes it to mean that "no known or predicted event must intervene" before what is "at hand." Hence, when Jesus says that the Kingdom is at hand, Scofield concludes that the Old Testament has no prediction of anything that occurs between the moment of Jesus' preaching and his second advent to institute the millennium. This means that the Old Testament contains no prophecy concerning the Atonement. Incredible as this is for an interpretation of the Old Testament, Scofield puts this quite explicitly: "When Christ appeared to the Jewish people, the next thing in the order of revelation as it then stood [i.e. in the Old Testament prophecies] should have been the setting up of the Davidic Kingdom. In the knowledge of God, not yet disclosed [i.e. not prophesied in the Old Testament] lay the rejection of the kingdom (and King) [Scofield's parenthesis includes the crucifixion and resurrection]... This was as yet locked up in the secret counsels of God." This is an explicit denial that there is any prophecy in the Old Testament relating to the crucifixion. "The world-wide preaching of the cross" including the events of Pentecost, which Peter said was the fulfillment of a prophecy by Joel, was all locked up in God's secret counsel. Incredible!

Though it may not be spelled out so explicitly, the footnote to *Matthew 5:2* in effect says that sinners during the millennium will be saved, not by the blood, merits, and grace of Christ, but by their obedience to the beatitudes, which are "pure law." But this contradicts the universal proposition of *Acts 4:12*: "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." The Scripture, quite the reverse of Dispensationalism, asserts that there is just one way of salvation. True enough, the divine plan in all its completeness, as Paul said in *Ephesians 3:5*, "was not made known unto the sons of men in other ages as it is now revealed to his apostles and prophets by the Spirit"; but Paul's fuller doctrinal explanation is precisely the same covenant that was less fully revealed in *Genesis 3:15*— "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it

shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel."

Though this is the fatal error that removes dispensationalism from the sphere of evangelical Christianity, there are also some minor infelicities, which, though overshadowed, need not be overlooked.

When it comes to Noah, the Scofield Bible professes to see only a covenant of civil government. Supposedly this divine test of man is limited to civil government. If it has any bearing on salvation, it would seem that heaven is to be achieved through governmental agencies. If it has no bearing on eternal life, the theory faces two difficulties. The first and more important point is that the whole transaction must envisage salvation from sin. The background is the wickedness of the human race as described in *Genesis 6*. God decided to destroy mankind because of its sins, but "Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord" (*Genesis 6:8*). Here then is the Covenant of Grace. Noah was not to be punished and destroyed with the others, because "With thee will I establish my covenant" (*Genesis 6:18*). Naturally the immediate deliverance is from the flood; but as the flood is the punishment for sin, it is hard to exclude an anticipation of a final and complete deliverance. Explicitly in the following chapter, it says, "Thee have I seen righteous before me" (*Genesis 7:1*). The underlying motif therefore is sin and salvation, not merely a flood and escape from drowning. But if this be the case, one cannot suppose that Noah achieved heaven on the ground that he instituted civil government.

In the second place, it is hard to find any reference to civil government at all. Chapter 9 does indeed mention capital punishment; but this can be inflicted, and was inflicted, by the family of the murdered man. This supposition is strengthened by the word "brother" in *Genesis 9:5*. Civil government simply does not appear. Instead, if anyone wishes to exclude salvation from sin, the passage becomes simply a covenant or promise not to cause another worldwide flood. But though this is the immediate concern, such an interpretation discounts the cause and purpose of the flood.

It is on the Abrahamic covenant that Dispensationalism most obviously founders. A supposed antithesis between the Abrahamic covenant and the Mosaic dispensation, plus the antithesis and mutual incompatibility between both and the New Testament covenant of grace, is a contradiction of both Testaments. Even in the so-called Mosaic dispensation, *Deuteronomy 1:8* and *4:31* briefly and partially, yet unmistakably, appeal to the covenant with Abraham. In an earlier passage, Moses prays for forgiveness on the basis of the promise to Abraham (*Exodus 32:13*). More clearly, *Leviticus 26:42* specifies the Abrahamic covenant as the basis for God's dealing with the Israelites after the Exodus. The unity of the covenant and its application during the time of David is expressed in *Psalms 105:8-10*: "He hath remembered his covenant for ever, the word which he commanded to a thousand generations. Which covenant he made with Abraham, and his oath unto Isaac; and confirmed the same unto Jacob for a law, and to Israel for an everlasting covenant." Note that it is an everlasting covenant, one that did not cease at the Exodus.

But of course the clearest and most important passage is *Galatians 3:6-9,17*: "Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham. And the scripture, for seeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed. So that they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham . . . And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect."

The first few verses of this quotation show that the elect in New Testament times are saved on the basis of the Abrahamic covenant and are counted as children of the patriarch. Further, these verses state that God's declaration to Abraham was in essence the very gospel that Paul preached. Not only so, but at the time of Abraham God explained to him that the covenant included the Gentiles. In the next place, Paul expressly affirms that the Mosaic

"dispensation" could not disannul the Abrahamic covenant that four hundred and thirty years earlier had been confirmed in Christ. *In Christ*, no less. The Mosaic ritual, Paul explains, was a temporary arrangement necessary because of the sins of the Israelites. It was to cease when the Messiah should come. Even during the Mosaic administration, the Abrahamic covenant was not disannulled, set aside, invalidated, or made of no effect. The Abrahamic covenant was operative all through the alleged dispensation of law. No one was ever saved by keeping the law. No one ever kept the law. Salvation, now, then, and always has been by grace through faith. Hence from the fall of Adam there has been one, just one continuing Covenant of Grace.

This unmasks another subsidiary though important instance in Scofield's footnote to *Matthew* 16:18: "Israel was a true church, but not in any sense the New Testament church—the only point of similarity being that both were 'called out' [ek-klesia], and by the same God. All else is contrast." But not all else is contrast. Israel and the New Testament Gentiles were not only as a matter of fact called out by the same God, but they were called out to the same salvation from sin. This salvation in both cases depended on faith in the same promises. To say otherwise, as Scofield does, is to imply that either David or Cornelius failed to arrive in Heaven.

Book Review

A Predestination Primer by John H. Gerstner (Winona Lake, Indiana: Alpha Publications, 1979 [1960], 51 pages, \$1.95). Reviewed by Garrett P. Johnson.

Dr. Gerstner is professor of Church History and Government at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary. He is also a minister of the apostate United Presbyterian Church. One is not surprised, then, by the fact that Dr. Gerstner's *parvum opus* on predestination is a defense of free will and an attack on divine sovereignty. The book contains many errors that are commonly preached in "Reformed" churches and seminary classrooms today. For that

reason, a brief examination of these errors could be quite instructive.

In chapter one, Gerstner stipulates a distinction between the terms "foreordination" and "predestination." He writes, "Predestination is that part of foreordination which deals with the actions of free moral agents, be they angels, men, or devils" (6). In describing a falling, inanimate object, Gerstner says, "It therefore does not pertain to predestination but it is a part of foreordination, merely" (6). This seems to be a distinction foreign to Scripture. The King James uses both "foreordain" and "predestinate" when referring to persons. See, for example, *1 Peter* 1:20 and *Romans* 8:29. Moreover, each word translates a different Greek word. Therefore, Gerstner's stipulated usage does not reflect scriptural usage and should not be assumed to do so.

In this same chapter, a more serious problem occurs when Gerstner says, "reprobation is usually regarded as a permissive decree..." for "God predestinates the acts of sinful men by ordaining all the circumstances which lead to the sinner's choice of evil.... God in this instance refrains from positive action. He does not change the heart of the individual, ... but on the contrary leaves the individual to himself" (7). In confusion, he cites *John* 1:12, 13, and 14:6 to prove that election and reprobation are asymmetrical: God actively acts in election, but merely permits evil choices and acts resulting in reprobation. But none of the verses demonstrates a permissive, "negative" decree in God. The idea that God does not positively determine moral evil, but merely permits the sinner to act on his own is a very common teaching found in *The Writings of James Arminius* (Baker, 1977). Arminius wrote: "God is the permitter of sin, ... in that He leaves to the creature the free disposition of his own influence" (Book 3, 450). These statements are contradicted by numerous scripture verses: "The king's heart [*i.e.* mind] is in the hand of the Lord.... He turneth it whithersoever he will" (*Proverbs* 21:1). "The preparations of the heart in man, and the answer of the tongue is from the Lord" (*Proverbs* 16:1); "He turned their heart to hate his people, to deal subtly with his servants" (*Psalms* 105:25); "And the Lord said to Moses ... I will harden [Pharaoh's]

heart, that he shall not let the people go" (*Exodus* 4:21); "There was not a city that made peace with the children of Israel, ... for it was of Jehovah to harden their hearts, to come against Israel in battle, that he might utterly destroy them" (*Joshua* 11:19, 20).

These verses, and many more, teach that the sinful acts of men are not the result of a "negative," permissive decree, but rather a positive, active decree in the will of God. Nevertheless, Gerstner claims God "does not change the heart of the individual, or enable or incline the individual to do the virtuous and saving act, but on the contrary leaves the individual to himself. This individual then inclines toward the evil and does the wicked deed which brings about his damnation" (7). By concluding thus, as though sinners acted independently of God, he denies the plain teaching of Scripture and is deserving of Calvin's rebuke. For Calvin wrote: "It is easy to conclude how foolish and frail is the support of divine justice afforded by the suggestion that evils come to be not by His will, but merely by His permission. Of course, so far as they are evils, which men perpetrate with their evil mind, ... I admit that they are not pleasing to God. But it is quite a frivolous refuge to say that God otiosely permits them, when Scripture shows Him not only willing but the author of them... Who does not tremble at these judgments with which God works in the hearts of even the wicked whatever He will, rewarding them none the less according to desert? Again it is quite clear from the evidence of Scripture that God works in the hearts of men to incline their wills just as He will, whether to good for His mercy's sake or to evil according to their merits, His judgment being sometimes open and sometimes concealed, but always just" (*Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God*, 176-177).

Chapters 2-5 of Gerstner's book, which together are only slightly longer than chapter 1, contain short discussions of total depravity, inability, the divine initiative, and predestination. These chapters are generally sound. However, in the sixth chapter on "Objections to Predestination," Gerstner displays his confusion once again. In bold defense of free will Gerstner claims that there is "one area [which]

is invulnerable and impervious to anybody and anything, namely, the sovereignty of our own will.... Not even Almighty God, once he has given me this faculty of choice, can make me, coerce me, force me to choose" (29). Perhaps *Daniel* 4:35 is an appropriate response to this humanistic declaration of independence: "And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, what doest thou?"

Gerstner objects when a person says that "predestination renders an act certain and makes it impossible that the actor will do otherwise" (30). Apparently Gerstner abhors the idea of "the actor" being incapable of resisting God's will. He says this "makes the actor a machine, taking away his freedom" (30). This statement illustrates the confusion in Gerstner's mind. The difference between men and machines is not some alleged—and unscriptural—freedom, but consciousness. Because the Bible denies the power of contrary choice to man, Gerstner believes that man becomes a machine. He never defines the term "machine." The missing definition is essential to the argument, and Gerstner expects the reader to provide it. His argument becomes increasingly invalid when he concludes, "If God forced the will it would no longer be a will" (29). Now when Jesus says, "No man can come to me except the Father draw him," is it not clear that a man must be forced by God against his dead, evil will to believe on Christ? In *John* 6:44, the word "draw," *elkuo*, literally means to *drag* or to *take* for oneself. Liddell and Scott inform us that it means "draw, drag, with collat. notion of force or exertion." God must actively drag unregenerate men whose minds are not subject to the law of God to choose Jesus. If Gerstner is displeased with this idea then his dispute is with the Holy Spirit, for he chose the word.

In the latter part of chapter six, Gerstner's infralapsarian and unscriptural notion of a permissive reprobation leads to even odder implications. He says, "if men are left to themselves they will perish while he [God] pleads with them to believe and be saved" (35). Here Gerstner confuses God's decretive will with his preceptive will. The

preceptive will or the Gospel *command* "to believe and be saved" he takes to be a secret desire of God's that what he has determined will never come to pass, will come to pass. Like Arminius, Gerstner simply imputes stupidity to God. His confusion can be seen in the following quotation: "It is a perfectly legitimate question to ask why God strives with men whom he knows and has predestinated should perish.... [We] wonder why God ...continues to work with [the reprobate] to persuade them to believe" (36). Gerstner bombards the reader with his paradoxes, and then concludes with a blatant falsehood: "[A]re we able to discover why God, who knows the futility of certain endeavors to convert certain persons, does proceed to make these endeavors which he knows are going to be futile ...? As we have said, it is only the wickedness of the human heart and not the decree of God which causes men to reject ... God and his gospel" (36-37). Paul eliminates this incredible confusion in one statement: "God ... causeth ... and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place. For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: to the one [*i.e.* reprobate] we are the savour of death unto death; and to the other [*i.e.*, the elect] the savour of life unto life." Paul teaches that God has a two-fold purpose in the preaching of the Gospel, not one, as Gerstner apparently believes. One is to redeem the elect; the second is to condemn the reprobate, so that seeing, they might not see and hearing, they might not hear, lest they turn from their sins and be saved.

On page 39, Gerstner ends his discussion by recommending Loraine Boettner's *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination* (Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing Company, 1976). This is an excellent volume, although Boettner seems confused on the subject of God and evil. For a more consistent and scriptural treatment of predestination the reader should consult Gordon H. Clark's *Biblical Predestination* and *Predestination in the Old Testament*. These books should be read before reading Gerstner. The Gerstner "Primer" is valuable only for the student who desires an example of the confusion that inhabits the minds of some so-called Calvinists.

The Horror File

"At the same time," Billy concedes, "I am far more tolerant of other kinds of Christians than I once was.... I've found that my beliefs are essentially the same as those of orthodox Roman Catholics, for instance. They believe in the Virgin Birth, and so do I. They believe in the blood atonement of the cross, and so do I. They believe in the Resurrection of Jesus and the coming judgment of God, and so do I. We only differ on some matters of later church tradition."

In the same article, Graham is quoted as saying: "I used to play God, but I can't do that any more. I used to believe that pagans in far-off countries were lost—were going to Hell—if they did not have the Gospel of Jesus Christ preached to them. I no longer believe that. I believe that there are other ways of recognizing the existence of God—through nature, for instance—and plenty of other opportunities, therefore, of saying 'yes' to God."

Graham issued a clarification following the publication of this interview in *McCall's*, and he repudiated the statements attributed to him concerning lost pagans, although, significantly enough, he did not claim he was misquoted. What he did say is this:

On the whole, I am pleased with the accuracy of the interview. However, a few of the statements unfortunately convey meanings which I never intended to suggest in the original, unedited interview. This may be due to my own failure to make myself as plain as I should have.... Whoever sees the footsteps of the Creator in nature can ask the God he does not fully know for help, and I believe God—in ways we may not fully understand—will give that person further light and bring him to a knowledge of the truth that is in Jesus Christ so he will be saved.

More significantly, however, Graham did not repudiate his views about Roman Catholicism. These views explain why he uses Roman Catholics as counselors in his evangelistic campaigns, why he

urged Catholics to reconfirm their confirmation at his 1979 rally in Milwaukee, why the Vatican would not oppose a Graham campaign in Rome, why he does not tell Catholic "converts" that they should leave their parish churches, and why there is now adequate evidence to question Billy Graham's belief of the truth. Paul curses anyone who perverts or preaches any other Gospel than that which Paul preached, and Christians ought to take such curses seriously.

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