TWENTIETH CENTURY DISPENSATIONALISM: WHAT AND WHENCE? – Chapter 1

THE GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM – With an Examination of DISPENSATIONALISM and the "Scofield Bible"

by Philip Mauro: 1928

FOR some of our readers a definition of modern dispensationalism will be a necessity, and for all it will be a convenience. It has been defined as "that system of doctrine which divides the history of God's dealings with the world into periods of time, called 'dispensations'." And it is an essential tenet of the system that "in each dispensation God deals with man upon a plan different from the plan of the other dispensations. Each dispensation is a thing entirely apart from the others, and, when one period succeeds another, there is a radical change of character and governing principles." (Rock or Sand, Which?, by Matthew Francis).

For example, we are told that the present era is "the dispensation of Grace," and the last preceeding was "the dispensation of Law"; and therefore the teachers of the new system strain their ingenuity to show that there was no grace in the preceding "dispensation," and there is no law now; whereas in fact there is all the law of God now that there ever was and there was abundance of the grace of God in the "former times."

In the elaboration of this crude system of error, the greatest harm has been done to the revealed truth of God concerning this present era of the Gospel. According to the prophecies of the Old Testament and the apostolical scriptures of the New as they have always been understood heretofore, this is the long looked for era of the Kingdom o[God, foretold by the

prophets. As Peter stated it, “All the prophets from Samuel, and those that follow after as many as have spoken, have likewise”—he had just referred to Moses “spoken of THESE DAYS” (Acts 3:24); and in his first Epistle he declares that the things now reported by those who preach the gospel with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven, are the very things, including the salvation of Souls, that were ministered in times past by the prophets; and that it was the very same “Spirit of Christ that was in them,” Who now empowers the gospel preachers (I Pet. 1:9-12).

Likewise Paul emphatically declared that in all his preaching (which even the extremest dispensationalists acknowledge as belonging to this era of grace) he had said “none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come” (Acts 26:22).

But according to “dispensational teaching” this age is “a mystery,” a gap of unmeasured length intervening between the past era of the natural Israel, and a future era in which (so it is taught) that apostate nation will be reconstituted and its earthly glories will be restored and enhanced. We are told that “this gospel era was not in the view of the prophets at all;” and this is maintained despite the plain statements of Scripture just cited above and of others to the same effect.

One of the unhappiest of the results of this violent wrenching of the “things the angels desire to look into” from the place to which the word of God assigns them, is that “the Kingdom of God” in its entirety, including “the gospel of the Kingdom” (Mat. 24:14; Acts 20: 25; 28:31) has been transferred bodily from this present age, and “postponed” to an hypothetical and mythical “dispensation” yet to come. This surely is a matter of such importance as to demand the most earnest attention of every saint of God; for it does violence to both the Old Testament and the New.

A RADICAL SYSTEM OF DOCTRINE

It will be readily seen therefore, that we have here to do with a system of teaching which, whether true or false, is of the most radical sort. Hence if true, it is most astonishing that not one of the Godly and spiritual teachers of all the Christian centuries had so much as a glimpse of it; and if false, it is high time its heretical character were exposed and the whole system dealt with accordingly. And inasmuch as it contradicts what every Christian teacher, without a known exception, has held to be the indisputable truth of Scripture concerning the Gospel of God and the Kingdom of God, it clearly belongs in the category of those "divers and strange doctrines," against which we are specially warned (Heb. 13:9). For it is undeniably diverse from all that has been hitherto taught the people of God, and it is altogether "strange" to their ears. This I deem worthy of special emphasis, and hence would ask the reader to keep constantly in mind the fact of the absolute novelty of dispensationalism. For here is modernism in the strictest sense; and it is all the more to be feared and shunned because it comes to us in the guise and garb of strict orthodoxy.

WHENCE CAME THIS MODERN SYSTEM?

As regards the origin of the system: the beginnings thereof and its leading features are found in the writings of those known as "Brethren" (sometimes called "Plymouth Brethren," from the name of the English city where the movement first attracted attention); though it is but fair to state that the best known and most spiritual leaders of that movement – as Darby, Kelly, Newberry, Chapman, Mueller and others, "whose names are in the Book of Life" – never held the "Jewish" character of the Kingdom preached by our Lord and John the Baptist, or the "Jewish" character of the Gospels (especially Matthew), or that the Sermon on the Mount is "law and not grace" and pertains to a future "Jewish" kingdom.

From what I have been able to gather by inquiry of others; (who were "in Christ before me") the new system of doctrine we

are now discussing was first brought to the vicinity of New York by a very gifted and godly man, Mr. Malachi Taylor, (one of the “Brethren”) who taught it with much earnestness and plausibility. That was near the beginning of the present century, either a little before or a little after. And among those who heard and were captivated by it (for truly there is some strange fascination inherent in it) was the late Dr. C. I. Scofield, who was so infatuated with it that he proceeded forthwith to bring out a new edition of the entire Bible, having for its distinctive feature that the peculiar doctrines of this new dispensationalism are woven into the very warp and woof thereof, in the form of notes, headings, subheadings and summaries. There is no doubt whatever that it is mainly to this cleverly executed work that dispensationalism owes its present vogue. For without that aid it doubtless would be clearly seen by all who give close attention to the doctrine, that it is a humanly contrived system that has been imposed upon the Bible, and not a scheme of doctrine derived from it.

A REVIVAL OF ANCIENT RABBINISM

Then as to what this modern system of teaching is, it will be a surprise to most of those who love the Lord Jesus Christ to learn that, in respect to the central and vitally important subject of the Kingdom of God, twentieth century dispensationalism is practically identical with first century rabbinism. For the cardinal doctrine of the Jewish rabbis of Christ’s day was that, according to the predictions of the prophets of lsrael, the purpose and result of the Messiah’s mission would be the re-constituting of the Jewish nation; the re-occupation by them of the land of Palestine; the setting up again of the earthly throne of David; and the exaltation of the people of Israel to the place of supremacy in the world.

Now, seeing that a doctrine is known by its fruits, let us recall what effect this doctrine concerning the Kingdom of God had upon the orthodox Jews who so earnestly believed it in that day. And in view of what it impelled those zealous men to

do, let us ask ourselves if there is not grave reason to fear its effect upon the orthodox Christians who hold and zealously teach it in our day? The effect then was that, when Christ came to His own people proclaiming that the Kingdom of God was at hand, but making it known that that 'Kingdom did not correspond at all to their idea of it; when He said, "My Kingdom is not of this world," and taught that, so far from being Jewish, it was of such sort that a man must be born of the Spirit in order to enter it, then they rejected Him ("received Him not") hated Him, betrayed Him and caused Him to be put to death.

Now let it be carefully noted in this connection, that the apostle Paul, referring to what had been done to Jesus by them "that dwelt at Jerusalem and their rulers," said that the reason for their murderous act was "because they knew Him not, nor yet the voices of the prophets which are read every Sabbath day", and furthermore, that "they have fulfilled them in condemning Him" (Acts 13:27). This plainly declares that it was because the Jewish teachers misinterpreted the messages of the prophets, that they were looking for the restoration of their national greatness instead that which the prophets had really foretold; a spiritual Kingdom ruled by "Jesus Christ of 'the' seed of David raised from the dead" (2 Tim. 2:18).

Have we not therefore, good reason to fear disastrous consequences from the fact that the teachers of the new dispensationalism say the Jewish rabbis were right in their interpretation of the prophecies, that the kingdom foretold by the prophets is an earthly kingdom of Jewish character, and that in fact Christ's mission at that very time was to restore again the earthly Kingdom to Israel? And why then did He not do it? The answer the dispensationalists give to this crucial question is one of the strangest features of the whole system. They say, in effect, that Christ was ready to do it, and that He would have done it, but that when He "offered" them the very thing they were ardently expecting, they (most

inconsistently, it would appear) “refused the offer,” whereupon it was “withdrawn” and the kingdom “postponed to a future dispensation.” And when we ask for the citation of a single Scripture that mentions the alleged “offer,” or its “refusal,” or the alleged “withdrawal” and “postponement,” not a reference is produced. And particularly, when we press the vital question, what, in case the offer had been accepted, would have become of the Cross of Calvary, and the atonement for the sin of the World, the best answer we get is that in that event, “atonement would have been made some other way.” Think of it! “Some other way” than by the Cross !

Now, in view of the above facts, I do most positively insist that, whatever the conclusion one may reach after an examination of the whole subject, there is to begin with, and because of the facts just stated, a very heavy “burden of proof” resting upon those who advocate this novel and radical system of teaching. And specially I insist that, as regards the doctrine of a future restoration of national Israel, with the accompaniment of supreme earthly greatness and dominion, there are two relevant facts that should receive our most serious attention: first, that that doctrine was the very cornerstone of the creed of apostate Judaism in its last stage, and the prime cause of their rejection and crucifixion of Christ; and second, that it made its first appearance among Christians near the end of the nineteenth century. These facts may not settle anything; but certainly they do impose a heavy “burden of proof” upon those who now teach that the apostate Jews were right in their interpretation of the prophets (whose “voices,” the apostle declares, “they knew not,” Ac. 13:27) and that christian teachers and expositors for nineteen centuries were all wrong.

SOME PRESSING QUESTIONS

Moreover, because of the springing up in our midst of this new system of doctrine, certain questions of the deepest interest to the people of God are pressing for an answer at this time.

Among them are the following:

Was it any part of the work of Christ to revive and reconstitute the Jewish nation? to re-establish that people in the land that was once theirs? to revive their system of worship, etc.? Did He come to reinstate the bondwoman and her son in the family of Abraham? and to make the son of the bondwoman to be heir with the son of the free woman? Did He come to raise up again, and to make permanent, that “middle wall of partition” between Jew and Gentile, or to take it away entirely and forever? Did He come to restore the “shadows” of the old covenant, or to abolish them? These are questions of surpassing importance, and they press for settlement at the present time. We are deeply convinced that one of the most urgent matters for the Lord’s servants and people in these last days is to grasp the truth that there is absolutely no salvation of any sort whatever, no hope for any human being, except “through the blood of the everlasting covenant;” that there is nothing but the abiding wrath of God for those who do not stand upon the terms of that covenant; and especially that there is absolutely “no difference” in God’s sight, and in His future plans, between Jew and Gentile.

It is my purpose, in the pages that follow, to seek the scriptural answers to the above, and other questions of like import.