

"A BRIEF SKETCH OF PROGRESSIVE DISPENSATIONALISM"

I. THE CHANGE WHICH IS TAKING PLACE CONCERNING TRADITIONAL DISPENSATIONALISM

- A. There is a growing number of Bible scholars who are espousing a new dispensationalism called "*progressive dispensationalism*."
- B. This newer brand of dispensationalism has been born out of a desire to find common ground with non-dispensationalists and it is a pursuit for unity between dispensational and non-dispensational premillennialists.
- C. The thrust of this newer dispensationalism is to bring itself in line with main stream evangelicalism by focusing on the present *spiritual* aspects of Christ's Kingdom rather than future *literal* fulfillments.
- D. In the fall of 1985 a group of 24 dispensationalists from several Bible colleges gathered in a faculty lounge of Biola University in Atlanta Georgia to discuss issues which divided the evangelical community. This group launched a dispensational study group which has met annually since then as the Evangelical Theological Society. Their meetings have yielded unprecedented discussions between covenant theologians, historical premillennialists, charismatics and the traditional dispensationalists who invited them to the meetings. The number has grown from the initial 24 to over 200 now at the annual meetings. Darrell Bock writes:

"Replacing the bellicose spirit of earlier eras, and even among some today, has been a climate of respectful exchange."

II. THE CONSTITUENTS WHO ARE PRESENTLY PROMOTING PROGRESSIVE DISPENSATIONALISM

- A. Robert Saucy may be regarded as the father of the movement. In his book *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism* he has written:

"In our opinion there is a mediating position between non-dispensationalism and traditional dispensationalism that provides a better understanding of Scripture."

- B. Darrell Bock and Craig Blaising have co-authored *Progressive Dispensationalism*. These men are champions of the movement. They have written:

"One of the tragedies of the current Christian evangelical scene is the divisive tendencies present in many strands of the community. When the subtradition is more crucial than the Christian tradition, we fragment the unity to which God has called us and for which the Lord intercedes."

III. THE CONTENTIONS OF THOSE WHO ARE PROMOTING PROGRESSIVE DISPENSATIONALISM

A. It is the contention of those in this movement that traditional dispensationalism involved a complicated hermeneutic or system of interpretation which has undergone various changes and is out-dated with its charts and information about the end-times. In his article "Charting Dispensationalism" Darrell Bock lists three types of dispensationalism:

1. Scofieldian Dispensationalism -

This was popularized by C.I. Scofield who was influenced by the teachings of those within the Brethren movement in England in the early nineteenth century. Scofield's teachings influenced others such as Lewis Sperry Chafer who founded Evangelical Theological College which became Dallas Theological Seminary.

2. Revised Dispensationalism -

This brand came about in the middle of the 1900's and was popularized by men such as Alva McClain, John Walvoord, Charles Ryrie and Dwight Pentecost. This revised form was to clarify positions held by those of the Scofield era and resulted in the publication of the New Scofield Bible in 1967. Bock contends that revised dispensationalism saw more continuity between the church and Israel and the promises of God to Israel are associated more closely with the church. He said, "no longer is there a great distinction in the work of God for two peoples as in the Scofieldian Dispensationalism."

3. Progressive Dispensationalism -

This newer form sees more continuity between Israel and the church in God's plan. Bock and Blaising stated: "the older idea that the church was a parenthetical break between God's Jewish work in the Old Testament and God's Jewish work in the future is being replaced by the assertion that the church, although different, has much in common with Israel."

- B. It is the contention of these progressive dispensationalists that dispensationalists and non-dispensationalists both share the same hermeneutical method or system of interpretation. They contend that both use the grammatical - historical approach but they see the matter of "*literal*" verses "*spiritual*" as a dead issue. **Here's a red flag!!**
- C. Progressive dispensationalists contend that Christ inaugurated the Kingdom of God in a **spiritual** aspect with His first advent. They see some literal aspects to be fulfilled in the future. But the Kingdom is either here in the **present**, in the **future** or both present and **future**. Progressive dispensationalists view the Kingdom as both **present** and **future**.
- D. Progressive dispensationalists contend that predictive prophecy is fulfilled both literally as well as **typologically**. They view the prophecies of Christ up to His ascension as having an earthly, visible fulfillment, but they see future Kingdom promises as having an **invisible** and **spiritual** fulfillment which is now

realized as a type.

IV. THE CONFUSION AND REFUTATION OF PROGRESSIVE DISPENSATIONALISM

- A. Progressive dispensationalists believe that Christ inaugurated the **spiritual** aspects of the Davidic Kingdom at His first advent. They see Christ **presently** reigning as King at the right hand of the Father which is equated with the throne of David.

Refutation: The Bible says that Christ sat down at the right hand of God's throne (Heb. 12:2). Presently He is serving as our High Priest only (Heb. 7:23-28). Progressive dispensationalists fail to properly distinguish between the Father's throne and Christ's Davidic throne which He will sit on at His Second Coming (Matt. 25:31). The parable of the pounds makes it clear that Christ will receive His Kingdom when He returns (Lk. 19:11-27). Moreover it should be noted that Christ's first act after His ascension was to send the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:33). Yet this is nowhere mentioned in the Davidic Covenant (II Sam. 7:8-17).

- B. Progressive dispensationalists view the New Covenant as having been inaugurated as well although it will not be fully realized until the millennial reign.

Refutation: The New Covenant is based upon the death of Christ and His blood is the basis for our present blessings but the New Covenant is not made with the church, it is made with Israel and its fulfillment is not spiritual but literal with Israel during the millennial reign (Jer. 31:31-34).

- C. Progressive dispensationalists have abandoned the teaching that the church is a distinct body from Israel and that God has distinct purposes for each of these.

Refutation: The Bible teaches that the union of Jews and Gentiles in the body of Christ was a mystery in the O. T. (Eph. 3:5,6). After the formation of the church at Pentecost Israel is referred to as a nation in contrast to the Gentiles (Acts 3:12; 4:8,10; 5:21). The fact that Paul prayed for Israel shows that he regarded them as a distinct group and separate from the church (Rom. 10:1). Note I Cor. 10:32.

- D. Progressive dispensationalism asserts itself to be a new development within the sphere of dispensationalism. Those in this movement view God's promises to be progressive in their fulfillment and those promises are being *partially* fulfilled *now* in the church age.

Refutation: Progressive dispensationalism is a departure from traditional dispensationalism rather than a refinement concerning an earlier position within dispensationalism. The failure within this movement is the abandonment of a "**literal** hermeneutic or system of interpretation for a "**spiritual and allegorical**" hermeneutic. When a literal hermeneutic is abandoned the Word of God can be made to mean anything.

WORKS CITED

- Beacham, Roy E. "Progressive Dispensationalism: An Overview and Analysis."
Winston Salem, NC: Handout in Piedmont Bible College Grad School Division,
March 1997.
- Bock, Darrell L. "Charting Dispensationalism." AOL Article: Christianity Today,
November 1997.
- Couch, Mal. **Dictionary of Premillennial Theology**. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications,
1996.
- Elwell, Walter A. "Dispensationalisms of the Third Kind." AOL Article: Christianity Today,
November 1997