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SOME MAJOR PROBLEMS IN DISPENSATIONAL INTERPRETATION

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The purpose of this dissertation is to discuss and attempt to clarify some of the major problems confronting dispensationalism. The author believes that dispensationalism can be successfully defended against the arguments of its detractors, and that it is a live theological option. Dispensationalism is treated as a method of interpreting the Bible, a system of theology, and a philosophy of history.

A thorough foundation is laid by distinguishing dispensationalism from opposing views, by setting forth the basic beliefs of dispensationalists, and by explaining the essential elements of a dispensation.

The broad bases of dispensationalism are shown to have their roots in history, hermeneutics, philology, philosophy, the Biblical covenants, soteriology, ecclesiology, and eschatology. Dispensationalism is shown to be logically necessary, since it is the only satisfactory method of harmonizing many apparent contradictions in the Bible.

From the standpoint of philosophy, dispensationalism presents a satisfying world view. While God has only one main purpose--to glorify Himself--He has several programs to accomplish His goal. Dispensationalism does not interrupt historical progress, but furthers it in several ways.

Far from being a novel view, dispensationalism in its

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primitive form may be traced to the church fathers, and antedates covenant theology, its chief rival. After the Protestant Reformation, dispensationalism developed more rapidly, and evidenced striking similarities to its modern form. Modern dispensationalism did not begin with John Darby, but evidently was the product of many inquiring minds. It can be traced at least as far back as 1827, when Henry Drummond published his work on prophecy.

Law and grace are carefully defined and contrasted, and it is shown that the present dispensation strongly emphasizes grace, and excludes the Mosaic law as a rule of life. But no dispensation, including the present one, is without a basic form of law. Nor does any dispensation, including the Mosaic, exclude the operation of God's grace. The two concepts are incompatible only as distinctive rules of life and ways of salvation.

Salvation has always been by one method alone. In every dispensation, salvation has been by God's grace, through man's faith, and on the basis of Christ's redemption. But the object of faith, while it has always included God the Father, has not always explicitly included His Son, Jesus Christ. The content of faith has increased with the progress of God's revelation. The expression of faith has changed somewhat from economy to economy. Man has constantly expressed saving faith by obedience (with the possible exception of the first dispensation), but he has not

always obeyed the same rules. The way of salvation under each economy is discussed, with special attention being given to salvation under the dispensation of Mosaic law.

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A Dissertation

Presented to

the Faculty of the Department of Systematic Theology

Dallas Theological Seminary

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In Partial Fulfillment
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"In practically all denominations . . . in America."² In a survey conducted by the writer, it was learned that at least 88 per cent of the Protestant denominations in America are directly involved in dispensationalism to a greater or lesser degree.³ Among these groups are at least half of America's Protestant church members. It is also clear from the survey that very few denominations are made up entirely of dispensationalists. But this method of interpreting the Bible has made remarkable progress while crossing denominational lines.

¹ C. Norman Kraus, Dispensationalism in America, cover jacket.

² Jesus Wilson Hedges, Christ's Kingdom and Coming, p. xi.

³ This assumes that the groups not heard from follow the same pattern as the 115 American Protestant denominations upon which these figures are based. See Appendix I for complete details of the survey.