

DISPENSATIONALISM AND FREE GRACE: INTIMATELY LINKED PART 1

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INTRODUCTION

About a decade ago I was introduced to Free Grace theology. At that time I understood *discipleship* to mean “being a Christian,” *the kingdom* to often mean “the church,” *reward* to mean “free gift,” *free gift* to mean “conditional gift,” *justified by works* (from James 2) to mean “justified by faith evidenced by works,” and *believe* to mean whatever I wanted it to mean at the time.¹ When I was introduced to Free Grace, I started seeing scholars like Joseph Dillow, Zane Hodges, and Bob Wilkin use the term *kingdom* to mean “kingdom,” *believe* to mean “believe,” *reward* to mean “reward,” etc., and I was dumbfounded. My thought process went something like, “This may provide an answer to the contradictions I was growing uncomfortable with, but do we have to *redefine* everything to make it work?” The irony certainly does not escape me.

It was not long until I realized that the Bible was really a much more simple book than I had imagined, and that it really was written to be understood. A non-literal

¹“Many people understand John 6:47 as though it read: ‘He who whatchamacallits has everlasting life.’ Since they don’t know what whatchamacallit is, they don’t know if they have everlasting life or not.” Robert N. Wilkin, “Beware of Confusion about Faith” *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* vol. 18, no. 34 (Spring 2005): 3. Wilkin here describes perfectly the confusion I had.

approach to Scripture is largely responsible for the widespread confusion and the resulting reluctance of the layperson to study the Bible without undue dependence upon commentaries. The popularity of paraphrases and dynamic equivalence versions of the Bible such as *The Message* and the *New International Version (NIV)* is largely due to this misconception, and reflects a growing pre-reformational attitude that the unlearned cannot be trusted with the Word of God without a mediator.²

I have found over the last several years that much of the task of a Free Grace teacher is simply to unravel the confusion woven by a long tradition of non-literal interpretation, to help students pay attention to context, and to let words mean what they say. In doing so, I am reminded of dispensational works such as *Prophecy Made Plain* by C. I. Scofield, where the author shows that prophecy is not impossible to understand if we simply pay attention to context and let the principle of literal interpretation rule. Soteriology is no different.

As a pastor, I have introduced many people to Free Grace theology in discipleship settings, and those who have accepted it have *without fail* commented that Free Grace makes the Bible much easier to understand. This

²This perspective is also in evidence in MacArthur's discussion of early dispensationalists: "Many of these men were self-taught in theology and were professionals in secular occupations. Darby and Scofield, for example, were attorneys, and Larkin was a mechanical draftsman. They were laymen whose teachings gained enormous popularity largely through grass roots enthusiasm. Unfortunately some of these early framers of dispensationalism were not as precise or discriminating as they might have been had they had the benefit of a more complete theological education." John MacArthur, *The Gospel According to the Apostles* (Nashville: Word Publishing, 2000), 223. This is the updated edition of *Faith Works*. Contrast this with Gerstner's assessment of Darby: "John Nelson Darby, for example, was a masterfully knowledgeable man, with expertise in languages and an intimate familiarity with the content of the Bible." John Gerstner, *Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth: A Critique of Dispensationalism* (Brentwood, TN: Wolgemuth and Hyatt Publishers Inc., 1991), 75. Darby's *capability* as a scholar is not in question, but the fact that he was self taught is likely to have contributed to him having the freedom to systematize the history of the Bible from the perspective of literal interpretation. Thankfully he was not taught in the allegorical method the seminaries of the time were teaching.

has long been recognized as a benefit of dispensationalism as well. This is plainly admitted in Arthur Pink's introduction to his work against dispensationalism:

[Dispensationalism is] a device wherein the wily serpent appears as an angel of light, feigning to "make the Bible a new book" by *simplifying much in it which perplexes the spiritually unlearned* (emphasis added).³

In Pink's understanding, the simplicity and accessibility afforded by dispensationalism is outweighed by the desire to apply every portion of Scripture directly to the church age. Thus, Covenant Theology's unification of Scripture was preferable to him. I have found this to be a common theme (at least to some extent) among many (perhaps all) who have written in defense of Lordship Salvation. This is true even among Lordship Salvation proponents who embrace some form of dispensationalism. This will be demonstrated in the present series of articles.

BACKGROUND AND NEED FOR THE PRESENT STUDY

Dave Anderson's articles in the *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*, "The Soteriological Impact of Augustine's Change from Premillennialism to Amillennialism: Parts 1 and 2"⁴ demonstrated conclusively that Augustine's abandonment of premillennialism produced a profound change in his soteriology. Out of an amillennial interpretation of Matt 24:13, "But he who endures to the end shall be saved," Augustine's doctrine of Perseverance of the Saints was born, and perseverance in faithful obedience became a condition for final salvation. Naturally, the reformer John Calvin, who depended

³ Arthur Pink, *A Study of Dispensationalism: And the Ninety-Five Theses Against Dispensationalism*, <http://www.pbministries.org/books/pink/Dispensationalism/dispensationalism.htm>. Last accessed February, 10, 2011.

⁴ Spring and Autumn 2002.

heavily upon Augustine for his doctrine, adopted both amillennialism and Perseverance of the Saints. Calvin's work has obviously had profound impact on many.

Building upon Anderson's conclusions, I will attempt to show that premillennialism is only one of many aspects of dispensationalism that has a significant impact on soteriology, as can be shown by the near universal acceptance of Lordship Salvation among covenant premillennialists. The cause-and-effect relationship between dispensationalism and Free Grace is so clear that dispensationalism is regularly attacked in works on soteriology written from the Lordship Salvation perspective. I will demonstrate in this series of articles that this is a legitimate connection because, unless many essential tenets of normative dispensationalism are abandoned, Lordship Salvation cannot be maintained.

Before proceeding, a definition of normative dispensationalism is necessary. While normative dispensationalists disagree on various things, virtually all would agree upon the following points:

1. Literal, historical, grammatical interpretation should be applied to *all* portions of Scripture.
2. The church and Israel are distinct peoples in God's program for the ages.
3. The Lord Jesus Christ will return bodily to earth and reign on David's throne in Jerusalem for one-thousand years.
4. The underlying purpose of God's dealings with the world is His glory, not merely the salvation of man, thus the Scripture goes far beyond evangelism.

5. The Christian is free from the law⁵ in its entirety for both justification (Gal 2:16) and sanctification (Gal 5:18).⁶

When discussing normative dispensationalism, these descriptions will define my usage.

A study of this nature is especially relevant today because dispensationalism is becoming more and more rare. *The Reformation Study Bible*, largely seen as Covenant Theology's answer to the *Scofield Reference Bible* is gaining popularity. Progressive dispensationalism (a non-dispensational system)⁷ is replacing normative dispensationalism in some historically dispensational seminaries, including Dallas Theological Seminary which produces hundreds of graduates who go on to become pastors every year.

And while there are some non-dispensational Free Grace scholars (R. T. Kendall comes to mind), Free Grace is extremely uncommon among non-dispensationalists⁸ because Free Grace is largely dependent upon the principles of literal interpretation and careful attention to historical context that are fundamental to dispensationalism.

⁵ I recognize that as believers, we have the law of Christ to fulfill (Gal 6:2), but this is a law of liberty (Jas 1:25; 2:12), fulfilled by love (part of the fruit of the spirit which is produced in freedom from law Rom 13:8, Gal 5:18-23), and is in contrast to the law of commandments contained in ordinances which has been abolished through Christ's fulfillment of it on the cross (Eph 2:13-16). Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty (Col 3:17).

⁶ For points 1-4 see Charles Ryrie, *Dispensationalism* (Chicago: Moody, 2007), 45-48. For point 5, see *The Ryrie Study Bible: New Testament New American Standard Version* (Chicago: Moody, 1977), notes on Romans 7, pp. 273-74. See also Alva J. McClain, *Law and Grace: A Study of New Testament Concepts as They Relate to the Christian Life*, (Chicago: Moody, 1991).

⁷ Progressive dispensationalism adopts a complementary (non-literal) hermeneutic in certain prophetic passages, asserts that Christ is already reigning on David's throne, and denies the distinction between the church and Israel, all are fundamental aspects of dispensationalism. For more information regarding this stance, see Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, chapter 9.

⁸ MacArthur's statement about this is not far from accurate: "No covenant theologian defends the no-lordship gospel" (MacArthur, *Apostles*, 222).

These articles are not intended to be an exhaustive defense of dispensationalism,⁹ but simply to show that Free Grace and consistent, normative dispensationalism are intimately linked. It is my hope that this article will encourage further study by more capable scholars.

In these articles, I will provide a brief survey of the ways dispensationalism has come under attack in the soteriological literature produced by some key proponents of Lordship Salvation,¹⁰ followed by a look at how various non-dispensational approaches to interpretation have yielded Lordship Salvation in these and other authors. Lastly I will argue that Lordship Salvation does not hold up under consistent dispensationalism, and that Free Grace is the natural outcome of a consistently literal interpretation of Scripture.

Before proceeding, I want to be careful to note that I do not believe that every consistent dispensationalist is consistently Free Grace. Many consistent dispensationalists hold to a soft Perseverance of the Saints, stating that every true believer will produce *some* good works. This is usually based on their understanding of Jas 2:14-26. My contention is that Lordship Salvation, an extreme view, cannot hold up under dispensationalism, and that dispensationalism *most naturally* results in consistent Free Grace.

⁹ Whatever the historical argument, surely the burden of proof is upon those who suggest that we should *not* interpret any portion of the Bible literally, respecting the original intention of the authors.

¹⁰ Due to limited space, I will be focusing on the writings of John MacArthur, John Gerstner, and Arthur Pink, but the theme of attacking Free Grace and dispensationalism in the same breath can be seen in the works of John Piper, R.C. Sproul, B.B. Warfield, and many others.

JOHN MACARTHUR AND DISPENSATIONALISM

John MacArthur clearly claims to be a Dispensationalist in both *The Gospel According to Jesus*¹¹ and *The Gospel According to the Apostles*.¹² There is no doubt that he *does* hold to the fundamental distinction between the church and Israel (though he does not always apply this division consistently), and in surveying his works I have never found anything to suggest otherwise. I want to state clearly that I take MacArthur's statements here at face value and do believe Dr. MacArthur to be a dispensationalist of sorts. However, as will be shown, the view he presents in *The Gospel According to Jesus* and elsewhere is not consistent with, and even hostile to, *normative* dispensationalism.

Dispensationalism has come under attack (and suffered much) as a result of the Lordship Salvation controversy, as MacArthur recognizes:

The lordship debate has had a devastating effect on dispensationalism. Because no-lordship theology [a pejorative term for Free Grace] is so closely associated with dispensationalism, many have imagined a cause-and-effect relationship between the two.¹³

¹¹ "Dispensationalism is a fundamentally correct system of understanding God's program through the ages. Its chief element is a recognition that God's plan for Israel is not superseded by or swallowed up in His program for the church. Israel and the church are separate entities, and God will restore national Israel under the earthly rule of Jesus as Messiah. I accept and affirm this tenet because it emerges from a consistently literal interpretation of Scripture (while still recognizing the presence of legitimate metaphor in the Bible). And in that regard, I consider myself a traditional premillennial dispensationalist" (John F. MacArthur Jr., *The Gospel According to Jesus*, Revised and Expanded Edition [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988, 1994], 31).

¹² "It may surprise some readers to know that the issue of dispensationalism is one area where Charles Ryrie, Zane Hodges, and I share some common ground. We are all dispensationalists" (MacArthur, *Apostles*, 219).

¹³ *Ibid.*, 221.

One of the most obvious examples of attacks on dispensationalism based on soteriology is Gerstner's book, *Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth*, especially chapters 11-13.¹⁴ Another is Reginald Kimbro's anti-dispensational work *The Gospel According to Dispensationalism*,¹⁵ which patterns its name after MacArthur's *The Gospel According to Jesus*. Anecdotally, when I was speaking with a friend about Free Grace, I had encouraged her to look into some of Dr. Chafer's works. The following week, she told me that she asked for them at her church library, and that she was told all of Chafer's books had been banned in their church after the publishing of *The Gospel According to Jesus*.

It is difficult to see that the attacks on dispensationalism that followed *The Gospel According to Jesus* were merely an unintended consequence. The words dispensationalism, and dispensationalist, are a common occurrence in the book¹⁶ and there are only two short paragraphs¹⁷ where the words were used in a positive sense. Even in those cases, MacArthur is careful to associate only with one tenet of dispensationalism (the separation of the church and Israel),¹⁸ and these brief paragraphs are sandwiched between an open critique of normative dispensationalism.

¹⁴ John Gerstner, *Wrongly Dividing*, 209-63.

¹⁵ Reginald Kimbro, *The Gospel According to Dispensationalism* (Toronto: Wittenberg Publications, 1995).

¹⁶ See especially pp. 31-35, 96-97, 176-77, and 247-48.

¹⁷ The first and second paragraphs of p. 31.

¹⁸ See also the following quote from *The Gospel According to the Apostles*, p. 223, "As I have noted, the uniqueness of dispensationalism is that we see a distinction in Scripture between Israel and the church. That *singular* perspective, common to all dispensationalists, sets us apart from nondispensationalists. It is, by the way, the *only element* of traditional dispensationalist teaching that is yielded as a result of literal interpretation of biblical texts [this claim will be addressed in the next installment of this series]. It also is the only tenet virtually all dispensationalists hold in common. That is why I have singled it out as the characteristic that defines dispensationalism. When I speak of 'pure' dispensationalism, *I'm referring to this one common denominator*—the Israel-church distinction" (emphasis added).

In fact, MacArthur repeatedly and directly condemns many of the fundamentals of normative dispensationalism. One quote in particular has gained some attention:

There is a tendency, however, for dispensationalists to get carried away with compartmentalizing truth to the point that they can make unbiblical distinctions. An almost obsessive desire to categorize everything neatly has lead various dispensationalist interpreters to draw hard lines not only between the church and Israel, but also between *salvation and discipleship, the church and the kingdom, Christ's preaching and the apostolic message, faith and repentance, and the age of law and the age of grace* (emphasis added).¹⁹

This quote is particularly relevant because it appears in the first chapter, entitled, “A Look at the Issues”, and is presented as foundational to his argument. Elsewhere, MacArthur criticizes the distinction between “the gospel of the kingdom” and “the gospel of the grace of God” found in the *Scofield Reference Bible*.²⁰ Throughout *The Gospel According to Jesus*, Luke 19:10 is used by MacArthur to suggest that all of Jesus’s teachings were related to the offer of eternal life.²¹ This reveals MacArthur’s soteriological view of history (the view of Covenant Theology), as opposed to the doxological view of dispensationalism.

In his criticism of L. S. Chafer on pp. 31-32, MacArthur also perpetuates the widely debunked myth that dispensationalists teach different means of justification salvation in the various dispensations (by law-keeping in the Age of Law and by grace through faith in the Age of Grace). While there were some statements made by Chafer and Scofield which left some with this impression, those

¹⁹ MacArthur, *Jesus*, 31.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 96.

²¹ As the Scripture index of *The Gospel According to Jesus* shows, Luke 19:10 appears more than any other verse outside of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew and the call to discipleship in 14:26-33. See especially pp. 33, 80, 96, and 103, where MacArthur clearly quotes the verse for the purpose of applying an evangelistic purpose to all of Jesus’s teaching.

statements were later revised so that their clear intention was evident. To perpetuate this myth, as is so commonly done, is to intentionally misrepresent their views. Every normative dispensationalist that I am aware of teaches that justification by grace through faith has been God's program since the fall of man.²²

Lastly, MacArthur's criticism of specific writers is reserved exclusively for dispensational scholars such as Chafer, Ryrie, Hodges, Constable, Scofield, Wilkin, and Thieme while quoting from nearly forty non-dispensational (and often quite anti-dispensational) scholars, and only one dispensationalist²³ for support in his disparagement of Free Grace. Many times, the specific works criticized were written in defense of dispensationalism.²⁴ The reasons stated above, along with one major purpose of *The Gospel According to Jesus* being to proclaim a non-dispensational view of Jesus's earthly ministry, has led many (including the present author) to conclude that it is as much an attack on normative dispensationalism as it is an attack on Free Grace.²⁵

In *The Gospel According to the Apostles*, MacArthur is careful to express that it is only "one arm of the dispensationalist movement"²⁶ that promotes the Free Grace

²² Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 121-40.

²³ H.A. Ironside. See MacArthur, *Jesus*, 176. It should be noted that Gerstner accuses Ironside of antinomianism (Gerstner's pejorative term for Free Grace) as well and points out statements made where Ironside wrote that a true Christian can persist in the practice of sin until death, which may come early due to such sinful behavior. See Gerstner, *Wrongly Dividing*, 216-17. It would be fair to say that Ironside was at least inconsistent in his Lordship Salvation.

²⁴ For example: Clarence Larken, *Dispensational Truth and Rightly Dividing the Word*, Charles Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today*, E. Schuyler English, et al., *The New Scofield Reference Bible*, L. S. Chafer, *Grace and He That Is Spiritual*.

²⁵ This intention is especially clear in his statement, "Frankly, some mongrel species of dispensationalism [which he has defined as the dispensationalism of Ryrie, Chafer, and others] ought to die, and I will be happy to join the cortege" (MacArthur, *Apostles*, 221).

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 34.

message. Later, he openly states that it is the dispensationalism of Chafer that has yielded Free Grace theology:

Who are the defenders of no-lordship dispensationalism? Nearly all of them stand in a tradition that has its roots in the teaching of Lewis Sperry Chafer. I will show in Appendix 2 that Dr. Chafer is the father of modern no-lordship teaching. Every prominent figure on the no-lordship side descends from Dr. Chafer's spiritual lineage. Though Dr. Chafer did not invent or originate any of the key elements of no-lordship teaching, he codified the system of dispensationalism on which all contemporary no-lordship doctrine is founded. That system is the common link between those who attempt to defend no-lordship doctrine on theological grounds."²⁷

This is precisely the point that I have been making.

In his appendix entitled "What is Dispensationalism", MacArthur is careful to define his dispensationalism as dealing with the separation of the church and Israel only. He states, "*Dispensationalism is a system of biblical interpretation that sees a distinction between God's program for Israel and His dealings with the church. It's really as simple as that*"²⁸ (italics in original). It is, then, only by excluding all other elements of dispensationalism, that MacArthur can call himself a dispensationalist.

More recently, MacArthur has claimed the term "leaky dispensationalist" and has often stated plainly that he is much closer to covenant theologians than he is to most dispensationalists. In an interview with John Piper and Justin Taylor, MacArthur states:

When I wrote [*The Gospel According to Jesus*] I didn't know anybody outside of my circles really, and I didn't know how this book would be received. But Jim Boice agreed to write the foreword, and John Piper wrote an endorsement

²⁷ Ibid., 35.

²⁸ Ibid., 219.

that was absolutely stunning to me, because I was really not moving in Reformed circles at that time. I was a leaky dispensationalist. That was my world, and I realized that I was much more one of you than I was one of them.²⁹

In other words, the more MacArthur is entrenched into Lordship Salvation, the more he finds himself siding with non-dispensationalists over and against dispensationalists. This can also be seen in his regular appearances at the Ligonier conference and other anti-dispensational groups. It is strange, then, that MacArthur would state that the connection between the two was simply imagined.³⁰ If the cause-and-effect relationship between dispensationalism and Free Grace is imagined, as MacArthur asserts, why would he have been so adamant about rejecting many aspects of dispensationalism in his books about soteriology? Why would MacArthur find himself more closely allied with anti-dispensationalists? And why would MacArthur adopt terms like “leaky dispensationalist” to define his views? Surely MacArthur recognizes that the connection between dispensationalism and Free Grace is more than coincidental.

JOHN GERSTNER

In *Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth*, Gerstner makes a compelling case that dispensationalism has led to Free Grace Theology, which he has incorrectly labeled *antinomianism*.³¹ Taken as a discussion of the soteriological differences between Covenant Theology and dispensationalism, it is a valuable tool. In it, however, only one brief chapter is devoted to dispensational hermeneutics,

²⁹ John Piper and Justin Taylor, *Stand: A Call for the Endurance of the Saints*, (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2008), 129.

³⁰ MacArthur, *Apostles*, 221.

³¹ Rightly understood, *antinomianism* is the doctrine that righteous living is not important. Free Grace, on the other hand, teaches the importance of righteous living, while keeping it distinct from justification before God.

and this chapter is adapted from his earlier work.³² While recognizing that Dispensationalists do tend more toward literal interpretation, Gerstner rejects the claim that dispensationalism is primarily a literal approach to Scripture and asserts that the theology is primary for the Dispensationalist, rather than hermeneutics.³³ Gerstner makes the same claim in *A Primer on Dispensationalism*, but in it he admits that this is an unsure conclusion:

It is very difficult to say which is the cart and which is the horse in this case. Is it the literalistic tendency that produces this divided Scripture, or is it the belief in a divided Scripture that drives the dispensationalist to ultra-literalism at some point? I think it is the latter, though that is not easy to prove.³⁴

In *Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth*, Gerstner seems to be more confident, but his argument is based upon an incorrect definition of literal interpretation (that literal interpretation does not recognize figures of speech) and by demonstrating where dispensationalists depart from it. This is nothing more than the burning of a straw man.

Unfortunately, Gerstner commits the error that he is accusing the dispensationalists of committing. In *Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth*, Gerstner largely bases his critique of dispensationalism upon its departure from TULIP Calvinism, and fails to address it exegetically.³⁵ The essential flaw is that the force of his argument starts with a soteriology and critiques dispensationalism, which is primarily a system of interpretation,³⁶ upon theologi-

³² John Gerstner, *A Primer on Dispensationalism* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1982), 2-6.

³³ Gerstner, *Wrongly Dividing*, 86-87.

³⁴ Gerstner, *Primer*, 5.

³⁵ See especially, John Gerstner, *Wrongly Dividing*, 105-147.

³⁶ Ryrie correctly asserts, "If plain or normal interpretation is the only valid hermeneutical principle and if it is consistently applied, it will cause one to be a dispensationalist. As basic as one believes normal interpretation to be, and as consistently as he uses it in interpreting Scripture, to that extent he will of necessity become a dispensationalist." Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 24.

cal ground, rather than upon hermeneutical differences. Gerstner's methodology in starting with soteriology and working backward from there has come under criticism even among those who share his soteriology.³⁷ It is clear that his methodology in this work is fundamentally flawed *as an argument against dispensationalism*. For this reason, *Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth* is more appropriately seen as primarily a theological argument against the soteriology that is born of dispensationalism.

In the next article in this series, I will address Gerstner's argument that theology is primary for the dispensationalist³⁸ rather than literal hermeneutics. But for now it will suffice to show that, for Gerstner, dispensationalism and Free Grace go hand-in-hand.

ARTHUR PINK

Arthur Pink, champion of Reformed Theology, was a dispensationalist early in his writing career. Pink wrote four books on the subject of premillennialism from a dispensational-premillennialist perspective.³⁹ The most well-known of these books is *The Redeemer's Return*, where Pink stresses the importance of Christ's imminent return and a pretribulational rapture.

³⁷ See Richard Mayhue, "Who is Wrong? A Review of John Gerstner's *Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth*," *The Master's Seminary Journal* vol. 3, no. 1 (Spring, 1992): 73-94. While I do not accept Mayhue's argument that dispensationalism and TULIP Calvinism are not incompatible, the article does well to point out the methodological flaws in Gerstner's book.

³⁸ See also Kimbro, *The Gospel According to Dispensationalism*. Kimbro's thesis is that dispensationalism is a system of soteriology first. This work is especially relevant because Kimbro writes from a Historic Premillennial viewpoint, demonstrating that it is more than dispensational eschatology that has an impact on soteriology.

³⁹ Including, *The Redeemer's Return* (Santa Ana, CA: Calvary Baptist Church Bookstore Publishing, 1970), *The Golden Age: A Treatise on the One Thousand Year Reign of Christ on Earth* (North Kingstown, RI: Historic Baptist Publishing, 1994), *The Antichrist* (Eastford, CT: Martino Fine Books, 2011), and *The Prophetic Parables of Matthew 13* (Covington, KY: Kentucky Bible Depot, 1946).

It may surprise some to know, however, that when Arthur Pink was a Dispensationalist, he also embraced Free Grace as is demonstrated in the following statement:

Are you constrained to ask, “What must I do to be saved?” Then the answer, *God’s* own answer, is ready to hand—“*Believe* on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.” Appropriate the provision which Divine grace has made for lost sinners.⁴⁰

This is only one of many of Pink’s clear statements regarding the free nature of the gift of eternal life.

Pink was not the beneficiary of more recent Free Grace scholarship that has helped to clarify many issues and terms and this is apparent in his use of phrases like “salvation of the soul” to mean “deliverance from the wrath to come,” and describing the believer as one who has “received the Lord Jesus Christ as his or her personal Saviour.”⁴¹ What he means by these phrases, however, is expressly defined in the context, and completely consistent with Free Grace. Simple faith in Christ was the only condition Pink ever presented as necessary for receiving eternal life during his works written as a dispensationalist.

Furthermore, Pink made several astute observations that demonstrate sophistication of understanding in soteriological issues from the Free Grace perspective. For example, Pink speaks of the “present-tense aspect of our salvation,” and further describes the believer’s secure position based upon John 5:24: “Eternal life is something which every believer in Christ already possesses, and for him there is no possibility of future condemnation in the sense of having to endure God’s wrath.”⁴² He goes on to describe the different aspects of salvation:

In the New Testament the word ‘Salvation’ [sic] has a threefold scope—past, present and future, which, respectively, has reference to our

⁴⁰ Pink, *The Redeemer’s Return*, 219. Emphasis in original.

⁴¹ Pink, *Redeemer’s Return*, 43.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 43.

deliverance from the penalty, the power, and the presence of sin.⁴³

Pink understood salvation as a broad concept that involves much more than justification before God.

Pink did not write a great deal of material about the Judgment Seat of Christ. He did, however, state its importance and describe the nature of it being to test the works of believers to determine reward. He states: "... the *purpose* of the appearing of believers 'before the Bema of Christ' is not to test their title and fitness for Heaven, but in order that their works may be examined and their service rewarded."⁴⁴ In this discussion, he expounds 2 Cor 5:10 and 1 Cor 3:11-15, showing that they are not related to eternal destiny but to reward. He also references Matt 25:23; 1 Cor 9:25; 2 Tim 4:8; Heb 6:10; 1 Pet 5:4; Rev 2:10; and 22:12, and alludes to the parable of the talents as related to the *Bema*.⁴⁵

Finally, Pink also demonstrated that, for him, grace should be properly understood in light of the special nature of the present dispensation:

Let us settle it once for all that the Dispensation in which we are living is a unique one, that it is fundamentally different from all that have preceded it and from that which is to follow it—the Millennium. This is the Dispensation of Grace, and grace obliterates all distinctions, grace eliminates all questions of merits; grace makes every blessing a Divine and free gift... Again we say, let us settle it once for all that we are living in the Dispensation of Grace (John 1:17; Eph. 3: 2) and that every blessing we enjoy is a *gift of Divine clemency*. We are justified by grace (Rom. 3:24). We are saved by grace (Eph. 2:8). The Holy Scriptures are termed "The Word of His Grace" (Acts 20:32). The Third Person of the Holy Trinity is denominated "The Spirit of

⁴³ Ibid., 42.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 210, emphasis in original.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 209-12.

Grace” (Heb. 10:29). God is seated upon a Throne of Grace (Heb. 4:16). And, the Good Hope which is given us is “through grace” (2 Thess. 2:16). It is all of Grace from first to last. It is all of Grace from beginning to end. It was grace that predestinated us before the world began (2 Tim. 1:9), and it will be grace that makes us like Christ at the consummation of our salvation. Thank God for such a “*Blessed Hope*.”⁴⁶

Dispensationalism clearly lead Pink to embrace grace “from first to last.”

When Pink abandoned dispensationalism, however, he also abandoned Free Grace. The once proponent of the simplicity of justification by faith alone now asserts, “Something more than ‘believing’ is necessary to salvation.”⁴⁷ Though he had once used John 5:24 and Acts 16:31 as the basis for the believer’s assurance, he now refers to the one basing his assurance upon these verses as “Mr. Carnal Confidence”⁴⁸ and asserts that:

Thousands are, to use their own words, “resting on John 3:16,” or 5:24, and have not the slightest doubt they will spend eternity with Christ. Nevertheless it is the bounden duty of every real servant of God to tell the great majority of them that they are woefully deluded by Satan.⁴⁹

No longer could assurance be found in looking to Christ and His promises alone. Instead, “...the *attainment* of assurance is by an impartial scrutiny of myself and an honest comparing of myself with the scriptural marks of God’s children.”⁵⁰

It is also interesting to note that, like Augustine, Pink had a fundamental change in his interpretation of Matt 24:13 after abandoning premillennialism. In *The*

⁴⁶ Ibid., 178, emphasis in original.

⁴⁷ Arthur Pink, *Studies on Saving Faith*, (Swengel: Reiner Publications, 1974), 12.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 156-63.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 109.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 134, emphasis in original.

Redeemer's Return, Matt 24:13 is treated as relating to Tribulation saints being saved out of the Tribulation period through endurance, while in *The Saint's Perseverance*, a work written after his abandonment of premillennialism, Matt 24:13 is treated as expressing the need for believers to persevere until the end of life in order to be saved eschatologically.⁵¹ As Pink ceased to believe in a literal Tribulation period, his interpretation of passages relating to the Tribulation necessarily changed as well.

It is not difficult to see that Pink's abandonment of dispensationalism had a profound impact on his soteriology. Such a dramatic change in approach to Biblical interpretation is bound to have an effect on many areas of theology. Soteriology is just one of those areas, but it is one that is impacted as much as any other. The changes in Pink's soteriology when he fundamentally changed his hermeneutics is a case in point.

CONCLUSION

The debate over Lordship Salvation and the debate over dispensationalism are often treated as one and the same. Yet, in recent years, this connection has only been stressed by those who would see both laid to waste. Dispensationalism stands upon the solid ground of a consistent literal interpretation of Scripture and *so does Free Grace*. It is essential that we in the grace community recognize this connection and understand that as normative dispensationalism is under attack, the foundation upon which Free Grace stands is being attacked as well.

The rise of dispensationalism in the 19th and 20th centuries brought with it a revival of the principles of grace. It is not coincidence that as the allegorizing of men was replaced by the unadulterated clarity of God's Word, the legalism of men was also replaced by the free grace of

⁵¹ Arthur Pink, *The Saint's Perseverance* (Lafayette: Sovereign Grace Publishers, 2001), 24.

God. The nature of man is invariably legalistic while God is unendingly gracious.

Furthermore, if it can be demonstrated conclusively that Lordship Salvation is dependent upon a non-literal approach to portions of Scripture, the shaky ground upon which Lordship Salvation stands is exposed. At the face of it, this seems like it may be a difficult task, but this is being plainly admitted by many proponents of Lordship Salvation as they eschew Dispensationalism. That this is further evidenced in the application of non-literal hermeneutics among Lordship Salvation proponents in their discussions on soteriology will be demonstrated in the next installment of this series.

