

Does Dispensationalism Teach Two Ways of Salvation?

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Introduction

At various times, opponents of dispensationalism have made the charge that it teaches two ways of salvation. Some have claimed two ways of salvation to be an explicit teaching among earlier advocates of dispensationalism, even if not advocated by more recent dispensationalists. Others have held that it is an inherent characteristic of the dispensational system *itself* which results in two ways of salvation.

The purpose of this article is threefold: 1) to set forth, once again, that dispensationalism teaches *one way* of salvation; 2) to explore why the charge of teaching multiple ways arose; and 3) to suggest that confusion over this matter is due, in part, to key differences in *ecclesiology* (rather than *soteriology*) between dispensational and non-dispensational systems.

It is hoped, by highlighting this third matter—that the key difference between dispensationalism and its rival systems concerns ecclesiology rather than soteriology—that the “tide of ink which has been spilled on this subject” might be stemmed.¹

One Way of Salvation

Let it be said up-front that normative dispensationalism has *never* taught anything other than a single way of salvation.² (The matter of unfortunate statements taken in isolation is discussed later.)

Are there two ways by which one may be saved? In reply to this question it may be stated that salvation of whatever specific character is always the work of God in behalf of man and never a work of man in behalf of God. This is to assert that God never saved any one person or group of persons on any other ground than

¹ John S. Feinberg, “Salvation in the Old Testament,” *Tradition and Testament: Essays in Honor of Charles Lee Feinberg* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1981) 43.

² Charles Ryrie, *Dispensationalism* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 106.

that righteous freedom to do so which the Cross of Christ secured. There is, therefore, but one way to be saved and that is by the power of God made possible through the sacrifice of Christ.³

...there are not two ways of salvation. All salvation of God stems from the Savior, the Son of God, and His work on the cross. ... The two great essentials of salvation remain the same from the salvation of Adam to the last soul which God takes to Himself in the future. Faith is the condition and the death of Christ is the basis.⁴

Let it be stated categorically that Dispensationalism has not and does not believe that the Law of Moses was a means of salvation. This concept is rejected because it would make salvation by means of works. Salvation was and always is by grace through faith. While the content of faith has changed from age to age, depending on progressive revelation, the means of salvation never changes. The law was not given to serve as a means of salvation (Rom. 3:20, 28; Gal. 2:16; 3:11, 21).⁵

We might add the following testimony from outside the dispensationalist camp:

Some think salvation is at the heart of Dispensationalism, because they erroneously think Dispensationalism teaches multiple methods of salvation. Those who properly understand the position realize its emphasis lies elsewhere.⁶

...dispensations are successive stages in God's revelation of his purposes. They do not entail different means of salvation, for the means of salvation has been the same at all periods of time, namely, by grace through faith.⁷

Those of both dispensational and non-dispensational persuasion understand Scripture to teach that man has always been saved by grace through faith. Many passages attest to this truth, although perhaps none more

³ Lewis S. Chafer, "Editorial," *Bibliotheca Sacra* Vol. 102, No. 405 (1945) : 1.

⁴ John Walvoord, "Series in Christology—Part 4: The Preincarnate Son of God," *Bibliotheca Sacra* Vol. 104, No. 416, (1947) : 422.

⁵ Fruchtenbaum, Arnold G, *Israelology: The Missing Link In Systematic Theology* (Tustin, CA: Ariel Ministries Press, 1989), 590-591.

⁶ Willem VanGemeren, "Systems of Continuity," *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship Between the Old and New Testaments* (Westchester: Crossway Books), 70-71.

⁷ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985), 1163.

dramatically than Paul's use of Genesis 15:6 to demonstrate that salvation by faith preceded Abraham's 'work' of circumcision (Romans 4).⁸

Dispensationalists are in agreement with covenantal interpreters here, not only because it is a plain teaching of Scripture, but because it is a requirement of man's fallen condition:

The major reason that salvation must be a result of God's gracious activity lies in the condition of man. God demands absolute righteousness of any creature who would be saved. But no one except Christ ever met such standards... if God were to deal with men in strict justice alone, no one would be saved. Thus, since God has chosen to save men, He extends divine grace toward them... God's method of salvation is always a grace method, never a works method.⁹

Claims to The Contrary

As Ryrie wryly observes, the claim that dispensationalists teach two ways of salvation "is repeated with the regularity of a dripping faucet."¹⁰ Opponents of dispensationalism have leveled this charge for at least a number of decades.¹¹

⁸ Ross argues from the Hebrew grammar that Abraham evidenced saving faith even earlier than Genesis 15—in his initial response to God's call recorded in Genesis 12. Allen P. Ross, "The Biblical Method of Salvation: A Case for Discontinuity," *Continuity and Discontinuity*, 168.

⁹ Feinberg, "Salvation in the Old Testament," 53.

¹⁰ Ryrie, 105.

¹¹ Daniel P. Fuller, "The Hermeneutics of Dispensationalism" (Th.D. diss., Northern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1957), 144-45, 151. Quoted by John S. Feinberg, *Tradition and Testament*, 42 ; John H. Gerstner, *A Primer On Dispensationalism* (Phillipsburg,: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1982), 149 ; "No one is saved who is not a part of the body of Christ." Keith A. Mathison, *Dispensationalism: Rightly Dividing The People of God?* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1995), 37. Since dispensationalism understands the body of Christ to be a *new* spiritual organism unique to this age, Mathison's statement is an implicit claim it teaches two ways of salvation.

Unfortunate statements taken in isolation

Critics of dispensationalism have asserted that older dispensationalists *actually taught* two ways of salvation. As evidence in support of this claim they appeal to individual statements made by early dispensationalists which, *taken in isolation*, imply that man was saved by works prior to this age. Perhaps the most famous of these is the statement made by C.I. Scofield in his commentary concerning John 1:16:

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 acceptance or rejection of Christ... [emphasis added]¹²

As many have observed, it is most unfortunate that Scofield used such terminology because *in isolation* his statement certainly implies justification by works. But is it legitimate to assert from this unguarded statement that Scofield intended to teach what this statement implies? What about other statements by Scofield, such as his commentary on Galatians 3:24 in the very same work: “The Christian doctrine of the law... (5) Law neither justifies a sinner nor sanctifies a believer”¹³ Couch rightly asserts:

Anyone who is intellectually honest will go beyond their few misstatements and look at the overall belief of these dispensational theologians... [The old dispensationalists] *never believed* that one is saved by the law. They have always taught that the basis of salvation was the death of Christ.¹⁴

Indeed, non-dispensational writers have made similar unguarded statements also subject to misrepresentation when taken in isolation.¹⁵

Misunderstanding dispensational terms and concepts

Another source of misunderstanding concerning dispensationalism has been its use of terms. By labeling the current dispensation as the *age of Grace* it appears as if dispensationalists are implying that grace did not operate in previous ages. Such is not the intention of using such terminology. Rather, it recognizes a shift in emphasis which even Scripture underscores: “...the law was given through Moses, *but* grace and truth came through Jesus

¹² C.I. Scofield, ed., *Scofield Reference Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1945), 1115.

¹³ Scofield, 1244-45.

¹⁴ Mal Couch, *A Biblical Theology of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1999), 34.

¹⁵ “From *the law* in this particular sense, both *as a means of obtaining eternal life* and as a condemning power believers are set free in Christ.” [emphasis added]. Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1941), 614.

Christ” (John 1:17, NKJV). Ryrie explores the relation between law and grace from a dispensational perspective and helps to clarify possible misunderstanding here.¹⁶ (It may be emphatically stated by all Bible interpreters that except for God’s grace in *every age* there would be *no one saved* and no progress in history.)

Misunderstanding dispensational tests

Another source of misunderstanding concerns the tests which accompany each dispensation. Although dispensationalists are careful to indicate that these tests are *not* associated with salvation, some remain unable to appreciate this distinction:

Here we simply refer the reader back to Scofield’s definition of a *dispensation* as ‘a period of time during which man is tested in respect to obedience to some *specific* revelation of the will of God.’ If the word *testing* is to have any meaning at all, it is involved in the way of salvation.¹⁷

The conclusion that any and all testing of man by God must be for salvific purposes does not follow. What then could be said of Satan’s sifting of Peter “like wheat”—testing which Peter *failed* (Luke 22:31, 60)?

Tests associated with dispensations are not for salvation, but are intended to serve a purpose similar to the Law: to illustrate man’s utter helplessness and point him to total dependence upon God.¹⁸

Two Ways Inherent in the Dispensational System?

For some critics of dispensationalism, clear statements by dispensationalists concerning a single way of salvation fail to address their concern. They assert that it is the system of dispensational understanding itself which *necessitates* two ways of salvation.¹⁹ This criticism is addressed by Feinberg who concludes, “dispensationalism as a system, contrary to the views of some, does not necessitate multiple methods of

¹⁶ Ryrie, 110-113.

¹⁷ John H. Gerstner, *Wrongly Dividing The Word Of Truth* (Brentwood, TN: Wolgemuth & Hyatt, Publishers, Inc., 1991), 270.

¹⁸ Ryrie, 106.

¹⁹ Gerstner, *Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth*, 150-151

salvation.”²⁰ This can be seen by recognizing that the key differences between dispensationalists and non-dispensationalists involve issues of hermeneutics, ecclesiology, and eschatology, not soteriology.²¹

As we shall discuss later, differences between non-dispensational and dispensational ecclesiology contribute to this misunderstanding. Dispensationalism accounts for distinctions within the salvific history of God. Non-dispensationalists who minimize or ignore these distinctions dogmatically assert that dispensationalism’s ecclesiological distinctions are soteriological in nature when in fact they are not.

Handling Continuity and Discontinuity

At the very core of the differences between dispensationalism and other systems is a different approach to handling continuity and discontinuity as God’s plan unfolds. All Bible interpreters recognize both continuity (elements which remain the same) and discontinuity (elements which change) in God’s progressive revelation. But disagreement arises in two respects: 1) what elements of Scripture constitute discontinuity; and 2) what do these discontinuities mean?

The focus of history

For both dispensationalist and non-dispensationalist, the way of salvation is held to be continuous—by grace through faith. Although both see God’s glory as the *fundamental* focus throughout the pages of scripture, they differ in their understanding of the primary goal of history.

Non-dispensationalists tend to view history primarily as one great stream of salvation whereas dispensationalists understand history as the gradual implementation and outworking of the kingdom of God. The latter view recognizes a greater variety of roles within the historical framework which God uses to contribute to His overall goal.²² Yet this variety of roles does not affect the essentials of salvation.

²⁰ Feinberg, “Salvation in the Old Testament,” 44, 49.

²¹ Feinberg, “Salvation in the Old Testament,” 48.

²² Feinberg, “Systems of Discontinuity,” *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship between the Old and New Testaments* (Westchester: Crossway Books, 1988), 85.

Progressive revelation

Another difference in continuity and discontinuity between the systems is seen in the ongoing discussion of the relevance progressive revelation played in the content of saving faith of saints in different periods of history. They disagree as to the actual content of saving faith as it applies to Old Testament saints prior to Christ.

Non-dispensationalists assert a specific knowledge by Old Testament saints of the promised redeemer stemming from a clear understanding of Genesis 3:15 and the many types and patterns within the Israelite culture within which they lived. They point to evidence such as the understanding of Simeon and Anna upon the presentation of the babe for circumcision (Luke 2:25-38).

In reply, dispensationalists point to passages which indicate a lack of understanding of specific elements of God's program by Old Testament saints (Dan. 8:26; 12:4, 8-9; Isa. 29:11; 1Pe. 1:10-11). They note the context of the salvation of Abraham (Gen. 12, 15), in which precious little is said concerning the specifics of a redeemer.²³ They point to the lack of understanding of the Apostles themselves evidenced in the gospels—especially how little Peter understood himself of his revelatory declaration of Jesus as the Christ (Mat. 16:18-22). And even *if* a Moses, an Abraham, or an Isaiah had greater revelation and understanding, what could be said of the average Israelite?

much is made of the illustrations of redemption in the sacrificial system in the Old Testament. However, little is said of how much the Israelites understood what those illustrations represented. The reason is plain—it is very difficult, if not impossible, to prove that the *average* Israelite understood the grace of God in Christ. ... Even if Moses understood about the coming Christ, did the average Israelite?²⁴

And then too, there is the deep mystery of the tri-unity of God and the incarnation.

Payne himself says: “That, to satisfy God, God must die, that men might inherit God, to be with God, was *incomprehensible* under the Old Testament seminal knowledge of the Trinity, the incarnation, and the crucifixion followed by the resurrection.”²⁵

²³ It seems best to understand John 8:58 as relating to Abraham's offering of Isaac in Genesis 22. But this occurs a considerable time after Abraham's salvation.

²⁴ Ryrie, 114, 115.

²⁵ Ross, 170.

Although discussions concerning what Old Testament saints did or did not understand concerning salvation are profitable, these differences in opinion do not constitute essential differences in the way of salvation—merely the details of the content of faith. And most parties would agree that even those who come to faith in the current age have widely different *initial* understanding of God’s provision and program for redemption.

What Changes? What Remains the Same?

The preceding discussion highlights a central factor in the discussion between dispensationalists and others concerning the nature of salvation: what things change and what things remain the same as Scripture unfolds? More importantly, how do these changing and unchanging elements relate to salvation?

Ryrie identifies various aspects related to salvation, some of which changed over time and some of which remain unchanged.

The basis of salvation in every age is the death of Christ; the *requirement* for salvation in every age is faith; the *object* of faith in every age is God; the *content* of faith changes in the various dispensations. It is this last point, of course, that distinguishes dispensationalism from covenant theology, but it is not a point to which the charge of teaching two ways of salvation can be attached. It simply recognizes the obvious fact of progressive revelation.²⁶

Feinberg identifies similar aspects of salvation to those of Ryrie which he denotes as: *basis*, *requirement*, *ultimate content*, *revealed content*, and *expression*.²⁷ Feinberg’s *ultimate content* is similar to Ryrie’s *object* of faith (God). His *expression* is a useful additional concept which denotes the actions by which a faithful believer demonstrates his faith within a given age.²⁸

According to Ryrie and Feinberg, the *basis*, *requirement*, and *object* (ultimate content - Feinberg) are the same in all dispensations whereas the *content* (revealed content - Feinberg), and *expression* change with progressive revelation and dispensation. Feinberg makes the additional helpful observation:

²⁶ Ryrie, 115.

²⁷ Feinberg, “Salvation in the Old Testament,” 54.

²⁸ This is similar to the dispensational idea of “test” which evidences faithfulness but never as a means of salvation.

only since the time of Jesus Christ has the revealed content to be believed coincided entirely with the basis, or ground, of faith. Before the age of grace, God had not revealed the fulness of salvation through the shed blood of Jesus Christ (the basis of salvation in any age).²⁹

As we have already noted, some may quibble with dispensationalists over the content of saving faith, but from the above it should be clear that dispensationalism understands the essentials of salvation (faith in God on the basis of Christ's shed blood) to have never changed. The specific content of faith and its evidence in the life of the faithful is seen to change in accord with progression in God's plan and revelation through history.

But is this all that changes between the Testaments? Are there other aspects related to (but not identical with) salvation which change? Dispensationalists would agree with Ross when he states,

there is no discontinuity between the Testaments in the method of salvation; that is, salvation has always been by grace through faith. Any discontinuity that exists comes in various aspects of salvation—notably the content of faith, the expression of faith, the work of the Holy Spirit, and the prospect of the saved.³⁰

Ross has identified the real bone of contention between dispensationalism and non-dispensationalism: the *work of the Holy Spirit* and the *prospect of the saved*.

Roles Among the Redeemed

It is the contention of this author that the claim that dispensationalism teaches two ways of salvation evidences deep-seated differences between dispensational and non-dispensational *ecclesiology*. Dispensationalists see evidence of a significant discontinuity in the work of the Holy Spirit—the historically unique coming of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. It is this discontinuity, overlooked or minimized by non-dispensationalists, which dispensationalism understands as affecting different roles and relationships *within* the community of the redeemed.³¹ This division of roles and relationships within the community of the redeemed is anathema to non-dispensational systems which at their foundation assert that there can be no such distinction.

²⁹ Feinberg, "Salvation in the Old Testament," 60-61.

³⁰ Ross, 161.

³¹ Feinberg, "Systems of Discontinuity," 83-84.

Here, we find ourselves face-to-face with what many have identified as a *sine qua non* of dispensationalism: a distinction between the church and Israel.³² Only in this case, the emphasis is not so much recognizing a distinction between the church and *Israel*, but between the church and *any redeemed individual of another age*.

Because non-dispensationalists emphasize continuity, they are at greatest odds with dispensationalism over the matter of ecclesiology. They view the church as an element of *continuity* having existed in the Old Testament whereas an essential aspect of dispensationalism is its recognition of the church as an element of *discontinuity* which began on the Day of Pentecost. This clashes with the ecclesiology of non-dispensationalists which holds that the church must have existed prior to Pentecost—even as far back as Adam.

The real point of disagreement centers on the relationship between believers in the church age and believers in other ages. ... According to dispensationalism, believers who died prior to Pentecost are not part of the body of Christ, the church. Reformed theology teaches that the believers of all ages are part of the one body of Christ. This is the heart of the debate between dispensationalists and non-dispensationalists. Is there one body of believers or are there two? No one is saved who is not part of the body of Christ. ... Jesus Christ is the head of one body of believers, which includes every believer since Adam.³³

All other differences between dispensational and non-dispensationalist systems pale in comparison with this central fact: the ecclesiology of dispensationalism recognizes distinctions in God's working in history which conflict with the ecclesiology of non-dispensational systems which assert a single *ekklesia* existing as the body of Christ throughout history. Non-dispensational systems *define* the church as the redeemed of *all* ages and a unified ecclesiology beginning with Adam *necessarily* results. But this also forms an explicit tie between ecclesiology and soteriology within those systems—it is impossible to be saved and be outside the church.

This is the heart of the confusion and disagreement. When a dispensationalist recognizes a class of redeemed individuals who are not part of the body of Christ (have not undergone baptism by the Holy Spirit—which began at Pentecost) this is tantamount to saying they are unsaved to those who assert that membership in the body of Christ is an essential element of soteriology. Hence the conflict between dispensational *ecclesiology* and non-dispensational *soteriology*. Understanding this conflict won't make it go away, but it will go a long way in helping to understand why each side sees things as they do—and why non-dispensationalists view dispensational ecclesiology through soteriological classes.

³² Ryrie, 40.

³³ Mathison, 23, 37.

What about Spirit baptism?

Because scripture makes it plain that the body of Christ is formed by the baptism of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13), but the Holy Spirit never performed His baptizing work prior to Pentecost (Mat. 3:11; John 7:37-39; Acts 1:4-8), proponents of the view that the body of Christ extends back to Adam are forced to make assertions which cannot be substantiated by Scripture:

By the Day of Pentecost, *all* who had ever been part of the true Israel, whether dead like Moses or alive like Peter, were united to the risen Christ.³⁴

If the Old Testament believers, those who made up true Israel, were saved, like us, upon the basis of Christ's redemptive life and death, then they may well have been swept by the event of Pentecost into the same body as the New Testament believers. ... The People of God are truly one people; the body of Christ is truly one body.³⁵

But, extending the body of Christ to include Old Testament saints would seem to entail some sort of "baptizing for the dead!" Although Scripture is silent on this seemingly critical point, are we to understand that in addition to baptizing living disciples (to say nothing of His ministry sealing and permanently indwelling) the Holy Spirit also, perhaps mystically, joined the redeemed dead to Christ's body when He came on Pentecost? In what sense can the redeemed dead participate in the purposes of the "body of Christ" operating here on earth in our Lord's absence?

Concerning the baptism of the Holy Spirit, Unger has observed:

Those who reject dispensational teaching, who posit an "all-time grace covenant," who make no adequate distinction between the "assembly" of Israel in the wilderness in the Old Testament, and the Church as the Body of Christ in the New Testament, simply do not know what to do with it. It remains, and must continue to remain, a Scriptural conundrum, to all such.³⁶

³⁴ Mathison, 41.

³⁵ Erickson, 1048-1049.

³⁶ Merrill Frederick Unger "The Baptism with the Holy Spirit, Part 1," *Bibliotheca Sacra* Vol. 101, No. 402 (1944) : 232.

Redemption vs. role

The non-dispensationalist assumes a strict identity between salvation and the resulting role of the redeemed in God's economy:

missing ... is any proof for a connection between the salvatory unity of the elect and the economic/historic/prophetic unity. The economic unity is [assumed as] a subhypothesis of the salvatory unity. But whenever [faced] with texts that would disprove the economic unity, he simply repeats the main hypothesis and its subhypothesis: There is a salvatory unity and therefore an economic unity. There is an economic unity because there is a salvatory unity.³⁷

Here dispensationalists part company in recognizing the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost as a discontinuity: a *new program* in God's dealing with the redeemed. But this discontinuity is not seen as salvific, instead denoting a difference in the *ministry* of the Holy Spirit and the *role* of the redeemed from Pentecost forward in God's economy.

the ἐν Χριστῷ (*en christō*) relationship, union of the believer with Christ, is part and parcel of the New Testament believer's salvation whereas that relationship does not pertain to salvation of an Old Testament saint. Such union with Christ is accomplished by means of the ministry of the Holy Spirit whereby He baptizes the believer into the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13). But the Holy Spirit did not begin to perform that ministry until the day of Pentecost (Acts 2).³⁸

even though Israel is redeemed by the blood of Christ, Israel never experienced the baptism of the Holy Spirit which placed them "in Christ," so this phrase can only describe those saints of the present age who are thus related to Christ.³⁹

In reply, the non-dispensationalist will point to the many passages of scripture which equate membership in the body of Christ with salvation. (1 Cor. 15:22; 2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 1:3-4; Col. 1:27). But are we to ignore the context and readership of the epistles—the New Testament church—for which these equivalencies *do* indeed

³⁷ Paul S. Karleen, "Understanding Covenant Theologians: A Study in Presuppositions," *Grace Theological Journal* Vol. 10, No. 2 (1989) : 135.

³⁸ John S. Feinberg, "Salvation in the Old Testament," 63.

³⁹ Dwight J. Pentecost, *Things To Come : A Study in Biblical Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1958), 407.

hold? As Couch has observed, non-dispensationalists want to read New Testament truths back into the Old Testament.⁴⁰

Dispensationalism recognizes differences within the company of the redeemed based upon historic differences in the ministry of the Spirit—especially the difference between *regeneration* and *baptism* by the Holy Spirit. Prior to Pentecost, believers were regenerated but not baptized by the Spirit. After Pentecost, believers undergo both:

A careful consideration, however, will show that the baptism with the Spirit is not regeneration. This operation places the believer “in Christ” (Rom 6:3, 4; Gal 3:27; 1 Cor 12:13; Col 2:12), whereas regeneration results in Christ in the believer (John 17:23; Col 1:27; Rev 3:20,). Regeneration imparts life. The baptism with the Spirit unites the life-possessing one to Christ and to those who possess life in Him. Did not the Lord Jesus, in His great Upper Room Discourse, when uttering words prophetic of the Spirit’s Advent into the world at Pentecost, and His ministry during this present age, refer to a distinction between these two operations of the Spirit as “ye in Me” (baptism with the Spirit) and “I in you” (regeneration) (John 14:20)? The baptism with the Holy Spirit and regeneration are thus two complementary, and yet distinct, works of God, simultaneously and eternally wrought in the believer the moment he exercises saving faith in Christ. By regeneration the soul is quickened from death into life (Eph 2:1–4). By the baptism with the Spirit the quickened soul is vitally united to Christ as Head (Eph 1:22, 23) and to all other believers as members of the one Body (1 Cor 12:12–27).⁴¹

Dispensationalism recognizes that among the redeemed there are different roles which are played out in God’s program leading to His kingdom. These role distinctions (e.g. Israel and the church) are akin to the role distinctions between male and female, Jew and Gentile, slave and free among the elect. They do not reflect different standing or value, but rather, differences in *purpose* according to God’s unfolding plan. In the same way that men and women obtain identical standing *in Christ*, but their role distinctions continue, so too may saints in different economies obtain salvation in the same way yet occupy different roles in God’s purpose.

Salvation, Pentecost, and the Redeemed

The following charts set forth a dispensational understanding of the elements of salvation and of the role of the redeemed in relation to the coming of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost.

⁴⁰ Couch, 30.

⁴¹ Unger, 233-234.

As will be seen, the essentials of salvation remain unchanged on either side of Pentecost (continuity). Yet significant changes also attend Pentecost (discontinuity). Baptism with the Holy Spirit—providing a unique organic union of the saints of this age with Christ—is understood as a discontinuous ministry of the Spirit which was *not essential for salvation in previous ages*. In this particular age, regeneration and baptism go hand-in-hand, but this was not always so. Nor will it be in the future (according to pretribulationists).⁴²

For the sake of simplicity, we focus on the pre/post-Pentecost transition since it is essential to dispensational ecclesiology. (The period is actually more complex, involving the preaching of John the Baptist, the period of the gospels, the crucifixion, the resurrection, and the ascension with attendant transitional elements.)

Soteriological (Continuity)		
Element	Before Pentecost	After Pentecost
Man's Condition	spiritually dead totally depraved ⁴³	spiritually dead totally depraved ⁴⁴
Means of Regeneration	born of the Spirit ⁴⁵	born of the Spirit ⁴⁶
Object of Faith	God	God
Basis of Salvation	blood of Christ ⁴⁷	blood of Christ ⁴⁸
Requirement of Salvation	By grace through faith ⁴⁹	By grace through faith ⁵⁰

⁴² 2 Th. 2:7.

⁴³ Gen. 2:17; Jer. 17:9; John 3:3.

⁴⁴ John 3:3; 1 Cor. 2:14; Col. 2:13.

⁴⁵ John 3:5,10. "Whatever salvation was wrought in Old Testament times was wrought by the Holy Spirit..." Lewis S. Chafer, *Systematic Theology* (Dallas: Dallas Theological Seminary, 1976), 6:74.

⁴⁶ 1Pet. 1:3, 23; 1 Jn. 5:1.

⁴⁷ Gen. 3:21; Ex. 12:13; Lev. 17:11; Isa. 53:10.

⁴⁸ Mat. 26:28; Acts 20:28; Eph. 1:7; 1 Pet. 1:9.

⁴⁹ Gen. 15:6; Hab. 2:4.

⁵⁰ Eph. 2:5-8; 2 Tim. 1:9.

Divine Program: Role in Redemptive History (Discontinuity)		
Element	Before Pentecost	After Pentecost
Content of Faith	progressive revelation of a coming redeemer ⁵¹	Jesus Christ <i>the</i> Redeemer ⁵²
Expression of Faith	follow the Mosaic law, offer animal sacrifices ⁵³	follow the law of Christ, practice the sacraments, walk by the Spirit ⁵⁴
Holy Spirit Baptism	not yet given ⁵⁵	yes, body of Christ ⁵⁶
Relation to Spirit	comes upon, fills, ⁵⁷ taken ⁵⁸	indwells, seals ⁵⁹
Spiritual Gifting	as needed, individually ⁶⁰	all believers ⁶¹
World Evangelism	no ⁶²	yes ⁶³
God's Dwelling Place	Holy of Holies ⁶⁴	within believers, the church ⁶⁵

⁵¹ Gen. 3:15; 15:6; 22:14; 49:10.

⁵² John 1:29, 36; 1 Cor. 5:7.

⁵³ This is but one example of works resulting from saving faith (operative after the giving of the Law at Sinai). The expression of faith differs in various dispensations.

⁵⁴ Rom. 8:1, 4-6; 1 Cor. 9:21; Gal. 5:16; Gal. 6:2;

⁵⁵ Mat. 3:11; 16:18; Luke 11:13; John 7:38-39; John 14:17-20; John 16:7; Acts 1:5,8.

⁵⁶ Acts 2:2-4; Acts 11:15-16; Rom. 6:3; 8:9; 1 Cor. 12:13, 27; Gal. 3:27; Eph. 1:22-23; 3:2-6; Col. 1:18.

⁵⁷ Num. 24:2; Jdg. 3:10; 6:34; 1S. 10:6; 19:20; 2 Chr. 15:1; 20:14; Luke 1:67.

⁵⁸ 1S. 16:13-14; Ps. 51:11.

⁵⁹ John 14:16; 2 Cor. 1:22; Eph. 1:13.

⁶⁰ Ex. 31:3; Num. 11:17, 25; Jdg. 3:10.

⁶¹ 1 Cor. 12:7,11; 1 Pe. 4:10. Gifts given at Christ's ascension, Eph. 4:8-12.

⁶² Mat. 10:5-6; Mat. 15:24. Israel was to be a holy nation and demonstrate the reality of Jehovah *as a nation*, but never was given the Great Commission of the church.

⁶³ Mat. 28:19-20.

⁶⁴ Ex. 25:8, 22; Num. 7:89; 1 Sam. 4:4; Isa. 37:16.

Divine Program: Role in Redemptive History (Discontinuity)		
Priesthood	Levites ⁶⁶	all believers ⁶⁷
Jew/Gentile Separation	Mosaic Law ⁶⁸	none, one <i>new man</i> ⁶⁹

Conclusion

We have seen that dispensationalism teaches, and has always *explicitly taught* a single way of salvation. Claims to the contrary have been based on inferences from imprecise statements taken in isolation, a misunderstanding of the terms or elements of dispensationalism, or the imposition of a non-dispensational ecclesiology upon dispensationalism.

It is this last tendency which has introduced the most confusion because it insists on interpreting dispensationalism from a viewpoint which disallows a *sine qua non* of dispensationalism—the recognition of distinct roles among the redeemed of history. I submit it is unproductive to approach an understanding of dispensationalism by imposing upon it a non-dispensational ecclesiology (the redeemed ≡ the church) and continuing to raise the red herring of multiple ways of salvation.

Dispensationalists concur with Klooster, a self-described “Kingdom-Covenant Theologian” who remarks:

In the light of [the] significant revision in the *New Scofield Reference Bible* [to clarify Scofield’s unguarded statement at John 1:16] and the arguments of dispensationalists as Ryrie and Feinberg, the old charge should be dropped. One must proceed from the acknowledgment that Dispensationalism recognizes

⁶⁵ 1 Cor. 6:19; 2 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:21.

⁶⁶ Ex. 28:1; Luke 1:5

⁶⁷ 1 Pe. 2:5-9; Rev. 1:6. “Old Testament priests *were Levites*. New Testament priests *wear levis!*”

⁶⁸ Post Sinai.

⁶⁹ Rom. 11:25-26, 32; 1 Cor. 12:12-13; Gal. 3:28; 6:15; Eph. 2:15; Col. 3:11. “*There are no longer any special qualifications like nationality. All such barriers have been removed.*” Erickson, 1038.

a single way of salvation throughout the Scripture. Salvation is now and has always been by grace alone—*sola gratia!*⁷⁰

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⁷⁰ Fred H. Klooster, "The Biblical Method of Salvation: A Case for Continuity," *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship between the Old and New Testaments* (Westchester: Crossway Books, 1988), 133.

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