

Dispensationalism and Calvinism

Introduction

The common attitude among those who are Dispensationalists is to feel that any person who holds to the doctrine of unconditional election is in serious error. Indeed, some have voiced the attitude that to hold to unconditional election or other of the five points of Calvinism is to leave the fold of the Dispensationalists.

One man in private discussions even said, "When I accepted the 'grace message' I left all of that Calvinism." What he was saying was that when he came to understand the Bible rightly divided he gave up his Calvinism.

Originally Dispensationalists were Calvinists

What is sad is that historically most Dispensationalists were Calvinists but they've strayed from the truth.

J. N. Darby is often credited with being the founder of 'Modern Dispensationalism' -- both by those who condemn and those who uphold this truth. Yet Darby was a very strong Calvinist. In some of his writings he seems to be stronger on the five points than most of his contemporaries who were well-known as five-point Calvinists¹.

It is well known that Darby would have nothing to do with the ministry of D. L. Moody because of Moody's view on the depravity of man. Darby held strongly to the view of Total Depravity and Moody did not².

Darby wrote a very interesting and important paper on the importance of the various points of Calvinism³. In this article, Darby proves to anyone willing to read, that the issue in the Reformation was precisely what is commonly called 'Calvinism'. He points out that to differ from this is to line up with the Roman Catholics on THE issue reformation.

It is to be presumed in this article that when Darby commends a writer and then quotes that writer that he at least in part agrees with that writer. Darby states, "Hence we may estimate the value of the quotation of Dr. Lawrence from Bucer appended to his own views of the subject. 'He who doubts about this (namely, about predestination), cannot believe himself to be called and justified, that is, cannot be a Christian. It is to be assumed, therefore, as a first principle of faith, that we all are foreknown, foredetermined, and separated from the rest, and selected for this, that we should be eternally saved; and that this purpose of God cannot be changed⁴,'"

Darby was not the only one of the early Dispensationalists who were strong Calvinists.

¹ Admittedly, there are some of his writings which seem nonstandard on 'Particular Redemption' while in others he seems strong on this issue.

² The reader should be reminded that there is no such thing as a non-Calvinist definition of 'Total Depravity'. The doctrine of total Depravity is the teaching that the unregenerate are not willing to do anything pleasing to God – they do not even want to believe on the Lord.

³ Willam Kelly, ed., J. N. Darby, Collected Writings, Doctrinal No. 1, Vol. 3 (Stow Hill Bible and Tract Depot, London) 1-43.

⁴ Ibid, p. 9

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Several writers have pointed out that most of the early Dispensationalists were strong Calvinists. In 1888 in a published analysis of the men who signed the call to the Prophetic Conference of 1878, it was pointed out that the proportion of those who were Augustinians was eighty-eight percent⁵. (The reader needs to be reminded that an Augustinian was a Calvinist -- one who believes in Total Depravity, Unconditional Election, Irresistible Grace, and Perseverance.)

It is for this reason that all of the doctrinal statements of dispensational groups of that era had a statement about 'Total Depravity' in them⁶.

What Happened?

The problem is that men, no matter what their persuasion on other points of doctrine, hate the doctrines of Total Depravity and Unconditional Election. These doctrines leave absolutely no basis for pride. These doctrines leave absolutely no place for anything but praise to God for having chosen us who are saved. And, men hate these truths.

When Christ taught these precious truths John 6, we read that (John 6: 66), "From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him." Those who seemed to be disciples -- they believed on Christ, they followed Christ, they seemed to hang on every word -- were lost. They were like those mentioned in I John 2: 19 who, by their departure, proved that they never were saved.

There is a very interesting story in I Kings 22. In this chapter, the prophet Micaiah prophesied that the wicked king Ahab would be defeated and killed in battle. But, what really got Ahab and his cronies exceedingly angry is recorded for us in verses 19-23. In these verses, Micaiah pictures the LORD as actually commissioning a lying spirit (demon) to put lies in the mouths of Ahab's false prophets. There is no question that Micaiah believed in a Sovereign God who even decreed the evil that happens.

CONCLUSTON

My dear reader, if the God you worship is not in sovereign control of men's minds then your God is not the God of the Bible. This is a sobering thought but it is true nevertheless. Do not run from the careful study of this issue anymore. Do not let those *you* respect scare you away from this subject because you want to be faithful to the Word rightly divided. I beg you to bow to the authority of God's Word on this matter.

⁵ S. H. Kellogg, "Premillennialism," Bibliotheca Sacra, Vol. XLV, 1888, pp. 253-254.

⁶ See, for example C. Norman Kraus, Dispensationalism in America (1958, John Knox Press, Richmond) p. 60.