

DISPENSATIONAL STUDY GROUP
18 November 2010

Response to “The Dispensational Covenantal Rift:
The Fissuring of American Evangelical Theology from 1936-1944

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Introduction

It was twenty-five years ago in La Mirada, California, at the annual Evangelical Theological Society, that Dr. David Turner, a faculty colleague at Grace Theological Seminary, invited me to attend an informal meeting of dispensationalists. Out of that meeting came the Dispensational Study Group, which I am honored to address today. A little background about me might be helpful in understanding the reason I am here and my perspective regarding a rift between covenant theology and dispensationalism.

The Lord brought me into fellowship with Him in my early teens through the ministry of the First Presbyterian Church of San Diego, California. At my conversion, I committed myself to a life of Christian vocational ministry. Under the care of the session of my local church, which at that time was the second largest in the Presbyterian Church, USA, I attended Whitworth College in the preministerial program, considering the possibility of subsequently attending Princeton Theological Seminary. While at Whitworth, I attended a meeting where a representative of the local presbytery addressed preministerial students. The only thing that I remember from that session was that we were told that the presbytery preferred that the students attend a Presbyterian Seminary but others were acceptable. One special exception, however, was Dallas Theological Seminary.

While in college, I began attending a Baptist church, pastored by a former student of William Bell Riley and an ardent dispensationalist. That was my introduction to the term and the movement. After wrestling for over a year with the question of water baptism, and consulting with my Presbyterian pastor, I joined the Loma Vista Baptist Church in my junior year of college. In that church a family introduced me to the writings of Lewis Sperry Chafer and Merrill F. Unger. Having bought some of their books and found them very helpful, I bought the big book—*Things to Come*, by J. Dwight Pentecost. Though very appreciative of these works, I initially attended the seminary that was part of the body with which my church was associated.

My first few months of seminary training were very disappointing as I was a Christian who had received little Bible training. I had enjoyed good preaching and teaching but never had been involved with a systematic study of scripture. I assumed that seminary was the place for that. When I shared that shortcoming with a dean at the seminary, he suggested that I attend a Bible College and then return to seminary. I had already been looking at the program at Dallas Theological Seminary and determined that I should transfer. The dean warned me that to do so posed a twofold danger. First, I would be spoon-fed my education and, second, would have to vow not to teach any other system of thought. I informed the dean that Edward J. Young, a Reformed Old Testament scholar, had recently been the W. H. Griffith-Thomas lecturer at Dallas, so there was some appreciation for the contribution of those beyond dispensational boundaries. I finished the year at the Baptist seminary and transferred to Dallas. I have been thankful throughout my life for that decision.

At Dallas, I found that for which I was searching but I also found an attitude on the part of some students with which I was uncomfortable. After my first year at DTS, I returned home

for the summer. In mid-summer I sought a church with an early service because I had an appointment in Anaheim at 1:30 that afternoon (watching Angels play). I found that an Orthodox Presbyterian Church less than ten minutes drive from my house had an 8:00 A.M. service. I went there and was welcomed by the pastor, Edward Kellogg, who sought to know something about me. I told him that I was a DTS student at home for the summer. He shared with me that a Westminster Theological Seminary student under the care of the church was going to speak there the following Sunday and I was invited to return. Then he asked if I would read the scripture at that service. I told him that I would (the Angels were playing in Anaheim that Sunday as well). At the next week service, prior to the reading of scripture and the sermon, the pastor introduced their speaker and gave glowing words of support for Westminster Theological Seminary. Then he introduced me to read the scripture and took a few moments to give similar words of appreciation about Dallas Theological Seminary due to its strong adherence to the scriptures and the essentials of the Christian faith. I was pleasantly surprised to hear those kind words. When I returned to seminary in the fall, being maritally-challenged, I was back in the dorm addressing some of my similarly-challenged dorm members about my experience in the Presbyterian church. One looked at me in dismay and asked: "You mean you could worship with amillennialists?" I thought to myself: "Yes, and I enjoyed it!" When I graduated two years later, Edmund P. Clowney, president of Westminster Theological Seminary, addressed the graduates and others assembled, on the topic "The Yoke of Christ."

Five years later I returned to DTS for doctoral work. For my doctoral dissertation, I proposed to write on the issues that precipitated the rupture at Princeton Theological Seminary in the 1920s. I chose that subject partly due to the fact that I had accepted a position at a Bible

college in the northeast and would have access, I hoped, to important materials in libraries there. There was some concern among a faculty member about how much cooperation a DTS student might find, especially at Princeton, but I was encouraged to pursue the subject. The Princeton Seminary librarian, Louis Willard, could not have been more helpful. He gave me unlimited access to everything under his authority in the library, including faculty minutes, which were critical to my study. He could not, however, grant me access to the minutes of the Board of Directors and Board of Trustees. Those were under the domain of the seminary president, James McCord. I wrote to Dr. McCord who responded quickly informing me that he had instructed Dr. Willard to make all board minutes available to me and shared that if I had any other needs, he would be pleased to meet them.

In 1982, I had the privilege of being invited by James Boice to be an observer at the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy Summit II Conference on Hermeneutics. There, at the conclusion of the conference, participants and observers were invited to sign the declarations produced. In line with me was George Knight III. This Reformed scholar reached out his hand to shake mine and said that it was an honor for him to sign the document with me, a Reformed scholar and a dispensational Baptist signing the same document pertaining to the interpretation of scripture! He did not know me but demonstrated the grace that I had come to see from many Reformed people.

The papers, responses, and minutes of the discussion of the 1989 Dispensational Study Group, focusing on Vern Poythress' *Understanding Dispensationalists*, were published in the *Grace Theological Journal*, of which I was at that time managing editor. The papers were by dispensationalists engaging Dr. Poythress, who responded to each. I made sure to share that not

all of the views in the discussion reflected those of the journal or Grace Seminary. The material was presented so that more people could be aware of an amillennialism different from that of Oswald T. Allis and his book, *Prophecy and the Church*. I received nary a letter of appreciation but did receive notices of cancellation, one from an alumnus of Grace who was shocked that we would print material by an amillennialist. About the same time I had shared with a Grace Seminary class on eschatology Anthony Hoekema’s amillennialism that took more seriously a literal fulfillment of God’s promises to Israel than had amillennialists who had published in the past. I said that I could appreciate an amillennialism that shared that perspective of a future kingdom hope (eternal and not millennial) for the nation of Israel—a literal fulfillment of prophecy for which dispensationalists had been arguing for generations. A colleague, having heard from a student my expression of appreciation, wrote a few hundred pastors questioning my fitness to teach at Grace. While attending a discussion between dispensationalists and covenant theologians at a meeting sponsored by the Coalition for Revival, I was told by one of the dispensationalists that I was not really a dispensationalist because I was identified with progressive dispensationalism. These last few months in preparation of this response, I have been inclined to think that sometimes the rift I have experienced is greater among dispensationalists than between some Reformed thinkers and dispensationalists.

The “Rift”

Todd Mangum has written a very helpful dissertation, published as a book, *The Dispensational-Covenantal Rift*.¹ I enjoyed reading the book, especially because it brought me back to people about whom I had spent much time in research thirty years ago. I commend Dr. Mangum for the thoroughness of his research. It led me to make a trip a trip to Dallas last June

in order to engage many of those sources myself. In his book, he uses the 1980 “explosion” of Mount Saint Helens in the state of Washington to begin his discussion of the cataclysms coming from dispensational-covenantal engagements of the 1930s and 1940s. I would prefer to use a different though similar example: that of plate tectonics. Plates of the earth’s crust collide with one another, sideswipe one another, or pull away from one another causing earthquakes, volcanoes, and other phenomena. The thought of the explosion seems to me to be too extreme an example. What we have with covenant theology and dispensationalism are two systems that are in some places incompatible. The dispensational distinction between Israel and the church does not fit comfortably with the covenantal emphasis of the church as “Israel” or “the new Israel.” The clash between views of the place of the Ten Commandments for the church; interpretation the Sermon on the Mount, the Lord’s Prayer, and the Olivet Discourse, though in recent years diminished somewhat by writings of some dispensationalists, still exists. We are not looking at two different faiths, as J. Gresham Machen did in his work, *Christianity and Liberalism*, comparing the biblical faith with a non-biblical view that claimed to be the same faith, but two expressions of the Christian faith, holding the essentials but clashing, scraping, pulling apart at other levels.

Mangum’s “Surprises”

Mangum shares his surprise that “‘Dispensationalism’ was not identifiable as a distinct theological system until the mid-1930s.” However, the word “dispensational” was often used. Clarence Larkin began his work *Dispensational Truth or God’s Plan and Purpose in the Ages* in 1915 with the final edition published in 1920.² Of course, this is not a complete book of Bible doctrine. Lewis Sperry Chafer’s *Major Bible Themes* was published in 1926. Claiming not to be

“a treatise on systematic theology,”³ Chafer wrote forty-nine short chapters that take one through the major theological categories of systematic theology: three chapters on bibliology, two on theology proper, seven on Christology, five on pneumatology, three on angelology, two on anthropology, two on hamartiology, seven on soteriology, three on ecclesiology (but nothing on the ordinances, polity, offices), six on eschatology (or prophecy), with single chapters on dispensations, covenants, law and grace, the sabbath, the Lord’s day and the new creation,, love, prayer, service (where in over six pages of text varieties of service for believers are mentioned but never does the word *church* appear), thanksgiving (no mention of *church*), and stewardship (again, no mention of *church*, though there is a reference to “saints at Corinth”). The Evangelical Theological College used Chafer’s “Analytical Questionnaire,” one for each of three years of systematic theology. The first year booklet included 1,034 questions/tasks to be answered/done under the headings of prolegomena, bibliology, theology proper, angelology, and anthropology. The second year booklet contains 1,247 questions/tasks over soteriology, ecclesiology, and eschatology. The third questionnaire has 2,800 questions/tasks under the heading of doctrinal summarization. There was also a fourth booklet dealing with the history of doctrine. The booklets included an opening “General Statement” which concludes: “This series of analytical questions is of temporary character aiming to serve the present necessity until a textbook incorporating a similar series of questions is secured.”⁴ There was a system of theology taught, though not identified by the name *dispensationalism*.

In a certain sense, dispensationalism is not a complete theological system. For example, though dispensationalism has much to say about the church, it has not developed a thorough ecclesiology. There have been Presbyterians, Baptists, Lutherans, Methodists,

Congregationalists, Plymouth Brethren, Grace Brethren, and others who could rightly be called dispensationalists yet holding to significantly different ecclesiologies. One could also include those sometimes classified as Ultra-dispensationalists, who think of themselves not as “Ultra” at all, and their distinctive ecclesiologies (one for Israel and one for the nations, beginning with the ministry of the apostle Paul). This is a deficiency, I believe, and one that is at the ground of much of the dissension about the movement. The view that the church is a parenthesis, a plan B as one dispensational teacher shared it, does not give adequate place to the significance of the body of Christ. Within dispensationalism there is not absolute agreement regarding eschatology. There are varying concepts of the rapture, the reinstatement of the priesthood and animal sacrifices in the millennial age, the place of abode of the church in the eternal state. In soteriology, there have been Arminian dispensationalists as well as five-point Calvinistic dispensationalists, and, forgive me, all points in between. However, the writings of Chafer and Scofield certainly presented the theological views of the two most significant men in the movement. Thus, I am not convinced that we can distinguish between dispensationalism as a system in 1936 from the dispensationalist teaching of previous decades.

The second surprise mentioned is that prior to Mangum’s “rift,” most American dispensationalists were “Westminster-Confession subscribing, Reformed . . . Presbyterians.” I have not done a statistical study but I am not sure that what is affirmed is true. There are only a few examples given, to which is added statistics regarding the proportion of Presbyterian students and faculty at the Evangelical Theological College/DTS. However, there were a large number of Baptist preachers who were leading dispensational preachers/writers. I. M. Haldeman, the previously mentioned Clarence Larkin, William Pettingill, and William Bell Riley

are just a few. H. A. Ironside is representative of the Brethren (often called Plymouth Brethren), many of whom were dispensational. Louis S. Bauman and Alva J. McClain were leaders in the Brethren Church who also were dispensationalists. W. E. Blackstone, whose *Jesus Is Coming*, was a big-seller among books by dispensationalists was a Methodist as was, originally, Arno C. Gaebelin. Certainly there has been a rich heritage of Presbyterian dispensationalists but I question the validity of Mangum's second surprise.

There is nothing that I could add to surprise #3. This is not an area that I have researched thoroughly. Mangum has done a thorough work and I am aware that there were, and are, conservatives in the Presbyterian bodies who are concerned about dispensationalism. However, I would not dismiss the fact that a liberal contingent may have had influence if for no other reason than the existence of Dallas Theological Seminary as a theological institution competing for students. At the same time, I agree that the concern about the incompatibility of dispensationalism and the Westminster Confession of Faith was the basis of the conflict.

The fourth surprise is an affirmation: "The the rift between dispensationalism and covenantal theology did not have to happen." Here I am reminded of the words of Lefferts Loetscher in an interview that this leading Presbyterian historian allowed me in preparation for the writing of my dissertation. He said: "As an historian, I don't find, I'm not satisfied to see, tremendous changes coming out of nowhere. And I think the whole key to history and the fine art of the historian is to go back before the very visible explosion to see in the period preceding the so-called explosion things that at the time were almost invisible, that help one to interpret and see as leading up to the so-called explosion."⁵

Certainly Mangum is correct in referring to the "rift," or to use Loetscher's similar term,

“explosion,” occurring in 1936. But I would contend that contributing to this explosion were a number of factors that Loetscher might regard as “almost invisible.” Interestingly, the sides in the 1936 rift were, for the most part, academics at Westminster Seminary promoting a theological system against challenges or concepts, promoted by Presbyterian pastors, contrary to that tradition, as the academics saw it. The prominent dispensationalists in the conflict were pastors, foremost of whom was Carl McIntire. The academic defending the covenantal tradition were also of the European variety that was strongly subscriptionist, upholders of a strict reading of the Reformed confessions. This contest in the Presbyterian Church of America is similar in that sense to what happened in the division of the Princeton Theological Seminary faculty in the preceding decades where those who were strictly academically oriented took one approach and those who had pastoral experience tended to take a different approach to the articulation and defense of the faith. There are a number of studies that relate the development of the Presbyterian church in the United States that have concluded that there has been, through most of that history, three parties within the church. William J. Weston has summarized this division by referring to “the two public opponents—call them ‘liberals’ and ‘conservatives’—and the vast mass they are trying to win over.”⁶ Presbyterians in America have lived with this tension for about three centuries.

Mangum focuses initially on the rift that occurred within the newly formed Presbyterian Church of America. It is well to note that the rift came within a small denomination of less than 5,000 members. It is a denomination that has suffered other rifts. Edwin Rian, who wrote *The Presbyterian Conflict*, a conservative account of the problems besetting the Presbyterian church in the first third of the 20th century, was an ally of Machen and part of the formation of the

Presbyterian Church of America, which became the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Rian, in 1947, retaining his conservative theology, returned to the mainline Presbyterian fold that he had left under Machen's influence. He commented about his return that there were three basic reasons. "First, we were fighting Christians and not the world, the flesh, and the devil. What we did in retrospect was to elevate certain convictions and declare them to be essential to the church."⁷ He further wrote: "Second, there is a self-righteousness and an intolerance in the attitude of withdrawal. I take myself as an example. We thought we had a corner on the truth, and a pipeline to God. We thought we were absolutely right and the rest of the world was wrong. We felt like we were on Mount Olympus looking down on the rest of Christians."⁸ He concluded: "Third, there was a certain rigidity of doctrine. We had a closed system of doctrine. We thought that the Westminster Confession of Faith was inspired. But creeds are dated and reflect the views of the time. The Westminster Confession is a human document. God is the source of truth, but our views of truth are in a process of development. If you look back at the church Fathers, to a man they all opposed separation from the church for those issues—including Charles Hodge, which may surprise some people."⁹ There was not just one "rift" among Presbyterians in this era, and dispensationalism was not always the issue.

On the other hand, there were writings by dispensationalists that naturally were confrontational in their wording. Regarding Chafer's 1915 publication, *The Kingdom in History and Prophecy*, John Hannah has summarized: "Chafer argued that any clergyman who did not understand the Bible as he and the host of Bible conference teachers did was 'incompetent to minister the whole Word,' falling 'falling far short of being an approved workman, rightly dividing the Word of Truth.'"¹⁰ Certainly these words would not be appreciated by all. Charles

R. Erdman, Princeton Seminary professor, wrote in a review of Chafer's book: "The present study repeats the interpretations of Scripture which during the last few decades have been current among Premillennialists, but it contains prominent features which are not held by many who agree with the author on the main points relative to the personal return of Christ and the establishment of his millennial reign. . . . However, when the writer attempts to describe the present phase of the Kingdom and discuss the 'Mysteries of the Kingdom' and the 'Mystery of Iniquity,' he becomes involved in the confusions which characterize the writings of many popular interpreters of prophecy but which are not necessary features of the Premillennial view."¹¹ After listing problems he perceived in interpretations by Chafer, Erdman concluded that those interpretations "will be rejected by many students of prophecy who agree with his general belief in a personal return of Christ and the establishment in glory of His perfected kingdom."¹² This review is cited for two reasons: first, to note that in 1917, a Princeton Seminary professor critiqued negatively dispensational views of Chafer and, second, to note that the critique was written by a premillennialist.

In the 1922 publication, *Grace*, Chafer wrote: "There are some who, ignorant of the dispensational divisions of God's Word, and seeking to qualify the clear teachings of the Apostle Paul, are encouraging themselves in legalism on the strength of the fact that Christ kept and vindicated the law in the days of His particular ministry to Israel. The teaching of these legalists is a circumvention of the whole revelation of divine grace."¹³ One might add that covenant thinkers could be just as harsh in their writings. The point is that dispensationalists should not have been shocked at the defense that writers such as Oswald T. Allis, John Murray, and R. B. Kuiper presented against dispensationalists. Mangum's words about John Murray are a good

representation of covenant theology approach: “when ‘dispensationalism’ came into the crosshairs of his theological argumentation, he applied a take-no-prisoners approach. It wasn’t personal; it was simply for the sake of the truth of ‘the Reformed faith.’ It had to be done.”

Returning to Mangum’s point that the rift in 1936 did not have to take place, I would agree that it did not have to take place then, but it would take place at some time because there are some incompatibilities between dispensationalism and covenant theology. A few years ago, I was awakened with a start as my bed was shaking about 4:40 A.M. and there was a sound as if a railroad train were coming down the street where there were no rails. It was an earthquake. I turned on a local channel and later a meteorologist stated that there had been anticipation of a great earthquake sometime soon and many were pleased that this small earthquake had relieved pressure being built up. I think of the dispensational-covenantalist rift in that way, trusting that the squabbles minor save us from a squabble more major.

I was interested in Mangum’s conviction that the rift would not have been so great had John Walvoord, Donald Campbell, Chuck Swindoll, or Mark Bailey have been president at the time. Once again I turn to my conversation with Loetscher. He shared his convictions that one’s environment is a significant factor in the making of a person. Walvoord, Campbell, Swindoll, and Bailey came from different environmental backgrounds than Chafer. The times were not quite as different for Walvoord, who worked with Chafer for many years, but would have been so for the other presidents. Family circumstances, places of upbringing, education, social emphases, and many other matters come into play. To put the successors of Chafer as DTS presidents into Chafer’s time would mean that they would not have been the same men that they were in their times. The same could be said about Chafer had he been placed in the time of

Campbell, Swindoll, and Bailey. I am also concerned about what I believe to be the harsh words about Chafer, identifying him as responding to criticism “not only with defensiveness but bitterness” and that he “developed a reputation, even among his friends, of being a bit thin-skinned, thick-headed and defensive.” John Hannah has shared with me that Chafer had a “confident assurance”¹⁴ in his position. Certainly his confidence in his position can be clearly evident in his publications and letters, yet that attitude probably is reflected by all of us at times in speaking or writing our convictions. However, confident assurance is not the same as bitter, thin-skinned, thick-headed, and defensive.

It is clear that Dr. Mangum grieves over the rift. In a sense we all should grieve division in the body. But division is a reality in the church and churches divide over much less important issues than the distinction between dispensationalists and covenantalists. Rather than trying to find fault, I believe that what is needed is a recognition that the body of Christ is one though the members are many and have differing, and at times opposing views. We need to recognize that there are still some sons of Zebedee, some Peters, some Pauls, people of strong, and sometimes different convictions who at times are thought like the earth’s plates, colliding, side-swiping, or pulling apart, but that which unites the body is greater than that which would divide.

I wish to simply give a quick summary of impressions of the last half of the paper prior to the suggestions for “establishing a better ground for discussion between covenant theologians and dispensationalists.” I am not certain who drew “first blood” in this rift. Strong affirmations of what was true and what was not were made by both sides. That practice persists. I agree that “Covenant theologians may not have been completely right in every respect in their critiques against ‘dispensationalism,’ but they at least had a point” But I also believe that advances

beyond the wording by Scofield and Chafer by many dispensationalists, whether classical, revisionist, or progressive, demonstrates that others agree as well. There have been various modifications, some of which Mangum mentions. Where some may say that matters were poorly stated or that some significant changes need to be made in dispensational interpretation, it seems that dispensationalists today are more careful, more precise, and, hopefully, more clearly communicating what the Word of God says. Though I believe that Mangum is helpful in demonstrating this point, I wish that Charles Ryrie, one of the best teachers I ever had, were here to respond to Dr. Mangum's assessment of his views.

With this point in mind, I turn to the first suggestion Mangum offers. Having stated that there were problems on both sides, what is it particularly that dispensationalists need to admit that has not already been addressed through a variety of clarifications? I would also ask: Have some covenant theologians not been guilty of harsh statements in this discussion? How many times do dispensationalists have to declare that they do not believe in two ways of salvation? How many times do they have to demonstrate that their views are not antinomian? The second suggestion, I think, refers to those matters that are irreconcilable due to different approaches by the two parties, recognizing that each approaches the scriptures with a particular mindset. These matters will probably never be resolved as we look through the glass darkly. But that does not mean that there must be open and bitter conflict. The people involved do need not to have unity in order to have harmony. I believe that suggestion three is similar to the second and may never be answered in this age. Suggestion four should cut both ways. Dispensationalists alone have not been guilty of dogmatizing and should not be the only ones to reallocate proposals "from the realm of 'doctrine' or 'dogma' and relegate them to the realm of 'opinion,' 'model' or

‘suggestion’ where they belong.” With suggestion #5 I am in agreement but I am not convinced that the division is as deep-rooted today as Mangum does. For support, I turn to the words of men who bear testimony of how to deal with significant differences. Interestingly, the three that come to mind are covenant thinkers, but I know dispensationalists who share the same attitude. One of the testimonies comes from personal experience, the second from the testimony of a former professor, and the third from the writing of an acquaintance.

While driving Cornelius Van Til to his home from Westminster Seminary, I heard these words from him: “Brother Clutter, you know that our dear Arminian brethren are just as secure in the hands of the Lord as we. They just don’t know it!” I must say that I was surprised. It was not “Arminians” but “our dear Arminian brethren.” In my meetings with Van Til, he continually asked Dr. Walvoord’s health and well-being and asked me to pass on his greeting to a former student who was a dispensational Baptist faculty colleague. My second testimony is from J. Dwight Pentecost. I recalled hearing him say over forty years ago that on occasion, Oswald T. Allis visited the church where Pentecost was pastor in order to partake of the Lord’s Supper, an observance that Allis appreciated but which was offered only a few times a year by the church he attended. Wanting to make sure that I heard correctly, this past summer while at DTS I had an opportunity to talk with Dr. Pentecost. He confirmed that I had heard him correctly. He went on to state that Allis came to his church one Sunday evening to hear a message on the Book of Revelation. After the service, he asked if I might be welcome to attend the remainder of the series as he wished to hear how a dispensationalist preached the Book of Revelation. He also participated in Lord’s Supper services there. Two men who wrote with strong conviction, strident in support of their views and their opposition to what they believed incorrect, Allis and

Van Til, but also men of grace who recognized that God's work was much wider than their system. The final testimony is from an acquaintance, John Frame. I took an apologetics class from Baptist Bible College to visit one of his classes at Westminster. Years later he authored a book related to our discussion here. In *Evangelical Reunion*, he wrote:

In one city I know, there is a large evangelical independent church with a dispensational pastor. The pastor is an excellent communicator of the gospel and doesn't hammer much on dispensationalist distinctives. He preaches mostly the positive teachings of Scripture, communicates love for the lost and for fellow Christians of all backgrounds, while not being indifferent to what he regards as error. There is also in that city a Reformed church in a denomination closely related to my own. The Reformed pastor's theology is significantly closer to mine than that of the dispensationalist. But the Reformed man's sermons are exceedingly obscure and highly negative. The people of his congregation seem always to have chips on their shoulders, indignant about this or that; there is very little joy in the Lord, very little welcome to people of a non-Reformed background. They claim to have much theological knowledge, but most of that 'knowledge' is poorly thought out, often wrongly applied. The mentality in the church is very much inward-facing. Now, if I had only these two alternatives, which would I recommend to our inquirer? I would not hesitate to recommend the dispensationalist. To me the question is: In which congregation can my friend best hear the gospel and see its fruits? It is clear to me that the dispensationalist in my example *conveys far more of the truth* than the Reformed pastor.

There is no doctrinal indifference, but quite the reverse. I send my friend to the dispensationalist church because I know that he will there learn *more* sound doctrine, more authentic biblical content, than if he went to the church more confessionally similar to mine. And when I look realistically at the needs of the inquirer and prayerfully consider the alternatives available, I see a better perspective and am often led beyond my own denomination, even my own theological tradition.¹⁵

I appreciate that kind of covenant theologian! (I do not have to worry about someone trying to have me fired now!) Whether Frame would repeat these words written twenty years ago or not, I believe that they represent the attitude befitting covenant thinkers and dispensationalists alike as they serve as brothers and sisters in the Lord in a world that is so in need of the light, the good news, that both have to share. We are together part of the most glorious body on this earth, the body of Christ. We share the same Father in heaven and are clothed in the righteousness of the

same Son of God. We experience the same so great salvation and the hope of the ultimate triumph of the Lord Jesus Christ in bringing this age to its conclusion. We will share in the glories of the future blessings as God's eternal people. Yes, there likely will be more be tremors and quakes, collisions and clashes, but through those uncomfortable times may the focus of each be that our light shine brightly, clearly, and effectively until Jesus comes and when there are disagreements, may the unity of the body result in retaining harmony as a family.

Endnotes

1. R. Todd Mangum, *The Dispensational-Covenantal Rift* (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2007).
2. Clarence Larkin, *Dispensational Truth, or God's Plan and Purpose in the Ages*, enlarged and revised ed. (Glenside, PA: Clarence Larkin Estate, 1920), p. 1.
3. Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Major Bible Themes* (Grand Rapids, MI: Dunham, 1964; reprint of 1926 edition), p. vii.
4. Lewis Sperry Chafer, "Analytical Questionnaire," First, Second, and Third Years (Dallas, TX: Evangelical Theological College, n. d.), p. 1.
5. Personal interview with Lefferts A. Loetscher, Princeton, New Jersey, 27 April 1981. Audio tape in my possession.
6. William J. Weston, *Presbyterian Pluralism* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee, 1997), p. xi. See also D. G. Hart and John R. Muether, *Seeking a Better Country* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2007), chapter 2.
7. Edwin H. Rian, "Theological Conflicts in the 1920s and 1930s in the Presbyterian Church and on the Princeton Seminary Campus." *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 5:3 (1984), p. 221.
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 221-222.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 222.
10. John Hannah, *An Uncommon Union* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), p. 116.
11. Charles R. Erdman, "Review of *The Kingdom in History and Prophecy*," *The Princeton Theological Review* 15:2 (April, 1917), p. 368.
12. *Ibid.*
13. Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Grace* (Grand Rapids, MI: Dunham, 1955; reprint of 1922 ed.), pp. 96-97.
14. Telephone conversation with John Hannah, 2 November 2010.
15. John M. Frame, *Evangelical Reunion* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1991), pp. 80-81.