

Ultradispensationalism

A Personal Testimony

By R. B. Shiflet

I HAVE NEVER MET A MAN who admitted that he was an ultradispensationalist. I have never heard nor read a satisfactory definition of one. I know that ultradispensationalism has a synonym, "hyperdispensationalism." Thus the propagandist who resorts to name-calling may have his choice of the Greek prefix (hyper-) or the Latin one (ultra-) to hurl at his victim. I am aware that these terms are thrown about promiscuously by Bible teachers who have status in conservative circles. The terms are also repeated parrot-like by those who are simply seeking notoriety among fundamentalists.

Usually someone is referred to as an ultradispensationalist if his dispensational interpretation of the Bible goes beyond one's own. That, of course, is the meaning of the word "ultra"—over, or beyond. If you are a dispensationalist, and your brother dispensationalist goes over or beyond the point historically or Scripturally that you do, he is, consequently, an ultradispensationalist.

There is another, and perhaps even more deadly, ultradispensationalism, for which little rebuke seems to be forthcoming from any of the publications dedicated to the right division of the Scriptures. I consider this form as practical ultradispensationalism, rather than doctrinal. I submit to you that, when we become guilty of any of the following practices, we are "ultra-" or "hyper-" in our dispensationalism; that is, we go beyond the Scriptures and become practical ultradispensationalists.

MAKE A SECT OF OUR DISPENSATIONALISM. We refuse fellowship with anyone who does not agree with us on every facet of our teaching on right division of the Word. By way of example, not long ago a woman called our home to inquire about our church services. She was fundamental in her beliefs and dispensational according to the Scofield-Darby system but she belonged to an independent fellowship of fundamental churches. When she discovered that our church was not affiliated with her denomination with its system of dispensationalism, she became aloof and would not attend our meetings, even though we assured her of the soundness of our teaching and that she would be made welcome in our assembly. This woman was so ultra- in regard to her denomination and its system that she could not see the many, many, many things we had in common and missed the sweet fellowship we could have enjoyed together as fellow believers.

To be honest, we must admit that some of the most sectarian groups we have ever encountered were dispensationalists who took pride in the fact of their non-sectarianism. Many who boast in their being "non-sectarian Christians" are so bound in their dispensationalism that they refuse to admit to their fellowship any who vary even slightly from their particular "norms."

MUTILATE THE SCRIPTURES BY OUR DISPENSATIONALISM. Foes of the right division of Scripture have often accused us of taking only a portion of the word of God and casting the remainder aside. A well-known fundamentalist who had been loud in his condemnation of dispensational Bible study, used to say that we took only a slice of the bread of God's word, while he took the whole loaf. He was, of course, inconsistent. He claimed to preach the "Great Commission" of Mark 16, but at the same time attacked with all his might the "healing preachers" who were attempting to carry out the

sign program of the same commission.

But the other side of the picture is that we of the "Grace Movement" have often been guilty of preaching the Mystery and "Pauline" truths while neglecting or ignoring the remainder of the Bible. The error is not in preaching the great truths of Paul's letters; it is in failing to give a balanced message, and so appearing to disregard or cast aside the rest of the Bible. The revelation of truth concerning the Body of Christ needs the background of the gospels. The gospels would not be understandable without the law, the psalms, and the prophets. Therefore, we need the whole Book. Let us not be so ultra- in our emphasis on dispensationalism (wherever we find the boundaries) that we neglect parts of the Word.

MISS THE SWEETNESS OF SPIRITUAL APPLICATIONS. Closely associated with neglecting the Word of God (other than Paul's letters) is the failure to see spiritual applications from portions belonging to other dispensations. Dr. E. W. Bullinger, a so-called ultradispensationalist, said in his excellent book, *How to Enjoy the Bible*:

"All the sweetness, all the blessing, all the truth can be obtained by a wise application, without in the slightest degree impairing the true interpretation. This may be left and preserved in its integrity, and yet something really spiritual may be appropriated by application—all, in fact, that can be desired—without doing any violence to the Divine Word . . ."

I think it was Dr. Henry Grube who called attention to the fact that 1 Corinthians 10:11 authorizes four types of Bible study: (1) "Now all these things happened"—I can study any of the Bible as literally true because these things actually happened; (2) "unto them for examples" (literally, "types")—I can study the Bible for types and shadows; (3) "and they are written for our admonition"—I can study the Bible for spiritual applications; (4) "upon whom the ends of the ages are come"—I can study the Bible to distinguish ages, or dispensations. Surely some of God's elect from among the Plymouth Brethren have done the Body of Christ a great service through their detailed studies, many still in print, of spiritual applications of Old Testament truths. Who among us has not rejoiced with C. H. Macintosh in many of his studies in type and shadow?

If we become so dispensational that we miss the sweetness of spiritual truths, we become "ultra-".

MANIFEST THE SPIRIT OF CONTINUOUS CRITICISM. I believe that, by the grace of God, most of us who love Paul's teaching, have grown out of this to a degree. But who among us cannot remember a time when a believer, new to dispensational truth, was almost afraid to open his mouth around older believers for fear of being criticized for his choice of words, choice of hymns, etc.? We did not dare refer to the Old Testament and the New without a dissertation on just when the Old was replaced by the New. We dared not use the words "Christmas" or "Easter," lest someone think we were "observing days." It was considered heresy to sing "Stepping in the Light" because we were surely not [as the first stanza states] "Trying to walk in the steps of the Saviour."

In our zeal to stress the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ was a Jew according to the flesh, born of a woman, born under the law, living on Old Testament ground, yet coming to die for our sins, not showing us the way but coming to be the way, we forgot another side of the picture. While we do not follow our Lord in His Jewish religion with its Sabbaths and ceremonies, we do (or should) strive to "let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus." As far as His humility, His kindness, His graciousness, and His love are concerned, we must remember that He left us an example that we should follow in His steps—not to be saved, but because He lives within us. In our zeal to "know Him no more according to the flesh" we may have put a stumbling block in the path of weak Christians who did not even know what we were talking about.

If our life is a pattern of criticizing those who fail to agree with us in that which has become "dispensational jargon," we are "ultra-".

This message is not an appeal to minimize or de-emphasize the precious truth of right division, nor is it designed to discourage anyone from making known the dispensation of the mystery. Surely, too few are doing enough to make these rich truths known. But I am convinced that Satan sometimes uses the friends of dispensationalism to be its greatest hindrance. The truth that was given to us by the risen Christ through the Apostle Paul was meant to stress the UNITY of the Spirit—the oneness of all believers in Christ. It is a sad commentary on our depravity that our message, through these forms of ultradispensationalism, has become a source of division.

A man of God whom I have heard, and whose sweet spirit has been an inspiration to me, even though I was never privileged to meet him face to face, was Brother Elmer Leake, a Texas pastor who, before any of us were born, was standing for many of the truths we hold dear. He was quoted as saying: "Brethren, if a wall of separation or sectarianism is ever built between us and other believers, let's let them do the building." In other words, this dear brother loved all believers and desired fellowship with them through the Lord Jesus Christ. Brother C. R. Stam once wrote: "We look forward to the day when, in God's grace, denominational walls will fall and we can all enjoy our oneness in Christ. Meantime, we seek what fellowship we can find with those who trust our Lord in truth, whatever their denominational affiliation." This statement climaxed an article that Brother Stam wrote on "The Practical Effects of the Mystery," in which he gave an impressive, clear-cut message on the preciousness of the preaching of Jesus Christ according to the revelation of the mystery, showing the practical effects this message should have in our lives.

When we have become so concerned with the smallest details of dispensationalism that we lose the realization of our oneness in Christ, we have become "ultra-."

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

*Dispensationalist . . . One who holds to the view that the key to understanding the Scriptures rests in understanding the dispensations given by God throughout the course of human history. A Dispensation literally means "house rules" or "economy" and involves God's requirements for mankind which varied depending on the point in time and the people with which God was dealing. For a more detailed study of dispensationalism, please consult the book Things That Differ by C.R. Stam (available from GEM).

**Scofield-Darby System . . . A system of dispensationalism which is found in the Scofield Reference Bible and that was taught by Dr. C. I. Scofield in the early 20th-century. Scofield and Darby saw the dispensational character of Scripture to a point, but yet intermingled teachings directed to the nation of Israel with those directed to the Body of Christ in many areas.

***Pauline Truths . . . Those teachings unique to the letters of Paul, given to him by revelation from Jesus Christ for the Church, which is Christ's Body. Examples of "Pauline Truths" are the one baptism, the catching away of the Church which is His Body, and the mystery of the joint Body of Christ of this age.

****Fundamentalist . . . One who embraces the "fundamentals" of the Christian faith, including: the inspiration of the Bible, the virgin birth of Christ, His substitutionary death and bodily resurrection, salvation by grace through faith alone, and the literal catching away of the Church into glory.
