

A Systematic Theology for Classical Pauline Dispensationalism?

Classical Pauline Dispensationalism, “CPD” (a biblical framework for interpreting Scripture) is built upon the *recovery* of biblical truth which began with Martin Luther (1483 – 1546) and the Protestant Reformation (first stage), followed by John N. Darby (1800 – 1882) and the early Plymouth Brethren (second stage)¹. CPD should not be confused with the so-called, post-Acts2 “Pauline dispensationalists” (Welch, Stam, O’Hair, Baker, etc.) who are all mutant forms of Scofieldism. For clarification, see [Dispensational Theologians](#). As of the year 2009, a comprehensive, systematic CPD theology is yet to be written, and given the eschatological hour, it may in fact never be written.

Contrary to popular and oft-repeated accounts, this *first stage* in the recovery of truth was launched by 1) the direct reading and referencing of the Pauline epistles (rather than Roman Catholic or Greek Orthodox ecclesiastical authority) and 2) the initial rediscovery of the truth of mankind’s lost estate and *bondage of the will* as inherited from the first Adam.² This foundational truth had been intentionally buried by centuries of humanistic religious obfuscation, and continues to this very day.

In the *second stage*, Darby recovered the Pauline truth of the believer’s heavenly position “in Christ,” which in turn led to seeing God’s earthly people--Israel, as a distinct and separate entity from the Church. Darby understood the Church to be exclusively composed of those “born again” (John 3:3) and who reside “in Christ” (1 Cor. 15:22; Eph. 2: 4-10) by a sovereign operation of God the Holy Spirit. This was a major break with the majority view of Christendom, which also held that the visible Church had replaced Israel in the plans of God.

With the recovery of both the believer’s and the true Church’s collective position “in Christ,” Darby and the early Brethren were effective in envisioning the Christian faith more free of Judaizing influence. Given the fact that a preponderance of the 66 canonical books are Jewish in origin, and that God historically forebear *messianic Judaism* until Acts 28, this transition has proven no easy task. Nearly two millennia of church history demonstrate the fact that the organized church has never real become free of either Judaism or its *galatianizing*³ influence. Comments in brackets [] are added by myself.

“...the writing of this book [*Elements of Dispensational Truth, Volume 3*] is not from the standpoint that the church [those born again viewed collectively] has replaced Israel, or is the spiritual Israel, or is the Israel of God. After we Christians are caught up to be with Christ where He is (John 14:1-3; 1 Thess. 4:15-18), God will work with a Jewish remnant during Jacob’s trouble [Tribulation spoken of in the book of Revelation]. Then when Christ appears in glory, He will smite the [non-Jewish] nations and place the purged Israel under the New Covenant in a distinct position, in the earth, among the nations, under His universal reign over the earth. This distinct position for Israel is not the same as the position of the assembly of God [“church” mentioned above] today.

¹ [The Plymouth Brethren - A Brief History](#), Miles J. Stanford. For an exhaustive account by a member of the Tunbridge-Wells Brethren, see *John Nelson Darby: Precious Truths Revived and Defended, Volume One, 1826-1845*, R. A. Huebner, Present Truth Publishers, 2004.

² See Martin Luther’s magnum opus, *De Servo Arbitrio* (Latin for *On The Bondage of the Will*). This recovery laid the foundation for the subsequent recovery of the Pauline truth of *justification by grace through faith*.

³ This adverb largely comes from Paul’s letter (Galatians) to the churches in the Roman province of Galatia and expresses the adverse effect of co-mingling certain Jewish concepts with Christianity.

“One purpose in writing this book is to bring before the Christian reader that he is heavenly and has a heavenly calling—and his place is to be *outside the camp* and *inside the rent veil* for individual and for assembly worship—while being in the position of a stranger and pilgrim here, on his way to being with Christ above. This is the way he is viewed in Hebrews and Peter’s epistles. On the other hand, the epistles to the Ephesians views the Christian as presently seated in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus. In that epistle, in keeping with that line of truth as seen seated there, we do not read of going into the heavenly sanctuary as we do in Heb. 10:19. Both lines of truth [as well as others truths] apply to us at the same time. Also, part 7 [of this book] will bring before us numbers of consequences of the bearing of our [identification] circumcision in Christ (Col. 2:11).

The epistles of Hebrews and of Peter were written to Jewish Christians—at a certain point in time intended by God, of course—regarding the unfolding of truth in the NT Scriptures in view of the fact that God had borne [as a temporal, not permanent condition] with the Judaistic practices and observances of early Messianic Jews. They had accepted Christ as the Savior and Messiah of Israel, but hung on to much from Judaism. Not paganism, but Judaism, had been a system authorized by God in His ways regarding the trial of the fallen, first man [First Adam] to show that he [his animating life which originated at Gen. 2:7 but subsequently became corrupted, as described in Gen. 5:3] was not recoverable from the fall. God was patient with their mixture of Judaism with some elements of Christianity until Paul’s first Roman imprisonment (which herein his two-year imprisonment is taken to be during 60-62 AD). During that two-year imprisonment he wrote Colossians, Ephesians, Philippians, Philemon, and Hebrews. 1 and 2 Peter were written about 63 and 64 AD, respectively. No doubt Peter had read Paul’s epistle to the Hebrews, acknowledging it as Scripture (2 Pet. 3:15, 16), something to keep in mind when reading Peter’s epistles.

The Epistle to the Hebrews was written to direct the early Messianic Jews to go outside the camp; i.e., to depart from their mixing Judaism and Christianity. Modern Messianic Jews, of course, resist this and seek to make the NT compatible with their Judaistic practices. Indeed, they point to the Acts and its evidence of Judaistic practices of the early Jewish converts as justification for their system. (This mixture is the very form of Judaism that Heb. 13:13 addresses!) The NT suffers immensely in the Messianic Jewish expositions of Scripture as they insist that the NT is a Jewish book. We will address some of these matters and show some of the wonderful things for the Christian that are set aside by such Judaistic practices.

Regarding Gentile [non-Jewish] believers, the history of the church evidences an early, rapid Judaizing. The worst case is the growth of the Roman Catholic [and Orthodox] Church. But Judaistic practices and elements are everywhere in Christendom, which is filled with professors [of being “Christian”] in name only, as well as some real Christians. Many of these real [born again] Christians seem oblivious [largely due to ignorance of the OT] to the features of Judaism in the systems to which they adhere. What we consider herein is also for the consciences of all such, indeed for all of us, of course. *Introductory Remarks*, R. A. Huebner