



# Critical Issues Commentary

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## HYPERDISPENSATIONALISM AND THE AUTHORITY OF CHRIST

### IS THERE REALLY MORE THAN ONE GOSPEL?

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Recently I spoke with a friend from another state who recounted to me how he had lost fellowship with a long-time Christian friend because of an eccentric doctrine the friend had gotten caught up in. The particular doctrine claims Jesus' teachings are not "for" the church, that the Great Commission is not binding on the church, that there are at least two different gospels, and that the gospel of grace was totally unknown until Paul received it. When my friend tried to correct his friend, he refused to listen and now only fellowships with others who believe these strange teachings. This is what Paul described as "factious" (Titus 3:10). A faction develops when doctrines derived from unbiblical sources become the condition for fellowship.

I have since heard from several others who have had friends or family get caught up in this same teaching. For many, the current source of this doctrine is radio teacher Les Feldick. Critics of this system (myself included) call the doctrine hyperdispensationalism. It is distinct from dispensationalism, which teaches that the church age began at Pentecost.<sup>1</sup> In this article I will describe the source of hyperdispensationalism, some of its current proponents, and examine its claims by comparing them with Scripture. I will conclude that its claims are false and constitute a diminishing of Christ's authority over His own church.

#### HYPERDISPENSATIONALISM

In the 19th century, Anglican clergyman E. W. Bullinger was the father of a system of theology that claimed that the gospel of grace was unknown until it was

revealed to Paul. He claimed that the church age as we know it did not begin until Acts 28, when an offer to immediately institute the kingdom of God on earth was withdrawn from Israel. Bullinger claimed that only the *prison epistles* were binding on the church. Thus Bullinger relegated most of Scripture to a category similar to the book of Leviticus: inspired, but not directly binding on Christians in all of its details. One implication of this teaching is that Jesus' own teachings, including the Great Commission, are not binding or applicable to the church. I label as hyperdispensational this and any other doctrine that claims that the gospel as we know it was first given to Paul sometime toward the middle or the end of Acts.

In 1938 H. A. Ironside wrote a rebuttal to what was then known as Bullingerism entitled *Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth*.<sup>2</sup> This book is still a valuable resource for those who have been confused by the false teachings of hyperdispensationalists. Current hyperdispensationalists distance themselves from Bullinger and resent being linked to him.<sup>3</sup>

The most popular versions of this doctrine today would prefer simply to be called "dispensationalist" but will tolerate being called "mid-Acts" dispensationalists because, unlike Bullinger, they believe that the gospel of grace that they deem distinctive to Paul was revealed to him somewhere between Acts 9 and Acts 13.<sup>4</sup> Les Feldick says this about the point at which Paul was given a never-before known message about the gospel of grace:

Now if you're a Bible student you will catch on real quick that Paul

is always referring to the mysteries that were revealed to him. And what are mysteries? Secrets. And Who kept them secret until revealed to this man? God did. And when God called Paul out of the religion of Judaism, and saved him on the road to Damascus, **He sent him down to Mt. Sinai and poured out on him for 3 years all the revelations of the mysteries. There are all kinds of mysteries that Paul speaks of in his writings, and since they were revealed to him he then became the steward of those mysteries.** And if he was the steward of them then he was the administrator of them. When we understand that, then this Book becomes as plain as a 300 watt light bulb. It just lays right out in front of you. **Of course this is a whole new administration or dispensation.**<sup>5</sup>

Feldick believes that Paul's time gaining this new mystery, that supposedly had not been told to any the other apostles, ended in about 40 A.D. By putting the change of dispensation in the middle of Acts instead of at the end of it as Bullinger does, mid-Acts dispensationalists may avoid a few of Bullinger's extremes but they create a serious exegetical problem for themselves: they ignore the narrative unity of Luke/Acts and make it rather easy to rebut their doctrines based on their use of Acts alone and by itself. I shall demonstrate that shortly.

#### ARE THE TEACHINGS OF JESUS BINDING ON THE CHURCH?

Hyperdispensationalists claim that Jesus presented to the Jews an offer of a kingdom that He would have instituted during the first advent—had they accepted. They further teach that the twelve apostles continued this offer after Jesus' res-

urrection and ascension. It was eventually withdrawn, they say, after it was clear that the Jews were not going to accept the offer. Hyperdispensationalist C. R. Stam claims the offer was withdrawn at the end of Acts: "The offer of the kingdom, made at Pentecost, was not officially withdrawn until Acts 28:28."<sup>6</sup> After that time, Jews and Gentiles alike are offered salvation by grace.

Hyperdispensationalists claim that Jesus' teachings were the terms that would have been in effect had the Jews accepted the offer of the kingdom. Those terms were still valid as long as the offer was valid. After that they have no importance to the church and are not binding.<sup>7</sup> They do not claim the gospels are not canonical, but that the teachings therein are not authoritative for the church unless they contain some principles that would transcend any given dispensation, much like we would use Leviticus. Hyperdispensationalists believe that the only revelation binding on the church is that which was given to Paul.

They also have a very different idea about the church itself. For example, when Jesus said, "On this rock I will build My church," he supposedly was not speaking of the church (i.e., the body of Christ) but a Jewish "church" that only existed for a while until the middle of Acts. This means that the church we are in is not what Jesus called "My church."

For example, Stam claims that we could easily solve the problem of Rome claiming Peter as the first pope if we were to realize that the church Jesus referred to as "My church" in Matthew 16:18 does not now exist on earth:

The solution to this problem [Stam's claim that Protestants have no good answer to Rome's claims of Papal authority based on Matthew 16 and 18] and the answer to Rome's pretensions is again a dispensational one. It lies in the fact that from the time God changes His dealings with men—a premise which must be granted by Romanists if indeed our Lord did confer such powers upon His disciples after several thousand years of human history had

elapsed—and that the church of today is *not* a perpetuation of the organization which Christ founded while on earth.<sup>8</sup>

This means that the church Paul speaks of in his epistles was not the church that Jesus founded or that Peter and the others belonged to. Stam claims, "The building of *this* house, the church of this age, was a secret which Peter and the eleven knew nothing about when they followed Christ as king and offered His kingdom to Israel at Pentecost."<sup>9</sup>

Let us examine the book of Acts to see if this claim makes sense. Hyperdispensationalists are quick to warn that simply because we see the term "church" (from the Greek word *ecclesia* in the New Testament) it does not necessarily mean the church that exists under the gospel of grace. It is true that *ecclesia* is occasionally used in a non-technical way where it simply means assembly (as it is in Acts 7:38; Acts 19:32, 39, 41). However, there are 23 other uses of *ecclesia* in Acts where it means "church."<sup>10</sup> What is obvious is that the meaning of the term did not change in the middle of Acts. Luke applies the term to gatherings of believers throughout Acts, and this is true whether the gatherings are of Jewish or Gentile believers. Luke knew nothing of two different "churches." To believe the hyperdispensationalist reading of Acts, we must consider the "church" that Paul persecuted according to Acts 8:1 to be unrelated to the church whose elders he admonished in Acts 20:28 (to whom Paul had preached the gospel of grace – Acts 20:24). In this thought the Acts 8 "church" was the Jewish church that Jesus called "My church" and the Acts 20 "church" was supposedly something entirely different.

Here is the problem: the change of meaning is not signaled by anything Luke wrote. In fact it never happened. The church to which God added Jews in Acts 2, Samaritans in Acts 8, God-fearing Gentiles in Acts 10, and Gentiles from Asia minor in Acts 20 is the same "church." The hyperdispensational claim that the church under Paul is some different entity is false and constitutes a very poor reading of Acts. Such a revo-

lutionary change would have been explained in the text had Spirit-inspired Luke knew it happened. Les Feldick says, "So when you see the word Church, this is why Paul almost always identifies it as 'The Church which is His Body,' which makes a big difference from the word Church that's maybe used elsewhere in Scripture."<sup>11</sup> This is false: the church to which God added members early in Acts is the same church that Paul calls "the body of Christ."

But, in the hyperdispensational reading of the gospels and Acts, Jesus' mention of "My church" is not the "church" now, and His teachings applied only to it and not directly to churches founded under Paul's new gospel. This would mean that Paul did not believe that what Jesus taught to the 12 disciples was binding on the churches that He founded. But in Acts 20:35 Paul quoted words that Jesus taught and applied them to the church: "In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" (Acts 20:35). These words are not found in any of the gospels, but Paul knew them to have been spoken by Jesus and applied them authoritatively to the Gentile church in Ephesus.

H. A. Ironside, in refuting the teachings of Bullinger, cited this passage:

*If anyone advocates a different doctrine, and does not agree with sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to godliness, he is conceited and understands nothing; but he has a morbid interest in controversial questions and disputes about words, out of which arise envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions, and constant friction between men of depraved mind and deprived of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. (1 Timothy 6:3-5)*

Here is Ironside's application of the passage to hyperdispensationalism:

One would almost think that this was a direct command to

Timothy to beware of Bullingerism! Notice, Timothy is to withdraw himself from, that is, to have no fellowship with, those who refuse the present authority of the words of our Lord Jesus Christ. Where do you get those actual words? Certainly in the four Gospels. There are very few actual words of the Lord Jesus Christ scattered throughout the rest of the New Testament. Of course there is a sense in which all the New Testament is from Him, but the apostle is clearly referring here to the actual spoken words of our Saviour, which have been recorded for the benefit of the saints, and which set forth the teaching that is in accordance with godliness or practical piety. If a man refuses these words, whether on the plea that they do not apply to our dispensation, or for any other reason, the Spirit of God declares it is an evidence of intellectual or spiritual pride.<sup>12</sup>

Ironside is saying that when Paul warned Timothy against those who do not teach doctrine in agreement with “the words of the Lord Jesus,” since those words are found in the gospels, Paul is warning against teachers like Bullinger and his hyperdispensational descendants.

Furthermore, the book of Hebrews claims that God has spoken “to us in His Son” (1:2) and claims Jesus’ words were confirmed to us by the apostles: “How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, God also bearing witness with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will” (Hebrews 2:3, 4). That should settle the matter—Jesus’ words and the words of His apostles are both considered from Jesus and binding on the church. But this does not work with hyperdispensationalists because to them the book of Hebrews is not for the church either. For example, Les Feldick will only apply Hebrews to those Jews under a different gospel than Paul preached:

Paul’s writings to the Gentiles (the Church) are the thirteen books of Romans through Philemon. Although Paul also wrote the book of Hebrews, he wrote it to the Jewish believers who had been saved under the gospel of the kingdom, the teaching of the twelve apostles of the circumcision (Jews). Hebrews was not written to the Gentiles.<sup>13</sup>

So, according to that thinking, what Hebrews says about the matter can be ignored safely because it was for a different “church,” and today we can safely neglect “so great a salvation” because it is no longer being offered.

### TO WHOM WERE THE GOSPELS WRITTEN?

Another huge problem for the teaching that Jesus’ words and the gospels are not for the church is that of the intended audience of the gospel writers. Take Luke for example:

*Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word have handed them down to us, it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write it out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus; (Luke 1:1-3)*

Theophilus is a Greek name, not a Jewish name. If the gospels were only for the Jews, as the hyperdispensationalists claim, why was Luke writing to a Gentile? Furthermore, when was Luke written? It was written after the end of Acts, probably between 60 and 62 A.D. In his commentary on Luke, Robert Stein writes, “The earliest and latest possible dates for the writing of the Third Gospel are quite clear. The earliest would be immediately after the events of Acts 28 (i.e., after Paul’s arrest and two-year stay in Rome.)”<sup>14</sup> This means that Luke wrote to a Gentile after Paul was imprisoned as recorded in Acts 28 (if not

later). So Luke was written not to the supposed “Jewish Church” that supposedly existed under a gospel different from Paul’s, but to the church as it was after the supposed withdrawal of the offer of the kingdom and change of dispensations.

But why would Luke write a gospel to the church as it was after the end of Acts and apply Jesus’ teachings to that church? Jesus’ teachings supposedly were no longer authoritative by the time Luke wrote his gospel. Why did Luke write to Theophilus? He says this: “So that you might know the exact truth about the things you have been taught” (Luke 1:4). The gospels were given and applied to the church. The gospel writers assumed that the teachings of the head of the church, Jesus Christ, are for the church. They are not merely an historical curiosity for those who want to know what the kingdom “church” would have been like had the Jews not rejected it.

This is seen by this passage in Matthew: “Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and so teaches others, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:19). Hyperdispensationalists annul Jesus’ teaching for the church and think they are thereby “rightly dividing” the Bible.

Consider this passage in Mark: “And He said to them, ‘Are you so lacking in understanding also? Do you not understand that whatever goes into the man from outside cannot defile him; because it does not go into his heart, but into his stomach, and is eliminated?’ (Thus He declared all foods clean.)” (Mark 7:18, 19). Hyperdispensationalists claim that the “Jewish church” until the kingdom offer was withdrawn, was still under the law. But Mark’s parenthetical clarification tells us that Jesus declared, to Jews, that all foods are clean. Despite this, hyperdispensationalist Stam says, “There is no indication of any revelation to them that the death of Christ had freed them from observance of the Mosaic law.”<sup>15</sup> So, for whom exactly was Jesus’ teaching as recorded in Mark? If Jesus indeed declared all foods clean, He could not have done so for the Jews whom Stam says were still under the law even after

the cross, and if He had not given this teaching through Paul, it was not binding on the church either (according to their scheme of things). So Jesus declared foods clean to no one at all. He was wasting His words.

Hyperdispensationalists tell us that until mid-Acts (or in Acts 28 depending on which one you listen to), the 12 disciples intended to set up the kingdom because they still hoped that Israel as a whole would accept the kingdom offer. They consider the law to still be in affect: "This is why [because Jesus asked the Father to forgive them] as the book of Acts opens we are still in a period of time when the dispensation of Law is in effect and God's people, Party #2, is still Israel."<sup>16</sup> But consider what Peter said to those who were saved from their sin on the Day of Pentecost: "And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, 'Be saved from this perverse generation!'" (Acts 2:40). Why would Peter tell these believing Jews to be saved from that perverse generation (Israel that had rejected Messiah) if Peter believed that Israel might soon accept the offer and the kingdom would be established just then? The reason believers needed to be "saved from them" was that the "perverse generation" already rejected the Messiah and His kingdom. Peter saw them as the enemies of Messiah, whom they had rejected and crucified. Luke/Acts leaves open the saving of Israel as a nation (see Acts 3:19-21). But it is clear that this will not happen until after the times of the Gentiles: "and they will fall by the edge of the sword, and will be led captive into all the nations; and Jerusalem will be trampled under foot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled" (Luke 21:24).

### THE GREAT COMMISSION IS REJECTED

Hyperdispensationalists treat the Great Commission with disdain and claim that any Christians who believe that they should seek to fulfill it are fools. Stam has an entire chapter entitled, "The So-called Great Commission." He writes, "What a mistake to call this *the great commission*" and *our marching orders*!"

How pathetic to see sincere believers vainly trying to carry out this commission and these orders!"<sup>17</sup> According to this thinking, taking the Great Commission in Matthew as authoritative would create "legalism."<sup>18</sup> In this system, one error leads to another. Since Jesus' teachings are not binding on the church, then this: "teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20) would be legalistic. It would be a legalistic sin on par with the Galatian heresy to teach the church to obey the head of the church, Jesus Christ! But the Great Commission specifically says that it is the "nations" (*ethnos*) to which the disciples were sent to disciple, baptize and teach. Stam claims that this commission was only to be applied by the disciples in Israel at Jerusalem and included the idea of "baptismal salvation."<sup>19</sup> Since they do not believe that water baptism is for Christians, they detach the Great Commission from the church, claim that Peter preached baptismal salvation because of Acts 2:38, and thus create two different gospels, the one Peter was commissioned to preach and a different one that no one knew about until Paul.

But doesn't Jesus promise "I am with you even unto the end of the age"? No problem for hyperdispensationalists: "Neither does the promise 'Lo, I am with you even unto the end of the age,' present any difficulty for, remember, this *present dispensation* is a parenthetical period of grace with was then still a secret 'hid in God' (Eph. 3:9)." So we are safely rid of Jesus' teachings, baptism, the need to go to the nations, and for good measure we are rid of "repentance for forgiveness of sins" (Luke 24:47) because, wouldn't you know it, that is "only for the Jews." Feldick says: "And yet for most people who are putting out the plan of salvation they say, 'You have to ask God to forgive you of your sins, you have to repent.' Well I can't find any of this in Paul's letter [sic] to the Church Age believers. It's not in here."<sup>20</sup> For Feldick, if Paul did not teach it somewhere between Romans and Philemon, it is not for us and not part of the gospel. Never mind that Paul commended the Thessalonians for turning from idols to serve the living God

(1Thessalonians 1:9), which surely sounds like repentance. Shortly I will show from Acts that Paul taught repentance—including changing one's behavior—and taught it to Gentiles.

### TWO GOSPELS?

Feldick and other hyperdispensationalists claim that are at least two different gospels. I state "at least" because Stam identifies four.<sup>21</sup> The favorite hyperdispensationalist proof text for the idea of two gospels is this passage: "But on the contrary, seeing that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been to the circumcised" (Galatians 2:7). Says Feldick: "Paul tells us in Galatians 2:7-9 that there were two Gospels, one that he (Paul) preached to the Gentiles (uncircumcision) by revelation from Jesus Christ. And the other that John the Baptist, Jesus, Peter and the 12 preached to the Jews or Nation of Israel (circumcision)."<sup>22</sup> Stam, Feldick and other hyperdispensationalists claim that the point is not just *to whom* Peter and Paul generally preached, but what they preached. They use the King James Version of Galatians 2:7 that says "of the circumcision" and assume that it has a different content than the gospel Paul preached. Stam claims that the gospel of the circumcision is a reference to Abraham and the gospel of the kingdom is a reference to David which is part of how he finds four gospels.<sup>23</sup> Feldick's two gospels are the gospel of the kingdom and the gospel of grace.

Hyperdispensationalists are not the first to misuse Galatians 2:7. The Gnostics used the passage to claim that Paul had a different gospel than Peter. The New American Commentary on the passage says, "Many of the early Gnostic teachers latched on to Paul as their favorite apostle. In their view he had been entrusted with the "pneumatic" gospel of uncircumcision, while Peter was laden with the "psychic" gospel of the Jews."<sup>24</sup> According to this commentary there was later a Hegelian interpretation like this:

In the nineteenth century F. C. Baur and his disciples interpreted the history of the early church in

terms of the Hegelian dialectic. According to this view, Peter and the church at Jerusalem represented the traditionalist pole in early Christianity (thesis), while Paul and his circle stood at the opposite progressivist pole (antithesis), with the emergence of an orthodox Christian consensus in the second century seen as a kind of convergence between the two (synthesis). Galatians 2:7 is a key text for imposing this kind of bifurcated grid onto New Testament history.<sup>25</sup>

The commentary also covers what it calls the “ultradispensationalist” view, the one that I am addressing in this article:

According to one dispensationalist line of argument, the gospel of circumcision that Peter preached on the Day of Pentecost was in fact a message of grace plus works (e.g., “Repent and be baptized . . . for the forgiveness of your sins,” Acts 2:38). However, with the calling of Paul, this message was superseded by the gospel of *sola gratia*. On this reading, Gal. 2:7 reflects a transitional period between the dispensation of law under the old covenant and the new dispensation of sheer grace that was inaugurated primarily through the preaching of Paul.<sup>26</sup>

The commentary correctly calls all of these interpretations “erroneous.” It contains this correct assessment:

The gospel Paul preached was identical with that proclaimed by the primitive church at Jerusalem. Just as the leaders of that community recognized him and his unique role in the spread of the gospel, so too he elsewhere associated himself with them as a witness to the resurrection and gave thanks to God for how he had worked mightily through all of his apostolic colleagues: “Whether, then, it was I or they, this is what we preached, and this

is what you believed” (1 Cor. 15:11).<sup>27</sup>

Paul said “this is what *we* preached”—and Paul had mentioned Peter, the 12 disciples, and other witnesses. What was it that “we” preached? That “Christ died for our sins” and the resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:3, 4). Feldick says that [the gospel of grace] Paul’s gospel was not that of the others: “Jesus Himself revealed that to the Apostle Paul, and Paul alone, in I Corinthians 15:1-4, Romans 10:9-10 and many other places in Paul’s writing. But Jesus and the 12 preached the Gospel of the Kingdom, which, for salvation, is believing that Jesus was the Messiah, repentance, and baptism.”<sup>28</sup> But in 1 Corinthians 15, Paul was obviously unaware that his gospel was different than Peter’s!

We can prove from the book of Acts that Feldick’s claims are false. Let us begin in Acts 20 where Paul recounted his ministry there to the Ephesian elders. He begins by saying this: “*I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house, solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ*” (Acts 20:20, 21). Contrary to Feldick’s claim, Paul preached repentance to both Jews and Greeks. Feldick claims that, based on Acts 2:38 that Peter taught that repentance and baptism were necessary for salvation; but that Paul taught neither based on the fact that in Acts 16:31 Paul only mentions “believe.”<sup>29</sup> It is false that Acts 2:38 proves that Peter considered baptism a prior condition for salvation. Throughout Acts various things associated with salvation happen in different sequences. For example, in Acts 10 Peter preached this to the God-fearers among the Gentiles: “*Of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins.*’ While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message” (Acts 10:43, 44). If we were to use Feldick’s selective technique to determine *ordo salutis* and the terms of the universal call of the gospel from one passage, we could claim from Acts 10:43 that Peter’s message was only “believe”

for forgiveness of sins and was identical to Paul’s in Acts 16:31. We would also claim from Acts 10 that baptism in water happens after conversion (which is indeed the Biblical pattern).<sup>30</sup>

Feldick’s interpretive process is fatally flawed. Concerning Acts 16:31 where Paul and Silas said, “Believe on The Lord Jesus Christ,” Feldick writes, “Does it say repent and be baptized? No.”<sup>31</sup> Using his truncated version of what is authoritative in the New Testament he reasons, “We have to believe the Gospel and nothing else. You search Paul’s letters from Romans through Hebrews (and Hebrews is more Jewish than the rest and there is a reason for that), and show me one place where Paul teaches repentance and baptism for salvation. You won’t find it. Paul doesn’t teach it.”<sup>32</sup> Feldick uses Acts to make the claim that Paul did not preach anything but “believe” only to turn and state that we cannot say Paul preached repentance unless we find it in his own epistles.

Let us continue our look at Acts 20. As we saw, Paul himself said that he, as was his habit for the whole time he was in Ephesus, preached repentance. If Acts tells us that Paul preached repentance, then Paul preached repentance. Feldick has no authority to deny it and claim that Paul did not preach repentance. Paul made it clear that repentance was part of the universal call of the gospel here as well: “*Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead*” (Acts 17:30, 31). How clear does the Bible have to be about this? Paul preached repentance to lost, Greek philosophers and claimed that God is commanding everyone to repent!

What about the claim that the gospel of the kingdom was different than anything Paul preached. Again, let Paul tell us what he preached: “*But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, in order that I may finish my course, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God. And now, behold, I know that all of you, among whom I went*

about preaching the kingdom, will see my face no more" (Acts 20:24, 25). The "gospel of the grace of God" is mentioned in a synonymously parallel way with "preaching the kingdom." These are not two different messages, one for the Gentiles and the other for the Jews. Paul preached grace and the kingdom in Ephesus to both Jews and Gentiles, by his own testimony. This is not hard to see.

As mentioned at the beginning of this article, E. W. Bullinger, the founder of hyperdispensationalism put the beginning of the supposed new dispensation at the very end of Acts. Current hyperdispensationalists try to soften Bullinger's claims by putting the dispensation change in the middle of Acts. But in so doing they make themselves inconsistent and easy to refute. For Bullinger only the prison epistles are authoritative for the church. Then we cannot use material in Acts or 1Corinthians to refute his claims because none of it would apply to Paul's final version of the gospel. But Stam and Feldick can be refuted from Acts and 1Corinthians.

Consider the narrative unity of Luke/Acts and think about the claim that repentance has no place in Paul's gospel. Early in Luke, John the Baptist told his Jewish audience to bring forth fruits that demonstrated repentance (Luke 3:8). Repentance is thematic throughout Luke/Acts, being taught by John the Baptist, Jesus, Peter, and then Paul. At the end of Acts Paul said this about his message: "Consequently, King Agrippa, I did not prove disobedient to the heavenly vision, but kept declaring both to those of Damascus first, and also at Jerusalem and then throughout all the region of Judea, and even to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance" (Acts 26:20). By mentioning "the heavenly vision," Paul claimed that preaching repentance to Jews and Gentiles is what Jesus called him to do.

### CONCLUSION

In Matthew 28:18-20, Jesus claimed to have all authority in heaven and on earth and thereby authorized His disciples to make disciples, baptizing them

and teaching them to observe everything Jesus commanded them. To say that we need do none of this because it does not apply to the church, but to a now non-existent Jewish "church" is nothing less than an attack on the authority of Jesus Christ. Such a diminishing of Jesus' authority over His own church is a serious error, no matter how folksy the purveyors of this error may be.

To truncate that which is binding on the church in the New Testament as hyperdispensationalists do has serious consequences. Not only does it lead to the claims we have examined here, but many other false teachings as well. For example, Feldick claims that the church is not part of any covenant with God. In answer to the question of whether or not we are a covenant people, he says "no." He says, "But, the flip-side, now in Christ Jesus we are made nigh, not by covenants, but by the Blood of Christ."<sup>33</sup> What? Paul in 2Corinthians claimed to be a minister of the new covenant (2Corinthians 3:6) and cited Jesus' words about "the new covenant in My blood" to the Corinthians to help them understand the Lord's Supper. Jesus links His blood to the covenant and so did Paul. Hebrews is all about the new covenant, but Feldick would not want us applying Hebrews to the church.

Frankly, this exegesis of Scripture is appalling. It is convoluted and confused. Christians who listen to this sort of teaching will surely be led astray and will end up for all practical purposes with a truncated Bible. Documents written by authoritative apostles for the church, such as the epistles of John, are silenced on the grounds that they were written for some Jewish "church" that does not now exist. Jesus' teachings are only for a non-instituted kingdom, so they bind to obedience no one who is alive today. Astonishingly, the teachings of the head of the church, Jesus Christ, are not binding on the church.

The teachers of hyperdispensationalism pick and choose as they jump around the Bible, making it nearly impossible to follow them. I know this because in preparation for this article I discovered how hard it was to read their material. The context of a passage under consideration means little to these writers.

Instead they want to know which of the supposed two or more gospels the passage applies to. In their system, authorial intent as a principle of hermeneutics is dead and buried. Did Luke want us to believe that the gospel itself suddenly changed in the middle of Acts? Obviously not. But these teachers show no concern about Luke's meaning. They import their own.

The whole of the New Testament is for the entire church and is binding today. There is only one gospel. Water baptism is a valid practice, ordained by Jesus Christ, and practiced by His apostles—including Paul. The church is part of the new covenant. Repentance is part of the universal call of the gospel. The gospel is not limited only to what Paul stated in 1Corinthians 15:1-4. Hyperdispensationalism is false, and it should be avoided. I do not know how to state it any more clearly.

### END NOTES

1. Hyperdispensationalists and dispensationalists agree that future, Bible prophecy is to be taken literally. They agree that there will be a literal great tribulation and a pre-millennial return of Christ. The disagreements are about when the present dispensation began and what teachings are binding on the church.
2. Ironside's entire book is published online here: <http://www.bibleinministries.org/onlinebooks/wrongly-dividing-the-word-of-truth/index.html>
3. See <http://www.bereanbiblesociety.org/articles/1011392439.html> where current followers of similar theology distance themselves from Bullinger. They have at least two reasons for doing so: 1) Most of them teach that the church as the body of Christ began somewhere between Acts 9 and 13, not 28. 2) Bullinger taught annihilationism and they do not.
4. S. Craig MacDonald, *Understanding Your Bible*, (Grand Rapids: Grace Gospel Fellowship, 1995) 52, 53.
5. <http://www.lesfeldick.org/lesqa-b.html> from Book 37 Lesson 1 part 1.

6. C. R. Stam, *Things That Differ*, (Milwaukee: Berean Bible Society, 1996 ed., first published in 1959) 223.
7. All of this can be gleaned from C. R. Stam, *Things That Differ*. Les Feldick endorses Stam's book but I notice that he differs on some points.
8. Stam, 157.
9. Ibid. 146.
10. Acts 5:11; Acts 7:38; Acts 8:1; Acts 8:3; Acts 9:31; Acts 11:22; Acts 11:26; Acts 12:1; Acts 12:5; Acts 13:1; Acts 14:23; Acts 14:27; Acts 15:3; Acts 15:4; Acts 15:22; Acts 15:41; Acts 16:5; Acts 18:22; Acts 19:32; Acts 19:39; Acts 19:41; Acts 20:17; Acts 20:28;
11. Feldick: <http://www.lesfeldick.org/lesqa-b.html>
12. Ironside, *Wrongly Dividing*
13. Feldick: <http://www.lesfeldick.org/lesqa-b.html> Editors note book 29, lesson two part II. Please note that Feldick's theory that Paul wrote Hebrews has little evidence to back it up.
14. Stein, R. H. (2001, c1992). *Vol. 24: Luke* (electronic ed.). Logos Library System; The New American Commentary (24). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.
15. Stam, 176.
16. MacDonald, 87.
17. Stam, 182.
18. Ibid. 170.
19. Ibid. 177.
20. Feldick: <http://www.lesfeldick.org/lesqa-a.html#18a>
21. Stam, 191.
22. Feldick <http://www.lesfeldick.org/lesqa-c.html#15c>
23. Stam, 201, 202.
24. George, T. (2001, c1994). *Vol. 30: Galatians* (electronic ed.). Logos Library System; The New American Commentary (161). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid. Paul does teach repentance in 2Timothy 2:25.
28. Feldick <http://www.lesfeldick.org/lesqa-c.html#15c>
29. Feldick <http://www.lesfeldick.org/lesqa-b.html#2b>
30. Feldick does cite the passage in Acts 10; but claims that God was trying to prove to Peter that Gentiles were saved in a different way than Jews. <http://www.lesfeldick.org/lesqa-b.html#2b>
31. <http://www.lesfeldick.org/lesqa-b.html#2b>
32. Ibid.
33. <http://www.lesfeldick.org/lesqa-e.html#13e>

### Critical Issues Commentary

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## ADDENDUM

Several other important issues arise in the discussion of hyperdispensationalism's unique theology. I will deal with two of them here. The first is whether or not the kingdom of God is different from the kingdom of heaven. The second is the misuse of 2Timothy 2:15 to teach that Paul intended that we "divide" the Bible.

### THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

Hyperdispensationalists and even some dispensationalists teach that the kingdom of God is different from the kingdom of heaven. For example, Les Feldick teaches that the kingdom of God is "the universal and eternal rule of God. The Kingdom of Heaven is the earthly sphere of the Kingdom of God, the coming Messianic reign of Jesus Christ, the Son of David."<sup>1</sup> This idea is refuted very eas-

ily. Matthew used the two phrases interchangeably: *And Jesus said to His disciples, "Truly I say to you, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God"* (Matthew 19:23, 24). There also are many synoptic parallels where the terms are clearly synonymous. For example: "I say to you that many will come from east and west, and recline at the table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 8:11) and "And they will come from east and west and from north and south, and will recline at the table in the kingdom of God" (Luke 13:29). Parallels like these exist where the synoptic gospels of Mark and Luke use the phrase "kingdom of God" in the same saying of Jesus where Matthew uses "kingdom of heaven." That they are synonymous is obvious to any reader, or at least should be.<sup>2</sup>

Despite the clear evidence that

Matthew used the terms synonymously and that they are synonymous in the synoptics, Feldick charges such teachers as Dwight Pentecost and John MacArthur with "error" for applying the Sermon on the Mount to Christians. Feldick sees the root problem as the failure to make a distinction between the kingdom of heaven and kingdom of God.<sup>3</sup> On the contrary, it is Feldick who is teaching error, not MacArthur. Here is Feldick's assessment of MacArthur and many other dispensationalists:

Over the past half century hypo dispensational leaders have turned their minds from the distinctions of the Kingdom of Heaven, and have embraced the error of making it synonymous with the Kingdom of God, ignoring the biblical division between earthly Israel and the heavenly Body of Christ, the Church of this age. Forgetting the message of

Galatians, they attempt to make grace subject to the Mosaic Law, heresy of heresies!<sup>4</sup>

The Sermon on the Mount is *not* Mosaic Law! Teaching people to love their enemies and turn the other cheek is *not* the Galatian heresy!

### RIGHTLY “DIVIDING”?

Sadly, even among traditional dispensationalists, 2Timothy 2:15 in the King James Version has been misused as an excuse to “divide” the Bible as much as possible. For example, C. I. Scofield wrote,

In 2 Timothy[2] 15 he is told what is required of him as a workman: “Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” The Word of truth, then, has right divisions, and it must be evident that, as one cannot be “a workman that needeth not to be ashamed” without observing them, so any study of that Word which ignores those divisions must be in large measure profitless and confusing.<sup>5</sup>

The Greek word translated “rightly dividing” in the King James is *orthotomeo*—it literally means “cut straight.” When used as Paul does in 2Timothy it means “to teach correctly.” Louw and Nida’s lexicon says this about the word: “to give accurate instruction—‘to teach correctly, to expound rightly.’”<sup>6</sup> Paul did not teach Timothy to “divide” the Bible, but to make correct use of it. What divisions exist or do not exist must be determined by authorial intent as shown by usage and context. In the case of kingdom of heaven and kingdom of God as we just saw, authorial intent and context show that they are synonymous. It makes no sense to claim they are different and thereby make more “divisions” (as if that was what Paul meant).

Hyperdispensationalist C. T. Stam uses the introduction to his book to pro-

mote “dividing” the Bible based on the King James of 2Timothy 2:15:

II Tim. 2:15 explains *how* God’s workman may get the most out of the Bible, while II Tim. 3:16 declares that *all* of it was given for his profit. All Scripture is indeed profitable when “rightly divided,” but when wrongly divided or not divided at all, the truth is change into a lie and becomes most unprofitable.<sup>7</sup>

Taking his marching orders from a passage that he misinterprets completely, Stam sets off to divide the Bible—and the more the better (at least in his mind).

John MacArthur rightly warns against going beyond the truth that the church has not replaced Israel and “. . . there is still a future and a kingdom involving the salvation and the restoration and the reign of the nation Israel (historical Jews).”<sup>8</sup> He then describes how many have gone beyond this to create too many categories:

Dispensationalism at that level [that God will save and restore national Israel], (if we just take that much of it, and that’s all I want to take of it, that’s where I am on that), dispensationalism became the term for something that grew out of that and got carried away because it got more, and more, and more compounded. Not only was there a distinction between the Church and Israel, but there was a distinction between the new covenant for the Church, and the new covenant for Israel. And then there could become a distinction between the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Heaven; and there could become a distinction in the teaching of Jesus, between what He said for this age and what He said for the Millennial Age; and they started to even go beyond that; and then there were some books in the New Testament for the Church and

some books in the New Testament for the Jews, and it just kept going and going and going until it became this very confounded kind of system. . . . I don’t believe there are two different kinds of salvation. I don’t believe there are two different [new] covenants. I don’t believe there is a difference between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven. I don’t believe the Sermon of the Mount is for some future age. I don’t believe that you can hack up New Testament books--some for the Jews and some for the Church.<sup>9</sup>

To that, I say amen. We are to interpret the Bible correctly, not “divide it up” as much as possible. – Bob DeWaay

### END NOTES ADDENDUM

1. <http://www.lesfeldick.org/news39.html>
2. Compare the following pairs of passages: Matt. 4:12 – Mark 1:15; Matt. 5:3 – Luke 6:20; Matt. 11:11 – Luke 7:28; Matt. 13:11 – Luke 8:10; Matt. 13:31 – Luke 13:18, 19; Matt. 13:33 – Luke 13:20, 21; Matt. 19:14 – Mark 10:14. In each case Matthew uses “kingdom of heaven” in the same saying of Jesus where Luke or Mark use “kingdom of God.”
3. <http://www.lesfeldick.org/news39.html>
4. Ibid.
5. [www.biblebelievers.com/scofield/scofield\\_rightly-intro.html](http://www.biblebelievers.com/scofield/scofield_rightly-intro.html)
6. Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996, c1989). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament : Based on semantic domains* (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition.) (1:414). New York: United Bible societies
7. C. R. Stam, *Things That Differ*, (Milwaukee: Berean Bible Society, 1996 ed., first published in 1959) 15.
8. [www.biblebb.com/files/macqa/70-16-9.htm](http://www.biblebb.com/files/macqa/70-16-9.htm)
9. Ibid. John MacArthur