

Dispensationalism — Calvinistic Heritage

"We think, it may be rightly said that the logical relations of premillennialism connect it more closely with the Augustinian than with any other theological system."

— Samuel H. Kellogg, *Premillennialism: Its relations to Doctrine and Practice*, *Bibliotheca Sacra*, XLV [1888], 253.

"Premillennialism logically presupposes an anthropology essentially Augustinian. The ordinary Calvinism affirms the absolute helplessness of the individual for self-regeneration and self-redemption."

— Samuel H. Kellogg, *Premillennialism: Its relations to Doctrine and Practice*, *Bibliotheca Sacra*, XLV [1888], 254.

"In America, he had a distinctly unique impact. By emphasizing separation from corrupt ecclesiastical institutions, Darby almost single-handedly influenced what would become the Bible School movement resulting in thousands of local, non-denominational churches. Several times Darby was invited by D. L. Moody to participate in evangelistic and teaching campaigns. While they eventually had a falling out over predestination vs. freewill, Darby being labeled an "extreme Calvinist" by Moody."

— Cf. Turner, *Unknown and Well Known*, 34–35; Weremchuck, *John Nelson Darby*, 143–44.

"Mr. Darby was invited by D.L. Moody to give a series of Bible readings in Farwell Hall. These were attended by many lovers of the Word of God, but unfortunately suddenly came to an abrupt end as the two clashed over the question of the freedom of the will. Mr. Darby held to what Mr. Moody considered extreme Calvinism on this point, affirming that so perverted was man's will he could not 'will' even to be saved... Mr. Moody insisted that man as a responsible person was appealed to by God to turn to Him and would be condemned if he did not... The controversy became so heated one day that Mr. Darby suddenly closed his Bible and refused to go on."

— W.G. Turner, *John Nelson Darby* (London, 1944), 21–22. The account is also found in H.A. Ironside, *A Historical Sketch of the Brethren Movement* (1942) rpt (Neptune, New Jersey, 1985), 81, and J.F. Findlay, Jr., *Dwight L. Moody: American evangelist, 1837–1899* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1969), 126–127.

"Although certain convictions, such as the supreme authority of Holy Scripture, the evangelical gospel with a Calvinistic complexion, and the expectation of a pre-millennial, personal return of Christ, were held firmly and universally, other matters of a practical as well as a doctrinal nature remained subjects of discussion."

— Harold H. Rowdon, *The Origins of the Brethren 1825–1850* (London, 1967), 227.

"Most dispensationalists are four-point Calvinists. The point they reject is the third point—Limited Atonement. They believe that the atonement of Christ is unlimited in both its sufficiency and efficiency".

— Dr. Jeffrey Khoo, *Dispensationalism Examined*, Reformed Tract Distributors, 9.

"Moody's initial love affair with the Brethren movement was inspired by their love for the Bible and their purposeful focus on reaching the lost for Christ. Therefore, Moody spent much time in Brethren assemblies on his [first] trip [to England in 1867], and he would invite many, including John Nelson Darby, to come to America and preach at the Illinois Street Church. Within a few years, however, Moody became uncomfortable with the Brethren. Not that he eventually swayed from his commitment to Scripture, premillennialism, missions, and evangelism, but he did find the increasingly separatistic views of the movement to be personally distressing and ultimately harmful to Christian unity. For instance, Darby was a staunch Calvinist who held unyieldingly to predestination and the doctrine of the elect. Increasingly, Darby unleashed verbal warfare against anyone who gave quarter to the Arminian and Wesleyan view that Christ died for all men and women. Moody was never a predestinarian, and as the years went by, his proclamation theology was like that of John Wesley rather than the one embraced by John Calvin (and Darby). Furthermore, while Darby wanted less and less to do with Christians who advocated clergy ordination, liturgy, and using women in ministry, Moody was seeking ways to unify all the denominations. Finally, Darby personally launched an ugly, verbal attack on Moody's "Arminian" views, arguing that he and most Americans, except for a few Presbyterians, did not know "the first principles of grace". Indeed, one day while doing a Bible reading time at Farwell Hall in Chicago, he and Moody had a verbal exchange on free will. The session ended when Darby, in disgust with Moody's emphasis on "whosoever will may come," [Rev. 22:17, KJV] closed his Bible and walked out; and he never returned."

— Lyle W. Dorsett, *A Passion for Souls: The Life of D. L. Moody* [Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1997], 136–137.

"There are, to be sure, important elements of seventeenth-century Calvinism in contemporary dispensationalism, but these elements have been blended with doctrinal emphasis from other sources to form a distinct system which in many respects is quite foreign to classical Calvinism."

— C. Norman Kraus, *Dispensationalism in America: Its Rise and Development*. Richmond: John Knox Press, 1958, 59.

"Taking all this into account, it must still be pointed out that the basic theological affinities of dispensationalism are Calvinistic. The large majority of men involved in the Bible and prophetic conference movements subscribed to Calvinistic creeds."

— C. Norman Kraus, *Dispensationalism in America: Its Rise and Development*. Richmond: John Knox Press, 1958, 59.

"The earliest Brethren were Calvinists to a man."

— Harold H. Rowdon, *Who Are the Brethren and Does it Matter?* Exeter, England: The Paternoster Press, 1986, 35.

"...for his views [J. G. Bellett] had become more decidedly Calvinistic, and the friends with whom he associated in Dublin were all, I believe without exception, of this school."

— George Bellett, *Memoir of the Rev. George Bellett*. London: J. Masters, 1889, 41-42, cited in Max S. Weremchuk, John Nelson Darby. Neptune, N.J.: Loizeaux Brothers, 1992, 237, f.n. 25.

"It was at a much earlier date (1831, I think) that F. W. Newman invited Mr. Darby to Oxford: a season memorable in a public way for his refutation of Dr. E. Burton's denial of the doctrines of grace, beyond doubt held by the Reformers, and asserted not only by Bucer, P. Martyr, and Bishop Jewell, but in Articles IX—XVIII of the Church of England."

— W. G. Turner, *John Nelson Darby: A Biography* [London: C. A. Hammond, 1926], 45.

"In fact the millenarian (or dispensational premillennial) movement had strong Calvinistic ties in its American origins. The movement's immediate progenitor was John Nelson Darby (1800-1882), who broke with the Church of Ireland and became the leader of the separatist Plymouth Brethren group. During his later career Darby spent a great deal of time proselytizing in North America. He found relatively little interest there in the new Brethren sect, but remarkable willingness to accept his views and methods of prophetic interpretation. This enthusiasm came largely from clergymen with strong Calvinistic views, principally Presbyterians and Baptists in the northern United States. The evident basis for this affinity was that in most respects Darby was himself an unrelenting Calvinist. His interpretation of the Bible and of history rested firmly on the massive pillar of divine sovereignty, placing as little value as possible on human ability. The organizers of the prophetic movement in America were predominantly Calvinists. In 1876 a group led by Nathaniel West, James H. Brookes, William J. Erdman, and Henry M. Parsons, all Presbyterians, together with Baptist A. J. Gordon, initiated what would become known during the next quarter-century as the annual Niagara Bible Conferences for prophetic study. To achieve wider publicity, virtually this same group in 1878 organized the first International Prophecy Conference, which became the model for similar conferences held every decade or so until the end of World War I. These early gatherings, which became the focal points for the prophetic side of their leaders' activities, were clearly Calvinistic. Presbyterians and Calvinist Baptists predominated, while the number of Methodists was extremely small, a Calvinistic movement with a strong interest in complex details of prophetic interpretation might have seemed contrary to the prevailing trends of the day. Even to revivalist evangelicals like D. L. Moody, who accepted the outlines of premillennialism, this doctrinal rigor was unappealing. John Nelson Darby puzzled over how Moody could on the one hand accept the prophetic truths concerning God's sovereignty in history, and yet inconsistently allow room for a non-Calvinist view of human ability when it came to personal salvation."

— George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism: 1870-1925* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1980], 46.

"The first converts to dispensational premillennialism after the Civil War were pietistic evangelicals who were attracted to its Biblicalism, its concern for evangelism and missions, and its view of history, which seemed more realistic than that of the prevailing postmillennialism. Most of the new premillennialists came from Baptist, New School Presbyterian, and Congregationalist ranks, which gave the movement a definite Reformed flavor. Wesleyan evangelicals who opposed premillennialism used this apparent connection to Calvinism to discredit it among Methodists and holiness people."

— Timothy P. Weber, *Premillennialism and the Branches of Evangelicalism*, in Donald W. Dayton and Robert K. Johnston, editors, *The Variety of American Evangelicalism* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press].

"Theologically, the early Brethren were moderate Calvinists—Anglican seceders of High Calvinist convictions usually became Particular Baptists—strongly anti-Erastian, and were endowed with considerable prophetic interest and a not unconnected missionary zeal."

— Peter L. Embley, 'The Early Development of the Plymouth Brethren', in Bryan R. Wilson (ed), *Patterns of Sectarianism: Organisation and ideology in social and religious movements* (London, 1967), 214.

"C. Fred Lincoln describes Chafer's 8-volume Systematic Theology as "unabridged, Calvinistic, premillennial, and dispensational."

— C. F. Lincoln, *Biographical Sketch of the Author*, in Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology* [Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1948], 8:6.

Additional Information:

- Forged from Reformation: How Dispensational Thought Advances the Reformed Legacy

<https://dispensationalpublishing.com/product/forged-from-reformation-how-dispensational-thought-advances-the-reformed-legacy/>

- The Doctrines of Grace in an Unexpected Place: Calvinistic Soteriology in Nineteenth-Century Brethren Thought

<https://www.christianbook.com/doctrines-unexpected-calvinistic-soteriology-nineteenth-brethren/mark-stevenson/9781498281096/pd/281092>

"Mark Stevenson's ground-breaking study offers a challenging and richly resourced reminder of what many Brethren, and historians of evangelicalism, have forgotten--that the movement that gave birth to dispensationalism was a movement of vigorous and emphatic Calvinists."

— Crawford Gribben, Queen's University Belfast

"With no official creed or confession, the Brethren movement presents a daunting challenge to those interested in inquiring into its original beliefs. From the writings of the movement's earliest leaders, Dr. Stevenson has produced a first-rate study of their soteriological convictions--specifically, their views on what are commonly known as the doctrines of grace. While his conclusions might surprise some, his scholarly insight will prove edifying to all."

— J. Stephen Yuille, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

"Stevenson provides a fascinating narrative strewn with ironies. The Brethren 'fathers' charted a doctrinal course that they believed to lie somewhere between Calvinism and Arminianism, the formal study of which they eschewed. Spurning doctrinal articles, they supposed (mistakenly) that their own periodic writings could suffice to guard the form of the gospel as they preached it. They lived to see their own mildly Calvinistic teaching undermined by new emphases traceable to the 1859 Revival and the Moody campaigns. Here, in microcosm, is the story of nineteenth-century evangelical Protestantism."

— Kenneth J. Stewart, Covenant College

"The Brethren, the vigorous Evangelical movement that sprang into existence in the years around 1830, repudiated systematic Calvinism as mere human speculation. They were insistent that they embraced the teaching of the Bible alone. But, as Stevenson shows clearly in this volume, nineteenth-century Brethren leaders normally professed beliefs that are recognizably Calvinistic. He has indeed demonstrated the existence of the doctrines of grace in an unexpected place."

— David Bebbington, University of Stirling

"Stevenson demonstrates irrefutably by the abundance of evidence he accumulates that the early Brethren were Calvinists. He lucidly explicates the nuances present in their convictions about salvation that enabled them to maintain the doctrines of grace while remaining passionate evangelists. His work succeeds in both filling a gap in Brethren historiography and being a thought-provoking work of historical theology with implications for contemporary developments in evangelicalism."

— Neil Dickson, Editor, Brethren Historical Review