

The Denial of the New Heart

The Achilles Heel of Dispensationalism

by Geoff Volker

Lewis Sperry Chafer was a leading exponent of Dispensationalism. His Systematic Theology is a widely recognized authoritative source on this system of teaching. The two quotations which follow are from volume two (Abridged Edition, edited by John F. Walvoord, published by Victor Book in 1988).

Stating the Dispensational Case

The all-important command is to believe in Christ. Normally this includes a reversal of any previous acts of unbelief, and it includes recognizing Jesus Christ as God. Experientially many Christians do not submit to Christ as Lord of their lives until sometime after their personal salvation, though in the nature of their faith in Christ they have to accept him as God. Accordingly all appeals to change of life and change of attitudes apart from faith in Jesus Christ are not accurate presentations. -- L. S. Chafer, pages 189-190.

In presenting the Gospel it is a subtle temptation to urge people not only to believe but also to surrender to God because of course this is the ultimate objective of their salvation. However, in explaining the terms of salvation this brings in a confusing human work as essential to salvation which the Bible does not confirm. -- L. S. Chafer, page 195.

Taking Jesus as Savior but not Lord!

I know that it sounds too simplistic to say that the error Dispensationalism is its teaching on conversion with its denial of the new heart. I also know that Dispensationalists will probably react strongly to my accusation that they deny the existence of the new heart in every new believer. I recognize that they do affirm that each believer is regenerated and takes on a new heart. What I do say is that when all is said and done, regardless of what they affirm, they end up denying the reality of the new heart in the believer.

When they affirm that "surrender to God" at conversion is an optional item on the salvation agenda they are denying the existence of the new heart. This is where the expression comes from which states that in the Dispensational scheme of things it is perfectly proper for someone to receive Jesus Christ as Savior while rejecting him as Lord and still be saved. To accept this understanding of conversion is to open the church to wholesale false professions of faith. This view of what it takes to become a believer is not only wrong, it is not the Biblical Gospel.

The New Covenant

In Hebrews 8:7-13 we find the author of Hebrews describing the content of the New Covenant. He quotes a very familiar passage, Jeremiah 33:31-34, which refers to the promise of God to restore Israel after its time of captivity in Babylon. If you read this passage in its context in Jeremiah you would swear that it is talking about literal Israel. But, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the New Testament author of Hebrews applies this passage to the time of the New Covenant church, our present era.

The context of Hebrews 8 pictures Jesus as the High Priest after the order of Melchizedek. He is contrasted with the Levitical High Priests, from the family of Aaron, who constantly die and have to be replaced. Melchizedek, that fascinating personality who shows up on the scene in

Genesis 14 as the King of Salem and the Priest of the Most High God, is described as someone who has no beginning or end. I think what is meant by this is that he had no genealogical records to describe his family history. No one knows where he came from. He just shows up and then is gone. Jesus is described as the High Priest after the order of Melchizedek to show the superiority of his priesthood to that of the priesthood of Levi. The sacrifices of the Levitical priests never accomplished the forgiveness of sins.

"The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming -- not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. If it could, would they have not stopped being offered? For the worshippers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins, because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins." -- Hebrews 10:1-4 (NIV)

But just as Melchizedek shows up on the scene and then doesn't seem to die, so also Jesus dies for sin once and for all and then rises from the dead to live forever as our Redeemer. Since he does live forever as our redeemer, the salvation that he purchased on the cross is also ours forever.

"When Christ came as high priest of the good things that are already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not man-made, that is to say, not a part of this creation. He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once and for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption." -- Hebrews 9:11-12 (NIV)

The redemption that Jesus Christ purchased on the cross, the New Covenant, is described as consisting of two parts. The first part is the forgiveness of sins. The second part is the New Heart.

"The time is coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they did not remain faithful to my covenant. And I turned away from them, declares the Lord. This is the covenant I will make with house of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in the minds and write them on their hearts, I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more." -- Hebrews 8:8-12 (NIV)

The forgiveness of sins refers to the legal aspect of our salvation where we are declared forgiven by the judge of the court of Heaven because he fully punished Jesus, his own Son, in our place. Jesus fully satisfied the wrath of the Father so that we could have peace with God. As a result of the work of Christ, we who believe are justified.

"Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand." -- Romans 5:1-2a (NIV)

The New Heart is the desire to live for Jesus which all believers receive at conversion. This new desire, or New Heart, will drive all believers to pursue the Lordship of Christ. The author of Hebrews describes it as having the law written on your mind and heart so that no one will have

to teach you. By this he does not mean that believers will not need teachers. What he does mean is that believers will be motivated from the inside out to live for Jesus. They are self, or Spirit, motivated to obey the Lord of the universe.

"Therefore, in anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" -- 2 Corinthians 5:17 (NIV)

"We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands. The man who says, 'I know him,' but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him." -- 1 John 2:3-4 (NIV)

"This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother." -- 1 John 3:10 (NIV)

Hebrews 8 also says that no one will have to teach his neighbor to know the Lord, because all will know him. This means that all who Jesus died for, the elect, will, at the appointed time, come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and desire to live for him. It is therefore absolutely guaranteed that every believer will experience a changed life, since it was infallibly purchased by the Son of God at Calvary. Our salvation was a package deal. If you are saved you will receive JUSTIFICATION (forgiveness of sins), SANCTIFICATION (a changed life), and GLORIFICATION (the promise of Heaven). You must get all of them or none at all. But above all else you must understand that without a changed life no one will get to Heaven, for that is the evidence of a saving Faith.

"Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord." -- Hebrews 12:14 (NIV)

Repentance is Much More Than a Change of Mind

When the question is asked, "What must we do to be saved?" the biblical answer is repentance and faith.

"I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus." -- Acts 20:21 (NIV)

The basic meaning of the word repentance in Greek means to change one's mind. But when it comes to conversion, repentance takes on a much deeper meaning. The reason for the change is the state of the heart of man. Man by nature is a God-hater. As a result of Adam's sin all of mankind come into the world guilty and have a hatred toward the Lord of the universe. So the problem of getting man to truly change his mind about God is that his heart or disposition toward the God of all must first be changed.

"As it is written: 'There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.'" -- Romans 3:10-11 (NIV)

"No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day." -- John 6:44 (NIV)

"The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned." -- 1 Corinthians 2:14 (NIV)

The changing of the heart of man is the work of the Holy Spirit. This is what our Lords was talking to Nicodemus about in John 3. Unless there is prior work of the Spirit of God on the heart of man he will never believe. When the Spirit draws to Himself those for whom Christ died, he changes the desires of the heart so that they no longer want to live for themselves (a God-hating experience), but now want to live for Jesus Christ. They do change their mind about Jesus, but it is much more than that. They change their allegiance from themselves and the world to that of serving Jesus Christ. This then is the meaning of Repentance, and why it is utterly inconceivable to view repentance as merely a change of mind.

"But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness." -- Romans 6:17-18 (NIV)

A Saving Faith Embraces Lordship

"What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such a faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, 'Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,' but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. ...As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead." -- James 2:14-17 (NIV)

The clear assumption in Scripture is that Saving Faith includes a desire to follow Jesus Christ as Lord. The issue is not simply convincing someone that Jesus ought to be their savior. The problem lies in the realm of the heart. All men have an aversion to Jesus the God-Man. To believe in Jesus is to receive him for all he is. There is no way that we will willingly give the Lord of Heaven and earth the keys to our life. Therefore, Saving Faith must be given to us as a gift if any of us are going to be saved.

"Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God -- children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God." -- John 1:12-13 (NIV)

"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith -- and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God -- not by works, so that no one can boast." -- Ephesians 2:8-9 (NIV)

The Testimony of Church Discipline to the Necessity of the New Heart

"If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector." -- Matthew 18:15-17(NIV)

When someone is caught in a verifiable sin and refuses to turn from it the Bible speaks straight to the issue. If the professed believer continues to hang on to his sin then he will ultimately find himself before the church. If he still refuses to repent then he is put out of the church (excommunication). The key point to understand about Church Discipline is the reason someone is put out of the church and regarded as an unbeliever: he is denying Jesus is his Lord! An on-going refusal to confess and turn away from a particular sin is a denial that you want Jesus Christ to be your Lord. To not want Jesus Christ as your Lord is to deny that you have a New Heart. Failure to have a New Heart means that you do not have a Saving Faith and are going to Hell.

The Necessity of the New Heart

"Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God." -- 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 (NIV)

Is it possible for you to receive Jesus Christ as your Savior but not your Lord and still be saved? The answer is obviously no! The salvation that was purchased by our Lord on the cross guaranteed that anyone who truly becomes a believer embraces Jesus Christ as the Lord of his life.