

Sunday, January 20, 2013—Grace Life School of Theology—*Grace History Project*—Lesson 89 The Legacy and Impact of Lewis Sperry Chafer

Legacy and Impact of Chafer and Dallas

- “Chafer’s contribution and lasting legacy to American evangelicalism in the twentieth century was enormous; he stands with his mentor, C.I. Scofield, as well as his successors, John F. Walvoord and Charles Ryrie, as a proponent of the Bible conference movement’s distinctive from the late nineteenth century, which emerged as an integral and influential subsegment of twentieth-century evangelicalism, the premillennial dispensational camp. In essence, Chafer’s contribution to the ongoing life of the church can be seen as the broadening and deepening of the Bible conference movement. This can be illustrated through both his institutional and theological contributions” (Hannah, 69)
- “Institutionally, Chafer’s legacy is the creation of Dallas Theological Seminary in 1924; it represented an extension of the Bible-conference emphasis at the post-graduate level of education, just as the Bible institute extended them at the under-graduate level. Chafer’s vision for a ministerial school began with this contact with students at the Mount Hermon School for Boys. His travels under Scofield’s auspices lead to contact with numerous pastors, denominational colleges, and seminaries, particularly throughout the South.” (Hannah, 69)
- “He came to believe that the unique emphasis of the Bible conference movement—intensive English Bible instruction, dispensational premillennialism, and the victorious Christian life teachings—were the additional ingredients, when added to an otherwise standard seminary curriculum, that could adequately prepare Christian missionaries and pastors—a combination of ingredients he described as “a new departure” in ministerial training.” (Hannah, 69)
- “The goal of the institution—to place men into the mainline churches after training in an independent school—proved elusive, however. Though the school was deeply influenced by Presbyterianism—Chafer and Scofield were both ordained in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) as were most of the early faculty—the distinctive ideas of the Bible conference movement were not accepted by many Presbyterian leaders or by other denominations as useful preparation for the ministry. They increasingly viewed the emphasis as antithetical to historic Presbyterianism. In the 1930s and ‘40s, Presbyterians in the North and South became openly hostile to dispensationalism. As a result, graduates of the seminary found placement in the mainline churches difficult.” (Hannah, 69)
- “At the same time, numerous denominational splinter groups, independent churches, and para-ecclesiastical organizations (Chafer supported many of them) were emerging in the country. The seminary became the major graduate-level source for their leaders. Thus, the distinctives of the Bible conference movement were carried into this emerging evangelical submovement of the American church.” (Hannah, 69)

- “Chafer’s theology, and subsequently that of the seminary, reflects his attachment to three somewhat diverse traditions within historic orthodoxy: Augustinianism, Keswick theology, and (Plymouth) Brethrenism. From the first source, Chafer’s systematic is Reformed or Calvinistic in anthropology and soteriology (i.e., the doctrines of election, predestination, humanity’s plight, and the origin and cause of Christ’s redemptive mercies). It reflects his adherence to Presbyterian confessionalism, although he deviated from that tradition by advocating an unlimited view of the intent of Christ’s sacrifice. It is profoundly Princetonian (i.e., Warfieldian inerrancy) in its delineation of the doctrine of the Scriptures.” (Hannah, 70)
- “In the second, Chafer’s understanding of the spiritual life, as put forth in *He That is Spiritual*, reflects a view that Warfield opposed. It was essentially a counteractivest understanding of the relationship of the Spirit and the believer relative to the duty of spiritual progress (i.e., a stress on the believer’s duty to be rightly related to the Spirit as the cause of growth), rather than the more traditional Reformed emphasis on suppressionism by the Holy Spirit (a stress on the activity of God as the cause of the believer’s sanctification).” (Hannah, 70)
- “Finally, reflecting the influence of the Brethren movement, which made significant inroads into American evangelicalism in the late nineteenth century through the emerging Bible conference movement, Chafer embraced the teachings of dispensationalism, modern premillennialism, and pretribulational eschatology.” (Hannah, 70)
- “Chafer’s third major legacy (his second being his writing ministry that we discussed in Lesson 88), and arguably the primary one, was his emphasis on the centrality of Christ and the grace of God; the preeminence of Christ and Calvary was the very heart of Chafer’s religious passion. In this Chafer stands without question in the orthodox tradition of the church. Chafer was at heart a herald of the Gospel, and the motto of the seminary he founded reflects this emphasis: “Preach the Word” (2 Tim. 2:2). To affect this mission, he felt that one had to know the Bible with intensity and affection, which implied a correct understanding of its overall purposes (i.e., dispensational premillennialism), and one must be in a correct relationship to the Holy Spirit (i.e., sanctified). . . Two works devoted to the theme of the Gospel followed: *Salvation and Grace* as well as briefer statements in other works, *Major Bible Themes* and *Systematic Theology*.” (Hannah, 70)

The Ephesian Letter: Doctrinally Considered (1935)

- In 1935, Chafer wrote a commentary titled, *The Ephesian Letter: Doctrinally Considered* that bears our consideration. Much of what Chafer says about Ephesians 2 and 3 is in agreement with the expositions of Ephesians that mid-Acts teachers were offering during the same time period. Despite holding the traditional viewpoint that the church began at Pentecost, Chafer is clear that the church was a unique Pauline revelation.
 - “A new age, with its peculiar Gentile privilege, has been ushered in by the death and resurrection of Christ and by the descent of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. . .

In proof of the fact that he had divine authority for the apostolic message, the Apostle here (verses 2-13) inserts a parenthetical passage of immense importance; resuming again, at verse 14, the original channel of his thought. He states that he is chosen of God to receive and declare a revelation of world-transforming import. A message which reduced the favored Jew to the level of the outcast Gentile (Rom. 3:9; 10:12); which asserted the utter worthlessness of human merit to those who had been taught to depend on naught else; and which offered a new and higher privilege even to Gentiles than had been previously enjoyed by the exclusive seed of Abraham, must, as it did, stir the unrelenting enmity toward the man who, under God, proclaimed this message. Thus we observe that the revelation of this new divine order for a new age was given to Paul, as it is directly declared in the immediate text (verse 2), and this is confirmed by the obvious fact that against him, as against no other, the hatred of the Jew was directed.

What then is the precise scope and character of this jealousy-provoking message? The answer is given in verse 6. But, before approaching this disclosure, the Apostle asserts that this special revelation was given to him (cf. verses 7-9) and through him to other "holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit." The revelation had been received by him previous to the writing of this Epistle, and that revelation had become the accepted order in the minds of others who, like Paul, were set for the proclamation of the newly revealed message. It was not to Peter, James, or John, though pillars in the Church, but to Paul only, that this distinctive revelation came." (Chafer, 95-96)

- According to Chafer, two distinct revelations were given to the Apostle Paul: 1) salvation by grace through faith, 2) the mystery of the church the body of Christ.
 - "As pointed out when considering Ephesians 1:9, two distinct revelations were given to the Apostle Paul: the first, concerning salvation by grace alone through faith apart from human merit, and on the ground of the work and merit of Christ (Gal. 1:11, 12); and the second, as set forth in this immediate context. (No consideration need be given here to less emphasized experiences on the part of the Apostle as recorded in Acts 26:19 and 2 Cor. 12:1-4. Note also the promise of Acts 26:16.) These two major revelations together form that larger body of truth which the Apostle designates as "my gospel" (2 Tim. 2:8).

According to verse 5, this revelation is the unfolding of a mystery, or sacred secret, "which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit." No better definition of a New Testament mystery will be found than that set forth in this context. A New Testament mystery is a truth hitherto withheld, or "hidden in God" (verse 9), but now revealed. The sum total of all the mysteries in the New Testament represent that entire body of added truth found in the New Testament which is unrevealed in the Old Testament." (Chafer, 96-97)

- While Chafer does see certain aspects that he calls the New Testament mysteries anticipated in Old Testament prophecy and type (Israel's judicial blindness Rom. 11:25, Isa. 6:9-10), he generally observed the distinction between prophecy and mystery.
 - "All this, though so evidently anticipating the Church, is not an adequate revelation of the great divine age-purpose in the out-calling of the Body and Bride of Christ, nor of that distinctive fact which in this context is termed the "mystery." If, for the previous bringing in of other divine purposes of an earthly nature, it were necessary to employ "holy men of God who spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost" (2 Peter 1:21), how reasonable is the declaration that "holy apostles and prophets" were used of the Lord for the present bringing in of the revelation of the heavenly purpose! Under these conditions is anyone justified in the assumption that the New Testament apostles and prophets who spoke forth a later revelation were one whit less honored of God as media of divine truth than the "sons of God" -- the "holy men of God" -- who spoke forth the former revelation? Messiah's kingdom occupied the Old Testament prophets' vision. They saw not the mystery of that "New Man" (2:15) which bears collectively the name Christ (1 Cor. 12:12). True, indeed, the Messiah was to die a sacrificial death. This fact had not only been typified, but it had been solemnly promised in every Jewish sacrifice. On the other hand, little had been revealed as to the value that would accrue from His resurrection. That particular event, being more related to the New Creation than to the old, was, to some extent, withheld as a part of the "mystery." (Chafer, 98)
- In Chafer's explanation of what the "mystery" is, he uses key time markers in the text such as "but now" to make his arguments. That Chafer saw the mystery as something that was hid in God before it was revealed to the Apostle Paul is beyond dispute. Moreover Chafer is crystal clear in his belief that today the kingdom is not being offered to anyone, Jew or Gentile.
 - "What then is the "mystery?" It is stated in verse 6 in the simplest of terms: "That the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel." This declaration must not be treated lightly. That the Gentiles should be fellow heirs and of the same body is not a recognition of the Old Testament prediction that, during Israel's coming kingdom glory, Gentiles will be raised to a subordinate participation in those blessings (Isa. 60:12). Those predictions were of an earthly calling and, being revealed in very much Old Testament prophecy, could be no part of the heavenly calling -- the "mystery hid in God." This mystery is of a present uniting of Jews and Gentiles into one body -- a new divine purpose, and, therefore, in no sense the perpetuation of anything which has been before.

Wonderful and startling indeed is the fact that heavenly blessings are now accorded to Gentiles. It will be remembered that they were without promise (2:12); but now they have promise in Christ by the Gospel. Just as wonderful and equally as startling is the assertion that Jews are to partake with Gentiles in this "one body." This divine offer of a possible entrance into the New Creation is no part of Israel's hope. So far as this new divine purpose is concerned, Israel was as much "without hope" as the Gentiles. At that time no

disposition existed on the part of the Jew to be united into one body with the Gentile, nor is he naturally so disposed today. No more drastic innovation in the divine dealing with men had ever been announced than was announced by the Apostle Paul at the beginning of this age -- that, as to Gospel privilege and the entrance into the New Creation in Christ Jesus, there is no difference between Jew and Gentile (Rom. 3:9; 10:12). The national covenants which belong to Israel are never said to be realized in the present dispensation of the Church. They are rather, as originally predicted, to be fulfilled in the coming Messianic Kingdom. On the other hand, the Gospel, which is now proclaimed by the authority of God and in the power of the Spirit, offers the Kingdom to no one -- neither Jew nor Gentile.” (Chafer, 98-99)

- In addition, Chafer takes issue with the popular belief that the Church in its present form is a continuation of God’s one purpose from the beginning of the human family.
 - “That the Church is a new purpose of God could not be more clearly stated than it is in chapters 3 to 9, yet certain schools of theology contend that the Church in her present form is but a continuation of God's one purpose from the beginning of the human family. They speak of an "Old Testament church" and seek to relate this to the one body which constitutes the New Testament revelation. The fact that Jews are now invited into fellow heirship in one body with Gentiles is no warrant for the belief that Old Testament saints are included in this new divine purpose. Arguments for an Old Testament church are usually based on: (1) the fact that the Old Testament sacrifices looked forward to Christ; (2) that Israel was a sanctified nation; (3) that there was a godly remnant in each of Israel's generations; (4) that the Septuagint translates the word which indicates an assembly or gathering of people by the word ekklesia; and (5) since all saints go to heaven, they must, because of that fact, constitute one company. . . These could not possibly be one and the same company. . . How could the Church, in which there is neither Jew nor Gentile, be any part of Israel in this or any other age? . . If these questions, and the many more that might be propounded, are answered from the Scriptures, the conclusion must be that the Church, the New Creation in Christ, which is made up of both Jew and Gentile, is a new purpose of God and constitutes the primary divine objective of this age.” (Chafer, 100-102)
- Lastly, Chafer understood that in Ephesians 3:7-11, one of the functions and purposes of the church was to teach the angelic hosts about the manifold wisdom of God.
 - “In verses 7, 8, and 9, the Apostle contends for his unique position as the one chosen of God for the reception and declaration of the new message concerning the mystery in Christ. In verse 10, he declares that it is through the Church that the angelic hosts now know the manifold wisdom of God; as, in 2:7, the angels are, in the ages to come, to know by the Church the exceeding riches of the grace of God. All of this disclosure concerning the Church and her present ministry to the principalities and powers as a revelation of God's wisdom is, likewise (cf. 1:9), according to the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord (verse 11).” (Chafer, 102)

Chafer's Impact on Charles F. Baker

- According to Donald Chrysler, author of *Paul's Great Commission*, "Charles F. Baker was born in Dallas, Texas where he attended the church of Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer. He later graduated from Wheaton College and Dallas Theological Seminary where Dr. Chafer was President." (Chrysler, 27)
- While doing research for this lesson, I stumbled upon an article about Mr. Baker on the Alumni webpage of Wheaton College, titled "Wheaton History A to Z." This webpage proved to be a treasure trove of biographical information about Mr. Baker.
 - "If Charles F. Baker presented an extreme form of dispensational theology, his credentials were impeccable. Born of English immigrant parents to Dallas, Texas, in 1905, he attended Scofield Memorial Church, founded by C.I. Scofield, editor of *The Scofield Reference Bible*. Baker's pastor was Lewis Sperry Chafer, who also founded the Evangelical Theological College, which later became Dallas Theological Seminary. Here Baker attended, a highly motivated student, again sitting under Chafer's ministry. Graduating, Baker entered Wheaton College, accompanied by a letter from DTS registrar Rollin Chafer to Wheaton College registrar, Enoch Dyrness. It stated, "Charlie is one of the best students we have ever had in the college and it gives me great pleasure to commend him to your faculty. Not only has his class work been of the highest grade, but he is one of the most spiritual men we have in the institution." After successful studies at Wheaton, Baker moved in 1932 to Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where he ministered for 23 years as pastor of Fundamental Bible Church. He also assisted J.C. O'Hair, pastor of North Shore Church on Wilson Street, Chicago, as chief engineer for broadcasting at station WPCC (We Preach Christ Crucified)." (Wheaton College Alumni Association)
- The influence of Lewis Sperry Chafer on Mr. Baker's life cannot be overestimated. Of all the founding fathers of the Grace Movement, Mr. Baker was one of the few men to possess formal theological training. Pastor Stam appears to have been self conscious about his lack of formal training because he twice points out in his *Memoirs* that his lack of formal schooling was not a detriment to his ministry ("The Missing College Education," page 36 and "How I Got My Ph.D.," page 57). Having sat under Dr. Chafer, Pastor Baker was exposed to Dispensational Theology through the prism of Systematic Theology as evidenced by Chafer's eight volume *Systematic Theology*. Consequently, Pastor Baker's approach was much more academic than Pastors O'Hair or Stam.
- This can be clearly seen when one considers Pastor Baker's masterwork, the 688 page, *A Dispensational Theology*, published in 1971. This work seeks to present the unique theology of mid-Acts dispensationalism within the framework of standard Systematic Theology. In this sense, *A Dispensational Theology* is truly significant because it seeks to set forth the doctrines of the Grace Movement in a manner that professional academic theologians would recognize and respect. Baker makes his intentions clear in the preface:

- “Very few attempts have been made to produce a work on Theology which is dispensationally oriented. A survey of some two dozen standard works on the subject revealed the fact that more than half of them make no reference whatsoever to the subject of dispensations. Most of those that do make mention of the Scriptural expression devote only the briefest reference to the subject, and their treatment of it is mainly from the viewpoint of Covenant Theology, which fails completely to recognize the distinctive character of the present dispensation, called by Paul the dispensation of the mystery, a plan and program of God which was kept secret from all former ages and generations (Colossians 1:26). Only one major work on Theology was found which recognized the dispensational principle in the interpretation of Scripture. . . While written as a textbook for college and seminary level of work, effort has been made to make the text useful for the layman also by avoiding as far as possible theological jargon and by Anglicizing Hebrew and Greek words. It is recommended that the Theological student consult the standard, evangelical works on Systematic Theology for more complete treatment of certain areas, as the purpose of this volume has not been to simply duplicate what capable and spiritual scholars have already written, but to give prominence to that which has been neglected, namely, the dispensational thrust of the Scriptures. ” (Baker, XI-XII)
- It was at Dallas Theological Seminary under the tutelage of Dr. Chafer that Mr. Baker was exposed not only to Dispensational Theology but also Systematic Theology. What Chafer’s *Systematic Theology* did for the dispensational views of the Bible conference movement, Baker’s *A Dispensational Theology* did for mid-Acts Pauline dispensationalism. Baker applied the principles and methodology he learned from Chafer in an attempt to create one of the only scholarly works of theology the Grace Movement has produced. Of all the founders of the mid-Acts Grace Movement in the United States, Pastor Baker was the Academic.
- Toward the end of their piece on Charles F. Baker, the Alumni Association of Wheaton College writes the following about their famous graduate, “Normative, mainstream dispensationalism, as espoused by Dallas Theological Seminary, Moody Bible Institute, or Philadelphia Biblical University, might agree with aspects of Baker’s research, but it would vehemently object to many of his assertions. . . Despite the controversy attached to his theological stance, Baker was known as a gracious, kindhearted man.” We will have more to say about Pastor Baker’s life and ministry in future lessons. (Wheaton College Alumni Association)

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