

In his notable book, *Dispensationalism Today*, Charles C. Ryrie sets forth what he considers to be "THE *SINE QUA NON* OF DISPENSATIONALISM":

"What marks off a man as a dispensationalist? What is the *sine qua non* of the System? Even though certain later discussions must be anticipated in order to answer the question, it seem appropriate to give an answer at this point.

Theoretically the *sine qua non* ought to lie in the recognition of the fact that God has distinguishably different economies in governing the affairs of the world. Covenant theologians hold that there are various dispensations (and even use the word!) within the outworking of the covenant of grace in other words, a man can believe in dispensations, and even see them in relation to progressive revelation, without being a dispensationalist.

Is the essence of dispensationalism in the number of dispensations? No, for this is in no way a major issue in the system, . . .

Perhaps the issue of premillennialism is determinative. Again the answer is negative, for there are those who are premillennial who definitely are not dispensational. . . .

What, then, is the *sine qua non* of dispensationalism? The answer is threefold.

- (1) A dispensationalist keeps Israel and the Church distinct. . . . Chafer summarized it as follows:
The dispensationalist believes that throughout the ages God is pursuing two distinct purposes: one related to the earth with earthly people and earthly objectives involved which is Judaism; while the other is related to heaven with heavenly people and heavenly objectives involved, which is Christianity. . . .
This is probably the most basic theological test of whether or not a man is a dispensationalist, and it is undoubtedly the most practical and conclusive. A man who fails to distinguish Israel and the Church will inevitably not hold to dispensational distinctions; and one who does, will.
- (2) This distinction between Israel and the Church is born out of a system of hermeneutics which is usually called literal interpretation. Therefore, the second aspect of the *sine qua non* of dispensationalism is the matter of plain hermeneutics. . . .
- (3) A third aspect of the *sine qua non* of dispensationalism . . . concerns the underlying purpose of God in the world. The covenant theologian in practice makes this purpose salvation, and the dispensationalist says the purpose is broader than that, namely, the glory of God. To the dispensationalist the soteriological or saving program of God is not the only program but one of the means God is using in the total program of glorifying Himself . . . John F. Walvoord . . . puts it this way:
All events of the created world are designed to manifest the glory of God. The error of covenant theologians is that they combine all the many facets of divine purpose in the one objective of the fulfillment of the covenant of grace. From a logical standpoint, this is the reductive error -- the use of one aspect of the whole as the determining element.