

LETTER FOUR

The Danger of Dispensationalism

The Fruit of a Theology of Retreat

Theology does more than explain the future. It shapes what believers expect, what they attempt, and what they consider possible under the reign of Christ.

We Must Examine the Fruit

Every theological system should be tested not only by the verses used to defend it, but also by the understanding of God, history, identity, and mission it produces. Jesus taught that a tree is known by its fruit. That principle does not permit us to judge every believer who holds a particular doctrine, but it does require us to examine what a doctrine consistently teaches people to expect.

Over the last century, much of the evangelical world has retreated from education, law, government, media, economics, the arts, and other spheres of cultural formation. Families have become fragmented, civic responsibility has weakened, and the world has often exercised more influence upon the Ecclesia than the Ecclesia has exercised upon the world.

Dispensationalism is not solely responsible for these developments. Historical change is never explained by one doctrine, and many dispensational believers have served Christ with remarkable courage, sacrifice, and faithfulness. Nevertheless, we must ask whether the system's expectations helped make retreat appear reasonable, prudent, and even biblical.

If believers are taught that history must decline, that the Kingdom belongs primarily to a future age, that the world remains Satan's rightful domain, and that the Ecclesia may be removed at any moment, long-term Kingdom responsibility will inevitably appear less urgent.

Our map of the future does not remain on a prophecy chart. It eventually determines how—and whether—we enter the battlefield of the present.

Theology Becomes Posture

Believers rarely withdraw because they consciously reject the Great Commission. They withdraw because they have received a story in which withdrawal makes sense.

The progression is simple:

- Theology shapes expectation.
- Expectation shapes imagination.
- Imagination shapes action.
- Repeated action becomes a culture.
- Culture eventually produces institutions—or abandons them.

When decline is expected and escape is anticipated, disengagement becomes logical. When Christ's public reign is assigned almost entirely to the future, present obedience is narrowed. When national discipleship is considered impossible before His return, saving individuals may replace teaching people and nations to obey everything He commanded.

This is why eschatology is never merely a debate about the sequence of future events. It answers practical questions: Who reigns now? To whom do the nations belong? What has Christ authorized His people to do? Should we build for generations, or simply endure until evacuation?

A future expectation eventually becomes a present posture.

The Battle Over the Story

The first deception in Scripture began with a competing interpretation of reality: “Did God really say?” The serpent reframed God's character, motives, intentions, and Word. Once Eve accepted the altered story, disobedience appeared reasonable.

That pattern remains. Spiritual warfare includes a battle over meaning—how people understand God, themselves, the world, history, and the future. Paul therefore speaks of demolishing arguments raised against the knowledge of God and of being transformed by the renewing of the mind (2 Corinthians 10:4–5; Romans 12:2).

Facts alone do not direct a life. People act according to the story through which those facts are interpreted. If believers are taught, “History belongs to evil until Christ returns,” their response to history is being shaped before they ever face a specific decision.

Eschatology, ecclesiology, and mission are therefore inseparable. Together they determine whether obedience feels meaningful or futile, whether engagement appears faithful or presumptuous, and whether believers expect the Gospel to bear public fruit or merely rescue individuals from a doomed world.

The Story Dispensationalism Tells

Classical dispensationalism contains several related expectations. Its various schools do not express them identically, and later forms have modified some earlier claims. Yet the system has commonly taught or implied that:

- the promised Kingdom was postponed after Israel rejected Jesus;
- the Ecclesia is a distinct, temporary interval in God's prophetic program;
- Christ's decisive public reign over the nations awaits a future millennium;
- the present age will decline into apostasy and tribulation;
- the pretribulation rapture will remove the Ecclesia before that tribulation;
- national Israel will again become the primary focus of God's earthly program; and
- the complete transformation of nations cannot occur through the present mission of the Ecclesia.

Each proposition may be defended as a technical theological distinction. Together, however, they form a coherent narrative: the Kingdom is later, collapse is inevitable, Israel will eventually fulfill the earthly promises, and the Ecclesia's immediate task is principally to save as many individuals as possible before removal.

Evangelism matters profoundly. Every person must hear the Gospel, repent, believe, and become a disciple of Jesus Christ. But Jesus did not commission His people merely to record decisions before the world collapses. Because all authority in heaven and on earth had already been given to Him, He commanded His followers to make disciples of all nations and teach them to obey everything He commanded (Matthew 28:18–20).

The problem is not the desire to save souls. The problem is reducing Christ's mission to saving souls while leaving families, communities, institutions, and nations undisciplined.

Theological Damage: A Kingdom Deferred

The deepest theological concern is the relocation of Christ's reign. Dispensational teaching affirms that Jesus possesses heavenly authority, yet its future-oriented structure can leave believers functioning as though His kingship has little present consequence for the nations.

Scripture presents a different emphasis:

- Psalm 2 declares that God has installed His King and summons the nations and their rulers to respond.
- Psalm 110 portrays the Messiah ruling in the midst of His enemies—not waiting until every enemy has disappeared.
- Daniel 7 depicts the Son of Man receiving dominion, glory, and a Kingdom.
- Matthew 28 grounds the Great Commission in authority already given to Christ.
- Acts 2 proclaims the crucified and risen Jesus as Lord and Messiah, enthroned at God's right hand.
- 1 Corinthians 15 says Christ must reign until every enemy is placed beneath His feet.
- Revelation introduces Jesus as “the ruler of the kings of the earth.”

These passages do not deny a future consummation. Christ will complete what He has begun, the dead will be raised, judgment will come, and every enemy—including death—will be defeated. But consummation is not inauguration. The future completion of Christ's reign does not mean His reign has not already begun.

Christ does not begin reigning after His enemies are defeated. He reigns while His enemies are placed beneath His feet.

When the Kingdom is treated primarily as future, the present age becomes a waiting room. The Ecclesia may confess Christ as King while behaving as though the nations remain outside the meaningful reach of His authority. This is not necessarily an explicit denial of His kingship; it is a practical postponement of its earthly implications.

Ecclesial Damage: From Assembly to Audience

The Greek word *ecclesia* described an assembled people called to act together. Jesus did not announce that He would build a weekly religious event. He declared that He would build His Ecclesia, and the gates of Hades would not prevail against it (Matthew 16:18).

Yet a theology centered upon preservation and evacuation can gradually recast the Ecclesia as a rescue center awaiting departure. It still gathers, teaches, worships, cares, and evangelizes—but its understanding of corporate authority and public responsibility becomes smaller.

The change is subtle:

- Shepherding becomes disconnected from sending.
- Personal healing becomes detached from Kingdom obedience.

- Reaction replaces initiative.
- Commentary replaces strategy.
- Spectatorship replaces ambassadorship.

Pastoral care is indispensable, but it was never intended to replace apostolic sending. Inner healing matters, but the new creation is not merely an improved version of the old self. Believers are being conformed to Christ so that, even as the Lord transforms them, they can strengthen and serve others.

The Ecclesia should not wait until its members feel complete before engaging the world. Nor should it send unformed people to act in the strength of the flesh. Formation and mission belong together. As Christ builds His people, His people participate in building up one another and faithfully serving the world around them.

The Ecclesia is not an audience waiting for rescue. It is a Spirit-filled people sent to represent a reigning King.

Missional Damage: From Nations to Individuals

If the world is assumed to belong to Satan until Jesus returns, the scope of Christian mission will naturally contract. Nations become enemy territory to escape rather than peoples to disciple. Public institutions appear irredeemable. Long-term investment in education, law, government, economics, media, or community life seems naïve because history is expected to unravel regardless of obedience.

The resulting mission can be summarized as:

Save souls. Hold services. Wait for the rapture.

But the Great Commission presents a larger movement:

Make disciples. Teach obedience. Represent the King among the nations.

This does not mean capturing institutions through coercion or creating a religious state. Jesus rejected worldly domination, and His Kingdom does not advance through the weapons of the flesh. Kingdom influence comes through truth, service, sacrifice, wisdom, justice, mercy, Spirit-empowered witness, and faithful stewardship.

Neither does discipling nations mean that every person will immediately become a believer or that history will advance without opposition. It means the Ecclesia refuses to declare any sphere beyond the rightful authority of Christ or outside the reach of faithful obedience.

Christians should therefore ask how the Gospel speaks to the formation of families, the education of children, the administration of justice, the stewardship of resources, the dignity of work, the purpose of government, the practice of medicine, the use of technology, and the stories a culture tells itself.

Damage to the Imagination

People live out of what they believe is possible. Before Joshua and Caleb's generation entered Canaan, most of the spies saw themselves as grasshoppers before giants (Numbers 13). The physical obstacles were real, but their perception of themselves, their enemies, and their God determined their response.

Jesus used images of seed, leaven, harvest, light, and a city on a hill. These metaphors teach His people to expect growth, permeation, fruitfulness, visibility, and influence. He also promised that those who believed in Him would do His works and even greater works because He was going to the Father (John 14:12).

When believers are disciplined to imagine inevitable defeat, they may become suspicious of any expectation of historical fruit. Hope sounds naïve. Long-term planning sounds presumptuous. Cultural engagement sounds worldly. Victory itself can begin to feel theologically dangerous.

This posture produces predictable habits:

- anxiety over world events;
- continual scanning for prophetic signs;
- fascination with Antichrist rather than confidence in Christ;
- short-term thinking;
- fear of deception without mature discernment;
- resignation in the face of institutional decline; and
- hostility toward constructive, generational vision.

Not every dispensational believer displays these traits. Many have built churches, schools, missions, businesses, charities, and institutions intended to bless future generations. That fact should be honored. Yet when they do so, they often act more constructively than the system's expectation of imminent collapse would seem to encourage.

A people convinced that they must lose will rarely prepare to build, inherit, and contend for generations.

Cultural and Civilizational Damage

No sphere remains neutral when faithful people withdraw from it. Education continues forming minds. Media continues shaping imagination. Law continues defining justice. Government continues exercising authority. Economics continues directing resources. Technology continues changing human relationships. When the Ecclesia declines to speak, serve, build, and participate, competing worldviews do not politely leave those arenas empty.

The issue is not that dispensationalism single-handedly caused the secularization of Western institutions. That claim would be historically careless. Industrialization, modernism, materialism, political movements, technological change, church division, moral compromise, and many other forces contributed.

The more defensible concern is that a theology of inevitable decline often left believers poorly equipped to resist those forces constructively. It could provide spiritual justification for abandoning arenas already under pressure: “Why polish brass on a sinking ship?”

But once believers accepted the ship was sinking by divine necessity, they stopped asking whether they had been called to repair it, steer it, serve its passengers, or build something that could survive the storm.

Education offers a sobering example. Education is never neutral because it always communicates beliefs about truth, morality, identity, authority, and human purpose. Many historic schools and universities were founded within broadly Christian intellectual traditions. As those institutions moved away from biblical foundations, too many believers responded primarily by lamenting the change rather than developing durable strategies for generational formation.

The same pattern can be seen in media, law, medicine, government, and economics. The Ecclesia frequently arrived after the crisis, issued a statement, and then returned to its internal programs. It reacted to decisions made elsewhere because it had surrendered the responsibility to cultivate qualified, wise, faithful servants within those spheres.

When the Ecclesia vacates a field, it should not be surprised when another worldview cultivates it.

Israel, Allegiance, and the Centrality of Christ

Dispensational theology has also fostered a deep attachment between many Christians and the modern nation-state of Israel. Love for Jewish people, opposition to antisemitism, prayer for peace, and honest concern for everyone living in the region are entirely appropriate.

The danger comes when biblical promises are applied to a modern government without sufficient attention to their fulfillment in Christ. “I will bless those who bless you” is frequently treated as a direct requirement of contemporary foreign policy. Political or financial support can then become a test of Christian faithfulness, and criticism of governmental actions may be confused with hostility toward Jewish people.

No modern state should be granted unconditional theological approval. Governments and nations must be evaluated by standards of truth and justice, and every person stands in need of reconciliation through Jesus Christ. The New Testament centers the covenant promises in Him: Christ is Abraham's promised Seed, and those who belong to Christ are Abraham's offspring and heirs according to promise (Galatians 3:16, 29).

The issue is not whether God cares about Jewish people. He does. Nor is it whether Romans 9–11 deserves careful interpretation. It does, and a later letter will address it directly. The issue here is whether devotion to a modern geopolitical project has displaced the centrality of Christ, divided the people of God, or redirected the attention and resources of the Ecclesia away from its mission among all nations.

Our allegiance is not organized around ethnicity, nation, party, or prophetic timetable. It belongs first and finally to Jesus Christ, the King of kings.

A Necessary Qualification

This letter makes a strong critique, so an equally strong qualification is necessary. I am not claiming that dispensationalists do not love Jesus, preach the Gospel, serve their neighbors, engage public life, or sacrifice for missions. The history of evangelical Christianity contains many examples to the contrary.

Nor am I claiming that one doctrine explains every weakness in the modern church. The Ecclesia's retreat also reflects fear, comfort, institutional self-preservation, consumerism, poor leadership, political compromise, and ordinary disobedience.

My claim is more focused: when dispensationalism postpones the Kingdom, separates the Ecclesia from the earthly scope of God's promises, expects inevitable decline, and makes evacuation the blessed hope, it creates a theological logic that can weaken long-term mission. Even when individual believers resist that logic, the system continues exerting pressure toward retreat.

We must therefore examine both doctrine and fruit. If a system causes believers to confess Christ's victory while expecting His mission to fail, something within the system requires correction.

From Retreat to Representation

Jesus has not commissioned His people to dominate others, preserve an institution, or build kingdoms for themselves. He has authorized them to represent Him.

We are salt and light (Matthew 5:13–16). We are a Kingdom and priests to God (Revelation 1:6). We are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, and a holy nation called to proclaim His excellencies (1 Peter 2:9–10). We are God's fellow workers (1 Corinthians 3:9). We are ambassadors through whom God makes His appeal (2 Corinthians 5:20).

These identities are not titles for a future age. They describe the people Christ is forming now.

Faithful representation begins wherever God has placed us: within our homes, congregations, neighborhoods, vocations, businesses, schools, communities, and governing institutions. We pray, listen, serve, speak truth, make disciples, build wisely, confront evil without becoming evil, and teach others to obey the King.

We do not wait to become perfect before acting. As the Lord builds us, we build up others. As He renews our minds, we help others discern truth. As He entrusts us with gifts, relationships, knowledge, and opportunity, we steward them for His purposes.

We do not labor because we imagine ourselves capable of creating the Kingdom. The Kingdom belongs to God. We labor because the King already reigns, His Spirit dwells within His people, and our obedience is never wasted.

Review and Summary

The danger of dispensationalism is not confined to an incorrect date, chart, or sequence of events. Its deeper danger is the story it can teach the Ecclesia to inhabit.

If the Kingdom is postponed, mission is postponed. If decline is inevitable, retreat appears faithful. If rescue is imminent, generational stewardship appears unnecessary. If earthly promises belong primarily to another people in another age, the Ecclesia loses confidence in its present identity and calling. If Christ's reign has no meaningful consequence until His return, believers learn to confess a reigning King while living as though history belongs to His enemy.

The fruit can be theological, ecclesial, missional, psychological, cultural, and strategic. Yet the answer is not anger toward those who inherited the system. The answer is a return to Scripture, interpretive humility, renewed identity, and obedience to Jesus Christ.

We must recover the whole commission:

- proclaim the Gospel;
- make disciples;
- teach obedience;
- serve our neighbors;
- build for generations;
- represent Christ in every sphere; and
- faithfully occupy until our King returns.

Dispensationalism postponed Christ's Kingdom, taught generations to expect retreat, and too often trained the Ecclesia to mistake defeat for faithfulness. The remedy is not another human system, but renewed confidence in the present reign of Christ and faithful obedience to the mission He gave His people.



<https://eleventhhourministries.com/>

The letter does not end here. Continue the journey as we learn to think biblically, live courageously, and faithfully represent Christ's Kingdom in every sphere of life.

Enter the War Room at 11thHourWarRoom.org

