

The Legalism of Last Days Madness

Legalism: Legalism is pursuing good works with the intention of earning God's favor. The point is to save one's self. It is good works without believing that God justifies us by faith alone. John Piper writes: "The essence of legalism is when faith is not the engine of obedience." (*The Anatomy of Legalism*)

Last Days Madness: Also known as Raptureism or Dispensational Premillennialism is a distinctive modern belief. It derives from a 19th-century British evangelist, John Nelson Darby. He believed that human history was divided into seven divine phases, or "dispensations". History would end with a seven-year tribulation, followed by Armageddon and the millennial reign of Christ, all of which were imminent.

I. Legalism is the Handmaid of Raptureism

The Bible says that we are justified by grace through faith alone, and it is not a work of our own but a free gift of God *in the finished work of Christ*. Our salvation is, and never will be, a result of our works (Ephesians 2:8). There is nothing we do to earn God's saving favor. In Christ, we have God's favor.

- A. The obsession with the "rapture" is a madness. Belief in an escape from this world through the rapture is a misplaced concept of hope for believers. Our hope should be in the Redeemer, not the rapture. The Redeemer is the resurrection and life and all of what that encompasses, not in a secret "catching away." The notion that you will soon be caught up in the air to escape this world leads to all sorts of legalism. Rather than resting in the finished work of Jesus Christ, the person with Last Days fever works to be ready. God is angry. He's coming to destroy. I must escape it.
- B. Raptureists are primarily distinct from free grace believers on the issue of deliverance from sin. Raptureists take the position that sinners have the power within to remove sin, while a free grace believer says it is "God in you, both to will and to do His good pleasure" (Philippians 2:13). A raptureist loses sight of God's mercy to sinners in Christ (see Matthew 1:21).

II. Three Famous Raptureists of Modern Times

The Rapture is coming and people better be ready or there will be "hell to pay" is a modern view.

1. **John Nelson Darby (1800-1882)**, a curate in the Church of Ireland parish, Darby distinguished himself by persuading Roman Catholic peasants in the Calary district within this parish to abandon the Catholic Church. His well-known gospel tract is "How the Lost Sheep was Saved." Darby has been credited with originating the *pre-tribulation rapture theory* wherein Christ will suddenly remove His bride, the Church, from this world to its heavenly destiny before the judgments of the tribulation. Thus, the prophetic program resumes with Israel's earthly destiny. Dispensationalist beliefs about the fate of the Jews and the re-establishment of the Kingdom of Israel put dispensationalists at the forefront of [Christian Zionism](#), because "God is able to graft them in again," and they believe that in His grace he will do so according to their understanding of Old Testament prophecy. They believe that, while the ways of God may change, His purposes to bless Israel will never be forgotten, just as He has shown unmerited favor to the Church, He will do so to a remnant of Israel to fulfill all the promises made to the genetic seed of Abraham. In 1829 he predicted the rebirth of a nation Israel over 100 years before it happened, just by reading the Bible (Prophetic No. 1 Vol. 2. J. N. Darby).
2. **Charles Finney (1792-1875)**, American Presbyterian Minister
"It certainly cannot be true, that God accepts and justifies the sinner in his sins."

*"The penitent soul remains justified no longer than this full-hearted consecration continues. If he falls from his first love into the spirit of self-pleasing, he falls again into bondage to sin and to the law, is condemned, and must repent and do his "first work," must return to Christ, and renew his faith and love, as a condition of his salvation."
"Whenever he sins, he must, for the time being, cease to be holy. This is self-evident.*

Whenever he sins, he must be condemned; he must incur the penalty of the law of God ... If it be said that the precept is still binding upon him, but that with respect to the Christian, the penalty is forever set aside, or abrogated, I reply, that to abrogate the penalty is to repeal the precept, for a precept without penalty is no law. It is only counsel or advice. The Christian, therefore, is justified no longer than he obeys, and must be condemned when he disobeys or Antinomianism is true ... In these respects, then, the sinning Christian and the unconverted sinner are upon precisely the same ground."

For Finney perfect behavior is a condition for salvation and this even includes a complete awareness of one's sinfulness.

3. **Cyrus Ingerson (C.I.) Scofield (1843-1921)** Cyrus Scofield was born in Michigan, the seventh and last child of Elias and Abigail Goodrich Scofield. Elias Scofield's ancestors were of English and Puritan descent, but the family was nominally Episcopalian. Abigail Scofield died three months after Cyrus's birth, and his father twice remarried during Cyrus's minority. Details of his early education are unknown, but there is no reason to doubt his later testimony that he was an enthusiastic reader and that he had studied Shakespeare. As the author of the pamphlet "Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth" (1888), Scofield became a leader in dispensational premillennialism, a forerunner of twentieth-century Christian Fundamentalism. Although, in theory, Scofield returned to his Dallas pastorate in 1903, his projected reference Bible consumed much of his energy, and for much of the time before its publication, he was either unwell or in Europe. When the *Scofield Reference Bible* was published in 1909, it quickly became the most influential statement of dispensational premillennialism, and Scofield's popularity as a Bible conference speaker increased as his health continued to decline. Royalties from the work were substantial, and Scofield held real estate in Dallas, New Hampshire, and Long Island.

III. Jesus Christ Fulfills the Law and Calls Us to Expand His Kingdom

Mosaic Worship – In the Old Covenant, worship is more about religion & liturgy—based on the Law.

New Covenant Worship – Worship is an internal attitude towards God (Rom. 12:1; I Cor. 6:19).

Mosaic Worship – Year after year atonement was made for Israel.

New Covenant Worship – The once and for all sacrifice of Jesus Christ (Heb. 9:11-14; 10:1-14).

Mosaic Worship – Manifestation of God's Presence in nature and miracles, signs and wonders.

New Covenant Worship – Manifestation of spiritual gifts and the Holy Spirit (Rom. 11:17; John 4:23).

Mosaic Worship – A special covenant with the Jewish people among "all the nations of the world."

New Covenant Worship – "A multitude from every nation, tribe, people, and language" (Rev. 7:9).