

DISPENSATIONALISM (44)

Doctrinal Theme #7 - A new future hope.

Prior to this Upper Room Discourse, the thought of the disciples concerned the fact that Jesus was King of Israel and had told them that the program with Israel had been temporarily shut down due to their rejection of Jesus as her God/Savior/Messiah and King.

In the Olivet Discourse, Jesus told them that there would be a series of signs that would occur in a Great Tribulation that would lead up to Him coming back to be King of Israel. Those signs were not positive (Matt. 24:5-29).

But as He sat with them in the Upper Room, He said something to them that they had not heard before. In John 14:1-3, Jesus introduced a new theme to these disciples and the theme was "I will come again and receive you to Myself." Now the implication is He would actually take these disciples from the earth to heaven to a place where He was and a place that He had designed for them.

The Apostle Paul differentiated between two different eschatological moments and movements:

Movement #1 - Jesus would move people from earth to heaven at the Rapture.

John 14:1-3; I Thess. 4:16-17

Movement #2 - Jesus would move people from heaven to earth at the Second Coming.

Matt. 24:30; II Thess. 1:7-10; Rev. 19:11-16

Now Jesus will come again two times. There will be two dispensational events:

- 1) He will come again in the sky and Rapture His people thus ending the Church Age.
- 2) He will come again and put His feet on the ground at His Second Coming thus beginning a new national program for Israel.

This passage in John 14 introduced this important eschatological fact for the first time to these disciples. It presented to them the hope that they would not have to go through the Tribulation, but that He, Himself, would come back in the sky to get them and take them to be with Him. This was brand new data.

Dispensational distinctions clearly come into play in the matter of the Rapture-versus-the Second Coming of Christ:

Distinction #1 - At the Rapture, Christ comes in the air and Christians meet Him.

His feet do not touch the earth. I Thess. 4:16.

At the Second Coming, Christ returns to the Mt. of Olives and His feet are standing on the earth. Zech. 14:2-4

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- Distinction #2** - At the Rapture, Christ Himself takes believers out of the world.
I Thess. 4:16-17
At Second Coming, angels take unbelievers out of the world. Matt. 13:41, 49
- Distinction #3** - At the Rapture, believers are taken from the earth and unbelievers are left on the earth. I Thess. 4:17
At the Second Coming, believers are left on the earth and unbelievers are taken from the earth. Matt. 13:41-42, 49-50
- Distinction #4** - At the Rapture, Christ comes to rescue His Church before Tribulation.
Rev. 3:10; I Thess. 1:10; 5:9
At Second Coming, Christ comes to judge all after the Tribulation.
Matt. 24:29-30
- Distinction #5** - Before the Rapture, there are no specific signs. Rev. 3:11; 22:20; Phil. 3:20
Before the Second Coming, there are very specific signs. Matt. 24:3-29;
Rev. 6-19
- Distinction #6** - At the Rapture, there is a resurrection of the “in Christ” dead before the Tribulation. I Thess. 4:16-18
At the Second Coming, there is a resurrection of Israel’s righteous dead after the Tribulation. Dan. 12:1-2

Dr. Thomas Ice wrote an article called *Differences Between the Rapture and the Second Coming*. He said this was a key reason why he concluded that the Rapture was very distinct from the Second Coming. He listed 13 contrasts:

- 1) **Rapture** features translation of all believers; **Second Coming** features no translation at all.
- 2) **Raptured** Saints go to heaven; **Second Coming** raptured Saints come back to earth.
- 3) **Rapture** earth is not judged so righteousness reigns; **Second Coming** earth judged Righteousness reigns.
- 4) **Rapture** is imminent, signless, at any moment; **Second Coming** follows definite predicted signs.
- 5) **Rapture** not in the Old Testament; **Second Coming** predicted all throughout Old Testament.
- 6) **Rapture** is for believers only; **Second Coming** will affect all people - believer, unbeliever.
- 7) **Rapture** is before the Day of Wrath; **Second Coming** concludes the Day of Wrath.
- 8) **Rapture** has no reference to binding Satan; **Second Coming** Satan is bound.
- 9) **Rapture** Christ comes for His own; **Second Coming** Christ comes with His own.
- 10) **Rapture** Christ comes in the air; **Second Coming** He comes to the earth.
- 11) **Rapture** Christ comes to claim His bride; **Second Coming** He comes with His bride.
- 12) **Rapture** only His own see Him; **Second Coming** every eye shall see Him.
- 13) **Rapture** begins the Tribulation; **Second Coming** begins the Millennium.

Rapture Passages: John 14:1-3; Rom. 8:19; I Cor. 1:7-8; 15:51-53; 16:22; Phil. 3:20-21; 4:5; Col. 3:4; I Thess. 1:10; 2:19; 4:13-18; 5:9; 5:23; II Thess. 2:1, 3; I Tim. 6:14; II Tim. 4:1,8; Titus 2:13; Heb. 9:28; James 5:7-9; I Pet. 1:7, 13; 5:4; I John 2:28-3:2; Rev. 2:25; 3:10; 22:7, 12, 20
Second Coming Passages: Dan. 2:44-45; 7:9-14; 12:1-3; Zech. 12:10; 14:1-15; Matt. 13:41; 24:15-31; 26:64; Mark 13:14-27; 14:62; Luke 21:25-28; Acts 1:9-11; 3:19-21; I Thess. 3:13; II Thess. 1:6-10; 2:8; I Pet. 4:12-13; II Pet. 3:1-14; Jude 14-15; Rev. 1:7; 19:11-20:6

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QUESTION #12 – What is Covenant Theology?

Covenant Theology is the great opponent of dispensationalism. As Dr. John Walvoord said, there is a “sharp cleavage” between covenant theologians and dispensational theologians (*Amillennial Soteriology*, Bibliotheca Sacra, Vol. 107, p. 284, 1950).

Covenant Theology is a system of Bible interpretation which interprets the entire Bible and God’s connection to man through the eyes of two main supposed covenants:

- 1) The covenant of works, which only lasts until Adam sins in Genesis 3.**
- 2) The covenant of grace, which begins when Adam sins in Genesis 3 and covers the rest of the Bible until Christ returns.**

1) According to the supposed covenant of works - Adam was promised eternal life if his works obeyed God and he did not partake of the tree and he was promised death for his works if he did not obey (Gen. 2:17). In all reality, Adam was promised death if he ate of the tree, but in no place is stated that he was promised eternal life if he did not eat.

2) According to the supposed covenant of grace - As soon as Adam disobeyed, God entered into a covenant of grace with all mankind for the purpose of saving the fallen elect which starts with Adam and ends when Christ returns at the end of the age.

Covenant Theology interprets everything in the Bible through the eyes of these two covenants.

Now upon initial surface level observation, this appears to be very reasonable. However, when one carefully and systematically studies this, it is doctrinally very shallow and very dangerous and very flawed.

QUESTION #13 – What is wrong with Covenant Theology?

There are three major flaws with a Covenant Theology system of Bible interpretation:

Flaw #1 - It invents two covenants that are not real covenants.

The two covenants that Covenant theologians base their entire interpretation of Scripture upon are not even said to be covenants. At least when it comes to dispensationalism, there are two clear texts that speak of various administrations of times - **Ephesians 1:10; Ephesians 3:9** and one text that specifically speaks of the dispensation of grace - **Ephesians 3:2**.

But when it comes to Covenant Theology, it begins by inventing covenants that are not even said to be covenants. So the entire premise is flawed. This is not just my opinion, this is the observation of both dispensational and covenant theologians.

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Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer spotted this very thing when he wrote: “The theological terms, ‘Covenant of Works and Covenant of Grace’ do not occur in the Sacred Text. If they are to be sustained it must be wholly apart from Biblical authority” (*Systematic Theology*, Vol. 4, p. 156).

Dr. John Walvoord observed exactly the same thing when he said, “Covenant theology is definitely a product of theological theory rather than Biblical exposition” (*Ibid.*, p. 285).

Dr. Charles Ryrie said, “The theological covenants on which covenant theology is based are not specifically revealed in Scripture” (*Dispensationalism*, p. 193).

Dr. Louis Berkhof, who was a proponent of Covenant Theology, admitted this very reality. When it came to these being actual covenants, he said, “It must be admitted that the term ‘covenant’ is not found in the first three chapters of Genesis...” (*Systematic Theology*, p. 213). He also said that when examining the teaching of the early Church fathers on this matter, “In the Early Church Fathers the covenant idea is seldom found at all” (*Ibid.*, p. 211).

Dr. J. Oliver Buswell, a covenant theologian, said, “It is argued, correctly, that the word covenant is not used in the Genesis record...” (*A Systematic Theology of Christian Religion*, p. 308).

Dr. Charles Hodge, another covenant theologian, also admitted exactly the same things when he said concerning God’s supposed covenant with Adam, “...the word covenant is not used in Genesis and does not elsewhere, in any clear passage, occur in reference to the transaction there recorded...” (*Systematic Theology*, Vol. 2, p. 117).

So we may clearly conclude that the entire system of covenant Theology is built upon covenants that are not said in Scripture to be covenants. This invention of non-existent covenants presents problems. For example, since a covenant is a legal pact between two specific parties (i.e. God and someone), and since, according to Covenant Theology, the supposed “covenant of grace” is a covenant that covers all Scripture after the fall, Dr. Berkhof admitted that he had a hard time deciphering who the second party actually is in the covenant of grace. He said, “It is not easy to determine precisely who the second party is” (*Ibid*, p. 273). Is the second party Israel? Is it Gentile nations? Is it Gentile individuals? Is it the Church? Naturally it isn’t easy to determine who the covenant of grace is with because there is no such covenant that exists.

This truly gets at the heart of a key problem of covenant theology; it lacks precise interpretation of anything because it does not begin with precise interpretation. It begins by inventing two covenants which are not even said to be covenants. It starts by spiritualizing and allegorizing things in the Bible and continues this all throughout Scriptures. The one consistent fact of covenant theology is it is always inconsistent with its interpretations.