

DISPENSATIONALISM (48)

Flaw #2 - It makes the major theme and whole purpose of the Bible the salvation of the lost.

There is absolutely no question that salvation by grace through faith is a wonderful and precious doctrine, which has application for every age. We would be quick to acknowledge that. The Apostle Peter said that God is “the God of all grace” (**I Peter 5:10**). But having acknowledged this, it would seem, based on clear statements in the Scripture, that **we cannot conclude that the whole purpose of the Bible is to save the lost**. In fact, the Bible is not even written for the lost; it is written to God’s people so they might know Him.

There is a very famous statement about the inspiration of the Bible that was written by Paul in **II Timothy 3:16-17**. When we read that statement, it certainly does not appear that saving the lost is the primary purpose of the inspired Scriptures.

We also know from specific statements that deal with the subject of redemption that the primary purpose of any salvation is to glorify God (**Ephesians 1:6, 12, 14**). This critical point about glorifying God is something stated multiple times.

Our conclusion is that the primary purpose of the Bible is not about the covenant of grace to save the lost, but to reveal the sacred truth of and about God so He may be forever glorified (Philippians 4:20; I Peter 5:11).

The salvation of the lost is just one aspect of the many things that brings glory to God. Creation brings glory to God; angels bring glory to God; animals bring glory to God and even the wrath of God brings glory to God (**Rom. 9:22-23**).

It is interesting to note that when the Apostle Paul discussed the great themes connected to salvation such as the guilt of all the lost; justification by grace and faith; the wrath of God; the elect and non-elect; the Gentiles, Israel and the N.T. believer, he broke out into a doxology that ended with these words: “For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever, Amen” (**Romans 11:36**).

Apparently by making this statement we may conclude that Paul did not believe that the salvation of the lost was the sole purpose of the Bible or the sole purpose of God. He believed that everything was for the purpose of giving glory to God, forever.

The major flaw with Covenant Theology on this redemptive point is twofold:

- 1) It interprets everything in the Bible as being for the sole purpose of saving the lost, which leads to a misinterpretation of many things.**
- 2) It fails to discern ethnic distinctions which are so important to Scripture.**

According to Covenant Theologians, all humanity (O.T. & N.T.) is one group in that they are Adamically lost, which is true. But then they draw a conclusion that all who are saved (O.T. & N.T.) are one group, which is not true.

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Many of the Covenant Theologians believe that all the real covenants in the O.T. are redemptive for everybody. So the real covenants that are stated to be covenants (Abrahamic, Palestinian, Davidic and New Covenant) are not specifically real or literal covenants for Israel, but are salvific for everyone. As we previously stated, Covenant Theology invents two covenants (works and grace) which they say are real and literal, which are not real and literal. Herein lies the confusion.

Let us illustrate the point. According to Covenant Theology, the Palestinian Covenant given to Moses for national Israel (**Ex. 19:5-6; Deut. 28-29**), is a covenant of grace designed to save the lost. The actual reality is that **the Palestinian Covenant given to Moses was not a covenant given to save lost people, but to a nation already saved, Israel, and its purpose was not to redeem Israel but to provide a rule of life for Israel.** Covenant Theology misses this point entirely because it sees everything as a Covenant of Grace designed to redeem the lost.

The Covenant Theologian cannot seem to see that the promises to believing Israel in the Old Testament are not the same as the promises to the believing Church in the New Testament. Covenant Theology considers all dispensations as one big dispensation called the “Covenant of Grace for the purpose of redemption.”

As a result, it lumps all believers into one big category and allegorizes various things that do not belong to everyone. It takes bits and pieces and parts of this and that and mixes them all together.

For example, land promises to Israel become symbolic for heavenly promises to everybody. Israel was just one group in the grace covenant progression and everything promised to her is communal and belongs to every believer in any age because we are all part of the one covenant group of grace receivers.

R. K. Harrison, in his exegetical commentary on the book of Numbers, is forced to deal with specific Promised Land boundaries in **Numbers 34** because that chapter deals with specific land boundaries and topography. When he tries to make application of this he writes that “What is applied to the old Israel is also true of its spiritual successor, the Christian Church” (*Numbers*, p. 434).

Herein lies a major problem with Covenant Theology. It neglects to account for clear ethnic differences that are specifically stated in God’s Word. For example, the Apostle Paul gave a threefold breakdown in I Corinthians 10:32 - Jews, Greeks, Church of God. Obviously these are not the same people or groups. Paul often draws a distinction between Israel and the Gentiles or Israel and the Church (Rom. 11:7-28; Acts 15:14-18).

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When a Covenant Theologian reads **Revelation 7** that there are 144,000 Jews from the twelve tribes of Israel, he has no clue as to what it means. He is at a loss to figure it out. For example, Simon Kistemaker, a Reformed Theologian, said, “The figure 144,000 (**v. 4**) and the subsequent summation of the twelve tribes with 12,000 persons each (**vs. 4-8**) understood symbolically represent the ideal (Revelation, p. 253). Frankly, this is pure eisegetical nonsense, not exegetical exposition.

A Covenant Theologian is at a loss to give any sane theological explanation for a text such as Matthew 10:5-6. **Why would Jesus specifically tell His twelve disciples not to go in the way of the Gentiles or the Samaritans but only to the lost Sheep of Israel, if the entire purpose of God, ever since the fall, is salvific, to save the elect from all ethnic groups in the covenant of grace?**

William Hendriksen, a scholarly writer I highly respect, said that the reason for this is so that it would add force to one of the main purposes of the book which is “fully to win the Jews for Christ” (*The Gospel of Matthew*, p. 456). There appears to me to be another major inconsistency. If the entire purpose ever since Genesis is to save all the elect and there is no ethnic distinctions, why would there need to be a Jewish focus, which eliminates Gentiles and Samaritans? To this question a Covenant Theologian has no answer.

Flaw #3 - It must spiritualize and allegorize the interpretation of the real covenants.

Sooner or later, the Covenant Theologian comes face-to-face with the real covenants that are in the Bible and when he does, he must come up with some interpretation that fits the one grace covenant system.

There are some very important covenants that are literal covenants in the O.T.. Those covenants are minimized in order to adhere to a covenant theology interpretive position. It is not proper interpretation to minimize a real covenant because you want to adhere to an invented covenant.

There are four very specific and important Covenants that God makes with Israel, which He specifically states:

- 1) He makes a literal covenant with Abraham (**Gen. 12:1-3; 15:18; 17:7-8**).
- 2) He makes a literal covenant with Moses (Palestinian) (**Deut. 29:1; 30:1-10**).
- 3) He makes a literal covenant with David (**II Sam. 7:8-17; Ps. 89:3-4**).
- 4) He promises a new literal covenant for and with Israel (**Jer. 31:31-34**).

The Dispensationalist is able to interpret these covenants literally. The Abrahamic covenant deals with a specific people and land and national blessing. The Palestinian covenant amplifies the land promises and the David covenant amplifies the specific lineage, family and seed. The New Covenant amplifies the National Blessings. The Dispensationalist has no problem seeing this and understanding this. But the Covenant Theologian has a real problem because he cannot give a full explanation as to how these futuristically apply to the various people like Israel, the Church or the Gentile nations.

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As Dr. Pentecost said, “While there is much in the position of Covenant Theology that is in agreement with Scripture, Covenant Theology is woefully inadequate to explain Scriptures eschatologically” (*Things to Come*, p. 66).

Covenant Theologians often use the word “ideal.” The use seems to be that it would have been ideal if Israel had obeyed and received all of those blessings, but since she didn’t the covenant is no longer real.

The land promises to Israel represent the ideal of what could have been, but now it symbolically refers to future promises to all of us.

It is critical to realize that it is very dangerous to dodge or explain away any covenant of God. It is a serious matter to say that a covenant made by the Almighty, Immutable God with Israel is no longer in existence.

When God makes a contract with someone, He always fulfills it literally. To demean the covenant with Israel by saying it was just an “ideal” for the sake of promoting your own invented covenants, which are not even mentioned in the Bible, is a serious mishandling of God’s inspired Word.

QUESTION #14 – What are the dangers of Covenant Theology?

There are three main dangers of Covenant Theology:

Danger #1 - It minimizes the importance of Israel.

This is a very dangerous matter because any thinking that minimizes Israel is thinking contrary to the Word of God and the Spirit of God and it is a hindrance to the blessings of God. **The greatest danger of Covenant Theology is that it muddies the waters concerning Israel.** We must not ever forget that God promises to bless those who bless and honor Israel, and He also promises not to bless those who minimize or forget or think negatively about Israel (**Gen. 12:3**).

No one can honestly read the Bible without seeing that Israel is at the center of everything connected to God on this earth. Dr. Chafer said, “The Jewish nation is the center of all things related to the earth. This...places Israel as the center of all divine purposes for the earth” (*Systematic Theology*, Vol. 4, p. 313). Covenant Theology totally misses this point. Covenant Theology promotes a mindset that thinks lightly and allegorically about Israel.

Dr. Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, who, after thirteen years of research, wrote His PhD dissertation on Israel, accurately observed that **the main distinguishing characteristic between Dispensationalism and Covenant Theology is Israel** (*Israelology: The Missing Link in Systematic Theology*, p. 7). Oswald Allis, a leading proponent of Covenant Theology said dispensationalism glorifies the Jew (*Ibid*. p. 8).