

DISPENSATIONALISM (52)

Covenant Theology spiritualizes and allegorizes specific promises to Israel such as land, king, kingdom. It ignores passages of Scripture which warn that there are major differences between Israel and the Church, and we are to always acknowledge that (Rom. 11:25-26). It is a very dangerous thing to minimize Israel in any dispensation. God warns about this in **Genesis 12** and Paul warns about this in **Romans 11**. An offshoot of Covenant Theology is “Replacement Theology” which says we have replaced Israel and this high-minded haughty attitude is a very dangerous attitude to have.

Danger #2 - It confuses Israel and the Church.

Dr. C. I. Scofield, in his famous *Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth*, said, “Whoever reads the Bible with any attention cannot fail to perceive that more than half of its contents relate to one nation—the Israelites. . . . Continuing his researches, the student finds large mention in Scripture of another distinct body, which is called the Church. This body also has a peculiar relation to God, and, like Israel, has received from Him specific promises. But similarity ends there,” and Theology misses the striking contrasts between Israel and the Church.

To the Covenant Theologian “the elect” refers to all the saved, in the invented “covenant of grace.” They do not see the distinction between the “elect” Israel as a nation and the “elect” Christian as an individual who is part of the Church. Unless you understand these distinctions, you cannot possibly understand Scripture. Dr. Chafer, in speaking on this very point, said, ‘No true interpretation of the Old Testament is possible if the fact of Israel’s national, sacred, eternal election be rejected’ (*Systematic Theology*, Vol. 7, p. 134).

This confusion carries all the way through Scripture. This is why Covenant Theologians often put people back under the O.T. law, which is clearly forbidden in the New Testament. In fact, it was Paul who addressed this very point when he said, “But even though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we have preached to you, let him be accursed” (Gal. 1:8). We may add to this if any system of Theology, such as Covenant Theology, tries to put you back under the law, let it be accursed.

Covenant Theologians just cannot clearly see the difference between O.T. Israel and the N.T. Church. There can be a real danger in soteriology when one cannot see the distinction between Israel and the Church. There is a confusion in eschatology and the Church ends up in the Tribulation and ends up as part of the 144,000 in Revelation.

Covenant Theology does not study to rightly divide Scripture in a literal way. It seeks to symbolize and allegorize and spiritualize. It cannot explain the differences in prophecy pertaining to Israel, the Church and the Gentiles. As a result, things become very confused. Instead of looking for the Rapture, they look for signs. Instead of looking for a future literal 1,000 year millennium, some explain it as meaning we are already in the millennium or there is no real millennium, even though the Scriptures plainly state it in Revelation 20. As Dr. Walvoord said, it is covenant theology that leads to Amillennialism (*Amillennial Soteriology*, *Bibliotheca Sacra*, Vol. 107, p. 284, 1950).

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Danger #3 - It keeps people in ignorance from ever “rightly dividing” and “understanding” the Word of God.

When it comes to understanding the Bible there is a right way to handle it and there are many wrong ways to handle it. Dr. C. I. Scofield said concerning II Timothy 2:15, “study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed *rightly dividing the Word of Truth.*” **“The Word of Truth, then, has right divisions, and it must be evident that, as one cannot be ‘a workman that needeth not to be ashamed’ without observing them, so any study of that Word which ignores those divisions must be in large measure profitless and confusing”** (*Rightly Dividing The Word of Truth*, p. 3).

When we read various passages concerning what Paul wanted for the church (i.e. I Tim. 4:13) and when we examine some of his prayers, it becomes very clear that he did not want God’s people shallow in their grasp of Scripture but very deep in their knowledge and understanding of God’s Word (Col. 1:9-10; Eph. 3:9-10). **No one will ever grow deep in their grasp of the totality of Scripture in Covenant Theology.**

Do not miss this point; **Covenant Theology will leave people shallow and ignorant of many things in the Word of God.** It spiritualizes and allegorizes and leaves people without a literal understanding of the text.

The words of Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer could not be more powerful on this point: “A theology which penetrates no further into Scripture than to discover that in all ages God is immutable in His grace toward penitent sinners, and constructs the idea of a universal church, continuing through the ages, on the one truth of immutable grace, is not only disregarding vast spheres of revelation but is reaping the unavoidable confusion and misdirection which part-truth engenders” (*Systematic Theology*, Vol. 4, p. 156).

It is no wonder that proponents of Covenant Theology do not know what to do with a book like Revelation. It cannot make any literal sense of Biblical prophecy. This teacher knows of a Covenant Theology church that actually told their members that the book of Revelation was not a book that was supposed to be understood now. One would think when the Apostle John wrote “do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book” (Rev. 22:10), that he actually symbolically meant just the opposite, “go ahead and seal them up because no one really knows what the book means.”

This is the main danger of Covenant Theology. There is no solid way to rightly divide and understand many passages of Scripture. In over 35 years of ministry, in three different Bible Churches, I have personally had families come to our church out of churches that embraced Covenant Theology. As these believers sit under a dispensational approach to Bible exposition, which is focused on a literal interpretation of everything, they come to life. Inevitably they all say, “For the first time the Bible is making sense and I can understand it. My only regret is that I stayed so long in a church that did not understand the Bible.”

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QUESTION #15 – What is hyper-dispensationalism or ultra-dispensationalism?

Any dispensationalist recognizes the distinctions between Israel and the Church. Any dispensationalist interprets the Bible literally. But there are differences between a dispensationalist and a hyper-dispensationalist.

In the late 1800's a man by the name of Ethelbert W. Bullinger, who was a very reputable Anglican Bible scholar, developed a somewhat quirky dispensational viewpoint. This was the beginning of what would become known as "hyper-dispensationalism" or "ultra-dispensationalism" or "extreme-dispensationalism." This viewpoint led Bullinger to other very strange doctrinal viewpoints, such as soul sleep and annihilation of the soul between death and the resurrection. He denied that water baptism and the Lord's Supper were for this age.

Now the primary historical difference between normal dispensationalism and hyper-dispensationalism is the date of the beginning of the Church.

Normal dispensationalists believe the Church began at Pentecost in Acts 2. Hyper-dispensationalists believe the Church began with the Apostle Paul after Acts 28.

Now the hyper-dispensational group contains two camps: 1) The Extreme camp; 2) The Moderate camp.

Now the main tenants of the extreme hyper-dispensationalist are these:

- 1) The Church began in Acts 28.
- 2) Acts is a transition book until Acts 28.
- 3) There is no place for the Lord's Supper to be observed in the Church.
- 4) The Scriptures written to the Church are the Prison Epistles of Paul.

The main tenants of a moderate hyper-dispensationalist are these:

- 1) The Church began in Acts 28.
- 2) Acts is a transition book until Acts 9 or 13.
- 3) The Lord's Supper may be observed in the church.
- 4) The Scriptures written to the Church are all of Paul's epistles.

QUESTION #16 – What are the errors with hyper-dispensationalism?

One key problem with a hyper-dispensationalist is that they fail to realize that when God began the Church, men did not necessarily know and understand exactly what God was doing. Hyper-dispensationalists believe that in order for a dispensation to begin, such as the Grace Age, it must be distinguishable and it was not until the Apostle Paul came on the scene.

So when God gave His Spirit in Acts 2 to take up residency in people, it could not be the Church Age because they did not understand everything about the Church Age.

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The hyper-dispensationalist says that whenever the Church is mentioned prior to Paul, it refers to a Jewish church and not the Body church because the Church as a body would not be developed until Paul surfaced.

But the problem with this is that it forces the hyper-dispensationalist to misinterpret various passages to fit their own system.

For example, the Apostle Paul states in various church Epistles that he persecuted the Church prior to his conversion (Gal. 1:13; I Cor. 15:9; Phil. 3:6). He does not differentiate types of church. **The normal way to interpret these passages is that this was the same church to which he was not preaching and ministering.**

The favorite text of the hyper-dispensationalist is Ephesians 3:1-12. Their favorite argument from this text is that Paul is the one to whom the mystery of the Church was revealed and therefore the Church could not have begun until Paul had been saved and had this data.

Dr. Charles Ryrie quotes Erich Sauer in an excellent refutation of this matter:

“In Ephesians 3:3, Paul does not assert that he was the first to whom the mystery of the church had been made known. He says only that the secret counsel that there is no difference in the church between Jew and Gentile, and the equal rights of the believing Gentiles and believing Jews had not been made known in the time (not before him personally but in general) before his generation, as it had now been revealed to ‘the holy apostles and prophets through the Spirit.’ The plural ‘apostles and prophets’ is to be noted as implying that the revelation was not to Paul alone, and it was made to them ‘through the Spirit,’ not by the agency of Paul (ver. 5). The ‘as it has now been revealed’ may indeed suggest that this mystery had been hinted at in the Old Testament, but under veiled forms or types, and only now was properly revealed.

What Paul does declare is that he had received this mystery by ‘revelation’ (ver. 3). But he says no word as to the sequence of these Divine revelations or the question of priority of reception. The emphasis of ver. 3 does not lie on ‘me’ but on ‘revelation.’ He does not use here the emphatic Greek *moi* (*me*) but the unemphatic *moi*, and he places it (in the original text), not at the head of the sentence, but appends it as unaccented. On the contrary, to stress the word ‘revelation’ he places it early in the sentence: ‘according to revelation was made known to me the mystery.’ Here (as in Gal. 1:12) he does not wish to declare any priority of time for himself or that the revelation was given to him exclusively, but only that he stood alone in the matter independently of man. Not till Eph. 3:8, does he use the emphatic *moi* and place it at the head of the sentence. But there he is not dealing with the first reception of the mystery but with his proclamation of it among the nations. This, of course, was then in fact the special task of Paul. He was the chief herald of the gospel to the peoples of the world.

If one says: ‘I received this information from Mr. Jones himself’, this does not assert that Mr. Jones had not formerly mentioned the matter to others.”

(Cited from Charles Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, pp. 203-204)