

Dispensational v Covenantal Theology

Hebrews 12:28 Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear:

Introductory Considerations

- While the issue is complex, it is not just something for “theologians” to debate
- People have differing viewpoints of their own “side:” there is not necessarily total harmony among those who hold the same view. For instance, C.I.Scofield taught the heresy of salvation by works in his view of Dispensational Theology
- People on both sides of the issue use the Bible to defend their position

- My goal is to present the two views as accurately as possible, letting each side speak for itself
- A basic understanding of the issues is essential, since much is at stake
- The most visible issue of debate is the nature of physical Israel
- The core issue is a matter of Biblical interpretation

The way one interprets the Bible is called hermeneutics

Joh 1:42 And he brought him to Jesus. And when Jesus beheld him, he said, Thou art Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation (the verb form if “hermeneutics”), A stone

Most Bible believers embrace a literal, historical-grammatical method of hermeneutics

- This is in contrast to the prevailing hermeneutic prior to the Reformation, in which the Church interpreted the Bible, and Church tradition was equal with Scripture
- I mention this, because the Protestant Reformation will be our historical marker
- Each side argues its view is the most Biblical

Though both sides interpret the Bible literally, they differ on “how” literal

- Ligon Duncan is a highly respected Presbyterian pastor and author (LigonDuncan.com)
- He wrote an article entitled “Dispensationalism—a Reformed Evaluation”
- In it, he provided a chart with 30 differences

In it, he said

- Dispensationalism “stresses *rigidly* ‘literal’ interpretation of the Bible”
- Covenant Theology “Accepts ‘normal’ interpretation of the Bible (allows literal and figurative)”

Some vocabulary

- Reformed, or Reformed Tradition: this is a phrase that refers to several aspects of the theology that arose in the Protestant Reformation. It includes Calvinism, Covenant Theology, Amillennialism, and the Presbyterian form of Church government

- Calvinism, and its counterpoint, Arminianism, are methodologies for explaining salvation in light of God's sovereignty
- Covenant Theology is a system that connects the Old and New Testaments together. It argues for a “Covenant of Works” (Adam to the Fall), and a “Covenant of Grace” (The Fall to the End). It harmonizes the Bible by having the Church replace Israel as recipient of the Abrahamic Covenant

- Amillennialism is a method of interpreting prophetic literature, that denies the existence of a 1000 year kingdom
- Dispensationalism is a system that attempts to harmonize the Old and New Testaments (as does Covenant Theology), by seeing God reinstate His relationship with national Israel