

Difficulties with Dispensationalism

Dispensationalism

Overview

- Dispensationalism splits redemptive history into various sections called dispensations
- Dispensationalism was formalized by John Nelson Darby, and one of the major underlying paradigms is the idea that the Bible should always be interpreted literally wherever possible unless there is explicit reason to do otherwise.
 - If you dig a bit deeper there, you start to see that Dispensationalists come to Scripture with the assumption God would not use word pictures or figurative language without explicitly warning us that He is doing so.
 - Frankly, I think this is a somewhat dangerous assumption to bring to the Scriptures
- Darby interpreted 2 Timothy 2:15 in the KJV, which mentions “rightly dividing the word of truth”, to mean the Christians are to split Scripture into different time periods (which he called dispensations)
- Each dispensation is generally thought to include five key aspects:
 - 1. A distinctive idea of God's revelation
 - 2. A specific test of man's obedience in relation to that divine revelation
 - 3. The failure of man under that test
 - 4. The judgment of God for man's failure
 - 5. The beginning of a new dispensation

Dispensational Beliefs

- There are two peoples of God
 - The main reason dispensationalism believes this is because it believes that there are prophecies about Israel that necessitate the idea of Israel being separate from the church.
- There will be a future restoration of Israel as a nation
- There will be a falling away of the church and the revealing of a powerful anti-Christ figure followed by a rapture and a great tribulation and the establishing of a literal millennial kingdom on earth
 - Dispensationalists generally believe that the world will get worse and worse until the church falls away
 - Dispensationalism sees this as something taught in Matthew 24, 2 Thessalonians 2, and in the book of Revelation.
- If you would like to learn some more about the history of dispensationalism, Catherine gave an excellent church history lecture about John Darby and the Plymouth Brethren and how dispensationalism got started.
<https://gcfdayton.org/sermon/dispensationalism-j-n-darby-and-the-plymouth-brethren/>

A Word on Unity

- Even though I don't agree with dispensationalism, I want to make it very clear that dispensationalists are still within Christian orthodoxy. Dispensationalists believe in the Trinity, the deity of Christ, and salvation by faith through grace. You can be a genuine and sincere God worshipping Christian and hold to dispensational theology.
- I believe that dispensationalism has some problematic logical outworkings, but it is nothing I would ever want brothers in Christ to have division over. We can disagree lovingly, and we can worship and fellowship together in unity

Difficulties with Dispensationalism

Defeatist Outlook

- One of the problems with dispensationalism is that it has an unbiblical defeatist outlook on life
- It takes up the assumption, that throughout redemptive history, God's design is for His people to fail
 - There is no reason for this assumption, and it is a harmful assumption
- Why it's unbiblical
 - The primary reason it's unbiblical is because there is no biblical reason to assume it.
 - It is particularly wrong what it teaches about the future of the Church (Matthew 16:18; Romans 16:20)
 - But in general, because dispensationalism starts with defeatist assumptions (the idea that dispensations always end in the failure of God's people), it takes passages that are not talking about the church's future ending in defeat, and it interprets them as if they are saying that the church's end is defeat
 - Matthew 24:1-34
 - In the beginning of this passage, we see that the disciples ask about when the temple will be destroyed, and so when Jesus responds, He is at least partly talking about when the temple will be destroyed.
 - He also said that that generation wouldn't pass away until this tribulation takes place
 - This clearly isn't talking about the future; it is talking about something that already happened.
- Why It's harmful: It lowers our expectations of what God will do
 - There are a lot of harmful things that come out of having a defeatist eschatology, but the worst one is that it leads people to have low expectations of what God will do
 - God wants to do great things through His people, and if we fail to believe it, we will likely miss them. Having a defeatist outlook causes a lot of people to miss the fact that God wants to do great things through His people today.

Two Peoples of God

- Why it's unbiblical: Ephesians 2:11-22; Matthew 3:9; Galatians 3:26-29; Romans 2:28-29, 11:17-21
- Why It's harmful: It causes us to misunderstand the plans of God
 - The idea that God has two different people will inevitably lead to the idea that He has different plans for each people group. And different dispensationalists work that conclusion out in different ways, but I want to point out three important truths Dispensationalism might lead a person to miss
 - 1. A Jewish person cannot have a relationship with God apart from Christ, and apart from Christ their being a Jew does nothing in terms to improve their standing before God
 - Acts 4:11-12; Galatians 2:15-16, 21
 - 2. God is not going to restore Israel to Himself apart from the church
 - God is going to restore Israel in some sense, but it will be within the Church
 - Romans 11:13-15, 25-27
 - Not everyone who is born a Jew will be saved (Romans 2:28-29)
 - Judas was a Jew, but he was not saved just by being a Jew
 - But we've clearly seen how a Jew cannot be saved unless they receive Christ. And if they receive Christ, they join the church.
 - Peter and Paul were Jews, and their receiving Christ made them part of the church.
 - 3. God does not want the sacrificial system to be restored (Hebrews 10:1-18)
 - God is never going to bring it back, and if we as Christians start to fight to help the Jews bring it back, we will be fighting against God in doing so
 - Not only that, but we are encouraging Jews to place themselves under a curse
 - Galatians 5:2-4