

Dispensationalism 101

What is the difference between dispensational and covenantal theology? Furthermore, is the difference really that important? After all, there are believers on both sides of the discussion. Before entering into the conversation, there are a couple of understandings that need to be embraced.

First and foremost there is the need to recognize the tension, and mystery which has characterized this and other theological discussions for centuries. There will probably never be a satisfactory answer or clarifying article that will settle the debate once and for all for both parties. There will be no end to the discussion until Jesus Christ returns (either in the rapture of His Church or earthly millennial reign, in my estimation☺).

Man is limited in his ability to understand and articulate each nuance of theology. Not everything can be comprehended about God and His sovereign purposes. Scripture reminds repeatedly of the humbling fact that God is majestic, infinite, and incomprehensible. His ways are inscrutable-He does not have to explain Himself. Passages such as Job 11:7 ask great questions such as, Can you discover the depths of God? Can you discover the limits of the Almighty? The Psalmist reminds us, “Your thoughts are very deep” (Ps 92:5) and we cannot attain them (Ps 139:6). Recall, as well, Isaiah’s record, that God’s thoughts are not our thoughts, nor are our ways His ways (Isa 55:8). Though there are scores of passages, one more is Paul’s doxology in Romans 11:33-34 in which he proclaims the depth of God’s wisdom and knowledge, with none to counsel Him. God transcends human comprehension, extends beyond human logic, and remains above man’s ability to reason and deduce. John Wesley was reported to have said, “Give me a worm that can understand a man, and I will give you a man who can understand God.”¹ Surely His greatness is unsearchable (Ps 145:3).

Second, and equally important, is the need during this exchange to be Bible-based, Christ-centered, and God-honoring. Though we are entitled to our own opinion, we are not entitled to our own truth. When speaking, the only basis for authority is the inspired, inerrant, authoritative, and sufficient Word of God. The truth of the Bible is objective, propositional reality that is to be unpacked through cautious and diligent exegesis rather than hearsay and speculation. Notice the third caveat here—God-honoring. When dialoging with fellow believers on opposing issues, we must be sober-minded and gracious. We cannot win “the opposing side” if we are being pejorative and unkind. We have no entitlement for condescending comments or judgmental jabs. We want to develop a winsome case, rather than use mockery or suggestions that the differing side is engaging in heresy on this matter. Many times in the readings of Christian academic papers there can be much unchristian cajoling that does not honor Christ. Let’s honor fellow servants of Christ rather than do what one well-known evangelical did while at a rival school on this issue when he called their view “goofy.” We must practice Christian charity as we honor one another in Christ.

¹ *Our Daily Bread*, Sept-Nov 1997, page for Nov 6.

The intent of this paper is not to fully flesh out the views of either dispensational or covenant theology but to show the clear distinctions between them and why, biblically, dispensational theology is to be preferred.

Covenantalism in a Nutshell

The terms “covenantal” and “reformed” are often used interchangeably. There are dispensationalists who speak of being reformed, yet the way they use the term “reformed” is in respect to salvation, referring to the doctrines of grace. Another might refer to himself as a “Calvinist-dispensationalist,” but this is a rather awkward phrase, since Calvinism is typically used in the discipline of soteriology, not eschatology. This designation would be used to refer to men like John MacArthur and faculty from his school, The Master’s University,² and others who have embraced the doctrines of grace and who apply a *consistently* literal hermeneutic, especially in the prophets, while not reading Jesus into every OT verse or giving the NT priority.³

When trying to define a system and associate certain teachers with it, there are nuances that make such a feat difficult. For example, James Montgomery Boice was pretrib⁴ and premil⁵, yet he also practiced paedobaptism.⁶ Not *all* covenantalists are amil⁷ or postmil. And not all premils are dispensationalists (e.g.: James Montgomery Boice and George Eldon Ladd).

Covenants

In covenantal thought, covenants are the interpretive framework through which to read Scripture. They say the covenants are the theological structure by which the Bible organizes itself. The contention of this author is that though there are several covenants in Scripture (Noahic, Abrahamic, New Covenant, etc.), the covenants that covenantalists build this system around are not explicitly found in Scripture. The first extrabiblical covenant (no malice in saying this) that this system is based on is the covenant of law (or works⁸). They lodge support from such

² John F. MacArthur, *Faith Works*, (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1993), 225.

³ More of these particulars will be augmented later in the article.

⁴ **Pretribulationism** teaches that God will remove His Church from the earth (Jn 14:1-3; 1 Thess 4:13-18) before pouring out His righteous wrath on the unbelieving world during seven years (Jer 30:7; Dan 9:27; 12:1; 2 Thess 2:7-12; Rev 16).

⁵ **Premillennialism** teaches that Jesus Christ will return to earth and rule with His saints for a thousand years. This is a time where He lifts the curse He placed on the earth and fulfills the promises given to Israel (Isa 65:17-25; Ezek 37:21-28; Zech 8:1-17), including a restoration to the land they forfeited through disobedience (Deut 28:15-68).

⁶ **Paedobaptism** is the practice of baptizing infants or children who are deemed not old enough to verbalize faith in Christ.

⁷ **Amillennialism** is the belief that the thousand years referenced by John in Revelation 20 are not a literal, specific time.

⁸ A brief treatment of the Covenant of Works is in R. C. Sproul’s *What Is Reformed Theology?* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1997), 111-13).

passages as Deuteronomy 30:15-20. This is the agreement between God and Adam where God promised life for perfect obedience.⁹

The other “covenant” (besides those agreed upon by dispensationalists) that they rely on is the covenant of grace (referring to the Gospel).¹⁰ In this covenant there is agreement between the offended God and the offending sinner. According to Michael Horton in *Pilgrim Theology*, such sinner has been “forgiven, justified, and renewed solely on the basis of Christ’s person and work.”¹¹ Unfortunately, to his chagrin, Horton also says, “These covenants are not always explicitly visible.”¹²

Paedobaptism

A third element of covenantalism, alongside the two covenants, is the water baptism of infants, also called paedobaptism. The esteemed covenant theologian Berkhof, says, “It is on the point of infant baptism that the most important difference is found between us and the Baptists.”¹³ He even admits at the outset that there is no explicit biblical command nor any single instance in the Bible in which we are told that children were baptized. Covenantalists see baptism as a sign and seal that replaces OT circumcision. There are many fine presentations that refute paedobaptism, however.¹⁴

The Church, the New Israel

A fourth view that is espoused by covenant theology is that the Church is the fulfillment of New Covenant (NC) prophecy. This is woven into the Covenant of Redemption.¹⁵ For this they see one people of God, not the unique mystery of the Church that is revealed by the Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles (Eph 3). In order to arrive at this conclusion, they see absolute continuity of believers before and after Pentecost rather than the dispensational view of more discontinuity between the two.

Again, this is a vastly over-simplified view of covenant theology, but it provides a starting point to show distinctions between it and dispensational thought.

⁹ *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 7.2, in *Trinity Hymnal* (Atlanta: Great Commission Publications, 1990), 852.

¹⁰ Sproul, *What is Reformed Theology?*, 113-16.

¹¹ Michael Horton, *Pilgrim Theology*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 160.

¹² *Ibid*, 60.

¹³ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 632.

¹⁴ At *Biblical Expositor*, accessed 6/2/16, there is a baptism class that presents a biblical, theological, and historical case for believer’s baptism. http://www.biblicalexpositor.org/site/outlines.asp?sec_id=180007636&secure=&lyear=0&dlcat=0 . Furthermore, professors Henrick Stander and Johannes Louw, recognized authorities in Patristic studies, give irrefutable evidence that paedobaptism was *not* the practice of the early church. (see *Baptism in the Early Church*, England: Reformation Today Trust, 2004).

¹⁵ Sproul, *What is Reformed Theology?*, 114-15.

Issues of Contention

The distinction between these two schools of thought centers on ecclesiology, eschatology, soteriology, and hermeneutics.

Ecclesiology (the Church)

Notice first the different views of the Church. Dispensational theologians see great discontinuity between the saints of the OT and the saints of the NT. We see God's gracious salvation plan in the OT centered on Israel. Some covenantalists would see the Church in the OT and base it on faulty word study.¹⁶ Insert here in your thinking the whole discussion of supercessionism and the Church replacing Israel.¹⁷ The scope of this introductory article does not allow for a fuller treatment of this aspect. Suffice it to say that the Church did not begin until Pentecost (Acts 2), after the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ. There was not outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the OT before Jesus Christ, though the Holy Spirit was active. As Larry Pettegrew wrote:

The baptism of the Holy Spirit could not begin until after the resurrection and ascension of Christ, and OT saints did not experience the baptizing work of the Spirit, even those alive during the earthly ministry of Christ... Baptism of the Spirit into the body is unique to the church age. The truth of the Jew and Gentile placed together into one body was a mystery that Paul developed for the first time.¹⁸

Paul did not mince words when he declared the uniqueness of the Church in this age (dispensation). It was a mystery, a truth not revealed in the OT.¹⁹ "Mystery" is the central theological concept to grasp in Paul's presentation of the stewardship that had been entrusted to him. He was commissioned by God to reveal the sacred secret that had been maintained throughout the whole OT but had now been

¹⁶ Iain Duguid, "The Church and Israel in the Old Testament," @Ligonier.org accessed 4/13/16. He bases his argument on the term for community (*qahal*), which the Greek translation of the OT often renders with the term *ekklesia* (from which we derive the translation "church." Recall to mind the fallacies that can come from word studies that are not anchored in authorial intent. The term *ekklesia* is not a religious term and is translated *church* when context of usage justifies it.

¹⁷ See Michael Vlach's fine treatment of this issue in *Has the Church Replaced Israel?* (B & H Publishing Group, 2010).

¹⁸ Larry Pettegrew, "Dispensationalists and Spirit Baptism," TMSJ 8:1, 1997, 45.

¹⁹ "A mystery was something that had previously not been understood until the appointed time. In the NT, the word connotes a secret of the OT that had now become known in the progress of revelation. It is not something that is a puzzle, but something previously only known by God Himself until, at His appointed time, He chose to reveal it. A passage like Ephesians 3:4-10 demonstrates that Gentiles, being fellow heirs with the Jews in one body, the Church, was a mystery unknown in the OT, but revealed in the NT." Parker Reardon, "Exposition of The Kingdom Parables of Jesus Christ in Matthew 13," Doctoral Dissertation, May 2012, 16-17.

revealed in Christ through Paul (Eph 3:1-13). The term occurs three times in this crucial passage (v 3, 4, 9). Though there is much in the OT in seed form, in the progress of revelation it does not get fleshed out until the NT. Paul acknowledges in verse two that he is the administrator of such mystery. He did not seek it out but was divinely commissioned. Previous generations were unaware of God's plan for uniting Jew and Gentile in one body—the Church (Eph 3:5). Though God promised universal blessing through Abraham (Gen 12:3) to Jew and Gentile, neither group fully understood nor anticipated the extent of what God would accomplish through the Messiah. Not even the greatest prophet understood that within the Church, composed of all the redeemed since Pentecost into one body, there would be no racial, social, or spiritual distinctions.

Along with this doctrinal heading of the Church, there is also the issue of infant baptism. Though covenantalists do not view this baptism as salvific, they do view these children as being baptized into the covenant. Yet, everywhere in Scripture, believers' baptism is vitally connected to faith and believing in Christ. There appears to be an unwritten assumption of the children of covenantal parents being regenerate, unless showing evidence to the contrary. Yet a vital component in instructing children is that the adult teachers and parents take the position of evangelizing children until they see fruit of regeneration in the lives of young people.²⁰ Berkhof, himself an advocate of paedobaptism, admitted that the Baptists believe that only believers in Christ are entitled to baptism and only those who give credible evidence of faith in Christ.²¹

Eschatology (end times)

Another doctrinal difference is in eschatology (study of end times). Whereas amillennialism does not take literally the thousand year millennial reign of Jesus Christ on earth, futuristic premillennialism sees a future for national Israel in fulfillment to OT prophecy. God has not done away with the promises He gave to Israel. In spite of her disobedience, His promises are unconditional. Physical and spiritual promises made to Israel will all be fulfilled with Israel. Though the Church experiences some blessing from the Abrahamic and New covenants, those promises are not fulfilled in or replaced by the Church. God's promises are inseparably bound up in His character, so God must eventually fulfill any unfulfilled promises in the future.

Soteriology (salvation)

There is even a soteriological issue to address. Some in the covenantal camp accuse dispensationalists of teaching two ways of salvation—one under the Old Covenant (OC) with the Law and another under the New Covenant (NC).²² R. C.

²⁰ For a helpful treatment on “Evangelizing Children,” go to GTY.org: <http://www.gty.org/resources/distinctives/DD05/evangelizing-children>

²¹ Berkhof, 632.

²² Teaching fellows of Ligonier include this discussion at an April 16, 2012, recording: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FZUPOWB4Nfg>. Unfortunately, some early dispensationalists, like Scofield, confused the issue as he presents in his

Sproul, after noting that the Westminster Confession refers to “dispensations” says, “Reformed theology knows nothing of different testing periods or different redemptive agendas for Israel and the church.”²³ I agree that there is continuity in the manner of salvation from the OT to the NT. People have always been saved by grace, through faith in Christ, whether an OC saint or a NC saint. Before Jesus Christ came to earth to live His perfect life of obedience to the Father and die as a substitute for sinners, the diligent followers of Yahweh held to the promise of the coming Messiah (Gen 3:15). They were looking forward to His coming in anticipation of the fulfillment of a long line of prophecy (Gen 15:6; Rom 4:3). On this side of the cross, however, we look back two thousand years ago to this same event and place repentant faith in Him alone. Salvation and righteousness are received by faith in the crucified, resurrected, and ascended Savior.

Another erroneous teaching that dispensationalists are accused of by some covenantalists is the introduction of “non-lordship salvation.”²⁴ One of the flagship schools that had been greatly used by the Lord in advancing dispensational thought has been Dallas Theological Seminary (DTS). It is no secret, though, that advocates of non-lordship salvation²⁵ have been on the faculty at that school. We need to be reminded that DTS was an unabashed Presbyterian school in its early days with ordained Presbyterian ministers such as Lewis Sperry Chafer and C. I. Scofield as past presidents. In 1944 a committee was convened to figure out if dispensationalism was compatible with the Westminster Confession. Due to an unfortunate ruling finding the two views incompatible, DTS grads were left partnering solely with Bible churches rather than Presbyterian ones. Sadly, other wrong assessments of dispensationalism followed and remain, apparently unchallenged by many, such as Gerstner’s less-than-kind critique, *Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth*.

Yet there have been faithful Bible teachers from within the dispensational camp who have sounded the alarm in favor of lordship salvation and who have maintained the absolute sovereignty of God in salvation and other “Calvinistic” teachings regarding salvation.

The Lord graciously used John MacArthur, among others, to put this argument to rest nearly thirty years ago. In his landmark work, *Faith Works*, on the subject, MacArthur includes a whole appendix on “What is Dispensationalism and

study notes that under the Law, God’s blessings were earned, whereas under Grace, grace saves the bad [Scofield Reference Bible, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1945), 1115]. This note, in reference to John 1:17, was enhanced in a subsequent revision. Also, there was the dualistic idea of redemption, emphasized in Scofield’s notes, among “classic dispensationalism,” teaching that the church is a parenthesis in God’s plan of redemption.

²³ *What is Reformed Theology?*, 115.

²⁴ This was espoused by R. C. Sproul and Sinclair Ferguson on April 12, 2012. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FZUPOWB4Nfg>, accessed 6/10/16.

²⁵ Please visit gty.org for an excellent summary of nine distinctives of lordship salvation: <http://www.gty.org/resources/articles/A114/an-introduction-to-lordship-salvation?Term=lordship%20%20distinctives>.

What Does it Have to do With Lordship Salvation?" While presenting the absolute Lordship of Jesus Christ over those whom He truly redeems, John MacArthur also acknowledges:

I am a dispensationalist because dispensationalism generally understands and applies Scripture—particularly prophetic Scripture—in a way that is more consistent with the normal, literal approach I believe is God’s design for interpreting Scripture.²⁶

He rightly sides with Gerstner’s critique and attack of antinomian²⁷ doctrine from within the dispensational camp.²⁸ So why do modern scholars such as R. C. Sproul (a student of Gerstner, who did not understand or agree with dispensational teaching) and Sinclair Ferguson, to name just a couple, still offer this argument, so many years after the debate over “Calvinistic-dispensationalism” has been muted? Furthermore, good research has been done to present the case that dispensational theology came out of the same reformed camp which so much derides dispensationalism now. Thomas Ice offers helpful evidence in his article, “The Calvinistic Heritage of Dispensationalism,” that the early promoters and practitioners of dispensational thought staunchly affirmed the doctrines of grace.²⁹ So dispensationalism came out of the same theological group that accuses dispensationalists of holding to non-lordship salvation.

Hermeneutics

The final and important issue to mention is hermeneutics. Though some have used the phrase “dispensational hermeneutics,”³⁰ that is an unfortunate combination of a doctrinal position (covering eschatology, soteriology, and ecclesiology, as already noted) and how we practice exegesis of the text of Scripture. The student of Scripture is not free to practice his own hermeneutical hopscotch, jumping around the text and twisting it to meet his theological agenda. God revealed Himself and His plan through the Bible, consisting of words, paragraphs, and books. When we read and study the Scriptures, we are bound by the rules of literature and grammar to unpack its meaning based on the *grammar* in front of us, as it was written in a real *historical* context. We in the dispensational line seek to practice a consistently literal, historical-grammatical interpretation of Scripture. To say that is

²⁶ *Faith Works*, 220.

²⁷ “This is the idea that behavior is unrelated to faith, or that Christians are not bound by any moral law. Antinomianism radically separates justification and sanctification, making practical holiness elective.” *Ibid*, 259.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 224.

²⁹ <http://www.pre-trib.org/articles/view/calvinistic-heritage-of-dispensationalism>, accessed 6/3/16.

³⁰ I very much appreciate the Council on Dispensationalism and have gleaned a great deal from the interactions there. Mike Stallard, who started the meetings, and to whom we owe thanks, has written some great articles on the literal and normal interpretation of Scripture.

to also interpret the Minor Prophets and Revelation like we do every other part of Scripture, yet acknowledging the difference in genre. The Bible does not have some hidden meanings or even layers of meanings, but a single point to be unpacked in each passage of Scripture. We “take it in its normal sense unless its normal sense makes no sense,” as one hermeneutics professor taught me.

Throughout the history of the church there have always been those who spiritualize and allegorize a text, not drawing out of the text the author’s intent but reading into it his own preconceived ideas. Some would suggest that Bible teachers on both sides of the discussion practice this method. Yet God has not left us to our own devices and creative ingenuity. The text clues in the interpreter through the use of figurative language and other devices as to how to interpret the text. Whether it be the drawn-out, meticulous instructions that Ezekiel gives for the future millennial temple, or the clear literal meaning of Revelation 20 that teaches a thousand-year physical reign of Jesus Christ on the throne of David, we must interpret Scripture literally and at face value; in its normal sense.

We owe a great debt to Bible scholars within the covenantal camp who have preached, taught, and written on the Word of God. Yet, the constant priority of the NT over the OT (as if the OT cannot stand on its own two feet or has to bow to the fuller revelation of the NT) and the interpretation (or even reinterpretation) of the OT with the NT cannot be excused. Furthermore, dispensationalists cannot, as covenantalists, read Jesus into every OT verse. Though all the Bible points to Jesus Christ, He is not in every passage. We must practice exegesis (reading out of the text what the author intended) rather than practice “exe-Jesus” and reading Him into every passage. We can be faithful to the text and still remain Christ-centered in the process.

Throughout the exegesis demonstrated by covenant theologians, we see an overdependence on figurative language, typology, and allegory, while the clear, simple language of Scripture is ignored. Many of those passages that are spiritualized have clear, unconditional kingdom promises to Israel.

Our default setting as exegetes must be to take the reading in a literal way unless context indicates a figurative nature.³¹ And, remember, even figurative language has a literal meaning to convey. Dispensationalism is a theological system, not a hermeneutic. We should become dispensational by conviction once we practice a consistently literal hermeneutic throughout Scripture, not because we go to the text with an agenda or presupposition from a theological construct. Dr. Ryrie wrote, “If plain or normal interpretation is the only valid hermeneutical principle and if it is consistently applied, it will cause one to be a dispensationalist.”³²

One more hermeneutical caveat to mention is the need to recognize the implications of progressive revelation. A careful study of Scripture shows the different dispensations or ages in which God has interacted with mankind. Each revelation from God has been incomplete apart from the Incarnate Word and the

³¹ For helpful articles on the literal interpretation of Scripture, see the articles under “Further Study.”

³² Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 20.

Written Word of God. As time progressed, so did God's revelation. The New Testament is a more complete revelation of God, especially of Christ, than the Old Testament. The church is a mystery unrevealed in the OT (Eph 3:1-13). Furthermore, the kingdom of God that is spoken of in the OT is elucidated in Christ's kingdom parables during His earthly ministry. Paul knew more of God's complete revelation than John the Baptist, as the ministry of Christ was between their two ministries. God used to speak through prophets, then through His Son, but now and forever through His Word (Heb 1:1-3). Though covenantalists acknowledge different applications of the covenant of grace, they try to unify the work of God, suggesting He always works the same way. Covenant theologian James Orr criticizes these inconsistencies in saying:

It failed to seize the true idea of development, and by an artificial system of typology, and allegorizing interpretation, sought to read back practically the whole of the New Testament into the Old. But its most obvious defect was that, in using the idea of the covenant as an exhaustive category, and attempting to force into it the whole material of theology, it created an artificial scheme which could only repel minds desirous of simple and natural notions.³³

We must admit that the OT prophets did not know all that would be revealed in the NT. As time moved on, God revealed more. Yet, just because Jesus and the apostles would give more specifics regarding the kingdom of God, this doesn't mean they were speaking of a different kingdom than the OT authors. Progressive revelation from the NT does not interpret or reinterpret the original meaning of the OT passages in a way that changes or cancels out the original meaning.

Again, we cannot allow our theology to change our hermeneutic. I am dispensational because a consistently literal hermeneutic brought me here. Our theology must flow out of a proper handling of Scripture that develops, informs, and changes our theology. Our systematic theology is based on biblical theology. Biblical theology is developed by careful verse-by-verse handling of the Word of God in its historical-grammatical context, taking it in its normal sense unless clued in by the author to do otherwise.

Dispensational Distinctives Delineated

It is readily known that Plymouth Brethren minister John Nelson Darby is credited with the systematizing of dispensational thought in the 1800s. Yet some history scholars trace the teachings back another century.³⁴

Though there is variation of beliefs within the dispensational camp, some of the major components that characterize it are:

³³ Ibid, 19.

³⁴ William C. Watson, *Dispensationalism Before Darby*, (Silverton, OR: Lampion Press, 2015).

- A consistently literal interpretation of Scripture, particularly in prophetic passages where God has made promises to Israel.
- A distinction between God's plan for Israel and His plan for His Church from that of Israel, in which the Church does not replace or continue Israel.
- Often a pretribulational rapture of the Church before the Great Tribulation.
- Premillennialism that includes fulfillment of eternal covenants made to national Israel.

It is important for the careful Bible student to reckon with the issues that are only dealt satisfactorily by dispensational theology. Rather than continuity between the covenants and the OT and NT, we must recognize great discontinuity. If you see that God dealt differently with man before the fall and after the fall, before the Law and after the Law, before the cross and after the cross, then you are at some level a dispensationalist. If you worship on the Lord's Day in a church building instead of a temple and you bring your Bible, spiritual gifts, and offering, rather than an animal for sacrifice, then you are a dispensationalist, whether you admit it or not. If you believe that God has not abrogated (done away with) the promises He gave uniquely to Israel, that not all have been fulfilled, and that the Church is a new entity that Christ started at Pentecost, then you are a dispensationalist.

When you study the biblical covenants (Noahic, Abrahamic, Priestly, Mosaic, Davidic, New), properly understanding them determines your eschatology, ecclesiology, and much more.

Understanding these six covenants will shape a person's understanding of Scripture. It will reflect a hermeneutical course that will determine the pitch of one's eschatological sails...When God enters into unilateral covenant guaranteed only by His own faithfulness; when God enters into a covenant void of any human requirements to keep it in force; when God establishes a covenant that will continue as long as there is day and night and summer and winter, then great care must be taken not to erect man-made limitations that would bankrupt the heart and soul of these covenants and annul the glorious full realization of all that He promised through them. Their significance cannot be overstated.³⁵

A consistently literal and normal interpretation of Scripture leads one to be dispensational. Understanding the biblical covenants, and the New Covenant ministry of the Holy Spirit, and the mystery that Paul revealed about the Church leads one to be dispensational in theology.

For Further Study:

Books:

Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995).

Michael Vlach *Dispensationalism*, (Los Angeles: Theological Studies Press, 2008).

Michael Vlach *Has the Church Replaced Israel?* (B & H Publishing Group, 2010).

³⁵ Irvin Busenitz, "The Importance of Covenants" TMSJ 10:2, 1999, 183.

Chad O. Brand ed., *Perspectives on Israel and the Church*. (B & H Publishing Group, 2015).

Mike Vlach, *Premillennialism: Why There Must Be a Future Earthly Kingdom of Jesus* (Los Angeles: Theological Studies Press, 2015).

Matthew Waymeyer, *Revelation 20 and the Millennial Debate*, (Woodlands, TX: Kress Christian Publications, 2004).

Articles:

Mike Vlach, "What is Dispensationalism?" (accessed at theologicalstudies.org 3/30/16).

Rolland D. McCune, "What is Literal Interpretation?" (originally appeared in 2002 in a start-up journal, but reappeared in distilled form by Mark Snoeberger, 5/21/2015, on Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary blog).

Mike Stallard, "Literal Interpretation, Theological Method, and the Essence of Dispensationalism" (JMAT 1:1, Spr 1997).

Mike Stallard, "Literal Interpretation: The Key to Understanding the Bible" (JMAT 2000).

Thomas Ice, "The Calvinistic Heritage of Dispensationalism" (accessed at pretrib.org 6/3/16).

Soli Deo Gloria,

Parker Reardon, D.Min.

Applegate Community Church

www.applegatechurch.org

www.biblicalexpositor.org

Adjunct Faculty, Liberty University & Pacific Bible College

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