

Covenant Theology Vs Dispensationalism

here is a tremendous amount of debate and confusion over the matters of Eschatology, that is, the Study of the End of Times. Two of the most prevalent school of thoughts are Covenant Theology and Dispensational Eschatology.

The matter of Eschatology is a secondary issue, or a Tertiary issue. This is not a cause for division between believers. We can worship together even if we disagree between Covenant Theology and Dispensational Theology.

Because ultimately, it doesn't matter who is right – all that matters is Christ will return for His children, and He will judge the living and the dead. Both Covenantalists and Dispensationalists will hold to salvation being by faith alone in Christ alone. Just because we disagree on the minor issues does not necessary deem one or the other a heretic.

What is Covenant Theology?

One of the most widely held understandings of Eschatology is that of Covenant Theology. This view claims that God deals with mankind through several Covenants, rather than distinct periods of time. There are a few variations of Covenant Theology. Covenantalists view the entirety of Scripture as covenantal in theme. They hold to an [Old Testament Covenant and the New Covenant in the New Testament](#), for Testament comes from the Latin word “testamentum” which is the Latin word for Covenant. Some Covenantalists hold to one Covenant, some to Two and some to a multiplicity of Covenants.

Most Covenant Theology theologians hold to a Two Covenant view. The Covenant of Works which occurred in the Old Testament. That one was a covenant between God and Adam. The New Testament is the Covenant of Grace, in which God the Father made covenant with Christ the Son. It is in this covenant that God promised to give Jesus those who would be saved and that Jesus must redeem them. This covenant was made before the world was

created. In classical covenantal theology, Jesus came in order to fulfill the law. He completely satisfied the ceremonial, moral, and civil Law.

What is Dispensationalism?

Dispensationalism is a method of biblical interpretation that teaches that God uses different means of working with people during different periods of time throughout history. That Scripture is “unfolding” in a series of Dispensations. Most Dispensationalists will divide this into seven different chronological periods, though some will say that there are only 3 major Dispensations, while others will hold to eight.

Dispensationalists generally regard Israel and the Church as two separate entities, in contrast to Covenantalists. Only in rare occurrences is the Church a replacement for Israel, but not entirely. Their goal is to emphasize the fulfillment of the promises to Israel through a literal translation of the Bible. Most Dispensationalists hold to a Pre-Tribulation, and Pre-Millennial Rapture that is separate from the Second Coming of Christ.

Dispensationalists believe: The Church is totally separate from Israel and did not begin until the Day of Pentacost in Acts 2. That the promise made to Israel in the Old Testament that have not yet been fulfilled will be fulfilled by the modern Nation of Israel. None of these promises apply to the Church.

What is New Covenant Theology?

New Covenant Theology is the middle ground between Covenant Theology and Dispensational Theology. This variation sees the Mosaic Law as a whole, and that it was all fulfilled in Christ. New Covenant Theologians tend to not separate the Law into the three categories of ceremonial, moral, and civil. They claim that since Christ fulfilled all the law, that Christians are not under even the Moral Law (the 10 Commandments) since it was fulfilled in Christ, but that we now are all under the Law of Christ. With the New Covenant Theology, the Old Covenant is obsolete and is totally replaced by the Law of Christ that governs our morality.

1 Corinthians 9:21 “To those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the Law of Christ, so that I might win those who are without law.”

What is Progressive Dispensationalism?

Another option in the middle ground is Progressive Dispensationalism. This mode of thought emerged in the 1980s and holds to Four major dispensations. While this variant is more closely aligned with Classical Dispensationalism, it does have a few key differences. While Classical Dispensationalists will use a literal hermeneutic, Progressive Dispensationalists will use a Complementary Hermeneutic. The key difference is the issue over David’s throne. In the Davidic Covenant, God promised to David that He would never cease to have a descendant on the throne. Progressive Dispensationalists say that Christ is right now sitting on David’s throne and ruling. Classical Dispensationalists say that Christ is ruling, but not that He is on the throne of David.

Luke 1:55 “As He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and his descendants forever.”

What Are The Seven Dispensations in the Bible?

1) **Dispensation of Innocence** – this dispensation covers creation of man to the fall of man. All of creation lived in peace and innocence with one another. This dispensation ended when Adam and Eve disobeyed God’s law to abstain from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, and they were expelled from the Garden.

2) **Dispensation of Conscience** – this dispensation began just after Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden. Man was left to rule by his own conscience, which was tainted by sin. This Dispensation ended in total disaster – with a worldwide flood. During this time man was totally corrupt and evil. God chose to end humanity with a flood, with the exception of Noah and his family.

3) **Dispensation of Human Government** – this dispensation starts just after the flood. God allowed Noah and his descendants to use animals for food and He established the law of capital punishment and were commanded to fill the earth. They did not fill the earth but instead bound together to create a Tower so that they could reach God on their own accord. God ended this dispensation by causing confusion with their languages so that they would be forced to spread to other areas.

4) **Dispensation of Promise** – this dispensation started with the Call of Abraham. It includes the Patriarchs and the Bondage in Egypt. Once the Jews fled Egypt and were officially the Nation of Israel the Dispensation was over.

5) **Dispensation of Law** – this dispensation lasted for almost 1,500 years. It started with the Exodus and ended with the Resurrection of Jesus. This was highlighted by God delivering the Law to Moses. The law was given to the people to show them that [they must depend on God to save them](#) because they could not hope to ever be holy on their own. It was a season of immense symbolism. The sacrifices of bulls and goats did not save the people, but is symbolized their need for salvation from the One who was the spotless Lamb and able to take away their sins.

6) **Dispensation of Grace** – this is the dispensation that occurs from the Resurrection and continues today. This is also known as the Church Age. Dispensationalists believe that there are more than 2,000 years of history between the 69th and 70th weeks in Daniels prophesy. It is in this age that we understand that Abrahams children are all those who have faith, including the Gentiles. It is only during this Dispensation that we are given the Holy Spirit. Most Dispensationalists hold to a Pre-Tribulation and Pre-Millennial Rapture. Meaning Christ will snatch away believers into the air before the Tribulation and before the Millennial Reign of Christ.

7) **Dispensation of the Millenia Reign of Christ** – this begins with the defeat of Satan and is a 1,000 literal years of peace where Christ will reign as King on the earth. After the 1,000 years, Satan will be released. People will follow him in a great battle against Christ but they will all be defeated again.

Then comes the final judgement. After that the earth and heaven will be destroyed and replaced by a new earth and a new heaven. Satan will then be cast into the Lake of Fire and we will then enjoy the Eternal Kingdom.

What are the covenants in the Bible?

1. A) **Adamic Covenant** – this was made between God and Adam. This covenant said that Adam would have everlasting life based on his obedience to God.

Genesis 1:28-30 “God blessed them; and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” Then God said, “Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the surface of all the earth, and every tree which has fruit yielding seed; it shall be food for you; and to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the sky and to everything that moves on the earth which has life, I have given every green plant for food”; and it was so.”

Genesis 2:15 “Then the Lord God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it.”

1. B) **Noahic Covenant** – this was a covenant made between Noah and God. In this covenant God promised to never destroy the earth by water again.

Genesis 9:11 “I establish My covenant with you; and all flesh shall never again be cut off by the water of the flood, neither shall there again be a flood to destroy the earth.”

1. C) **Abrahamic Covenant** – this covenant was made between God and Abraham. God promised to make Abraham the father of a great nation and that all the nations of the world would be blessed through him.

Genesis 12:3 “And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.”

Genesis 17:5 “No longer shall your name be called Abram, But your name shall be Abraham; For I have made you the father of a multitude of nations.”

1. D) **Mosaic Covenant** – this covenant was cut between God and Israel. God promised that He would be faithful to Israel as a holy nation.

Exodus 19:6 “and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words that you shall speak to the sons of Israel.”

1. E) **Davidic Covenant** – this covenant was made between David and God. God promised to have someone of David’s line on his throne forever.

2 Samuel 7:12-13, 16 “I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your own flesh and blood, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name. I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.... Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever.”

1. F) **New Covenant** – this covenant was made between Christ and the Church. This is where Christ promises us eternal life by grace through faith.

1 Corinthians 11:25 “In the same way He took the cup also after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.’”

Famous dispensationalists

- Isaac Watts
- John Nelson Darby
- C.I. Scofield
- E.W. Bullinger
- Lewis Sperry Chafer
- Miles J. Stanford

- Pat Robertson
- John Hagee
- Henry Ironside
- Charles Caldwell Ryrie
- Tim LaHaye
- Jerry B. Jenkins
- Dwight L. Moody
- John Macarthur

Famous Covenantalists

- John Owen
- Jonathan Edwards
- Robert Rollock
- Heinrich Bullinger
- R.C. Sproul
- Charles Hodge
- A.A. Hodge
- B.B. Warfield
- John Calvin
- Huldrych Zwingli
- Augustine

God's People differences in Covenant Theology and Dispensationalism

Covenant Theology – According to Covenant Theology, [God's People are the Elect](#). Those who have been chosen by God to be His People. They were

chosen before the creation of the World. Christ will not return before every one of His people come to a saving knowledge of Him.

Dispensationalism – According to Dispensationalism, God's People refers to the Nation of Israel. The Church is a separate entity, a parenthesis more or less, adopted as God's people but not entirely God's People.

God's Purpose in Covenant theology and Dispensationalism

Covenant Theology – God's Purpose according to Covenant Theology is that God may be Glorified through the Redemption of His People. God's plan all along was the Cross and the Church.

Dispensationalism – God's Purpose according to Dispensationalism is God's Glory in a variety of ways that may or may not be centered around Salvation.

The Law

Covenant Theology – The Law according to Covenant Theology is God's commands for mankind. In general this refers to God's Moral Law, or the 10 Commandments. But it also can encompass His Ceremonial Law and His Civil Law. God's Moral Law applies to all the world and even to Christians today. We will all be judged according to God's moral law.

Dispensationalism – The Law found in the Old Testament: the Moral, Civil, and Ceremonial Law has been completely abolished under Christ. Now, all believers are to live under the Law of Christ.

Salvation

Covenant Theology – In Covenant Theology, God had one plan of Salvation for all of His chosen people since time began. Salvation was to occur by Grace through Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Dispensationalism – In Dispensational Theology, God always had one plan of Salvation. But it has been often misunderstood. The Old Testament believers were not saved by their sacrifices but by their faith in the sacrifice to

come. The content of the faith would vary from dispensation to dispensation until it was fully revealed in Jesus's atoning work on the Cross.

The Holy Spirit

Covenant Theology – In Covenant Theology [the Holy Spirit has always existed](#) and has interacted with people since the Old Testament. He was in the Pillar of Fire and the Cloud that guided the Jews on their Exodus. He did not indwell anyone until Pentecost.

Dispensationalism – In Dispensational Theology the Holy Spirit has always existed, but He did not play an active role until Pentecost.

Believers are in Christ

Covenant Theology – Believers are all of God's elect who have through Grace by Faith in Jesus been redeemed. There have been believers throughout time.

Dispensationalism – There are two modes of Believers according to Dispensationalism. Israel and the Church. Both are required to by Grace through Faith believe on Jesus Christ who is the ultimate sacrifice, but they are totally separate groups.

The Birth of the Church

Covenant Theology – The Birth of the Church according to Covenant Theology occurred back in the Old Testament. The Church is simply all of the Redeemed people since Adam. Pentecost was not the beginning of the church but merely the empowering of God's people.

Dispensationalism – According to Dispensationalism the Day of Pentecost was the Birth of the Church. The Church did not exist at all until that day. The Old Testament saints are not a part of the Church.

First and Second Coming

Covenant Theology – The purpose of Christ's First and Second Coming according to Covenant Theology is for Christ to die for our sins and to establish the Church. The Church was made manifest under the Covenant of

Grace. The Church is the Kingdom of God – which is offered spiritually, physically, and invisibly. Christ had to come in order to establish His Messianic Kingdom. [His Second Coming is to bring Final Judgement](#) and to establish the New Heaven and New Earth.

Dispensationalism – Christ initially came to establish the Messianic Kingdom. It is an earthly kingdom which is in fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies. Dispensationalists disagree some on the order of what happens with the Second Coming. Many believe that: during the Second Coming, the Rapture will occur and then a tribulation period followed by a 1,000 year reign of Christ. After that comes the Judgement and then we enter into our eternal state.

Conclusion

While there are two primary modes of thought, there are a number of variations within them. We must remember that just because there is a difference of opinion in this matter that it is considered a minor, secondary issue. Christ is indeed returning again for His People. He will judge the living and the dead and set up our eternal state. For that cause, [we must always be ready and live each moment in obedience for His glory.](#)

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