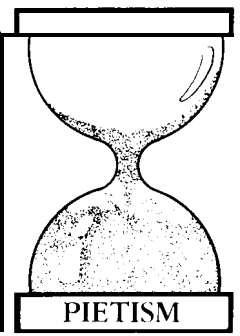


Dispensationalism in Transition

Challenging Traditional Dispensationalism's "Code of Silence"



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DISPENSATIONAL DISTORTIONS (PART ONE)

Christological Distortions

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Due to my dispensationalist background I am asked from time to time to speak on the topic of dispensationalism and to give a reformed critique of certain of its leading errors. In this and the next two newsletters, I will be highlighting three classes of dispensational distortions that I feel to be harmful to a balanced Christian worldview. In this series, I have chosen to cover dispensational errors in the areas of Christology, Redemptive History, and Contemporary Historical Progress. There are, of course, a number of other areas that could be considered.

Before I turn to a consideration of these, it should be understood that, as in any system, there will be some internal disagreements among its adherents. The aspects chosen for our scrutiny are broadly popular, even if some of the details of the following features are debated by dispensational theologians (e.g., John S. Feinberg vs. Charles C. Ryrie²).

"Christ's Rule is Future"

First, popular dispensationalism denies the contemporary presence of Christ's kingdom, despite the clear teaching of Scripture. House and Ice write that: "Whatever dynamic God has given believers today does not mean that the Messianic kingdom is here. We see it as totally future."³

The dispensational view requires Christ's *physics*/presence on earth to rule over His kingdom. Dispensationalists often say, "You cannot have the kingdom present without the presence of the king." Of course, an immediate problem with this statement is that Satan has an evil kingdom present (Matt. 12:26; John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11), even though he is only *spiritually* present (Eph. 2:2; 2 Cor. 4:4; Eph. 6:12). But a more serious problem is that Christ clearly taught that He established His kingdom when He came to earth. Let us survey *some* of the evidence.

In Mark 1:14-15, early in His ministry, Christ said: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand." Notice that the prophetically decreed time had come; the kingdom was declared near at hand – not 2000 (or more!) years away. A little later in His ministry, as he exercised power over Satan, the Lord noted: "If I cast out devils by

the Spirit of God, *then* the kingdom of God *is come* unto you" (Matt. 12:28).

Christ even prophesied that its coming with *great power* would be witnessed by His hearers: "And he said unto them, Verily I say unto you, that there be some of them that stand here, which *shall not taste of death*, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power" (Mark 9:1).⁴ There seems no way around the fact that some that literally stood in Jesus' presence would 'live' ("not taste death") until that time although by the very expression, it is implied that some would, in fact, taste death before that event. Consequently, Christ teaches that the kingdom's coming "with power" would occur in that generation, even though it would be somewhat later than when Jesus spoke (and, hence, not the Transfiguration of only six days later).

Thus, in Colossians 1:13 Paul writes of our present salvation: "He *bath* delivered us from the power of darkness, and *bath translated* us into the kingdom of His dear Son." John agrees in Revelation 1:6, 9: "And He *bath made* us kings and priests unto God and His Father, . . . John, who also am your brother, and companion in the tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ." In fact, we are now ruling with Christ, for Paul says in Ephesians 2:6: He "bath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (cp. Rem. 6:5; 8:17; Col. 2:13; 3:1-3; Rev. 20:4).

Dispensationalism distorts Christ's teaching about the *coming* of His kingdom, despite the clarity of His instruction. In other words, a major reason for Christ's first coming – to be gloriously enthroned as Messianic king (Isa. 9:6, 7; Luke 24:26; John 12:23; 17:5; 18:37; Acts 2:30-34; 1 Pet. 1:11) – is lost in dispensationalism!

"Christ's Rule is Political"

Second, dispensationalism posits a carnal and political kingdom, rather than a spiritual and redemptive one. Dispensationalism has Christ on a physical throne in earthly Jerusalem administering the day-to-day political affairs of the world. Citing House and Ice again, we learn: "Then God's will in heaven will be brought to earth. But not until Christ rules physically from Jerusalem."⁵

But Christ and the New Testament writers clearly discount such, when they teach that His kingdom is a *spiritual* kingdom rooted in the heart (although not denying its external impact). In Luke 17:20-21 Christ contradicted the ZI-

1. I was converted under a dispensational ministry and educated at two dispensational schools: Tennessee Temple University and Grace Theological Seminary.

2. John S. Feinberg is a major dispensationalist theologian who has made welcome concessions of major consequence to reformed thought. See: John S. Feinberg, ed., *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship Between the Old and New Testaments* (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1988), Ch 3.

3. H. Wayne House and Thomas D. Ice, *Dominion Theology: Blessing or Curse?* (Portland, OR: Multnomah, 1988), p. 220.

4. There seems to be a distinction necessary here between the kingdom's coming (which in Luke 17:20-21 is subtle and present, see below) and the kingdom's coming "with power" (which in the destruction of the temple was dramatic and future, from Christ's perspective).

5. House and Ice, *Dominion Theology*, p. 160.

onist tendencies of the Pharisees, when He denied a future earthly, political kingdom introduced by catastrophic intervention: "When he was demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come, he answered them and said, The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, 10 there!, for behold, the kingdom of God *is within* you."

When Christ stood before Pilate, He repeated the same truth. In John 18:36 we read: "My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight." His was not a political kingdom like that of Caesar's, requiring an army. This probably explains why He asked Pilate where he got his information (John 18:33, 34): Had he heard it from the Jews, Pilate would have heard a misconception of the nature of the kingdom; had he heard Jesus say it, he should have known what Jesus intended.

Paul picks up on and promotes the spiritual nature of the kingdom, when he writes that "the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost" (Rom. 14:17).

Dispensationalism discounts the spiritual glory of Christ's present rule by denying it. And this despite the biblical record.

Christ's Second Humiliation

Third, dispensationalism has Christ endure a second humiliation by leaving heaven (which is His throne) to return to rule on earth (which is His footstool) — only to finally have His personal kingdom rule rebelled against. One major aspect of His humiliation was His dwelling in the dust of the earth and suffering abuse during His ministry. House and Ice write that in the postmillennial view: "Messiah is in heaven and only present mystically in his kingdom. His absence from the earth during his kingdom reign robs Messiah of his moment of earthly glory and exaltation."⁶

But Scripture teaches of Christ's return to heaven that it is not a place where His reign is *robbed!* We must understand the majestic glory that is His, which issues from His ascension into heaven.

Did He not pray to the Father just before the cross: "And *now*, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was" (John 17:5)? He was preparing to leave the earth to enter heaven. He considered that to be glorious — not a robbery of glory!

6. House and Ice, *Dominion Theology*, p. 240.

Ephesians 1:20 says, "Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at His own right hand in the heavenly places, Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: And hath put all things under His feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church." The same concept is repeated in Philippians 2:9, "Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name." 1 Peter 3:22 agrees: "Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him." This is a robbery of His glory?

What is worse, the "moment of glory" that Christ has during His millennial rule *ends up in chaos and rebellion!* Pentecost states that toward the end of the millennial kingdom Satan "goes forth to deceive the nations, in order to lead a final revolt against the theocracy of God." Pentecost admits that "there is no understanding how a multitude, 'the number of whom is as the sand of the sea', could revolt against the Lord Jesus Christ, when they have lived under His beneficence all their lives."⁷ Christ's "moment of glory" ends in chaos and ultimate failure!

As Walvoord put it: "Thus the last gigantic rebellion of man develops against God's sovereign rule in which the wicked meet their Waterloo. As the battle is joined in [Rev. 20:9], the great host led by Satan and coming from all directions compasses the camp of the saints. The word for 'camp' seems to refer to the city of Jerusalem itself which is described as 'the beloved city.'"⁸

Dispensationalism's "moment of glory" for Jesus puts Him back in the dust of the earth, so that He might personally, physically administer a kingdom that eventually revolts against Him and attacks Him and His capitol.

Conclusion

The errors we have just surveyed are serious. Dispensationalism has significant, not inconsequential, problems — inherent within it relative to the view of Christ and His ministry. It is important that we recognize the debate regarding dispensationalism is not over minute details of the complex of end time events. Dispensationalism inadvertently diminishes the glory of the person and work of Christ.

7. J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1958), pp. 548, 551.

8. John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1966), p. 304.