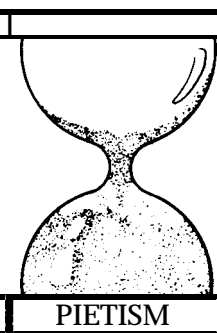


Dispensationalism in Transition

Challenging Traditional Dispensationalism's "Code of Silence"



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DISPENSATIONAL DYSLEXIA

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The Diagnosis

In his classic little work, *The Time is At Hand* (Presbyterian and Reformed, 1966) Jay Adams suggested that dispensationalists are afflicted with diplopia, or double vision. He did so because of their systemic claim to two peoples of God, two resurrections, two second comings of Christ, two judgments, and so forth. His point is well-taken. Perhaps Jesus was prescribing a surgical corrective for dispensationalism when he said: "it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one, than having two eyes" to experience diplopia (Mark 9:47, Textus Genticus reading).

Unfortunately, this dispensationally induced malady has caused other ophthalmological dysfunctions. This may explain why Jesus was concerned with eye trouble: "He that has eyes to see, let him see."¹ I believe that the diagnosis has not only pointed out severe Dispensational Diplopia but also a related problem, Dispensational Dyslexia.²

The *Random House Unabridged Dictionary* defines "dyslexia" as "Any of various reading disorders associated with impairment of the ability to interpret spatial relationships or to integrate auditory and visual information." Foremost among dyslexic dysfunctions is the tendency to see things backwards, which makes it hard for dyslexic children to read properly. Let us see how Dispensational Dyslexia causes so many misreadings of Scripture by considering the havoc wreaked on the Kingdom Parables.

In the Gospels we learn much of Jesus' preaching ministry. We learn that He was greatly concerned with preaching the "kingdom of heaven" or "of God." Jesus urgently preached: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 4:17; Mark 1:15). The kingdom was so spiritually glorious that those who were "poor in spirit" and "persecuted for righteousness sake" were given it (Matt. 5:3, 10; Luke 6:20).

To enter that kingdom men "must be converted and become as little children" (Matt. 18:3; Mark 10:15; Luke 18:17), by the new birth via God's Holy Spirit (John 3:3,5). He even warned that to enter this kingdom it was necessary to "do the will of my Father" (Matt. 7:21). Those who did so would gloriously share with the Patriarchs in its glory (Matt. 8:11; Luke 13:29).

The kingdom of heaven was so glorious that even John the Baptist would be surpassed by the "least" in it (Matt. 11:11; Luke 7:28). Consequently, it is compared to "a treasure" that brings such "joy" that a man would "sell all that

he has" to attain it (Matt. 13:44). indeed, it is like a "goodly pearl" (Matt. 13:45). Truly the "kingdom of heaven" is majestic! But now what do popular dispensational writers teach regarding Jesus' teaching on the kingdom of heaven? Apparently, Matthew 13 causes severe dyslexic episodes among dispensationalists.³ Consider, for example, J. Dwight Pentecost's treatment of three of the parables.

"The Kingdom of Heeven is Like Declining Productivity"

in the Parable of the Soils (Matt. 13:3-9; Mark 4:3-8) the kingdom of heaven is likened to a sower sowing seed. The seed produces up to a hundredfold increase. But does this suggest an overwhelming influence of the seed of the kingdom? According to the dispensationalist: "It only letulosB."⁴ Pentecost states:

During the course of the age there will be a decreasing response to the sowing of the seed, from 'a hundredfold' to 'sixty' to 'thirty.' Such is the course of the age. Mark 4:13 reveals that this parable wit the revelation of the program which it makes, is basic to the understanding of the other parables in the discourse.⁵

Two objections may be urged against this severe misreading: (1) The parable obviously is speaking of a wondrous *multiplication* of effect. Even a mere (!) thirtyfold increase in an investment should be considered glorious. The Lord is not informing His disciples of the *decline* of gospel influence, but of its *increase*. As such, it is akin to the Abrahamic Covenant, which promised that Abraham's seed would become as the sands of the sea and the stare of heaven for multitude (Gen. 15:5; 22:17; 26:4; 32:12; Exe. 32:13; Deut. 1:10; 10:22; Neh. 9:23). After all, Abraham is associated in the Gospels with the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 8:11; Luke 13:28).

(2) In the Gospel records of Christ's references to the increase, the *order* has absolutely *no* intended bearing on the interpretation of the parable, despite Pentecost's assertion. This should be obvious when Matthew 13:3-9 is laid alongside Mark 4:3-8. Read them side-by-side for yourself. These two records of the parable are virtually identical, except for the *order* of increase. Consequently, we must assume that the order of listing – whether 100-60-30 or 30-60-100 – is unimportant.

3. In fact, if you want to determine whether or not a pereon suffers from Dispensational Dyslexia, hold up before the patient a large-print edition of the Bible opened to either Matthew 13 or Mark 4. Using it as an eye chart, you can quickly detect the malady, when the text is read end interpreted.

4. Please note that the exclamation must be read *dyslexicly*, from right to left. Non-dispensationalists will have to hold this page up to a mirror to read the phrase.

5. J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1956), p. 146. Cp. *The New Scofield Reference Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 1015.

1. It is at least interesting to note that Paul, "a Hebrew of the Hebrews," had eye trouble, apparently left over from his being Jewish (Jews longed for a millennial, carnal kingdom, John 6:15). See: Gal. 4:15; 6:11.

2. The uncovering of these two ophthalmological problems may explain my past expedience in dispensational settings where votes were taken regarding eschatological statements. I constantly heard: "The eyes have it." Having been "healed" from dispensationalism, I now know what that statement means.

The point of the parable is the tremendous increase of the kingdom, reaching a hundredfold – a fact that well complements the Great Commission expectation (Matt. 28:19). How can Pentecost pessimistically emphasize the Marcan order?

“The Kingdom of Heaven is Grotesque”

Even more severe than the dyslexic episode brought on by the Parable of the Soils is that which is produced by the Parable of the Mustard Seed (getting soil in your eye is one thing, but a seed is much more painful). Consider, again, Pentecost’s view:

As the age progresses several facts are to be observed. (1) The age is characterized by an abnormal external growth. That which was to be an herb has become a tree – it has developed into a monstrosity. (2) This monstrosity has become the resting place for birds. In the first parable the birds represented that which was antagonistic to the program of God and consistency would demand that they be so interpreted here. . . . The parable teaches that the enlarge sphere of profession has become inwardly corrupt. That is the characterization of this age.⁶

That this interpretation is patently erroneous should be obvious in the parable’s opening words: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed.” According to dispensationalism, Jesus is saying: “The kingdom of heaven is like a monstrosity” !

Furthermore, birds are not necessarily types of evil in Scripture (Gen. 1 :20; Deut. 14:20; Matt. 6:26). Likewise, the lion is not necessarily a type of evil (cp. 1 Pet. 5:8 with Rev. 5:5), nor the dove necessarily the type of silliness (Hos. 7:11; Matt. 10:16). It would seem less disruptive of Christ’s teaching to note that the birds, which originally sought to destroy the seed of the kingdom in the ground (Matt. 13:4, 19), finally become converted to the influence of the seed grown to a great plant (Matt. 13:32). After all, all of Christ’s converts were at one time His enemies (Rem. 5:10; Eph. 2:1-4; 1 Tim. 1 :15).

Our view is especially suggested by the Old Testament backdrop upon which Jesus seems to reflect: Ezekiel 17:22-24:

I will also take of the highest branch of the high cedar, and will set it; I will crop off from the top of his young twigs a tender one, and will plant it upon an high mountain. In the mountain of the height of Israel will I plant it: and it shall bring forth boughs, and bear fruit, and be a goodly cedar: and under it shall dwell all fowl of every wing; in the shadow of the branches thereof shall they dwell. And all the trees of the field shall know that I the Lord have brought down the high tree, have exalted the low tree.⁷

Here the birds do not illustrate evil infiltrating the kingdom. The portrayal is of the gracious provision of shelter when the kingdom of heaven comes to full fruition.

“The Kingdom of Heaven is Like Evil”

The final parable with which we will deal is that of the Parable of the Leaven (Matt. 13:33). Pentecost comments:

The progress of the age is marked, according to this parable, (1) by the ministry of the woman. This evidently refers to the work of a false religious system (Rev. 2:20;

17:1-8). . . (2) The age is marked by the introduction of the leaven. This figure is used in Scripture to portray that which is evil in character (Ex. 12:15; Lev. 2:11; 6:17; 10:12; Matt. 16:6; Mark 8:15; 1 Cor. 5:6,8; Gal. 5:9). . . .

There is a different emphasis in the parables of the mustard seed and the leaven. The mustard seed refers to the perversion of God’s purpose in this age, while the leaven refers to a corruption of the divine agency, the Word, through which this purpose is realized.⁸

But here again we are startled at the distortion of Christ’s teaching on the kingdom of heaven. Christ clearly states: “The kingdom of heaven is like leaven.” Is He saying, “The kingdom of heaven is like evil?” Surely not! Will the kingdom be “corrupted”? Will “the gates of hell prevail against it”?

Women are not necessarily types of evil in Scripture (Prov. 9:1-3; 2 Cor. 11 :2; Rev. 12:1,2; 21 :2). Jesus even employs them in a good sense in His parables (Matt. 25:1-2; Luke 15:8). It just so happens that women normally bake bread, as per the parable’s demands (Lev. 26:26; 1 Sam. 28:24), much like the three measures being an amount which would be fitting (Gen. 18:6; Judg. 6:19; 1 Sam. 1:24). The woman imports the leaven into the meal, as Christ’s kingdom comes from without (John 18:36; Rev. 21 :2) and works within (Luke 17:20-21; Rem. 14:17).

Neither does leaven always represent evil. If so, we would meet with a strange offering in Leviticus 7:13 and 23:7. In fact, let us quickly consider Pentecost’s Scripture citations, which supposedly demonstrate the evil symbolism of leaven.

Exodus 12:15 forbids leaven in the Passover, to be sure. But it does not say why. It would seem that the whole idea is to be found in the fact related in verse 11: “And thus shall ye eat it; with your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and ye shall eat it in haste.” The people were to portray the haste with which God would remove them from Egypt – and leaven takes time to work.

The offerings in Leviticus 2:11; 6:17; and 10:12 do forbid leaven, but do not tie this prohibition to leaven’s evil symbolism. Even honey is forbidden as an offering in the first passage! No mention at all is made of leaven’s evil symbolism.

In Matthew 16:6; Mark 8:15; and 1 Corinthians 5:6,8 the leaven references are all modified by such phrases as: “of the Pharisees” and “of malice.” The modifiers make the leaven references evil in these passages. In Galatians 5:9 Paul happens to be speaking of the danger of false doctrine when he alludes to a general maxim, that can be used in either a good or an evil sense: “A little leaven leavens the whole lump.”

Actually, the subtle penetrative power of leaven is the source of its legendary interest. When used in analogy, it can be used of the penetrative influence of either good or evil.

Jesus says, “The kingdom of heaven is like leaven.” The dispensationalist says it is, therefore, like evil. “Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil” (Isa. 5:20).

Recommended Therapy

Dyslexia can be overcome by a concentrated, carefully conducted reading program. I suggest the following reading program: Bahnaen and Gentry, *House Divided: The Break-up of Dispensational Theology*, Roderick Campbell, *Israel and the New Covenant*, David Chilton, *Paradise Restored*, and Lorraine Boettner, *The Millennium*.

S. Pentecost, *Things to Come*, p. 146. Cp. *The New Scofield Reference Bible*, p. 1015.

6. Pentecost, *Things to Come*, p. 147.

7. Incredibly, dispensationalist Warren Wiersbe takes this reference in Ezekiel as an indicator of “a world power” undergoing “abnormal growth”. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition commentary* (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1969), 1:46.