

## **Council on Dispensational Hermeneutics**

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### ***Dispensationalism for Tomorrow: A Homegrown Critique and Proposal for Change***

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#### **Introduction**

Why is Dispensationalism in decline? Dispensationalists claim to have the most faithful hermeneutics and understanding of the Bible’s storyline, so why is it not popular? Either the vast majority of Christians aren’t interested in faithful hermeneutics and getting the Bible’s storyline right, or maybe Dispensationalists have gotten something wrong. It seems that a new generation of theologians has come from the turn of the century, and very few of them have brought dispensational commitments with them. This is not because theologians are less concerned with Biblical truth, but rather because of issues within Dispensationalism. The theological system is often associated with mischaracterizations, myths, and misunderstandings. So how do we fix it? In this paper, I will propose a way to revitalize dispensationalism and make it appealing to the next generation. In order to do that, I will state the major issues of the system as I see them. This paper is a product of my dissatisfaction with dispensational theology. It is my persuasion that if these issues are addressed and dealt with within the Dispensational community, then dispensationalists could expect to see a change in the current theological climate.

#### **Issues**

The first issue is the lack of an agreed-upon definition. This is the first issue I see, even 60 years after Ryrie wrote, “There is no more primary problem in the whole matter of dispensationalism than that of a definition.”<sup>1</sup> What is Dispensationalism? What is it all about? How would you sum it up? Prominent Dispensational thinkers all answer this question differently and not always sufficiently. Covenant theologian Michael Glodo recognizes this when he states, “Even among

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, Rev. and expanded. (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2007), 27.

those who are self-described adherents today, there is disagreement as to what necessarily and truly constitutes dispensationalism.”<sup>2</sup> This is an issue.

There have been many proposed definitions of the system. Charles Ryrie wrote his now-famous three-fold *sine qua non* of Dispensationalism. 1) Israel and the Church are distinct. 2) Consistent plain hermeneutics 3) Doxological purpose of history.<sup>3</sup> John Feinberg offered his own essentials 20 years later:

In his 1988 article “Systems of Discontinuity,” John Feinberg presented six “essentials of dispensationalism”: (1) belief that the Bible refers to multiple senses of terms like “Jew” and “seed of Abraham”; (2) an approach to hermeneutics that emphasizes that the Old Testament be taken on its own terms and not reinterpreted in light of the New Testament; (3) belief that Old Testament promises will be fulfilled with national Israel; (4) belief in a distinctive future for ethnic Israel; (5) belief that the church is a distinctive organism; and (6) a philosophy of history that emphasizes not just soteriology and spiritual issues but social, economic, and political issues as well.<sup>4</sup>

Michael Vlach, building off of Ryrie and Feinberg, has his own list of essentials as well:

- 1) Progressive revelation from the New Testament does not interpret Old Testament passages in a way that cancels the original authorial intent of the Old Testament writers as determined by historical-grammatical hermeneutics
- 2) Types exist, but national Israel is not a type that is superseded by the church.
- 3) Israel and the church are distinct, thus the church cannot be identified as the new or true Israel.
- 4) There is both spiritual unity in salvation between Jews and Gentiles and a future role for Israel as a nation.
- 5) The nation Israel will be saved, restored with a unique identity, and function in a future millennial kingdom upon the earth.
- 6) There are multiple senses of “seed of Abraham”; thus, the church’s identification as “seed of Abraham” does not cancel God’s promises to the believing Jewish “seed of Abraham.”<sup>5</sup>

Born and raised dispensationalist Glenn Kreider wrote in 2015 that “Dispensationalism is defined as the view that the Bible teaches that there are distinguishable periods of time in which God

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<sup>2</sup> Michael J. Glodo, “Dispensationalism,” in *Covenant Theology: Biblical, Theological, and Historical Perspectives*, ed. Guy Prentiss Waters, J. Nicholas Reid, and John R. Muether (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 526–527.

<sup>3</sup> Charles Caldwell Ryrie and Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, Rev. and expanded. (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2007), 46–48.

<sup>4</sup> Michael Vlach, “What Is Dispensationalism?,” in *Christ’s Prophetic Plans: A Futuristic Premillennial Primer* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2012), 20–21.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 24–34.

administers His plan for creation differently.”<sup>6</sup> Similarly, Brian Irwin and Tim Perry wrote in 2023 that “the most basic tenet of dispensationalism as proposed by Darby and accepted by others is that God has related to human beings in varying ways across time.”<sup>7</sup> And around the same time, James Fazio wrote:

Dispensationalism is that theological system which reflects God's administration over His household, whereby a sovereignly appointed steward has administered a divinely apportioned measure of God's grace; each of these administrations, which have occurred throughout the successive ages, have ended in judgment, and will find their culmination in the coming Messianic Kingdom.<sup>8</sup>

Which one should the younger theologian pick? The first three definitions are primarily concerned with hermeneutics and doctrinal distinctives, while the last three are concerned with different administrations and stewardships throughout time.

The issue can be shown like this: someone could adopt one of the first three definitions (the hermeneutical and doctrinal distinctions) and totally reject the concept of a dispensation as being the engine of Scripture. Also, someone could just as easily adopt one of the last three definitions and totally reject the hermeneutics and doctrinal distinctions of the first three definitions. This leads to the second issue.

The second issue is a lack of a good definition. The reason there is not an agreed upon definition is that dispensationalism lacks a good definition. Even though the definitions above have been well accepted by many dispensationalists, they have also been heavily critiqued Ryrie’s *sine qua non*.

While Ryrie’s book was a milestone in dispensational development, it is not without its issues. Here, I will only show the weaknesses of his definition. For starters, some have pointed out that many other systems utilize a “plain” hermeneutic. The now-called grammatical-historical hermeneutic is not a distinguishing mark of dispensationalism. Milton Terry wrote the foundational work for this hermeneutic in 1885, and he was a partial-preterist. Rather, dispensational theology has different interpretations or conclusions than other systems, but

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<sup>6</sup> D. Jeffrey Bingham, ed., *Dispensationalism and the History of Redemption: A Developing and Diverse Tradition* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2015), 27.

<sup>7</sup> Brian P. Irwin and Tim Perry, *After Dispensationalism: Reading the Bible for the End of the World* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2023), 99.

<sup>8</sup> Cory M. Marsh and James I. Fazio, eds., *Discovering Dispensationalism* (SCS Press, 2023), 45.

dispensationalism is not necessarily distinct by a G-H hermeneutic, or as Ryrie calls it, a “plain” or “literal” hermeneutic.

Also, Ryrie’s claim that Dispensationalism is primarily concerned with God’s glory with the implication that Covenant Theology is not, is very misleading. For example, the first three questions and answers of the Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF) shorter catechism read:

*Quest. 1. What is the chief end of man? Answ.* Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him for ever. *Q. 2. What rule hath God given to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him? A.* The word of God, which is contained in the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him. *Q. 3. What do the scriptures principally teach? A.* The scriptures principally teach what man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man.<sup>9</sup>

According to the WCF, man’s main purpose is to glorify God, and the primary way of doing that is through Scripture, which reveals what God requires of man. Apart from the Israel/church distinction, the WCF *summum bonum* is nearly identical to the heart of classical dispensationalism, i.e., glorifying God through the stewardships revealed in Scripture. Not only is Ryrie’s 3 indispensables problematic, but two of the three are not at all unique to dispensationalism.

### **Feinberg’s and Vlach’s definition**

Feinberg and Vlach clarify a lot of the issues with Ryrie’s definition, but any reader will notice that the two lists are somewhat different from each other and very different from Ryrie’s. On top of that, they are a list of beliefs and not necessarily a definition of the essence of a theological system. Further, one thing that all of these lists have in common is that they have nothing to do with dispensations. This is not by accident, but it is an issue. Why is the system called dispensationalism if it doesn’t revolve around dispensations?

### **Kreider, Irwin, Perry, and Fazio’s definition.**

One can hardly blame the last three for defining the system with dispensations at the center, considering it is called dispensationalism. However, this is still a confusing definition for multiple reasons. First, is a dispensation a time period or a stewardship? Second, how is the concept of different time periods or different stewardships unique to dispensationalism? Third, is either concept of a dispensation even at the heart of the system and its theology?

#### **1. *Is a dispensation a time period or a stewardship?***

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<sup>9</sup> Westminster Assembly, *The Westminster Confession of Faith: Edinburgh Edition* (Philadelphia: William S. Young, 1851), 387–388.

You will get a different answer depending on who you read. This is not the main issue with defining dispensationalism around dispensations, just a somewhat confusing one.

## ***2. How is the concept of different time periods or different stewardships unique to dispensationalism?***

Theologians (dispensational and non) have recognized that the concept of a dispensation is not the essence of dispensationalism nor is it unique to the system. Michael Glodo points this out referencing the WCF and Vern Poythress:

The word dispensation refers to the different epochs of redemptive history as witnessed in Scripture. This notion, however, does not provide a sufficient basis on which to distinguish dispensationalism and covenant theology. The Westminster Confession of Faith, for example, recognizes such historical periods when it states, “There are not therefore two covenants of grace differing in substance, but one and the same under various dispensations” (7.6). As Poythress notes, “Virtually all ages of the church and all branches of the church have believed that there are distinctive dispensations in God’s government of the world... The recognition of distinctions between different epochs is by no means unique to [dispensationalists].”<sup>10</sup>

Michael Vlach is in agreement; he even says one of the myths of dispensationalism is that “Dispensationalism is primarily about believing in seven dispensations.”<sup>11</sup> Vlach goes on to say, “believing in dispensations cannot be the sole distinguishing characteristic of dispensationalism since all Christians believe in dispensations.”<sup>12</sup> He continues:

John Feinberg points out the error in believing “that the word ‘dispensation’ and talk of differing administrative orders only appears in dispensational thinking.” Feinberg is also correct that “Defining the term ‘dispensation’ no more defines the essence of dispensationalism than defining the term ‘covenant’ explains the essence of Covenant Theology.”<sup>12</sup>

Brent Parker and Richard Lucas add, “dispensationalism cannot be defined based on the term or concept of dispensation.”<sup>13</sup>

## ***3. Are the dispensations dispensational?***

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<sup>10</sup> Glodo, 529.

<sup>11</sup> Michael Vlach, “What Is Dispensationalism Not?,” in *Christ’s Prophetic Plans: A Futuristic Premillennial Primer* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2012), 52. <sup>12</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>13</sup> Brent E. Parker and Richard J. Lucas, “Introduction to Covenantal and Dispensational Theologies: Four Views on the Continuity of Scripture,” in *Covenantal and Dispensational Theologies: Four Views on the Continuity of Scripture*, ed. Brent E. Parker and Richard J. Lucas, Spectrum Multiview Books (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic: An Imprint of InterVarsity Press, 2022), 12.

We saw above that the first three definitions of dispensationalism are primarily concerned with hermeneutics rather than dispensations. Blaising comments, “[t]hese hermeneutical developments have led to the search for a new definition of dispensationalism, since clear, plain, literal, normal hermeneutics had been identified as an element of the very essence of dispensational thought.”<sup>14</sup>

Cory Marsh has summed up this hermeneutical development well when he called dispensationalism a “diachronic biblical theology,”<sup>15</sup> This captures the major tenets of dispensationalism. Diachronic meaning “through time” captures the dispensational commitments to context and progressive revelation, and “biblical theology” captures the commitment to authorial intent and Scripture interpreting Scripture. I think that this would be adopted by most, if not all, dispensationalists as their theological method. With all of that being said, I will restate the question: are the dispensations dispensational?

Is the dispensational framework (i.e 7 dispensations) that is used to understand and interpret Scripture consistent with the hermeneutics and methodology of the system? I would say that it is not. Speaking on the dispensational divisions, Christopher Cone states, “these divisions are not expressly revealed in the text of Scripture, but are rather derived deductively.”<sup>16</sup> If that is true doesn’t that oppose current dispensational methodology?

Vlach adds his critique to the dispensations, “I have never been entirely convinced of the ‘test,’ ‘failure,’ ‘judgment’ criteria for determining a dispensation that is often a part of classical dispensationalism. This seems somewhat arbitrary and results in dispensations that are doubtful while omitting others that appear obvious (like the Eternal State).”<sup>17</sup> Paul Henebury proposes questions that dispensationalists should consider, “questions such as whether the dispensations are exegetically justified, or whether they are given theological prominence by the inspired writers...?”<sup>18</sup> The dispensational schisms appear somewhat arbitrary and imposed on scripture to the outside onlooker. Similar to the way a dispensationalist views the theological covenants of

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>15</sup> Cory M. Marsh and James I. Fazio, eds., *Discovering Dispensationalism* (SCS Press, 2023), 17.

<sup>16</sup> Christopher Cone, “Dispensational Definition & Division Revisited,” in *Dispensationalism Tomorrow & Beyond: A Theological Collection in Honor of Charles C. Ryrie*, ed. Christopher Cone (Ft. Worth, TX: Tyndale Seminary Press, 2008), 162.

<sup>17</sup> Michael Vlach, “What Is Dispensationalism Not?,” in *Christ’s Prophetic Plans: A Futuristic Premillennial Primer* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2012), 52–53.

<sup>18</sup> Paul Martin Henebury, “Is Dispensationalism Dying? (Pt. 1),” *Dr. Reluctant*, 8 March 2024, <https://drreluctant.wordpress.com/2024/03/08/is-dispensationalism-dying-pt-1/>.

covenant theology. Above all of that, the dispensational framework seems scandalous to the theological method of the system. Is the concept of a dispensation really at the heart of scripture?

There seem to be two main proposals of the essence and definition of dispensationalism. 1) Dispensationalism is primarily about dispensations. 2) Dispensationalism is primarily not about dispensations. Both of these definitions are at odds with each other and have major issues. If one chooses the former, then you have said almost nothing distinct about one's theological system, and if you go with the latter, you have only stated something in the negative and not actually defined the system. Thus, there is a lack of a good definition. This is a problem.

The third major issue with Dispensationalism, which demonstrates the need for a name change, is the lack of a used definition. Above, I noted my appreciation of “diachronic biblical theology” as a methodology of dispensationalism, but there is a lack of “dispensational” biblical and systematic theologies. The definition is not being utilized; it isn't being used.

Dispensationalists may be able to brag about having the best methodology, but they surely can not boast about using it. By this, I do not mean that dispensationalists are inconsistent in their exegesis (apart from the dispensational schisms critiqued above) but rather that they simply do not use it. Where are all the dispensational theological works and commentaries? This is what I mean by a lack of a used definition.

It seems that the majority of dispensationalists have spent the last half-century attempting to define the system and address misconceptions about the system rather than actually doing theology. Allow me to illustrate my point. Imagine if a debate arose in America about American vs. European football. Soccer players do not need to be given history lessons about proto-football thought in the founding fathers, and given the common myths and misconceptions about American football (although there is a place for that). What soccer players really need is to put some pads on and get tackled. What better way to show someone what football is all about, and what better way to excite someone about the game? Imagine a student, scholar, or layperson preparing a message that they are going to give in their Sunday school class. What theological works and commentaries do they grab off of their shelf? Unless they are teaching on end times in Daniel or Revelation, the probability is that they aren't going to be referencing anything written by a dispensationalist.

The lack of dispensational, systematic, and biblical theology isn't shocking considering one of the common claims of dispensationalists, which is what I believe to be the cause of the

theological drought. The claim is that dispensationalism doesn't affect areas of theology outside ecclesiology and eschatology. This issue is stated by Michael Vlach, although he is not stating it as an issue. "Dispensationalism does not have a direct relationship to every category of theology. It is inherently linked to some areas of theology, but is unrelated to others. It is primarily concerned with the doctrines of ecclesiology (church) and eschatology (end times). It is also closely linked with hermeneutics and principles of Bible interpretation."<sup>19</sup>

It is common practice for dispensationalists to claim that the system is primarily concerned with hermeneutics, ecclesiology, and eschatology and not so much with other areas of theology. John MacArthur goes so far as to claim, "Pure dispensationalism has no ramifications for the doctrines of God, man, sin, or sanctification. More significantly, true dispensationalism makes no relevant contribution to soteriology, or the doctrine of salvation."<sup>20</sup> and Richard Mayhue echoes, "One may be a five-point Calvinist and still be a consistent dispensationalist."<sup>21</sup>

Depending on what definition of dispensationalism the above authors are using, they might be correct. However, considering the hermeneutical and methodological development of dispensationalism, the above statements are logically and practically inconsistent. The proposal is that dispensational methodology doesn't affect any areas of theology outside ecclesiology and eschatology. How can that be? Are dispensationalists really content with the conclusion that non-dispensational methodology will get every area of theology right other than eschatology? This is an erroneous conclusion, and if it were true, dispensationalists should reconsider their own methodology.

This mindset has led to the lack of a used definition. It is as if dispensationalists have delegated theology proper, Christology, anthropology, soteriology, and other areas of theology to the Reformed theologians, while they kept ecclesiology and eschatology for themselves. This is not appealing to young theologians who are attracted to theology proper, Christology, and soteriology. Why would they become dispensational if dispensational theology has nothing to offer in the areas of theology that are most interesting and important to them?

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<sup>19</sup> Vlach, 40.

<sup>20</sup> John F. MacArthur Jr., *Faith Works: The Gospel according to the Apostles* (Dallas: Word, 1993), 222. Quoted from Vlach, 41.

<sup>21</sup> Richard L. Mayhue, "Who Is Wrong?" *A Review of John Gerstner's Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth*, *The Master's Seminary Journal* 3 (spring 1992): 89. Quoted from Vlach, 47.

This is not to say that dispensational theology would be completely different from reformed theology or traditional Baptist theology in every area outside eschatology. Hopefully, there would be a lot of agreement considering both are examining the same material, but surely there would be disagreement because of the different methodologies. Even for areas where there is total agreement on doctrine, the different methodologies would still matter.

For example, the five points of Calvinism are undoubtedly grounded in theological and philosophical presuppositions and grounded in deductive reasoning. This is not to say that they are all wrong necessarily, but it definitely is to say *they are derived from a non-dispensational methodology*. There is little doubt or denial that the doctrine of limited atonement is primarily driven by logic and deduction rather than clear exegesis. Again, this is not to say that the doctrine is necessarily wrong, but it is far different from a dispensationalist tracing the biblical data from Genesis to Revelation, showing the Scriptures that plainly teach Jesus died exclusively for a group chosen in eternity past.<sup>22</sup>

### **Conclusion to the Issues**

So far, we have seen three major issues with dispensationalism. 1) The lack of an agreed-upon definition. This is directly related to the second issue: 2) the lack of a good definition, which then flows directly into the third issue: 3) the lack of a used definition. Do not expect someone to write from a theological tradition that has neither an agreed-upon nor a good definition.

### **Proposal for Change**

I hope by now the dispensationalist can see the need for something to change. I understand that it would be somewhat inappropriate to critique the name and definition of dispensationalism but not offer better ones in its place. I would like to offer a starting place. Going back to the need for a new definition Craig Blaising offers good insight, “What is needed today is a new approach to defining dispensationalism. The issue is one not of excluding features shared by nondispensationalists, but of noting the emphases, values, and beliefs that together as a pattern form an abiding identity in the dispensational tradition.”<sup>23</sup> If dispensationalists are serious about

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<sup>22</sup> If the Scripture does or doesn't teach limited atonement is not the point of the example.

<sup>23</sup> Craig A. Blaising, “Dispensationalism: The Search for Definition,” in

their methodology and theology succeeding, especially with the next generation, then I would propose serious consideration about changing the name of the system and developing, defining, and agreeing on the fundamentals of the system.

First off, I believe a better framework than the dispensations is the biblical covenants, which can be arrived at inductively. I would like to see dispensationalists take the covenants back from covenant theology. Sadly, it seems that some have forfeited that battle:

“[D]ispensationalists, unlike covenantalists, do not believe that the “covenant” establishes the framework of the biblical story. This does not mean that dispensationalists deny the importance of covenants in the biblical story, but that they believe that covenants are subsidiary to another structural construction.”<sup>24</sup>

On the contrary, Michael Vlach states that two key elements of dispensationalism are: “The kingdom of God on earth is central to dispensational theology,” and “Dispensationalism asserts that the explicitly mentioned biblical covenants should be the starting point and priority for understanding God’s covenantal purposes in the Bible.”<sup>25</sup> Would dispensationalists really rather 7, or 8 or 12 (depending on the dispensationalist) dispensations as the ruling grid for which we read the bible or would we prefer the biblical covenants understood inductively and diachronically.

Paul Henebury agrees that the biblical covenants should replace the dispensations. “I personally believe the divine covenants are a sine qua non,”<sup>26</sup> and “I have a bias towards the biblical covenants. I am not sold on dispensations. I wish dispensations would be kicked to the sidelines and God’s covenants would become the backbone of the system.”<sup>27</sup> Henebury recently wrote a biblical theology where he makes his case:

It will not escape notice that since I believe the oaths of the covenants of God to be hermeneutically fixed and inviolable, many of my conclusions agree with those of a traditional Dispensational understanding of the Old Testament. This work therefore

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*Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church: The Search for Definition*, ed. Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 1992), 30.

<sup>24</sup> Glenn R. Kreider, “What is Dispensationalism?” in *Dispensationalism and the History of Redemption: A Developing and Diverse Tradition* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2015), D. Jeffrey Bingham, ed., 20.

<sup>25</sup> Michael J. Vlach, *Dispensational Hermeneutics: Interpreting Principles That Guide Dispensationalism’s Understanding of the Bible’s Storyline* (no place of publication: Theological Studies Press, 2023), 12-14.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Paul Martin Henebury, “Is Dispensationalism Dying? (Pt. 2),” *Dr. Reluctant*, 15 March 2024, <https://drreluctant.wordpress.com/2024/03/15/is-dispensationalism-dying-pt-2/>.

challenges dispensationalists to look again at whether dispensations structure the Bible or whether God's covenants do. As such Biblical Covenantalism is presented as a more biblically robust system than Dispensationalism, whether in its traditional, revised, or progressive forms. Dyed-in-the wool dispensationalists may balk at that assertion, but I show both that dispensations are unstable things, and that God's oaths are far more stable and given much greater emphasis in Scripture. I hope I will be given a hearing.<sup>28</sup>

“Biblical Covenantalism” as Henebury calls it revolves around the biblical covenants. That framework would be grounded in the text and easy for outsiders to see. I believe this is the way forward for the system. Henebury’s and Vlach’s works on biblical theology and the “New Creation Model” could serve as the start towards a new name and definition.

I anticipate resistance to this proposal considering dispensationalists’ conservative nature. To that, I would remind the readers of dispensational roots. Stanly Gundry writes, “[a]t its best, within dispensationalism has always been a dynamic that drives it to be constantly correcting itself in the light of Scripture,”<sup>29</sup> and “[d]ispensationalism has been in the process of change since its earliest origins within the Plymouth Bretheren movement of the nineteenth century.”<sup>30</sup>

Dispensationalism has been an evolving system from the very beginning. It would be non dispensational to refuse any change within the system. Adam Harwood’s comments about Baptists are applicable here, “Baptists are not bound to prior theological systems or views—regardless of the origination council, synod or theologian... Baptists are a maverick group willing to reject teachings affirmed by Christians for centuries if they conclude those teachings cannot be established from a plain reading of Scripture alone.”<sup>31</sup> This is the same sentiment carried by the dispensationalists of Niagara, the dispensationalists of the 1900’s and the dispensationalists today. Michael Williams writes:

Today, however, the old dispensationalist certainties are far less certain. While many wish to retain the designation ‘dispensationalist’, and seek to theologize from the tradition, there is nevertheless a genuine rethinking of dispensationalism as a theological system. This reevaluation is taking place on two fronts, the exegetical and the theological. Exegetically, dispensationalist theologians today are far more willing to re-think the

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<sup>28</sup> Paul Martin Henebury, *The Words of the Covenant: A Biblical Theology*, vol. 1 (Maitland, FL: Xulon Press Elite, 2021), 8.

<sup>29</sup> Stanley N. Gundry, “Foreword,” in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church: The Search for Definition*, ed. Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 1992), 11.

<sup>30</sup> Stanley N. Gundry, “Foreword,” in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church: The Search for Definition*, ed. Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 1992), 11.

<sup>31</sup> Adam Harwood, *Christian Theology: Biblical, Historical, and Systematic* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Academic, 2022), 16-17.

hermeneutical groundings of the system, and - even more crucially - appear willing to modify, change, or even scrap those elements of the system which do not proceed from sound exegetical inquiry. The question is no longer, "Does it agree with dispensationalist thought?" but rather, "Does it agree with Scripture?" Theologically, dispensationalists are willing to ask whether the worldview of their dispensationalist parents and grandparents was indeed the understanding of reality under which Moses or Paul operated.<sup>32</sup>

I submit therefore that changing the name of dispensationalism and agreeing on a new definition would be a dispensational thing to do.

### **How Change Fixes The Problems**

So far we have seen multiple issues within dispensationalism.

1. Lack of a agreed upon definition
2. Lack of a good definition
3. Lack of a used definition

A change of the system would be an obvious solution to the above three problems. If the influential dispensational theologians and schools would come together and agree upon a new name and a definition to go with it then I believe all three issues would be solved and the system would have a clear path forward.

The system could forever say goodbye to being labeled and thought of as the dispensationalists of old. They could say goodbye to accusations about two ways of salvation and the application of the sermon on the mount to the church. It would once-and-for-all remove dispensationalists from older dispensational misconceptions. Also, a system that has a name that agrees with the theology of the system, and a definition that isn't confusing and is agreed upon by its adherents would be far more appealing to younger theologians. On top of all of that, a framework of the biblical covenants would be there for anyone to see right in the text. Opponents of the system would have to take issue with the covenants of Scripture rather than the dispensations of theologians.

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<sup>32</sup> Michael D. Williams, *This World Is Not My Home: The Origins and Development of Dispensationalism* (Fearn, Ross-shire, Scotland: Mentor, 2003), 11-12.

## **CONCLUSION**

I am grateful for my dispensational upbringing. Approaching the Bible on its own terms and using a plain hermeneutic has allowed me to see the goodness and wisdom of God in His faithfulness to Israel and plans for the nations. In contrast, I have seen the ramifications when someone brings a theology to the text and does not interpret it literally. It leads ultimately to the nullification of the Word of God. For that reason I do hope that dispensational methodology regains prominence. For that to happen, proponents of dispensational methodology need to ask themselves if they are being consistent with their own methodology and should seriously consider changing the name and focus of the system.

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