

**Traditional Dispensationalism: The Only Framework for
a Consistently Accurate Outworking of Social Justice**

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ABSTRACT

Traditional Dispensationalism is the result of a consistent use of the Literal Grammatical-Historical (LGH) hermeneutic – a fact which is attested to by many¹, and even alluded to by some of those who do not hold to this same position². Only by knowing and consistently applying this hermeneutical model through the exegetical process will one possess the proper understanding and outworking of socio-political thought, including social justice.³ With so many other prominent hermeneutical approaches being followed by the Church⁴ – some unknowingly doing so – it is vital that this framework, and ultimately, its hermeneutical approach be defended as it properly leads the student of the Bible to a proper understanding of social justice.

It is understood that this position is greatly disagreed upon by respected theological scholars⁵, both intentionally and unintentionally, and it is the purpose of this paper to defend the position of this writer by using the Biblical text. Secondly, the hope is to provide implications by the conclusions from the LGH, as well as dangerous implications from other models.

¹ This is attested to by gentlemen such as Charles C. Ryrie in *Dispensationalism*, Christopher Cone in *Prolegomena to Biblical Hermeneutics*, and Thomas Robert in *Evangelical Hermeneutics*.

² Some examples would be Louis Berkhof in his *Systematic Theology* and Oswald T. Allis in *The Church and Israel*.

³ A proper hermeneutic consistently applied to the correct authority will lead to an accurate reality (metaphysics), ethic, and finally socio-political view.

⁴ Individuals within the universal Church are following hermeneutical models that, in a consistent outworking, will justify homosexuality (trajectory model [Emerging Movement]) and even universalism (canonical model [Catholic Church]).

⁵ Scholars who seek to handle the Scriptures well, but simply have a different approach are who would be in view in this statement. This would include John MacArthur, John Piper, Don Carson, etc.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

“One of the most marked features of Premillennialism in all its forms is the emphasis which it places on the literal interpretation of Scripture. It is the insistent claim of its advocates that only when interpreted literally is the Bible interpreted truly; and they denounce as ‘spiritualizers’ or ‘allegorizers’ those who do not interpret the Bible with the same degree of literalism as they do. None have made this charge more pointedly than Dispensationalists.”⁶

O.T. Allis may strongly disagree with dispensationalism and may have quite the misunderstanding (Cone, *Biblically Derived Premillennialism as a Necessary Condition for a Biblical Socio-Political Model* 2014) of a literal interpretation⁷, but the above remark shows the foundational difference between dispensationalism and any other outworking of Scripture. At the heart of the matter is, in fact, authority as can be displayed in viewing one’s hermeneutic method. What principles govern one’s interpretation of Scripture? If one approaches the Scripture with a literal grammatical-historical (LGH) hermeneutic, and consistently applies those principles, the outcome is sure to be that of Traditional Dispensationalism. If, however, these principles are compromised at any point, leading to inconsistency, the outcome is sure to be different – what that difference is depends on where the inconsistency occurs.

Proper hermeneutic principles applied should lead to exegesis of the text. It is the position of this author that the LGH hermeneutic is the only one by which a consistently accurate understanding of Scripture can be achieved. Because Scripture is sufficient for a complete

⁶ Oswald T. Allis, *Prophecy & The Church* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co. 1947), p. 16–17.

⁷ While the quoted statement is great, O.T. Allis later remarks that the literal interpretation of Scripture is impossible due in part to the use of figurative language within Scripture implying that a literal interpretation of Scripture eliminates this possibility. The LGH certainly takes into account figures of speech. Context is the guide for doing this correctly.

worldview, this does not apply only to matters of epistemology (the study of knowledge), metaphysics (the study of reality), or ethics (how one ought to act), but also to those topics of socio-political thought (how society ought to act) – topics such as politics, social inequality, race, and even social justice. If one is to have a consistently accurate view of even these topics, one must apply the LGH which results in a proper outworking of Scripture – Traditional Dispensationalism.

If the authority to determine meaning is not consistently given to the proper person, then the outworking of said worldview will also be inconsistent. If the interpretation of said authority is not consistent throughout the worldview, said worldview will continue to be inconsistent. In order to achieve a Biblical understanding of social justice, one must be consistent in both authority (who determines truth) and hermeneutics (how should one understand the communication of said authority).

Before the subject is unveiled any further, definitions need to be determined. As Robert Thomas adequately established in his work *Evangelical Hermeneutics*, there has been much confusion about the meaning of terms such as hermeneutics, exegesis, and eisegesis.⁸ It is not the point of this work to argue over such definitions, but for clarities sake, it is important to identify what is meant by the author whenever such terms are utilized.

Hermeneutics point to a set of principles utilized for the translation or interpretation of any given communication. Hermeneutics is not the act of interpretation, but the rules which govern that act. In fact, the practice of implementing valid hermeneutic principles resulting in the receiving of meaning from the received communication is exegesis. Eisegesis is just the opposite – the implementation of *invalid* hermeneutic principles resulting in the *injection* of meaning *into*

⁸ Robert L. Thomas, *Evangelical Hermeneutics*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2002), p. 20–27.

the received communication. Authorial intent is the intended meaning of the communication from the author which can only be discovered through exegesis, as exegesis is that which receives the meaning from the communication. The author is the determiner of the meaning of the communication, not the reader or receiver of said communication. However, eisegesis flips this claim. Any eisegesis takes the authority of determining meaning away from the author or originator of the communication and gives that authority to someone or something else.

It is important to note here; the term authority has already appeared a few times. To add to the importance of the topic at hand, the LGH is the only hermeneutic model which consistently views God, the ultimate author of the Scriptures⁹, as the authority in determining truth throughout the entirety of the Biblical worldview. For example, the Roman Catholic Church follows a canonical hermeneutic model which gives the authority to the Church¹⁰. Reformed pastor's like Kevin DeYoung give authority to their theological system while also claiming *sola scriptura*¹¹. Emergent theologians like Brian McLaren and Phyllis Tickle give authority to the culture, following a sort of trajectory model of hermeneutics claiming that meaning should shift as culture shifts¹². Progressive Dispensational theologians give authority to a theological system as well which is shown in their complementary hermeneutic model – reading the New Testament back into the Old Testament¹³.

The LGH is the only hermeneutic which truly gives the authority of determining the meaning of the Scriptures to the author, and sets the receiver of said communication in the role

⁹ 2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:20–21; Proverbs 2:6

¹⁰ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, (1994), p. 31–39.

¹¹ See Kevin DeYoung's article, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/your-theological-system-should-tell-you-how-to-exegete/>

¹² Phyllis Tickle, *The Great Emergence: How Christianity Is Changing and Why*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2012), p. 150–151.

¹³ An example of this would be their view on the New Covenant. See Bock's *Current Messianic Activity*.

of receiving that meaning – it truly results in exegesis, uniquely placing it as the hermeneutic which will provide the reader with a consistently accurate (aka Biblical) understanding of socio-political thought. It is the goal of this work to defend this stance, showing the necessity of Traditional Dispensationalism, as it is the result of the LGH hermeneutic, to receive a consistently accurate understanding of socio-political thought resulting in the proper outworking of that very topic.

CHAPTER 2: THE BASIS FOR TRADITIONAL DISPENSATIONALISM

“So one would agree that ‘orthodoxy is that branch of Christendom which limits the ground of religious authority to the Bible.’ The Scriptures contain the objective revelation of God and are therefore the basis of authority for the conservative Protestant.”¹⁴

As has been discussed at the 2014 Council on Dispensational Hermeneutics, every worldview starts with the foundation of authority. As Dr. Christopher Cone states, “Epistemology, as the study of knowledge and the first step in the worldview inquiry, helps us arrive at understanding how we can know with certainty the answers all the other steps. In short, epistemology considers the source of authority for all other inquiry.”¹⁵ It all starts here. As previously stated, if the authority is given to the wrong person or thing, falsehood will be achieved.

So, naturally, the question must be answered, “Who rightfully holds the authority to determine truth?” It is this truth by which mankind should live¹⁶. This question seems to find an answer throughout the pages of Scripture, starting in Genesis 1¹⁷ through to Revelation 22¹⁸.

Basis of Authority Found in God

Scripture begins in Genesis 1 with a fact which attests to the authority in which God possesses, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”¹⁹ In the act of creation, God demonstrates his authority over all that exists using words. God speaks, and those words are the

¹⁴ Charles Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999) p. 22

¹⁵ Christopher Cone, "Biblically Derived Premillennialism as a Necessary Condition for a Biblical Socio-Political Model." *Council on Dispensational Hermeneutics*, 2014.

¹⁶ John 17:17

¹⁷ Genesis 1:1 demonstrates the authority of God.

¹⁸ Revelation 22:13 is God's claim to authority based on who He is.

¹⁹ Genesis 1:1

cause for action and creation. This fact is attested to throughout the entirety of the Scriptures. God points to creation in a dialogue with Job about authority.²⁰ God's authority is attested through the topic of creation in multiple places throughout the Psalms.²¹ Arguably most notably in Psalm 24:1–2. All is God's because He created it all.

Matthew attests to Jesus' authority which is grounded in and granted by God²². This authority is also seen throughout the epistles. Paul attests to the fact that all authority comes from God in Romans 13:1. He, also attests to all authority being given to Jesus throughout his other epistles²³. First Corinthians 15:20–28 is an interesting group of passages which point to the nature of God's authority in relationship with Jesus. God has given Jesus authority, or has made “all things subjected to Him” but Jesus is still subjected to the one who has made all things subjected to Him – namely God the Father. God is the final authority, as can be seen throughout the entirety of Scriptures. As the Scriptures are in fact God-breathed, words spoken from God Himself²⁴, they carry that same authority – the authority of God. The authority of Scripture is found in its inspiration – those words which come directly from God. Just as God's words were authoritative in Genesis 1, the words which were given to His creation through Scripture hold that same authority.

Biblical Sufficiency – Does it matter with Socio-Political Thought?

The question then arises, “Is God's word sufficient for issues of socio-political thought?” Does the final authority have anything to say about matters of socio-political thought? If it does, then those things are authoritatively true, and God's people are subject to what it says²⁵.

²⁰ Job 38–41

²¹ Psalm 29, 47, 93, etc.

²² Matthew 11:27; 28:18

²³ Ephesians 1:20–22; Philippians 2:9; Colossians 2:10; 1 Corinthians 15:20–28

²⁴ 2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:20–21

²⁵ James 1:22; John 14:23; Romans 12:1–2; 2 Timothy 4:1–8

Second Timothy 3:16–17 Explored

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work. - 2 Timothy 3:16–17

Second Timothy 3:16–17 is key for understanding Biblical sufficiency and even the extent in which it applies. Scripture is inspired by God, or “God-breathed.” This can also be affirmed (as if it needs to be) in 2 Peter 1:20–21. Peter explains the method in which Scripture was given to mankind – namely, “...no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.” God used men as an instrument to vocalize or write down His very words making the words of Scripture “God-breathed.” This fact is what attests to the authority by which the Scriptures possess.

Paul continues in 2 Timothy 3:17 to explain the purpose of the Scriptures – namely, “so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.” Adequate comes from the Greek word, ἄρτιος, meaning to be well fitted for some function or able to meet all demands²⁶. Equipped comes from the Greek word, ἐξηρτισμένος, meaning to be made ready for service²⁷. The Scriptures are written with the purpose of equipping every man of God with what’s necessary for faith and practice – being made able to meet all the demands of the good works God has predestined for them. In order to understand this more fully, an exploration of the term “good works” ought to take place.

Ephesians 2:10 tells the believer that they were “created in Christ Jesus for good works...” This passage comes directly after the famous statement so often quoted in Ephesians 2:8–9, “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift

²⁶ Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000). A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature (3rd ed., p. 136). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

²⁷ *ibid*

of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.” Christians are saved by grace through faith with the purpose of completing good works.

Colossians 1:9–10 explains the prayer in which Paul had been praying over the church in Colossae. Paul had been praying that the Colossians would be “filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding.” The reason is so that the Colossians would live in such a way that was pleasing to God and resulted in the bearing of fruit in every good work. Paul prays that the Colossians would be filled with the knowledge of God’s will so they could live a life that is pleasing to God and results in bearing fruit in every good work. Christians are to walk in these good works.

In multiple places throughout Scripture, it’s made obvious that the individual good works involve interaction between individual ethics and socio-political thought. While 2 Timothy 3:16–17 speaks to Timothy, the good works which God had predestined²⁸ for him would involve interaction with communities. For example, Timothy dealt directly, as an authority figure, with the Church in Ephesus²⁹.

Socio-political action is seen throughout the Bible – both Old and New Testament. Adam, Eve, and God made a community and a particular ethic was found within that community³⁰. Moses was given a particular ethic for interaction with the nation of Egypt³¹. Israel was given a particular ethic for both internal interactions as well as external interactions. The Church isn’t any different. God has given the Church, and the members of that body, a socio-political ethic as the Church interacts with different communities and with its individual members. These communities are given a particular order of priority.

²⁸ Ephesians 2:10

²⁹ 1 Timothy 1:3

³⁰ Genesis 1:26–3:24

³¹ Exodus 3:14–22

Galatians 6:10 lays this priority out, “So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith.” In this passage, there are two distinct communities – namely, all people and the household of the faith. The Church is given priority, and then secondarily, while we have opportunity, all people. Not only this, but Christians are to “do good.” This is an ethical statement which denotes a socio-political ethic as the context connects doing good with all people – a community of people. Christians are expected to interact with not only the community of the Church, but also the community of the lost. Scripture is not shy on giving guidelines for this interaction.

For example,³² Romans 12–13 gives great socio-political guidance and imperatives to the Christian. Chapter 12 really points to the Church³³ while chapter 13 points to the state³⁴, or governing authorities. In chapter 12, the Christian is to think with sober judgement³⁵, understand he/she is one of many members³⁶, exercise their gifts (which differ among different members)³⁷, love without hypocrisy³⁸, abhor or hate evil³⁹, hold fast to what is good⁴⁰, love their brothers and sisters in Christ⁴¹, give preference to the other considering them more highly than themselves⁴², continue in diligence, be excited or fervent while serving the Lord in spirit⁴³, rejoice in hope,

³² This example is not to exhaust the Bible’s discussion on issues of society, but simply to prove the Bible does have things to say about these topics relating to society.

³³ Romans 12:4

³⁴ Romans 13:1

³⁵ Romans 12:3

³⁶ Romans 12:4–5

³⁷ Romans 12:6–8

³⁸ Romans 12:9

³⁹ *ibid*

⁴⁰ *ibid*

⁴¹ Romans 12:10

⁴² *ibid*

⁴³ Romans 12:11

persevere in tribulation, constantly pray⁴⁴, contribute hospitably to the needs of the saints⁴⁵, bless those who persecute them⁴⁶, rejoice and weep with those who rejoice and weep⁴⁷, be of the same mind with the other members and never think more highly of themselves than they ought⁴⁸, not get revenge⁴⁹, take care of the enemy, and hold fast to what is good⁵⁰.

Chapter 13 continues with, “Every person is to be in subjection to governing authorities.” Interestingly, it begins with “Every person” which includes not only Christians, but unbelievers as well. All people, including Christians, are to be subject, as a junior officer is subject to a senior officer, to every governing authority. Why is this the case? Because all authority comes from God⁵¹. Those who are in political power have been placed there by God as his ministers⁵². All people who oppose that authority oppose the ordinance of God and will receive judgement accordingly⁵³. Government exists for the good of humanity⁵⁴. The imperative in these verses, however, is found in verse 1 which sets the stage for the remainder of the chapter – be subject to the governing authorities. This is reiterated in Titus 3:1, “Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed...” Government is a temporal minister of God to enforce good and punish evil, a temporal minister in which the members of the Church are to be subject to⁵⁵.

⁴⁴ Romans 12:12

⁴⁵ Romans 12:13

⁴⁶ Romans 12:14

⁴⁷ Romans 12:15

⁴⁸ Romans 12:16

⁴⁹ Romans 12:17

⁵⁰ Romans 12:18–19

⁵¹ Romans 13:1

⁵² *ibid*

⁵³ Romans 13:2

⁵⁴ Romans 13:3

⁵⁵ Romans 13:1–7 It’s interesting to point out here – the Church is subject to the entity which is to enforce societal justice putting the Church outside of that role. It is not the role of the Church to enforce social justice.

Subjection is not the only duty the Christian has toward the government or society. In fact, Paul continues in Romans 13:8 to give the Christian's duty to the individual at a society level (those inside or outside the Church) – namely, to do everything out of love. Christians are to love their neighbor, no matter the person. This is a continuation of the statement found in Romans 13:7, “Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax *is due*; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor.” Christians are not to owe anything to anyone, with the exception of love, not in the sense that Christians should withhold love, but that the Christian is unable to fulfill the debt of love. Loving the neighbor is the fulfillment of righteousness toward each other. This is the reason for Paul's statement in Romans 13:9⁵⁶. Of course, as already discussed, Galatians gives Christians a state of priority – namely, the Church first. Romans 12:9 tells the Christian to love the Church (the whole body) and Romans 13:8 tells the Christian to love everyone (all of mankind).

Paul concludes chapter 13 with a hope to the coming of Jesus Christ, which is the Christian motivation for persevering. It is whenever the King of the coming kingdom arrives that social issues will be remedied⁵⁷. Whenever an unrighteous society is no longer leading is whenever the desired society will exist⁵⁸. The kingdom is not here or now in any way, shape, or form⁵⁹, but Christians can have hope knowing that it is coming, and it's coming in God's perfect

⁵⁶ The NASB inserts *the* before “law” in both instances within this verse. The definite article is not present in the Greek text, but inserting the definite article points one to the Law of Moses. This may be a good translation and it may not, but either way the principle still stands. However, the lack of the definite article seems to give credence to the principle which is present. This verse is not a proof text for the Christian being accountable to some “moral” law which is part of the Mosaic covenant. That law was given to Israel and has been fulfilled in Christ. However, the principle remains – righteousness toward our neighbors can be summed up in the statement, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

⁵⁷ 1 Corinthians 15:50–58; Isaiah 9:7

⁵⁸ Revelation 21:1–6

⁵⁹ 2 Samuel 7:16; Psalm 132:13, 17

timing⁶⁰. Paul knows the audience he is writing to, those who are in Rome. In typical Pauline fashion, while breaking such hard news to a group of individuals who aren't necessarily interested in submitting to a Roman authority, Paul reminds them of the coming authority⁶¹.

All this to say, the Bible is certainly sufficient to inform the believer in all things pertaining to faith and practice. The Bible is sufficient for even those matters which would fall under socio-political thought like race and social justice.

The Bible is Sufficient to Identify Proper Hermeneutics

All of these topics are vital to understanding the basis for Traditional Dispensationalism. The Traditional Dispensationalist believes the Bible is absolutely authoritative and is sufficient. This authority and sufficiency even apply to how one is supposed to interpret the Scriptures themselves. If one is going to claim sufficiency, they must understand that the sufficiency of Scripture must include the means to identify proper interpretive practices.

“One of the most marked features of Premillennialism in all its forms is the emphasis which it places on the literal interpretation of Scripture. It is the insistent claim of its advocates that only when interpreted literally is the Bible interpreted truly; and they denounce as ‘spiritualizers’ or ‘allegorizers’ those who do not interpret the Bible with the same degree of literalism as they do. None have made this charge more pointedly than Dispensationalists.”⁶²

While O.T. Allis contributes the literal interpretation of Scripture to those who hold a Premillennial view of eschatology, it certainly doesn't stop there. A literal (normative/plain) interpretation of Scripture is the mark of not only a Premillennialist, but a Traditional

⁶⁰ Revelation 20:1–6

⁶¹ This, along with other texts, lends a hand to the Christian motivation for issues of socio-political thought. Jesus' return, the eschatology of the Christian faith, is the motivation for right living – not only in the Church, but also among members of society. See

⁶² Oswald T. Allis, *Prophecy & The Church* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co. 1947), 16–17.

Dispensationalist,⁶³ as O.T. Allis states at the end of his quote. While O.T. Allis would disagree with the sentiment of a literal interpretation (at least within the realm of prophecy), it is this very fact that brings weight to the statement. Critics of Dispensationalism recognize that Dispensationalist consistently hold to a literal hermeneutic. In fact, famous covenant theologian Louis Berkhof makes quite the statement in the realm of the literal interpretation of prophecy, “The theory based on a literal interpretation of the prophetic delineations of the future of Israel and of the Kingdom of God, which is entirely untenable.” The idea that a literal interpretation of prophecy is “entirely untenable” without any justification⁶⁴ of the statement is telling. Traditional Dispensationalism, as attested to by many, is simply the outworking of a consistently applied literal grammatical-historical hermeneutic.

Many other systems of interpretation would in part hold to a literal approach to Scripture, but the difference is where does one part with this method of interpretation. Do they stop with prophecy? Do they stop with Roman-Greco bios?⁶⁵ Do they stop with Hebrew poetry? If so, based on what authority?

Take R.C. Sproul for example in his book, *Knowing Scripture*. He opens up a section titled “Interpreting the Bible Literally” with a scenario where someone asks him, “You don’t take the Bible literally, do you?”⁶⁶ He later states, “...I answer, ‘Of course.’” However, he closes the section by stating, “...and above all, we must be carefully involved in what is called *genre analysis*.” While figures of speech, literary structure, and the like are the “grammatical” aspect

⁶³ O.T. Allis is still accurate in his first sentence as Traditional Dispensationalist hold to Premillennial view of eschatology. It’s a shame that he limited to simply eschatology.

⁶⁴ Berkhof seems to point to other books that point to this “truth” but never does give a defense for his position. The short defense he does give simply points to things that Berkhof sees as “absurdities” but never gives a biblical case for seeing the millennium in another way.

⁶⁵ To qualify the gospels as Roman-Greco bios is in itself the product of eisegesis – a departure from the LGH. The Bible doesn’t claim this type of literature, and to impose it on the text is improper and very dangerous.

⁶⁶ R.C. Sproul, *Knowing Scripture*, (Downer Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1978) p. 48

of the LGH, imposing genres on the Scriptures which *aren't identified by Scripture* imposes an outside authority, that which isn't the authority of God. This is the crux of the argument when discussing topics such as the nature of creation, the historicity of Jonah, and understanding the millennium. If the gospels are Greco-roman bios, which were bios of respected individuals which inflated the truth about their lives, did Jesus really rise from the dead? Which aspects are inflated, and which are not? If Revelation is apocalyptic literature instead of prophecy, as it claims,⁶⁷ is John actually writing to physical churches in Revelation 2:1–3:21?

So, the question remains, is this the way in which God intended for communication, specifically His communication to man, to be understood? Dr. Christopher Cone presented a paper which explained results of a project where he sought every instance in which God spoke in the book of Genesis and Job. Due to the massive amount of time in which these books cover (2,000 years), it acts as a great sample size to see how God would desire to be understood. As the speech acts were examined, the response would be the determining factor of how the recipient of said speech act understood the communication. C1's represent that time in which the recipient of the information responded literally (pointing to a literal or plain interpretation of the communication) and C2's represent that time in which the recipient of the information responded figuratively (pointing to a non-literal interpretation of the communication).

“In examination of the ninety-four passages in Genesis and Job that record Divine speech acts, the evidence is overwhelming (eighty-one C1's to absolutely zero C2's) that God intended for His words to be taken at face value, using a plain-sense interpretive approach. The hermeneutic method that reflects this straightforward methodology has become known as the literal grammatical historical hermeneutic.”⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Revelation 1:3

⁶⁸ Christopher Cone, *The Precedent for Literal Grammatical Historical Hermeneutics in Genesis*, <http://www.drcone.com/2015/04/13/the-genesis-account-as-early-model-for-scriptural-hermeneutics/>

The results of the study are astounding and give great exegetical support to the LGH hermeneutic as God's intended method of communication. This method recognizes the authorial intent being communicated in a plain and normative sense. Traditional Dispensationalism is simply the outworking of this hermeneutic consistently applied to the entirety of Scripture – that Scripture which is authoritative and sufficient for all of the Biblical worldview including socio-political thought.

The hermeneutic which is exegetically derived is the hermeneutic which is reliable and true. Because the LGH is exegetically derived, it is reliable and true uniquely making Traditional Dispensationalism the only framework for a consistently accurate understanding of socio-political thought among other topics. While admittedly, this argumentation can be applied to any topic, not just social justice or race, this fact lends a hand to the point of this work. Switching hermeneutic method whenever topics of social justice are the subject of discussion is not called for or warranted within the Scriptures. To come to an exegetical understanding of social justice or race, one that is pulled from the text itself, the LGH must be applied. Prophecy is not an exception. Creation is not an exception. Socio-political thought is not an exception. The system which does this effectively and consistently is Traditional Dispensationalism. No other system of theology can accurately make such a claim.

CHAPTER 3: A VIEW AT THE DIFFERENCES

While Traditional Dispensationalism holds to a consistent use of the LGH hermeneutic, an exclusive claim, like this paper is making, is cause for an overview of other systems. For that reason, four different systems will be viewed as they seem to be popular within today's discussions of socio-political thought. First, the canonical model of hermeneutics will be viewed as it's found within the Roman Catholic Church. Next, the theological method will be viewed as it's found within the Reformed tradition. Third, the trajectory hermeneutic will be viewed as it's found within the Emerging movement⁶⁹ from theologians like Phyllis Tickle and Scot McKnight. Lastly, Progressive Dispensationalism will be looked at. The questions to be answered are, "does the system make God the final authority?", "does the system prove the sufficiency of Scripture?", and "does the system consistently apply the hermeneutic provided by Scripture?"

Canonical Hermeneutic

The canonical hermeneutic is the hermeneutic which places the authority of interpretation to the Church. Church Tradition is then elevated to the same authority as Scripture. This is found most prominently in the Roman Catholic Church⁷⁰. In fact, "As a result [of the nature of Holy Tradition] the Church, to whom the transmission and interpretation of Revelation is entrusted, 'does not derive her certainty about all revealed truths from the holy Scriptures alone. Both

⁶⁹ While the emerging movement isn't booming in today's society, the thoughts of theologians like Brian McClaren, Phyllis Tickle, and Scot McKnight are still found within society.

⁷⁰ The Catechism of the Catholic Church will be in view as we look at RCC doctrine. The Catechism says of itself on page 11, "This catechism aims at presenting an organic synthesis of the essential and fundamental contents of Catholic doctrine, as regards both faith and morals, in the light of the Second Vatican Council and the whole of the Church's Tradition. Its principal sources are the Sacred Scriptures, the Fathers of the Church, the liturgy, and the Church's Magisterium."

Scripture and Tradition must be accepted and honored with *equal sentiments of devotion and reverence*” [emphasis mine]. At the very least, the RCC doctrine places the Tradition of the Church and Scripture on equal levels of authority which does not find its origins within Scripture⁷¹. This fact alone is enough to disqualify RCC doctrine from a reliable, consistent Biblical understanding of topics. Because of this shift in authority, Scripture clearly isn’t sufficient (or there would be no need for Holy Tradition) and the hermeneutic is derived from the Church, not the Scriptures.

Theological Hermeneutic

The theological hermeneutic is that which filters the truths of Scripture through the grid of one’s theological system. This is much easier to do than one may think but must be avoided! Kevin DeYoung, a reformed pastor, advocates for this position in one of his articles titled, “*Your Theological System Should Tell You How to Exegete*”⁷²

Without a systematic theology how can you begin to know what to do with the eschatology of Ezekiel or the sacramental language in John 6 or the psalmist’s insistence that he is righteous and blameless? As a Christian I hope that my theology is open to correction, but *as a minister I have to start somewhere*. We all do. *For me that means starting with Reformed theology and my confessional tradition and sticking with that unless I have really good reason not to*.

So rather than pretend to be theologically unprejudiced, *why not acknowledge our own preconceptions and use them in the exegetical process?* If we are honest about our theological systems we will be better equipped *to reformulate our grid* when it doesn’t work and better equipped to deal openly with the hard spots in the text. *Without a system we will approach a passage like James 2:24 and get it wrong*; or just as likely, we will ignore the difficult questions exploding in everyone’s brains. Theology does not have to distort exegesis. Done well, it can help provide guardrails for the interpretive process, honor the unity of Scripture, and throw a spotlight on the most important and most difficult issues arising from the Word of God.

⁷¹ The crux of the argument is found on Apostolic Succession. Ultimately, it all comes down to one verse, Matthew 16:18. However, the context and grammar of the passage seems to show that Peter is not the rock by which Jesus will build His church but Jesus Himself is that rock.

⁷² Kevin DeYoung, *Your Theological System Should Tell You How to Exegete*, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/your-theological-system-should-tell-you-how-to-exegete/>

Theology certainly has a place in one's exegesis, but it is not a grid by which Scripture should be ran through. Exegesis *must* inform one's theology – not the other way around. John 6 can be interpreted without a theological system. It must be approached in a literal sense, taking into account the rules of grammar and syntax, the context around it, and let the results inform the theological system. To start with a theological system is to let that system inform and determine the exegesis – which doesn't result in exegesis at all, but eisegesis. How can one identify falsehood within the system if the system is informing the interpretation? The authority has been removed from the text, and in this case, been given to “Reformed theology and my confessional tradition.”⁷³

An example of this is found in Kevin DeYoung's understanding of the 144,000 in Revelation 7. A quick perusal of his article⁷⁴ on this matter enlightens the reader to a terrible form of eisegesis. He starts his article by stating, “The 144,000 ‘sealed *from every tribe of the sons of Israel*’ (Rev. 7:4) represent the entire community of the redeemed” [emphasis mine]. He then proceeds to give his reasoning for such a claim by utilizing different texts as launching pads into reasoning which some would see as logical. For example, the claim is made where because Satan seals all of his followers, it would make sense that God does the same – as if God is controlled by the acts of Satan. He also makes a claim that, “the 144,000 are called the servants of our God (Rev. 7:3). There is no reason to make the 144,000 any more restricted than that.” Well, the following text (Rev. 7:4–8) gives plenty of reason as it specifically identifies which tribes these 144,000 are coming from along with the amount of people from each tribe.

⁷³ *ibid*

⁷⁴ Kevin DeYoung, *Theological Primer: The 144,000*, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/theological-primer-the-144000/>.

The conclusion that the 144,000 represent “the whole of God’s pure and perfectly redeemed servants” cannot be pulled from the text but seems to be a product of a theological system being imposed on the text – namely, a Reformed system.

The Emerging Movement’s Ideology

While the terminology, the Emerging Movement, doesn’t seem to be over popular these days, the ideology which was presented seems to be alive and potentially thriving. The Emerging Movement ideology stems from a liberal, postmodern ideology, embracing relativism and follows a trajectory model of hermeneutics. The trajectory model essentially states that meaning shifts with the culture. Culture is the determiner of meaning and should guide the reader’s understanding. Kirk MacGregor recently published a book on Contemporary Theology and says this, “...texts and experiences of the divine can and should assume new meaning based on the changing situation of the individual or society.⁷⁵” They conclude that the Kingdom of God is established on earth based on social transformation. The culture needs to continue to shift, and whenever it reaches the pinnacle, the kingdom will be ushered in. Like the others, their root issue is the shift in authority. The culture determines truth, not God. Truth is relative, and if the culture shifts, so does truth. Phyllis Tickle, a proponent for the Emerging Movement, writes this, “...sola scriptura which, although used so well by the Great Reformation originally, is now seen as hopelessly outmoded or insufficient...⁷⁶”

⁷⁵ Kirk MacGregor, *Contemporary Theology: An Introduction: Classical, Evangelical, Philosophical, and Global Perspectives*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019.

⁷⁶ Phyllis Tickle, *The Great Emergence: How Christianity Is Changing and Why*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2012), p. 150–151.

Progressive Dispensationalism

“The bottom line is that a choice between dispensationalism and progressive dispensationalism amounts to a choice of which system of hermeneutics an interpreter chooses to follow.”⁷⁷

“For whatever reason, proponents of progressive dispensationalism sometimes call their hermeneutics ‘grammatical-historical,’ but they mean something quite different by the phrase.”⁷⁸

“Note how preunderstanding again injects a subjectivism into progressive dispensationalism that is not present in traditional grammatical-historical interpretation.”⁷⁹

While the previous three comparisons have been with somewhat more obvious opponents of Traditional Dispensationalism, Progressive Dispensationalism also falls short in its interpretive method, and ultimately in the authority by which it interprets Scripture. While Progressive Dispensationalists claim the LGH hermeneutic, claiming God as the interpretive authority, they openly claim a multiple meaning approach. The idea of single meaning is vital to the LGH hermeneutic as the only valid meaning is that which was intended by the author. The twelfth chapter of Robert Thomas’s work,⁸⁰ *Evangelical Hermeneutics*, makes a great case in this area. For example, the Progressive Dispensationalist (Saucy, Blaising, and Bock being examples) redefine historical within the LGH. Traditional Dispensationalist define historical as being that time in which the author was writing. Instead of letting the original setting in which the original author was writing freeze the meaning of the text, “Bock concludes that textual meaning is dynamic, not static—ever changing through the addition of new meanings.”⁸¹

⁷⁷ Robert L. Thomas, *Evangelical Hermeneutics*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2002), p. 351

⁷⁸ Ibid p. 353

⁷⁹ Ibid p. 354

⁸⁰ As Robert Thomas notes, “This chapter is adapted and updated from ‘A Critique of Progressive Dispensational Hermeneutics,’ in *When the Trumpet Sounds*, ed. Thomas Ice and Timothy Demy.”

⁸¹ Robert L. Thomas, *Evangelical Hermeneutics*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2002), p. 358

Progressive Dispensationalist often refer to a dual prophecy. This means that there is a fulfillment for the time it was prophesied and then there is an ultimate fulfillment. If a single prophecy has two fulfillments, then there is, by default, two meanings. Once a text is given more than one meaning, the determination of how many meanings something has becomes up to the reader, taking the authority away from the author and giving it to the reader. That transition is from authorial intent to reader's response – a transition that can't be taken lightly. Bock openly admits such a practice by claiming it is due to the fact that revelation is progressive. As revelation progresses, new meaning is added to the old meaning, in turn creating new meaning – multiple meanings. However, progressive revelation makes no such claim. Progressive revelation is simply teaching that new revelation is given through time with its own single meaning – not changing the meaning of previous revelation.

The result of this hermeneutic is vastly different from that of the traditional dispensationalist. Ultimately, however, it's important to note that the complementary method, which if employed brings multiple meanings to a passage, taking the reader out of the role of receiving meaning and placing them in the role of determining meaning. The authority is stripped from the text itself and given to the receiver of the communication – the very definition of eisegesis.

CONCLUSION

God is the final authority in and for all things. God has communicated through Scripture – it is in fact, God-breathed. Because of this, Scripture carries the authority of the Creator of all things. Everything which is contained within its pages are authoritative to mankind and should be understood for the foundation and proper outworking of the entire Biblical worldview for the Bible is also sufficient for to properly inform all aspects of that worldview. This includes issues of socio-political thought which includes social justice, race, and the like. Biblical authority and sufficiency also require that the interpretive method be exegetically derived. The Bible models a literal approach to understanding and more specifically the Literal Grammatical-Historical method of interpretation. The Literal Grammatical-Historical method of interpretation consistently applied results in Traditional Dispensationalism. Because of this, Traditional Dispensationalism is uniquely the system by which a consistently accurate understanding of life can be provided, including issues of social justice.

If the LGH is not consistently applied to the whole of Scripture, Traditional Dispensationalism will not result. What results depends upon where the inconsistency occurs. Regardless, the inconsistency shows a shift in authority, which is the root issue, demonstrating that if all authority is given to God, then Traditional Dispensationalism will result. This means that Traditional Dispensationalism is that system which is rightfully grounded in God's

authority⁸². As God is the authority for determining truth, He rightfully provides a consistently accurate outworking of social justice.

It was not the goal of this work to define social justice, but simply to defend the hermeneutical approach which will bring anyone to the right understanding of social justice if employed. There are many different methods of interpretation, but God has given man one that He expects them to utilize, and it seems to be the LGH. This hermeneutic will lead the reader to an absolute, reliable, and consistently accurate (Biblical) understanding of the Scriptures and will lead them to Traditional Dispensationalism as it is the result of the LGH consistently applied to the whole of Scripture.

⁸² This is not to say that those who claim to adhere to Traditional Dispensationalism all possess all the best answers. However, it is to say that if the LGH is properly, consistently, and accurately applied, the right answers will be achieved.

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