

ASK FOR THE OLD PATHS #16

Introduction

We are coming to the end of our teaching series on “Ask for the Old Paths”, a text taken from Jeremiah 6:16, where God speaks to His people on how to recover themselves and their nation.

Killing Sacred Cows

In returning to the ‘old paths’, we have had to kill some sacred cows along the way. What do we mean by term, ‘sacred cow’?

‘Sacred Cow’

An idea, custom, or institution held to be above criticism.

You might have missed our messages in this series on killing sacred cows like ‘cheap grace’, the ‘sinner’s prayer’, and the ‘secret rapture’; but today I want to tackle a teaching system that is such a sacred cow many will be angry if you come to kill it or even touch it. I’m entitling this teaching...

“Dismantling Dispensationalism”

I know that I run the risk of offending many folks tonight, because most American Christians are Dispensationalists, whether they know it or not. But...

Theme

I believe that few things have hindered the effectiveness of the Church and the cause of Christ more than the unbiblical, deceptive doctrines of the theological system known as Dispensationalism.

Dispensationalism can only be dismantled by exposing it for what it is.

Ernest C. Reisinger, “Lord and Christ”

“It is my conviction that many who are presently disposed toward dispensationalism would not be victims of the system if they were better acquainted and informed about the system and its history, it’s theological roots, and the doctrinal errors it has spawned.”

With that in mind, I want to answer 3 questions about...

Dispensationalism

What Is It?

What's wrong with it?

Why does it need to be dismantled?

I. What Is It?

1. The first thing you need to know is that Dispensationalism is what we call a 'new path'; a system of interpreting the Bible that did not appear in the 1st 1800 years of church history!

R.C. Sproul

Dispensational theology is a nineteenth-century aberration (departure) away from historic, orthodox, Biblical Christianity.

2. Where did it come from?

Marvin Rosenthal and Kevin Howard

Examining the Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church

As an established view, it can be traced back to J.N. Darby and the Plymouth Brethren in 1830. Some scholars trace its origin back two years earlier to a 20-year-old visionary woman named Margaret MacDonald who went into trances and announced there would be a pre-tribulation rapture of the Church.

3. Millions of American Christians today believe in a 'secret rapture' of the Church before a 'great tribulation' comes upon the world; it may surprise you that before 1830, no one had ever heard of such a teaching.

Dr. Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr.

Only after 1830 was this novel pretribulationistic eschatology speedily disseminated. This was done in Britain by the Plymouth Brethrenist J.N. Darby. It was thereafter done especially in the United States by C.I. Scofield, D.L. Moody, and L.S. Chafer and by dispensationalistic Seminaries.

Dr. Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr.

The Bible does, of course, teach the future physical catching up in the air of the saints at the Second Coming of Christ in Final Judgment. Yet the Bible does not teach the idea of a ‘secret’ rapture or a ‘double resurrection’.

4. But Dispensationalism does not just invent a pretribulation ‘secret rapture’ in the ‘end-times’; it boasts itself as a discovery of a new way to interpret the entire Bible!

Dispensationalism

A theological system for interpreting the Bible that considers Biblical history as divided by God into dispensations, defined periods or ages to which God has allotted distinctive administrative principles.

5. For 1800 years, Christians understood the dealings of God in terms of 2 covenants, the Old Testament and the New Testament; but ‘Oh, no’ said the Dispensationalists; they invented a system where God deals with mankind 7 different ways, during 7 time periods called ‘dispensations’.

The 7 Dispensations

- 1. Innocence (Adam and Eve)**
- 2. Conscience (From Adam to Noah)**
- 3. Human Government (Noah to Abraham)**
- 4. Promise (Abraham to Moses)**
- 5. Law (Moses to Christ)**
- 6. Church (Christianity)**
- 7. Kingdom (Comes with Christ)**

6. In other words, as history unfolds, God has dealt differently the human race. That’s what it is. So you ask, ‘what’s wrong with that?’ Many things!

II. What’s Wrong With It?

A. First: It Creates Confusion About How God Deals With Mankind

1. For 1800 years, the Christian church understood that God deals with mankind on the basis of *Covenant*; this is what we call ‘Covenant Theology’. They viewed the Bible as one book containing 2 primary covenants:

a. The Old Covenant (Testament) was between God and Adam; it was a Covenant of works.

b. The New Covenant (Testament) was between God and His Son, the God-man or the '2nd Adam'; it was a Covenant of grace.

2. This is what we call 'Covenant Theology' and it was the way the Church interpreted the Bible for 1800 years; but the Dispensationalists invent a 'new path'; a system of interpretation where God *changes* from age to age.

a. They replaced the 2 Covenants with 7 'Dispensations'.

3. Let me give you two verses, 1 from the Old Testament and one from the New, that proves God does not change the way He relates to the human race.

Malachi 3:6

I am the Lord; I do not change.

a. The Dispensationalists teach that God changes how He deals with mankind during different time periods.

b. The writer of Hebrews restates the unchanging nature of God's immutability this way...

Hebrews 13:8-9

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Do not be carried about with various and strange doctrines.

c. It seems here the writer was anticipating the 'strange doctrine' of Dispensationalism, that God does change.

4. No wonder the modern American Christian is confused about the nature of God! But this is only the beginning of what's wrong with Dispensationalism.

B. Dispensationalism Disconnects the Old Testament from the New Testament

1. **One of the devastating doctrines of Dispensationalism is that it creates a discontinuity between the Old and New Testaments.**

2. This opens the door for a floodgate of related errors and a refutation of each:

- God saved men by law in the Old Testament but by grace in the New Testament

Dewey Dovel

Dispensationalism has no concept of the law/grace distinction in scripture.

- One major dispensationalist denomination teaches that only the New Testament is a guide for Church polity (no musical instruments or fellowship halls allowed)
- One famous dispensationalist faith teacher taught that the Old Testament is the ministry of the Father, the Gospels are the ministry of the Son, and the rest of history is entrusted to the ministry of the Holy Spirit (Kenneth Hagin)
- One of the cornerstone errors of dispensationalism is the teaching that God has 2 peoples: Israel and the Church; and He has 2 plans of salvation: one for Israel and one for the Church.

Charles C. Ryrie, "Dispensationalism"

"This is probably the most basic theological test of whether or not one is a dispensationalist, and it is undoubtedly the most practical and conclusive.

The one who fails to distinguish Israel and the Church consistently will inevitably not hold to dispensational distinctions; and one who does will."

(There's just one problem, Charles...)

Dr. Kenneth L. Gentry

"The separation of the Church and Israel had never before been taught in church history."

To maintain the separation, Dispensationalists have to create a

Dr. Joel McDurmon

Dispensationalists believe in a distinction between Israel and the Church, that there is a special future for ethnic Israel that is separate and distinct from that of the Church. The position of historic Christianity is that there is, and always has been, only one people of God, and that this assembly of people has always included both Jews and Gentiles.

Dr. Joel McDurmon

This is precisely because the people of God has never been purely ethnically defined, although in the Old Testament it was administered within an ethnic group. Nevertheless, it was not defined by ethnicity or nationality, but by *faith* and by faith *alone*.

God has ONE PEOPLE, not two!

In the Old Testament, Israel is called a “kingdom of priests” and a holy nation”. Exodus 1:6

In the New Testament, the Church is called a “holy nation” and the saints are “kings and priests”. 2 Peter 2:9 and Revelation 1:6; 5:10

Old Testament Israel is called “the church in the wilderness” in Acts 7:38
The New Testament church is called “the Israel of God” in Galatians 6:16

The Apostles had to address the question of separation many places in the New Testament; to convince the Jews that the Gentiles were truly saved and to convince the Gentiles that they were accepted into the family of God.

1 Corinthians 12:13

For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.

3. Dispensationalist doctrine continues to confuse modern Christians God has 2 peoples instead of one. Confusion! But that’s only the beginning.

B. Dispensationalism Limits the Manifestation of the Kingdom of God to the Future

1. Remember that **in the dispensational timeline, the Kingdom of God does not actually appear until the very end of time.**

2. This is a half-truth. The full manifestation of the Kingdom of God on earth will not appear until the Second Coming of Christ. But the dispensationalists overlook the fact that Jesus spoke of the Kingdom of God as a present reality!

Luke 17:20-21

Now when He was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, He answered them and said, "The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, 'See here!' or 'See there!' For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you."

Matthew 12:28

But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you.

Luke 10:8-9

Whatever city you enter, and they receive you, eat such things as are set before you. And heal the sick there, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.'

R.J. Rushdoony

The Kingdom Is Present and Future

Attempts to see the Kingdom of God as a future event are mostly the product of the late nineteenth century's rise of dispensationalism. But the Gospels tell us the Kingdom is to be sought in our lives,⁹ to be received now,¹⁰ that a man in Christ's day could see it and enter into it,¹¹ and that it is found among us.¹² The **Apostle Paul speaks of the Kingdom in the present tense.**

9. Matt. 6:33 10. Mark 10:15; Luke 18:17 11. John 3:3, 5 12. Luke 17:21. [T]he Kingdom of God is within you" may be translated "among you." 13. Rom. 14:17

Romans 14:17

For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

3. Traditional Christianity taught that the Kingdom came to earth in Jesus Christ and would continue to expand throughout the world until its full

manifestation in the 2nd Coming. Dispensationalism denies that doctrine by placing the manifestation of the Kingdom to the future. This is why Dispensationalists in general believe in a doctrine of defeatism for the church.

C. Dispensationalism Teaches the Doctrine of Cessationism

1. Not all, but many dispensationalists teach that the gifts of the Holy Spirit and the ministry of the Apostle ceased with the Apostles.

2. One of the most prominent dispensational teachers today is the Rev. John MacArthur, an otherwise excellent Bible teacher, but writes books attacking all expressions of the spiritual gifts as demonic.

John MacArthur

John MacArthur, in his book 'Strange Fire', critiques the origins and workings of Pentecostal and Charismatic movements as counterfeit revivals. MacArthur feels especially fraudulent the contemporary ministry of prophecy, the healing ministry, speaking in tongues, and the recovery of the office of the Apostle.

3. One has to wonder how a man who knows the Bible as well as he does could claim the gifts of the Holy Spirit ceased with the Apostles and overlook verses like these:

a. After the Resurrection, on the Day of Pentecost, the Apostle Paul declared it a fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecy of Joel:

Acts 2:17-18

And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, that I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall see visions, your old men shall dream dreams. And on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days; and they shall prophesy.

Ephesians 4:8,11-12

**"When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men."
And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists,**

and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ...

Romans 11:29

For God's gifts and His call can never be withdrawn.

b. The truth is that there is not one verse in the Bible, Old or New Testament, that teaches the gifts of the Holy Spirit would pass away

4. MacArthur, in claiming the gifts of the Holy Spirit passed away with the death of Jesus' apostles ignores history!

Justin Martyr

(AD 100-165)

"For the prophetic gifts remain with us even to the present time. Now it is possible to see among us men and women who possess gifts of the Spirit of God."

Irenaeus

(AD 125-200)

"In like manner we do also hear many brethren in the Church who possess prophetic gifts and through the Spirit speak all kinds of languages. Yes, moreover the dead have even been raised up and remained among us for many years."

Tertullian

(AD 150-240)

For seeing that we too acknowledge the spiritual charismata, or gifts, we too have merited the attainment of the prophetic gift...and heaven knows how many distinguished men, to say nothing of the common people, have been delivered from devils and cured of their sicknesses.

Origen

(AD 185-254)

Some give evidence of having received this gift through their faith a marvelous power by the cures which they perform, invoking no other over those who need their help than that of the God of all things, along with Jesus and a mention of His history.

Saint Augustine

(AD 354-430)

In his work "City of God", Augustine tells of healings and miracles that he observed first-hand and says, "I am so pressed by the promise of finishing this work that I cannot record all the miracles I have seen."

Jonathan Edwards

(1703-1758)

Their joyful surprise at salvation caused their hearts to leap, so that they broke forth in a flood of laughter and tears at the same time. It was a frequent thing for many to be seized with terror in hearing the Word of God and the Holy Spirit's conviction of sin that they fell down and were carried out of the church; and they afterwards proved to be most solid and lively Christians.

5. So why do John MacArthur and many dispensationalist preachers continue to claim the gifts of the Holy Spirit have passed away? John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist Church, who believed in the gifts, figured it out...

John Wesley

(1703-1791)

I became fully convinced of what I had once expected...that the grand reason why the miraculous gifts were so soon withdrawn was not only that faith and holiness were well nigh lost, but that dry, formal, orthodox men began even to ridicule whatever gifts they had not themselves, and to decry them all as either madness or imposture.

6. I, too, have become convinced the same is true today; the lack of the expression of supernatural power in the church today is a lack of holiness and faith in churches where 'dry, formal, orthodox men ridicule the gifts of the Holy Spirit simply because they don't have the gifts themselves; therefore they have any supernatural power themselves.

III. Conclusion:

A. Review: What Have We Said?

Theme

Few things have hindered the effectiveness of the Church and the cause of Christ more than the unbiblical, deceptive doctrines of the theological system known as Dispensationalism.

1. Dispensationalism is a 'new path', teaching doctrines unknown to the church in the first 1800 years of church history. It's a 'sacred cow' that has to be dismantled.

What's Wrong With Dispensationalism?

- **It creates confusion about how God deals with mankind**
 - **It creates discontinuity between the Testaments**
 - **It futurizes the manifestation of the Kingdom of God**
- **It promotes the belief that the gifts of the Holy Spirit have ceased**

2. Dispensationalism has disempowered the Church at the worst possible time!

Phillip Mauro, The Gospel of the Kingdom

"This modern system of dispensational teaching is a cause of division and controversy between the followers of Christ who ought to be at this time of crisis, solidly united against the mighty forces of unbelief and apostasy."

3. Most dispensationalists have no idea how far they have drifted from the New Testament model of a church empowered by the Holy Spirit to advance the Kingdom of God on earth until Christ returns for His glorious church. It's time to return to the old paths!

James Denney, Scottish Theologian (1856-1917)

Primitive historical Christianity must always be the normative, and if later types of religion so diverge from the primitive type as to find the New Testament an embarrassment rather than an inspiration, the question becomes whether they can any longer be recognized as a Christian.

Closing Prayer

Title