
WHAT IS REFORMED THEOLOGY?

Session 7: Dispensational Calvinism

CALVINISM WITHIN DISPENSATIONALISM HAS A LONG HISTORY

- Ariel Ministries –
 - “We believe that the dispensations are stewardships by which God administers His purpose on earth through man by varying responsibilities; that they are chronologically successive; that they are not ways of salvation nor different methods of the administration of the Covenant of Grace...”
 - “...those who are saved have been unconditionally elected to salvation in eternity past and have been effectively and irresistibly called by the Holy Spirit.”
 - “...You will find that Ariel Ministries' doctrinal statement reflects to a large extent the conclusions commonly lumped together as “Calvinism””
- Scofield Prophecy Ministries (Mal Couch) –
 - “Though God is Absolute Sovereign over all creation and history, He is not the author of sin. Yet in some mysterious way, His decrees include all that takes place in the universe.”
 - “The sovereignty of God also extends to the doctrine of divine election whereby those chosen by the council of the Lord’s own will, shall come to Him in faith.”
- Thomas Ice (The Pretribulation Research Center) –
 - “I personally think that if systematic Dispensationalism is rightly understood then it still logically makes sense only within a theocentric and soteriologically Calvinistic theology. After all, Dispensationalism teaches that it is GOD who is ruling His household, as administered through the various dispensations of history.”
- Lewis Sperry Chafer (Dallas Theological Seminary) –
 - “I am pleased to state that there is no institution to my knowledge which is more thoroughly Calvinistic nor more completely adjusted to this system of doctrine, held by the Presbyterian Church”
- C.I. Scofield (Scofield Reference Bible) –
 - “Election is, therefore: (1) The sovereign act of God in grace whereby certain are chosen from among mankind for Himself... (note on 1 Peter 1:2)

WHAT CREATES A DISPENSATIONAL CALVINIST?

1. A THEOLOGICAL UNDERPINNING: A DISPENSATION OF MAN’S NATURE

- If one creates a pre-fall and a post-fall *nature* of man, then a Calvinistic salvation is not only the outcome, but the *only conceivable outcome*.
 - Every dispensational Calvinist accepts the doctrine of *total depravity*, which is a doctrine of Reformed Theology.
 - Dispensational Calvinists: The pre-fall dispensation and the post-fall dispensation(s).
 - Reformed Theology: The covenant of works and the covenant of grace.
 - Both Dispensational Calvinism and Reformed Theology will then further divide the covenant of grace.
 - Dispensational Calvinists: conscience, government, promise, law, grace, kingdom.
 - Reformed Theology: Old Testament, New Testament.
 - Thus Dispensational Calvinism has a “two-dispensations of anthropology” doctrine.
- Two examples:
 - Ariel Ministries – “We believe that man was created in the image of God; that he fell through sin and lost his spiritual life; that he is dead in his trespasses and sins and, hence, is totally depraved; that this fallen nature is transmitted to every descendent of Adam, the man Christ Jesus excepted; that man has no spark of divine life and is unchangeable apart from divine grace.
 - Charles Ryrie – “...total depravity means (1) that corruption extends to every part of man's nature, including all the faculties of his being; and (2) that there is nothing in man that can commend him to a righteous God. Calvinists trace depravity to an inherent corruption of nature inherited from Adam. Until the time of Augustine this idea of original sin was relatively undeveloped by the Fathers, and the semi-Pelagian reaction to the teachings of Augustine finds its successor today in

Arminianism which denies total depravity, the guilt of original sin, and the loss of free will, and which affirms involvement in the sin of Adam to the extent of giving mankind a tendency toward sin but not a sinful nature.” (Baker's Dictionary of Theology, ed. Everett F Harrison (Baker, 1960))

- Question: Does the Bible teach that man has a totally corrupt nature so that he cannot accept the Gospel of Jesus Christ?
 - The Westminster Confession says that we are “wholly defiled in all the faculties and parts of soul and body” and that “we are utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil.”
 - Dispensational Calvinists have adopted this Reformed doctrine.
 - Charles Hodge: “*These three undeniable facts, the universality of sin among men, its controlling power, and its early manifestation, are clear proof of the corruption of our common nature...*” (Systematic Theology, vol. 2, pgs 237-238).
 - Notice that these *undeniable facts* are observations, not Biblical teaching.
 - Never base your theology on your observations of humanity or nature.
- Why do so many dispensationalists adopt a “two-dispensations of anthropology” doctrine?
 - Many early dispensational teachers came out of Presbyterianism and thus were raised on the Westminster Confession.
 - Just like the Reformers, it is hard to “reform everything” and easy to get stuck in moving “one step forward.”
 - GroupThink is real!

2. AN INTERPRETIVE UNDERPINNING: THE SELECTION OF VESSELS OF DISHONOR

- Romans 9:13-17 gives several “vessels of dishonor,” including Esau and Pharaoh.
- The fact that God hated Esau or that Pharaoh was raised up to show God’s power to the nations cannot be used to prove the doctrine of election.

3. AN INTERPRETIVE ERROR: THE CONFLUENCE OF THE ELECTION OF ISRAEL TO THE ELECTION OF INDIVIDUALS

- One of the most fundamental principles of dispensationalism is to take a passage in context.
 - A text without context is pretext.
- Romans 9:18-25 (and even the broader section) is taken by dispensational Calvinists *outside of its context*.
 - Note that in Romans 9 Paul has not once brought a Christian of the church age into this discussion. This is 100% about His election of Israel. To make conclusions beyond this is hermeneutical malpractice.
 - Does verse 24 bring in *the church*?
 - The pronoun **us** is a reference to the elect (i.e. the nation of Israel, which has been the exclusive subject of the chapter).
 - These elect are **Jews** and **Gentiles**, according to the KJV (and almost all translations).
 - However, *Gentile* is an anachronistic term. The strictest translation is that the elect are those (*us*) who are *out of Judea* as well as *out of the nations* (i.e.: diaspora Jews).
 - The word ἔθνος [ethnos] is a word that *always* requires interpretation. Note that Acts 26:4 uses the word *ethnos* to refer to the Jewish nation.
 - This is a minority position. However, even if the typical translation is taken, this passage *does not demand that election is in force in the salvation of individuals today*. It simply states that there are elect among the Jews and the Gentiles.
 - Note that if *ethnos* in verse 24 is taken to be *gentiles*, then verse 25 (quoting from Hosea 2:23, which is clearly about the scattered tribes (scattered to *the nations*) and NOT about gentiles.
 - While it is baffling how interpreters can take a passage that is so clearly Jewish in interpretation and make it to be non-Jewish in its application, this *hermeneutical crime* has been committed so often that it has become a *big-lie* kind of “truth.”
- Ephesians 1:4
 - Who has been **chosen...in him before the foundation of the world** to be **holy and without blame before him**?

- Were the Jews chosen? Consider Deuteronomy 7:6-7, Psalm 33:12, 135:4, Isaiah 41:8, 65:8-10, Matthew 24:22, 24, 31, 1 Peter 1:1-2, etc.
 - Were the Jews chosen to be holy and without blame? See Leviticus 19:2, Isaiah 26:2, 1 Peter 1:16, 1 Peter 2:9, etc.
 - Summary: Dispensational Calvinists make a flawed assumption that the election of Israel is proof of the election of individuals even during this dispensation. Such an assumption has no Biblical support.

WHY I REJECT DISPENSATIONAL CALVINISM

- Dispensational Calvinism fails to recognize a dispensational salvation.
 - Not that God once saved individuals in a different way.
 - Rather that God was previously dealing with a nation and individual salvation was not the topic of conversation.
 - Scripture is definitive that Paul is the pattern of salvation for our dispensation (1 Timothy 1:15-16). Dispensational Calvinism makes Israel the pattern for our salvation.
- Dispensational Calvinism adopts a doctrine of man that is a new, man-made doctrine which is neither found in early theologians nor in the pages of Scripture itself. It is the product of the Reformation.
- Dispensational Calvinism is forced to accept, in some measure, the false-theology of a Covenant of Grace. Such covenant is not in the pages of Scripture and cannot be rightfully deduced from the teaching of Scripture. It is an unnecessary fabrication that clouds a literal, grammatical hermeneutic and thus is antithetical to dispensationalism.