
Subject: Covenant verses Dispensational Theology
Posted by [william](#) on Tue, 28 Oct 2008 18:32:39 GMT
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Recently I've been looking at the foundational premises of these two radically different theological systems especially given the fact that Charismatics are rapidly moving in the covenantal direction.

Let me first say that it is rather difficult to define either system in any sort of narrow way, both systems have problems. The dispensationalists are speckled with cessationists, and the covenantals do make some good points, at least on some issues, but what I'm specifically looking at is what I see to be the foundational difference: A Kingdom-Now verses a Kingdom-Come perspective.

Just look at the variety of opinions expressed in the threads dealing with the Christian's relationship to the government, voting issues, etc..

Maybe I'm just an alarmist, but it seems to me that one's fundamental beliefs regarding this subject may place you squarely in one or the other of these radically different theological systems. Personally, I believe that the hoopla surrounding the shepherdship movement back in the 1970's pales in comparison to this issue.

So whether you hail from the Covenantal/Replacement/Kingdom-Now position or the Dispensational/Kingdom-Coming position, I would like to hear from you. I'm not interested in some of the periphery issues surrounding these systems since there are hundreds of variations, but only on this particular issue (kingdom-now verses kingdom-come) since I believe that this question, and how one answers this question, is the foundational doctrine that determines one's world-view (no pun intended!).

Blessings,
William

Subject: Re: Covenant verses Dispensational Theology
Posted by [james](#) on Sun, 09 Nov 2008 14:04:07 GMT
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William,

Could you give us a little more info as to what you're saying or asking on this? I just thought

everyone was dispensationalist, if we have to put a label on it; but I've found out lately that I shouldn't make assumptions, especially when it involves christians. We sure aren't on the same page when it comes to interpretations of God's Word and how to apply it to living day to day. I think I see where you're coming from as to being concerned, but if you'd expound a bit, maybe people will come out of their caves and respond. (then again, maybe not) It's strange how we can go on and on about stuff that is meaningless, and yet, few responds to direct questions, polls, or chances to discuss openly spiritual matters that have eternal consequences. I know it has to concern you, it does me.

thanks,

james

Subject: Re: Covenant verses Dispensational Theology

Posted by [no_dominion_for_death](#) on Wed, 28 Jan 2009 04:47:58 GMT

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First, William, I don't think it is accurate to say that Charismatics are moving in a Covenant direction. I would say they are moving in a Latter-Rain dominionist direction, perhaps, but it is important to emphasize that this is not the dominionism of Reformed Calvinists' Covenant Theology. Covenantal dominionism and Charismatic dominionism are two very separate streams of theology. I DO think it is the case, though, that Reformed peoples who already confess Covenant are being wooed by the Charismatic movement and are in turn wooing evangelicals who are semi-Charismatic in their theories of worship. And while Reformed theology does seem to be growing a little lately, it's mostly among disenchanting premillennialist Baptists who aren't unwilling to dabble in Third Wave Charismatism (take John Piper's popularity, for instance).

Second, "replacement" theology is quite the misnomer. No Reformed scholar teaches anything like a "replacement" theology. Rather, those who teach Covenant Theology insist along with the apostle Paul that Christ has made the TWO peoples, Jew and Gentile, into ONE (cf. Gal. 3:28 & Eph. 2:11-14) by grafting the Gentiles onto the ONE body of Christ (Rom. 11:17-24), which is the single universal church that has existed all down through the ages and was predominantly Jewish until Christ. I offer you proof from the writings of Covenantalist Anthony Hoekema:

Quote: The Hebrew term qahal, commonly rendered ekklesia in the Septuagint... is applied to Israel in the Old Testament. To give just a few examples, we find the word qahal used of the assembly or congregation of Israel in Exodus 12:6, Numbers 14:5, Deuteronomy 5:22, Joshua 8:35, Ezra 2:64, and Joel 2:16. Since the Septuagint was the Bible of the apostles, their use of the Greek word ekklesia, the Septuagint equivalent of qahal, for the New Testament church clearly indicates continuity between that church and Old Testament Israel." (Hoekema, The Bible and the Future, pp. 215)

"Continuity" -- NOT "replacement". If you want to be brutally honest, it is dispensationalism that teaches a "replacement" theology, because it treats the church age as though it were "Plan B" in God's salvific work. "What? You Israelites don't want the Messiah I sent you? I guess I'll make a SECOND plan of salvation so I can have a covenant people until the Jews learn to shape up" -- that's what the dispensationalist God says.

Third -- to answer your main question, William -- the Covenantal / dispensational debate is NOT the foundational issue. It's just a trickle-down outworking of what IS the issue: hermeneutics. Dispensationalists insist on taking Bible prophecy "literally" -- except in the New Testament, where Jesus and the apostles all tell us that the prophets were speaking figuratively. Covenantalists insist over and against dispensationalism that the NT can and should be allowed to comment on the OT because Scripture is its own commentary (a principle called the *analogia fidei*).

That's the starting point. Where that goes depends on which hermeneutic you follow. The dispensationalist makes a lot of conclusions about eschatology first and applies that to God's salvation economy in the New Testament second (Christians are saved in a way that's different from the way the Jews were saved). Only after he's answered those questions does he concern himself about Christian ethics like how to act with respect to the government.

The Covenantalist draws his first conclusions in soteriology: Christians are saved the same the way the Jews were saved, i.e. by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone and unto the glory of God alone. He concludes issues of Christian ethics second, and these conclusions follow from the continuity he sees between OT and NT. Eschatology is a peripheral issue that only loosely follows from the first two conclusions. That's why you don't see Lutherans or Presbyterians holding eschatology conferences. It's not that eschatology isn't important to them; it's that it doesn't figure as prominently into the core of their central theological framework.

Now, that's not to say that Charismatic dominionism (Kingdom Now) -- which, again, is NOT the same as Covenant Theology -- doesn't draw its fundamental differences with dispensationalism at the eschatology level. I'm really not sure what Kingdom Now's hermeneutic is, or if they even consciously have one, much less whether that's where they fundamentally differ with dispensationalism. Given what I've read of Kingdom Now's literature, though, I'm betting it is.

Fourth, it's important to recognize that Covenant Theology does not even perfectly correlate with the Reformed/Calvinist form of dominionist postmillennialism. A large contingent are postmillennial, and these tend to be more in favor of direct political activism, since the whole idea of postmill is that a literal 1000-year reign of Christ will be ushered in only after a significant portion of the inhabited world is converted to Christianity. However, the majority of Covenantalists are amillennial (or "nunc"-millennial, i.e. "now"-millennial).

The program of Reformed/Covenantal (and Lutheran) amillennialism is quite different. While amills don't shy away from participation in government, they do insist that the roles of state and

church be kept distinct. The state's job is to exact justice. The church's job is to minister the word of God and the sacraments. Generally, a Christian can serve in the armed forces with a clear conscience, because he is acting on behalf of the state, to whom God has given the sword to act as an agent of wrath toward wrongdoers (Rom. 13:5). He is expected to obey the higher law of God if ordered by his superiors to commit acts of injustice, but on the other hand he is not to use the state's power to perform the church's role, either.

(And a word of disclaimer: amills don't reject a literal 1000-year Millennium out of theological liberalism. Some of the most staunch defenders of orthodoxy in the early 20th century -- such as J. Gresham Machen -- were amillennial. They simply believe that other portions of the New Testament, when interpreted literally, preclude a literal interpretation of Rev. 20. Nor are amills anti-Semitic. In fact, many amillennial Dutch Reformed Christians who were living in Germany in the 1940's hid Jews from the Nazis, often right under the noses of the Wehrmacht.)

Unfortunately, although amills represent the majority of Covenantalists, certain misinformed but boisterous people *cough*Hal Lindsay*cough* confuse the issue by focusing their critique of Covenant Theology on the postmillennialists. But the differences between postmills and amills should not be taken lightly. While amills don't agree with the separationism of dispensationalists, they don't advocate the theonomy of the modern postmill movement, either.

In summary, William, (1) You confuse Covenant and Kingdom Now theology, and I'm really not seeing Covenant Theology experiencing any growth lately, and I should know as an Orthodox Presbyterian. (2) Additionally, "replacement theology" is an inaccurate label that obscures Covenantalists' actual beliefs, (4) which are only loosely correlated with agendas of social dominionism anyway. And finally, (3) eschatology is not the fundamental difference between dispensationalism and Covenantalism; hermeneutics are.
