**Dispensationalism What and Why Not**

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“Lutherans are unbelievers.” That is the first thought that crossed my mind when I learned they did not believe in the “rapture” or the “millennial kingdom” (the 1000 year reign of Christ on earth). Were not these teaching central to the Biblical witness and clear for everyone to see?

At that moment two different theologies had collided and engaged in battle; Israel and Jesus, grappling on the shore of the Jabbok. The two theologies were “Dispensationalism” on one hand, and “Lutheranism” (“orthodoxy”, if you will) on the other. I did not yet know the names of the opponents, but I right away had a sense of the ferocity of the battle. At stake were two totally different ways of understanding the end times, the church, salvation and the purpose of history, even the very heart and character of God.

So we arrive at the topic at hand: What is Dispensationalism and why is it wrong? There is perhaps no better example of confusing Law and Gospel in modern theology that the teaching of Dispensationalism. The depth of this confusion is tragically matched by the breadth of its exposure. Dispensationalism is so popular and widespread that it has become a major (if not the central) article in American Evangelical doctrine, teaching, preaching and popular piety.i Dispensationalism is not an isolated false teaching, it is an over-arching theological system; it is an eschatology (doctrine of the end times), an ecclesiology (doctrine of the church), soteriology (doctrine of salvation), a hermeneutic (approach to the Scriptures) and so forth. Like a cancer, dispensational theology spreads into every part, making the whole body of theology critically ill. What follows is a dose of dispensational radiation treatment.

Part of the trouble with dispensational theology is that it is more often “caught” that “taught” or thought out, less like a teaching and more like a head cold. Most dispensationalists arrive at their belief, not by careful study of the Scriptures, but by dogmatic osmosis. Often these “Dispensationalists by Default” wake up with a crick and wonder, “How did I get this pain in the neck?” We begin, then, by defining the central tenants of Dispensationalism, the articles on which the system stands or falls, and they are the following:

* + 1. The distinction between Israel and the Church.
    2. The use of a “consistent, literal hermeneutic.”
    3. The purpose of God in the world is His own glory and *not* man's salvation.

These are the “three pillars” of dispensationalism, the *sine qua non* which we hope to make *non*[*ii*](http://www.hope-aurora.org/update/pages/DispensationalismWhatandWhyNot#sdendnote2sym)*.*