

PROGRESSIVE DISPENSATIONALISM

Progressive dispensationalism began on November 20, 1986 in the Dispensational Study Group in connection with the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society in Atlanta, Georgia. The label "Progressive Dispensationalism" was not actually introduced until the 1991 meeting of this group. It was used to describe the significant revisions that had taken place in dispensationalism by that time. Those at the forefront of this movement include: Darrell L. Bock (New Testament Professor; Dallas Theological Seminary), Craig A. Blaising (Professor of Systematic Theology; Southern Baptist Theological Seminary), and Robert L. Saucy (Professor of Systematic Theology; Talbot Theological Seminary).

The basic beliefs of progressive dispensationalism include: (1) The kingdom of God is the unifying theme of biblical history. (2) Within biblical history there are four dispensational eras, i.e., (a) Patriarchal, (b) Mosaic, (c) Ecclesial, and (d) Zionitic. (3) Christ has already inaugurated the Davidic reign in heaven at the right hand of the Father, which equals the throne of David, though He **not yet** reigns as Davidic king on earth during the Millennium. (4) Likewise the new covenant has **already** been inaugurated, though the blessings are **not yet** fully realized until the Millennium. (5) The concept of the church as completely distinct from Israel and as a mystery unrevealed in the Old Testament must be abandoned along with the idea of two purposes and two peoples of God. (6) A complementary hermeneutic means that the New Testament makes complementary changes to Old Testament promises without abandoning those original promises. (7) The one divine plan of holistic redemption encompasses all peoples and all areas of human life, personal, societal, cultural, and political.

Each of these beliefs will be addressed in order: (1) This view is not clearly defined. Those that hold to this belief have imprecisely defined it as God's rule over the whole earth. This inclusive definition blurs important distinctions between various kingdoms. (2) (a) This era eliminates the pre- and post-fall contracts God made with Adam and Eve, which were different from the stewardship which God made with Abraham. This blends together pre-fall, post-fall, and the Abrahamic covenant under a joint stewardship. (b) The progressives end this dispensation at Christ's ascension rather than His death (Col. 2:14). (c) The Ecclesial dispensation is this present church age and the inaugurated Davidic kingdom. (d) The Zionitic dispensation is subdivided into (1) millennial and (2) eternal. The millennial kingdom is seen as an intermediate point between the inaugurated Davidic rule now in heaven and the fullness of the kingdom of God on the new earth. (3) This stance ignores the fact that Christ's first act after His ascension was to send the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:33) which is nowhere found in the Davidic covenant.

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Scripture (Heb. 12:2) clearly states that Christ sat down at the right hand of God's throne, not David's. Also Christ's present activity is as a priest only. He shall not function as Davidic king until His second coming, (Rev. 1:5; 11:15; 12:10; 17:14; 19:16), when He becomes the absolute ruler of the kingdoms of the earth. (4) The New Covenant is promised to the house of Israel and the house of Judah in (Jer. 31:31-34). It is based on the death of Christ which is the payment for sins of all ages. For Israel in the future, the covenant promises forgiveness of the nation Israel, Israel restored to favor with God, peace, and the sanctuary of God being rebuilt. (5) Israel is spoken to as a nation in contrast to Gentiles after the establishment of the church at Pentecost, (Acts 3:12; 4:8,10; 5:21,31,35; 21:28). Paul prayed for Israel (Rom. 10:1), clearly regarding them as a people distinct and separate from the church. The church enjoys distinct relationships to her living Lord Jesus Christ. (Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:18; I Cor. 12:27). The union of believing Jews and Gentiles in the body of Christ is a mystery which was not revealed to previous generations (Eph. 3:5-6). The church is indwelt by Christ Himself (Col. 1:27). The church has a distinct time as stated by Paul (Eph. 2:15) which was only possible after Christ's death. Lastly it was the

[redacted] Holy Spirit that brought into existence the church [redacted] at Pentecost that men were first placed into the [redacted] the church is the Body of [redacted] quite clear [redacted] church did not exist prior to the [redacted]

allows for spiritualizing concepts found in the New [redacted] make complementary additions to promises. For in [redacted] to a temple in (Rev. 11:1-2) is a literal building according to literal hermeneutics but the complementary hermeneutic would permit one to conclude that this is a reference to a body of believers based on the fact that it is used in that manner elsewhere in the New Testament. The danger of this position is where are the limits and who determines them. (7) The content of holistic redemption can easily lead to faulty priorities. Scripture teaches man about his social responsibilities; i.e., use of money, vocations, and civic duties. Scripture also calls on believers to obey church ethics, not kingdom ethics, and to do good particularly to the believers, (Gal. 6:10).

Progressive dispensationalism appears to be a change from either that development within normative dispensationalism lead or what significance it will have cannot be predicted.

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