Text: Various
Title: The Practical Usefulness of Dispensationalism
Truth: Dispensationalism is not just an academic theory about how to read the Bible. It answers practical questions about the Christian faith.
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Introduction

When we mention dispensationalism to explain some part or another of Scripture, it can be confusing to Christians as to why it is important or useful in everyday life. Here are some answers to that question. Dispensationalism is helpful because:

1. Explains Differences Between Israel and the Church

It explains the differences between Israel and the church, and between God's administrations of those two entities in their respective primary ages. For Israel that is 1444 B.C. until Christ's death (~ AD 32), and for the church it is Pentecost through the present day.

So, for example, Dispensationalism offers a clean and very rational explanation for why we do not go to a temple, offer sacrifices, avoid clothing with mixed fabrics, do not have to keep kosher in our diet, or worship on Saturday. and many other details of Jewish traditional practice. It explains why we can worship on Sunday without any fear of displeasing God by not keeping the Jewish Sabbath. It explains why we need not circumcise our male children. It explains why God does not require us to have the same penalties in modern law as in Israel's law.

2. Explains How Things Have Become Known Over Time

It explains why some things we know were unknown to saints in previous ages. We have in Dispensationalism the doctrine of progressive revelation.

It means that God pieced out His self-disclosure over time, so that Abraham could not know the Son of God the way we do. He could "see His day" (John 8:56) in a murky fashion and know Him as God, but he did not see Him as Jesus of Nazareth incarnate, crucified,

buried, and risen as we do. We are required to believe in Jesus as Lord and that God raised Him from the dead, with that other information attached; Abraham was not (Gen. 15:6).

It explains how Ephesians 3:5 can be true, that the church would be a body of Jews *and* Gentiles, and that this was unknown and not made known to mankind until Christ came, and particularly with Paul's explanation of it in his letters. Notice that the Old Testament did reveal Gentile *salvation* (Gen. 12:3, Isa 2:2-3, 11:10, 42:6, 45:22, 49:6, 52:10, 56:6-7; Psalm 22:27, 86:9; Amos 9:11-12). But it did not reveal the church *per se*.

3. Explains Future Events

It explains clearly and in a sensible fashion how future events are going to unfold. This is what Dispensationalism was historically known for—its emphasis on prophecy and end times. Although that is not its most important feature, it is a piece of it because its consistent approach to understanding the Bible yields a certain framework of how the future will come about.

One insight it offers is how Israel can have a future hope in light of its past failures. God's as-yet-unfulfilled promises that were made to Israel in the past will still come to pass in the future; Romans 11:25-27 is one example of a restatement of those promises in the New Testament.

Another practical advantage of this is that it gives us hope in the midst of a cursed world. Things seem to be getting worse in this age, because they are, and the Scriptures tell us that God is permitting that to happen, will cap that with the rapture and Tribulation, and then Jesus will return to set things right in His kingdom—the next distinguishable administration of His sovereignty. Dispensationalism offers a lot of hope despite the darkness.

The ultimate hope in other Christian theological systems is similar, of course, with the return of Jesus looming large in all orthodox beliefs, but Dispensationalism explains the particular hope that Jesus with make right things on *this earth* before He just closes it

down and sends us all to some other place (heaven) with no resolution to the injustices and that have happened on *this* planet.

4. Explains Not Every Promise is Mine

It explains why "not every promise in the book is mine." *Some* promises are for people under other dispensational administrations. Some are to Israel. It is invalid to take those promises for ourselves. Other promises are applicable in principle to all of God's people, if not directly, then indirectly. Dispensationalism gives a framework for understanding which is which and how to carefully extract relevance instead of cavalierly but invalidly taking it.

Similarly, "not every regulation in the book is mine." We have touched on this already, but the Christian is expected to follow the Law of Christ, not the Law of Moses.

It also explains how "not every curse in the book is mine." Practically speaking, almost no one takes the curses from the Old Testament—certainly not like the promises! But Dispensationalism helps us explain how those curses are located in their particular administration and do not necessarily "leak out" into other administrations. They almost always do tell us about God's serious displeasure against sin and rebellion, which we can expect is a constant with God's faithful character, but He does not necessarily demand the same punishment in other administrations.

5. Gives us a Framework for Interpreting Scripture

It explains how we should interpret all of the Bible—consistently, according to the original author's intention as published in the text. Because a it provides a proper framework for understanding how certain promises can be fulfilled, we feel therefore no need whatsoever to "spiritualize" those promises to make them fit the church.

For example, Ezekiels speaks about a new temple and future restoration of temple worship, including animal sacrifices. Of all systems of theology, I believe only Dispensationalism offers a good

explanation of how that can literally come to pass in the future without undermining the work of Christ on the cross.

Another example is Amos 9:11-12. We believe it refers to the actual restoration of the Davidic monarchy, a straightforward interpretation and easy to explain—Jesus is going to come back, rule as Jewish king in the line of David, and rule over the whole earth as well. But many Christian teachers tell us that the fallen tabernacle of David *cannot* be the Davidic dynasty or Davidic kingdom. Instead, the fallen tabernacle of David is either Christ in his resurrection and ascension; or it is the church itself. The promises of David's kingdom being restored are reinterpreted as a description of the church and Christ, removing national fulfillment and replacing it with church fulfillment. The fulfillment therefore looks nothing like what the Bible seemed to say earlier. Dispensationalism gives a better answer.

Conclusion

Certainly, more could be said, but this gives you some key points to help you understand why at Fellowship Bible Church we believe that Dispensationalism is a sound and practical approach to understanding Scripture.

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