Busting Myths about Dispensationalism

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Myth 1: Dispensationalism teaches multiple ways of salvation—by works in the OT and by grace in the NT.

According to Ryrie, “the most frequently heard objection against dispensationalism is that it supposedly teaches several ways of salvation.” John Wick Bowman made this accusation in 1956 when he said that dispensationalists are “clearly left with two methods of salvation.” In 1960, Clarence Bass argued that dispensational distinctions between law and grace and Israel and the church “inevitabily result in a multiple form of salvation—that men are not saved the same way in all ages.”

In his 1991 book, Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth: A Critique of Dispensationalism, John Gerstner accused all dispensationalists of teaching more than one way of salvation. He said, “We must sadly accuse dispensationalists (of all varieties) of teaching, always implicitly and sometimes explicitly, that there is more than one way of salvation and, in the process of developing that theology, excluding the one and only way even from this dispensation of grace.”

Response: Dispensationalists have consistently taught that salvation is only by grace. This is true for both testaments. Even many non-dispersationalists acknowledge this.

Myth 2: Dispensationalism is inherently Arminian

Keith A. Mathison said, “Dispensationalism has adopted a semi-Pelagian, Arminian doctrine not based on Scripture.” Gerstner viewed dispensationalism as inherently “anti-Calvinistic” and accused dispensationalism of denying all five points of Calvinism. He also says, “In its views of the creation of man, the Fall, the Atonement, soteriology, and eschatology, this system is a variation of the Arminian system.” J. I. Packer appears impressed with Gerstner’s assertions when he states, “He [Gerstner] sets out to show that Calvinism and Dispensationalism are radically opposed, and he proves his point.”

Response: Many dispensationalists are not Arminians. There is nothing inherent within Dispensationalism that leads to Arminianism.

Myth 3: Dispensationalism is inherently antinomian

According to Gerstner, dispensationalism is “committed to the non-negotiable doctrine of Antinomianism.” To him, “all traditional dispensationalists teach that converted Christian persons can (not may) live in sin throughout their postconversion lives with no threat to their eternal destiny.” It is important to note that Gerstner went beyond simply arguing that certain
dispensationalists teach antinomianism. To him, dispensationalism is inherently antinomian. Gerstner believes dispensationalism is inherently antinomian because of its assertion that the Christian is not under the Mosaic Law and because of its alleged failure “to understand the Reformation doctrines of justification and sanctification.”

**Response:** While most dispensationalists believe the era of the Mosaic Law has passed, this does not mean that Christians are without any law. Christians today are under the Law of Christ. Believers before the Mosaic Law were not ‘lawless’ just as those who live in the post-Mosaic Covenant era are not lawless.

**Myth 4: Dispensationalism denies the lordship of Jesus Christ**

According to Gerstner, “All this dispensational defection from the gospel has come to a head in the Lordship controversy.” To him, “The gospel of dispensational Antinomianism declares that a person may have Christ as Savior but refuse to accept Him as Lord of one’s life.”

**Response:** Most dispensationalists affirm that salvation involves believing in Jesus as Lord and Savior. There is nothing essential to Dispensationalism that leads to the view that believing in Jesus as Lord is optional or not necessary.

**Myth 5: Dispensationalism is mostly about land.**

**Response:** While dispensationalists believe that land promises to Israel will be literally fulfilled, the bigger issue is that God will be faithful to all He promised Israel—including salvation, spiritual, and physical blessings.

**Myth 6: Dispensationalism is mostly about believing in dispensations.**

**Response:** Of course, dispensationalists believe in dispensations, but so does every Christian. The bigger issue is how the dispensations work together not whether they exist. Who does not believe that there is a dispensational distinction between the pre and post-fall worlds or pre and post flood worlds?

**Myth 7: Dispensationalism is about believing in seven dispensations.**

**Response:** Dispensationalists often believe in seven dispensations but the number is not the issue. Some who hold to seven have lists different from others who have seven. Plus, other dispensationalists have argued for 4 or 8 dispensations.
Myth 8: The cardinal doctrine of Dispensationalism is the pre-trib rapture.

Response: Most dispensationalists affirm the pre-trib rapture but the pre-trib rapture comes within the context of bigger more foundational issues such as proper hermeneutics, the Israel-Church distinction, and nature of the Day of the Lord. No list of foundational beliefs of Dispensationalism lists the pre-trib rapture view as the bedrock of Dispensationalism.

Myth 9: Dispensationalism emphasizes the pre-trib rapture so much that its adherents don’t care about current and world events.

Stephen Sizer, in his book, *Zion’s Christian Soldiers?*, makes the assertion that dispensational beliefs result in a total lack of concern of major national and global issues: “Sadly, the mistaken idea of a secret rapture has generated a lot of bad theology. It is probably the reason why many Christians don’t seem to care about climate change or about preserving diminishing supplies of natural resources. They are similarly not worried about the national debt, nuclear war, or world poverty, because they hope to be raptured to heaven and avoid suffering the consequences of the coming global holocaust.”

Response: Many dispensationalists and dispensational institutions care about current and world events.

Myth 10: Dispensationalists are leading the world toward Armageddon.

According to Hanegraaff, today’s dispensationalists threaten the entire human race. They are “bent on ensuring that the horrors of Armageddon become a self-fulfilling prophecy” (*The Apocalypse Code*, 47). In fact, the only way to save the world according to Hanegraaff is to reject Dispensationalism: “If the evangelical death march toward the endgame of Armageddon is to be subverted, it will be because believers recommit themselves to *faithful illumination*” (48).

Response: This is an emotional argument with no proof. While dispensational influence in the United States has contributed to pro-Israel sentiments there is no proof that dispensationalists are trying to force Armageddon.

Myth 11: Dispensationalism affirms a distinction between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Heaven.

Response: Some dispensationalists of previous eras held this distinction, but this view is not popular today. Most dispensationalists view the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Heaven as synonymous.
Myth 12: Dispensationalists don’t believe the Sermon on the Mount is applicable to today.

Response: Some dispensationalists in the past claimed the Sermon on the Mount was describing conditions in the coming millennial age, but dispensationalists today hold that millennium is applicable to today. Most hold that the Sermon on the Mount is describing how followers of Jesus should act in this age before Jesus returns.