

Hyper-dispensationalism (aka Ultra Dispensationalism)

Hyper dispensationalism is the doctrine that teaches the early churches lost “four basic truths” starting near the end of Paul’s ministry. These 4 truths are (in order of loss):

1. The Distinctive Message and Ministry of the Apostle Paul.
2. The Pre-Tribulational “Rapture” of the Church, the Body of Christ.
3. The Difference between Israel and the Church, the Body of Christ.
4. Justification by Faith Alone in Christ alone.

The Distinctive Message and Ministry of the Apostle Paul.

Paul’s status is a result of having been commissioned as “the apostle to the Gentiles” and then personally taught by the risen and glorified Lord of Heaven (as opposed to Jesus in his humility). Proponents sometimes characterize this view as the “Pauline Distinctive.”

The Pre-Tribulational “Rapture” of the Church, the Body of Christ.

Pre-tribulation rapture theology originated in the eighteenth century, with the Puritan preachers Increase and Cotton Mather, and was popularized extensively in the 1830s by John Nelson Darby and the Plymouth Brethren, and further in the United States by the wide circulation of the Scofield Reference Bible in the early 20th century.

The Difference between Israel and the Church, the Body of Christ.

At the heart of Hyper-dispensational theology is the belief that God has two entirely distinct and separate groups and, taking this to its logical conclusion, the Church has now replaced Israel in the plans of God. Thus all the blessings and promises of God originally given to Israel now belong to the Church.

Justification by Faith Alone in Christ alone.

Justification is granted solely on the basis of a person’s faith or belief in Christ’s vicarious death on the cross for sin and His subsequent resurrection alone. Thus, this precludes any need for sacraments administered by a clergy class of priests ordained by men; nor do our good works earn any favour from God or aid us in justification.

Probably the leading proponents of Hyper-dispensationalism are J.C. O’Hair, Charles Baker, C.R. Stam and Dr. E. W. Bullinger.

Examining the Doctrines of Hyper Dispensationalism

Hyper-dispensationalism is sometimes nick-named “Bullingerism” after E W Bullinger.

In an article by the renowned Bible teacher Harry A. Ironside dealing with the subject of Hyper Dispensationalism we read:

There are perhaps six outstanding positions taken by these teachers:

First, inasmuch as our Lord Jesus was “a minister of the circumcision to confirm the promises made to the fathers,” it is insisted that the four Gospels are entirely Jewish and have no real message for the Church, the Body of Christ. All might not put it quite as boldly as this, but certainly their disciples go to the limit in repudiating the authority of the Gospels.

Secondly, it is maintained that the book of Acts covers a transition period between the dispensation of the law and the dispensation of the mystery; that is, that in the book of Acts we do not have the Church, the Body of Christ, but that the word “ekklesia” (church, or assembly), as used in that book, refers to a different Church altogether to that of Paul’s prison epistles. This earlier Church is simply an aspect of the kingdom and is not the same as the Body of Christ!

Third, it is contended that Paul did not receive his special revelation of the mystery of the Body until his imprisonment in Rome, and that his prison epistles alone reveal this truth and are, strictly speaking, the only portion of the Holy Scriptures given to members of the Body. All of the other epistles of Paul, save those written during his imprisonment and the general epistles, are relegated to the earlier dispensation of the book of Acts, and have no permanent value for us, but were for the instruction of the so-called Jewish church of that time.

Fourth, the entire book of Revelation has to do with the coming age and has no reference to the Church today. Even the letters to the seven churches in Asia, which are distinctly said to be “the things which are,” are, according to this system, to be considered as “the things which are not,” and will not be until the Church, the Body of Christ, is removed from this world. Then, it is contended, these seven churches will appear on the earth as Jewish churches in the Great Tribulation.

Fifth, the Body of Christ is altogether a different company, according to these teachers, from the Bride of the Lamb, the latter being supposed to be Jewish.

*Sixth, the Christian ordinances, having been given before Paul is supposed to have received his revelation of the mystery in prison, have no real connection with the present economy, and therefore, are relegated to the past, and may again have a place in the future Great Tribulation.**

**As to this, these ultra-dispensationalists differ. Most of them reject water baptism entirely for this age. All of them are not prepared to go so far in connection with the Lord's Supper, but many of them repudiate it too.*

(Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth, ULTRA-DISPENSATIONALISM EXAMINED IN THE LIGHT OF HOLY SCRIPTURE, By Harry A. Ironside)

David Cloud comments:

“Hyper-dispensationalism” is characterized by making a sharp division between the ministry of Christ and that of the Apostles, and of further dividing Paul's teaching from that of Peter and the other apostles. Some of the well-known teachers of hyper- or ultra-dispensationalism are E.W. Bullinger, Cornelius Stam, J.C. O'Hair, Charles Welch, Otis Sellers, A.E. Knoch, and Charles Baker. There are many varieties of hyper-dispensationalism, but the following are some of the characteristics:

(1) The four Gospels are entirely Jewish and contain no direct teaching for the churches. Yet, the writer of Hebrews said that the same gospel of salvation that was preached by the apostles was preached by Christ (Heb. 2:3-4). Though we know that Christ presented Himself to the Jewish nation and we do understand that there are differences between the gospels and the epistles, yet in Hebrews 2 we do not see a sharp delineation between the gospel preached by Christ and that preached by the apostles who followed. In fact, the Gospel of John presents exactly the same gospel as that preached by Paul. Further, 1 Timothy 6:3 shows that Christ spoke directly to the church age.

(2) The book of Acts is also largely Jewish. Hyper-dispensationalists commonly believe that after Christ was rejected by Israel in the Gospels, that they were given a second chance to receive the kingdom in the first part of the book of Acts. Thus, they teach that there are two different churches viewed in the book of Acts, and the true Pauline church only started after Acts 9, 13, or 28. The church mentioned in the first part of Acts allegedly refers to a different church than that of Paul's prison epistles. The earlier “church” in Acts is simply an aspect of the kingdom preached in the Gospels. Most of the book of Acts is therefore discounted as a guideline for the churches today. Yet, at the very end of the book of Acts we still find Paul preaching about the kingdom (Acts 28:23). In fact, he was still preaching about it in his epistles! (2 Thess. 1:5; 2 Tim. 4:1). While we can see an obvious transition in the book of Acts, and not everything in Acts continues to be in effect in the churches today (e.g., tongues speaking and apostolic sign gifts) this does not mean that there are different gospels and different churches in various parts of Acts. The book of Acts is a book about and for the churches. The pattern of the first church as described in Acts 2 is the pattern for the churches throughout the age, except for the temporary and unique aspects pertaining to the coming of the Holy Spirit and the apostolic miracles.

(3) The mysteries given to Paul are a different revelation from that given to Peter and the other Apostles, and only Paul's writings are directly for the

church today. The other epistles, such as Hebrews, James, 1 and 2 Peter, and the epistles of John are not for us today in a direct sense. Yet, Paul himself said that the church is built upon the “apostles” plural and not merely upon himself (Eph. 2:20) and the mysteries were “revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets” (Eph. 3:5) and not to him alone. Peter also referred to the writings of Paul and made no distinction between Paul’s teaching and the teaching of the other apostles (2 Pet. 3:1-2, 15-16). Peter said Paul wrote to the same people and preached the same message. Though we know that Paul was the special apostle of the Gentiles and he was given unique revelations about the church as the body of Christ, his revelations in no way contradict the revelations given in the General Epistles (Hebrews - Jude).

(4) The gospel preached by Peter in the early part of the book of Acts is different from the gospel preached by Paul. Yet, there is actually no difference between the gospel preached by Peter and that which Paul preached. Peter preached salvation through the blood of Christ (1 Pet. 1:2), salvation by God’s free mercy (1 Peter 1:3), the new birth (1 Peter 1:3), eternal security because of the resurrection of Christ (1 Pet. 1:3-4). Acts 15 plainly states that all of the apostles, including Peter and Paul, agreed on the gospel. Paul plainly said in 1 Cor. 15:11-14 that they all preached the same gospel. Even in Acts 2, Peter was preaching the gospel of the grace of Christ rather than a “kingdom gospel.” He preached Christ -- His crucifixion (Acts 2:23), resurrection (Acts 2:24-32), ascension and Lordship (Acts 2:33-36). He preached that the people should repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38). This is not a “kingdom gospel.” Further, Paul states in Galatians 1, that anyone who preached a different gospel was cursed. If Peter were truly preaching a different gospel in those days, he would have fallen under this curse.

(5) Baptism and the Lord’s Supper were given to Paul before he received the church age mysteries; thus, they are not for the churches today. Hyper-dispensationalists differ on this point. Some accept both baptism and the Lord’s Supper; some reject water baptism and the Lord’s Supper altogether; while others reject only baptism and keep the Lord’s Supper.

(6) According to hyper-dispensationalism there are different ways of salvation in the Old Testament and during the Tribulation. Peter Ruckman, for example, teaches that men were saved by faith plus works in the Old Testament and that they will be saved by faith plus works in the Tribulation and by works alone in the Millennium. IN MILLIONS DISAPPEAR: FACT OR FICTION? Ruckman says: “If the Lord comes and you remain behind, then start working like a madman to get to heaven, because you’re going to have to. ... You must keep the Ten Commandments (all of them, Ecclesiastes 12:13), keep the Golden Rule (1 John 3:10), give your money to the poor, get baptized, take up your cross, hold out to the end of the Tribulation, wait for Jesus Christ to show up at the Battle of Armageddon, and be prepared to die for what you believe. In the Tribulation you cannot be saved by grace alone, like you could before the Rapture.”

...Romans 4:1-8 plainly states that Abraham before the law and David under the law were saved by faith without works. This is the only plan of salvation God ever has had and ever will have--salvation by grace alone through faith alone based upon the shed blood of Jesus Christ alone. The Old Testament saints did not know what the New Testament saint knows, but Romans 4 makes it plain that they were saved by faith without works. Like Abraham, they believed God and it was counted unto them for righteousness. Those who are saved in the Tribulation will also be saved through faith in God's Word and by the blood of Jesus Christ and through this alone (Rev. 7:14).

(Beware of Hyper-dispensationalism by David Cloud pub. February 7, 2002)

One key doctrine espoused by Hyper Dispensationalists is that there are two different salvations (or two different Gospels), one for the Jews and one for the Gentiles. Apparently Paul received the Gospel for the Gentiles which means that the four Gospel accounts of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John are written for the Jews and, thus, do not apply to the Gentiles.

Let us consider Paul's teaching concerning this:

*For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Zion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins. **As concerning the gospel, they are enemies for your sakes: but as touching the election, they are beloved for the fathers' sakes.** (Romans 11:25-28)*

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believes; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. (Romans 1:16)

It would appear from the above scripture that the Gospel that Paul preached to the Gentiles was the same Gospel that he preached to the Jews!

What did Peter preach?

Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them, You rulers of the people, and elders of Israel, If we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole; Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him does this man stand here before you whole. This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved. (Acts 4:8-12)

Compare it with Paul's preaching to the Greek Pagans:

Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device. And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commands all men everywhere to repent: Because he has appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he has ordained; whereof he has given assurance to all men, in that he has raised him from the dead. (Acts 17:29)

Seems that both Paul and Peter were preaching the same message.

In Acts 13 we read how that Paul had been preaching to the Jews. The following Sabbath many Gentiles came to hear the message that Paul preached:

And when the Jews were gone out of the synagogue, the Gentiles appealed that these words might be preached to them the next Sabbath. Now when the congregation was broken up, many of the Jews and religious proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas: who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God.

And the next Sabbath day came almost the whole city together to hear the word of God. But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy, and spoke against those things that were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming. Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles. (Acts 13:43-46)

Yet again it appears that the message that Paul preached to the Jews was the same message that the Gentiles responded to.

We can also ask that if Peter preached a different Gospel than the one preached by Paul then how did the Gentile Cornelius and his men come to faith by hearing it?

Conclusion

The doctrine of Hyper-dispensationalism can only be deemed as a complete and total heresy. It is not based upon the teachings of Christ or His Apostles, as revealed through the scriptures. It is a modern innovation based on the wisdom of men and not upon the wisdom of God.

If you are holding to this doctrine, please consider prayerfully your position in the light of scripture. If you know anyone who holds to this doctrine pray for them and, in all humility and love, exhort them to reconsider their position. If necessary, speak with your elders and pastors so that they might speak with them.

If they are stubborn and will not listen to reason then, I am afraid, you may have to reconsider your relationship with them.

Remember:

*You did run well; who hindered you that you should not obey the truth? This persuasion does not come of him that calls you. **A little leaven leavens the whole lump.** I have confidence in you through the Lord, that you will be no otherwise minded: but he that troubles you shall bear his judgment, whoever he is. (Galatians 5:7-10)*

Even a small amount of false teaching is enough to corrupt an individual and an entire assembly of believers.

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