

Is The Moody Church Dispensational in its Theology?

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As a system of thought, (Classical) Dispensationalism was formalized within the past two hundred years. Led by the notable theologians Darby and Scofield, the dispensational hermeneutic is a comprehensive system which deeply affects and shapes how one understands the Scriptures.

While the word “dispensation” strictly refers to an era or an age, the word has a richer meaning in dispensational thought. A dispensation is defined as a distinct economy of God. In Classical Dispensationalism, the number of distinguished ages is seven. In recent decades, many dispensationalists have opted for a more “progressive” approach, wherein the number of ages is fewer and the lines of distinction are less defined. However, either way, dispensationalists have certain characteristics in their treatment of Scripture.

Dispensationalism advocates a “grammatical-historical” interpretation. To simplify, this means that numerous passages of prophecy should be understood literally, or better, they should be understood in a normal fashion. Of course dispensationalists recognize that the Bible has various kinds of figures of speech, such as symbols, parables, and other obvious literary genres.

Dispensationalists believe that when the Bible refers to Israel it means ethnic Israel and not the church; when it says Jesus will rule over the throne of David, it means that Jesus will rule where David ruled on Earth, etc.

The bottom line is that dispensationalists distinguish between Israel and the church and thus they do not believe that the church replaces Israel in the economy of God. Rooted in the Old Testament prophecies, Israel’s destiny is to be a separate people of God’s choosing, and the New Testament church stands as another avenue of His grace. Depending on the form of

Dispensationalism (Classical or Progressive), this distinction can vary in the details, but the basic distinction must be maintained.

This distinction plays a role in our conviction that the coming of Jesus Christ will be in two stages: first the rapture (the church will be taken to heaven) and then at the glorious return, the Millennial Kingdom will be established. And, there is some evidence that although the church and the believing remnant of Israel will share in the glories of heaven, there may be some distinction between the two groups for all of eternity.

Also, the dispensational hermeneutic interprets Revelation 20 (where the phrase “a thousand years” occurs six times) as a literal thousand years; this period is known as the millennium, when Christ will rule over the earth with righteousness and peace.

At The Moody Church, we wholeheartedly hold to dispensational thought. These rich, historical doctrines are woven into the very fiber of our church’s teaching. However, in no way do we desire to alienate anyone from worshipping together with us who holds a different view of the prophetic Scriptures. Indeed, it is possible to be member of The Moody Church and hold to some other variation of eschatological teaching.