

Some problems That Some Dispensationalists Have With This Conception of the Church

(1) The Problem of the Time Element in God's Program

This is really a cluster of problems, centering around the time of Christ's death and resurrection, and the question of which spiritual realities are tied to that time. The basic problem is this: How can spiritual blessings which are based upon the time-space facticity of Christ's death and resurrection be applied before those events occur?

For example, how could Old Testament believers be regenerated or indwelt by the Holy Spirit until Christ died, rose, ascended, and sent the Holy Spirit at Pentecost? And how could there be an Old Testament body of Christ until Christ sent the Holy Spirit? And how could Christ build a church until He became incarnate and accomplished redemption? These are all time problems. Furthermore, how could Old Testament believers be united to a Christ who was not yet incarnate, who had not yet died and risen and ascended to the right hand of the Father?

One answer is simply to conclude that none of these blessings could come to any Old Testament believer until Christ actually accomplished redemption in time. Another answer is that Christ's redemptive work was certain in God's eternal purpose; thus all atonement blessings could be applied in the Old Testament period, and especially to the Old Testament believer.

(2) The Problem of Dispensational Differences in the Ministries of the Holy Spirit

The problem here is this: Which of the personal ministries of the Holy Spirit (conviction, regeneration, indwelling, filling, fullness, sanctification, assurance, etc.) recognized as the rightful portion of the New Testament believer were also the rightful portion of the Old Testament believer?

Are the differences total? Is this an either-or situation? Or are there some ministries which pertain to both, some which differ in degree, and perhaps some which differ in kind? And which are which?

Indwelling is certainly one sticking point, but I believe the problem here is one of definition, not of spiritual reality.

If the baptizing of the Holy Spirit is taken as a technical concept related to the forming of a new body (entirely new, that is) by the Holy Spirit, who baptizes New Testament believers (both Jews and Gentiles) into union with the Head of the new body; and if this baptism is identified with what happened on the Day of Pentecost and on subsequent occasions with groups and individuals; then there is another sticking point. However, if I Corinthians 12:13 is understood indeed as the Holy Spirit's ministry of uniting all true believers to Christ and thus to each other in one body; and if Acts 2 is understood as something quite different (at least as far as the 120 disciples in the upper room are concerned), i.e., as the pouring out of the Holy Spirit in the ministry of filling; and if both I Corinthians 12:13 and Acts 2 are understood as baptisms, then "the baptism of the Holy Spirit" loses its alleged technical significance, and stands for differing ministries of the Spirit.

In such a case, the idea of Pentecost as "the birthday of the Church" would not stand, even though the New Testament church could be understood to begin shortly before this time, at the accomplishment of the New Testament in Christ's blood at the cross.

However, that there are differences in degree in some of the ministries of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament and the New Testament can be affirmed, and perhaps some differences of kind. However, these ministries need to be clearly defined before comparisons can be made.