



Introduction to Theological Systems:

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Theological Systems

- Dogmatic Theology:

A doctrine or body of doctrines of theology and religion formally stated and authoritatively proclaimed by a group.



Calvinist Theology



- John Calvin (1509-1564) French
- *Institutes* – 80 chapter document explaining his views
- Presbyterian churches
- Jonathan Edwards, George Whitfield, Charles Spurgeon, Charles Hodge, William Shedd, Benjamin Warfield, Cornelius Van Til
- Westminster Confession - 1647

Emphases of Calvinism

- Sovereignty
- Predestination
- TULIP – Synod of Dort (1619)

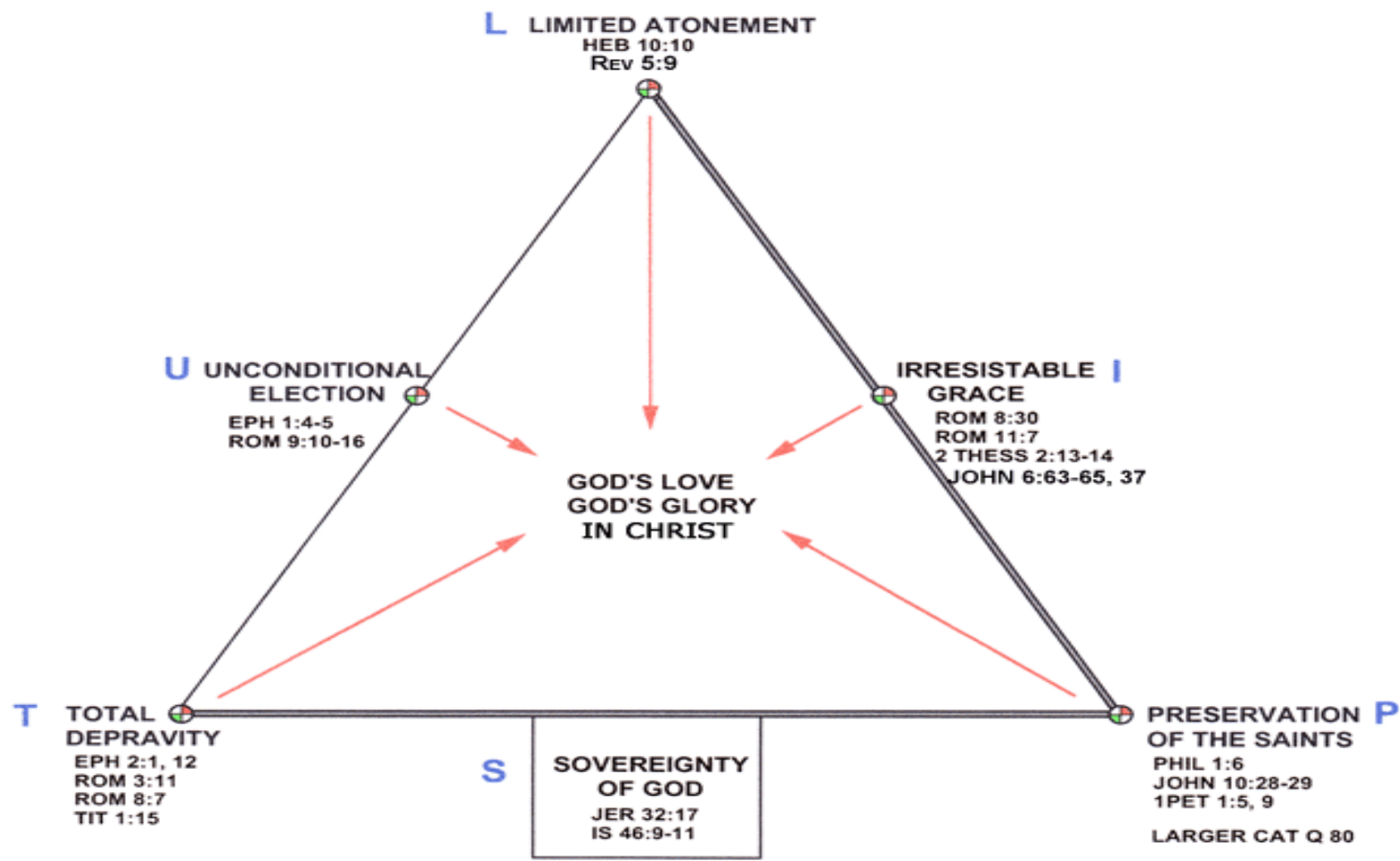
Total Depravity

Unconditional Election

Limited Atonement

Irresistible Grace

Perseverance of the Saints



A CHIASMIC VIEW OF CALVINISM

Arminian Theology

- Jacob Arminius (1560-1609) Dutch
- *Remonstrance* – 1610 document by followers of Arminius explaining his doctrine
- Methodist, Wesleyan, Episcopalian, Anglican, Free Will Baptist churches
- John Wesley, H. Orton Wiley

Emphases of Arminianism

- God limits His sovereignty in accordance with man's freedom – all divine decrees are based on foreknowledge
- Prevenient Grace – Prevenient grace has removed the guilt and condemnation of Adam's sin – it reverses the curse

Emphases of Arminianism

- Man is a sinner but not totally depravity (Free Will)
- Conditional Election based on the foreknowledge of God (God does not predestine all things)
- Unlimited Atonement
- Resistible Grace
- Salvation Insecure

Covenant Theology

- Johann Bullinger (1504-1575) Swiss
- He was the sole author of *Second Helvetic Confession of 1566*, which gives a clear statement of the Reformed doctrine.
- Reformed churches
- Johannes Wollebius, William Ames, Johannes Cocceius, Hermann Witsius
- Westminster Confession – 1647

Emphases of Covenantism

- A system of interpreting the Scriptures on the basis of two covenants: the covenant of works and the covenant of grace. Some add the covenant of redemption.
- Importance of grace – In every age, believers are always saved by grace.
- God's primary purpose on earth is redemptive.
- Allegorical system of hermeneutics

Emphases of Covenantism

- Covenant of Works – God entered into a covenant with Adam as the federal head of the human race in which He promised eternal life for obedience and eternal death for disobedience.
- Covenant of Redemption – A covenant made between God the Father and God the Son in eternity past in which they covenanted together for the redemption of the human race.
- Covenant of Grace – A covenant made by God with the elect in which He provides salvation to the elect sinner.

Dispensational Theology

- A system of interpretation that seeks to distinguish differing stewardships whereby man is tested in respect to his obedience to the revealed will of God.
- Dispensationalist is one that embraces the *sine qua non*:
 1. A plain, normal, grammatical-historical, literary method of interpretation;
 2. God has a plan for Israel that is distinct from the Church:
 3. God's overall purpose is to glorify Himself.

Dispensational Theology

- Justin Martyr (110-165) recognized 4 dispensations (Adamic, Abrahamic, Mosaic, Grace)
- Irenaeus (130-200) recognized 4 principal covenants (same as above)
- Clement of Alexandria (150-220) recognized five dispensations (Adamic, Noahic, Abrahamic, Mosaic, Grace)

Dispensational Theology

- Isaac Watts (1674-1748) recognized 6 dispensations (Innocence, Adamic, Noahic, Abrahamic, Mosaic, Grace)
- John Nelson Darby (1800-1882) recognized 7 dispensations (Adamic, Noahic, Abrahamic, Israel [Mosaic], Gentiles [as opposed to Israel in OT], Spirit [grace], Millennium)
- C. I. Scofield (1843-1921) recognized 7 dispensations (Innocence, Conscience, Noahic, Abrahamic, Mosaic, Grace, Millennium)

Emphases of Dispensationalism

- Importance of grace – In every age, believers are always saved by grace.
- Sine qua non - “without which there is not”
- God’s primary purpose on earth is doxological.
- Literal method of hermeneutics.
- Distinction between Israel and the Church.

Catholic Theology

- Semi-Pelagian – the sin of Adam left him in a weakened condition but not spiritually dead. As a result, man can initiate salvation. Pelagius taught complete free will.
- Tradition, Church, and Scripture (including 15 apocryphal and pseudepigraphical writings) are authoritative.
- Council of Trent – 1546; tradition is authoritative, RC church is only interpreter of Scripture, adoption of Latin Vulgate as standard Bible for preaching and teaching.
- Church began with Peter – the papacy has the authority of Peter

Emphases of Catholicism

- Papal Infallibility – when he speaks *ex cathedra*, “from the chair.”
- Union with the RC church is essential to salvation: Pope Pius IX in 1854 declared, “It is to be held as a matter of faith that no one can be saved outside the Apostolic Roman Church. It is the only ark of salvation and anyone who does not enter it must sink in the flood.”
- Mary is the co-redemptrix with Christ, the mediatrix of grace [provides motherly care for the church and reigns with Christ], a perpetual virgin, and immune from all sin.
- Purgatory – a place in which reside the souls of those who die in grace but with the temporal debt for sin unpaid. Here the soul is purged, cleansed, and readied for eternal union with God in Heaven.

Emphases of Catholicism

- Seven Holy Sacraments
- Baptism
- Confirmation (reception of the Holy Spirit)
- Eucharist (Lord's Supper; transubstantiation)
- Confession (sorrow, confession, absolution)
- Holy Orders (ordination)
- Matrimony
- Anointing the Sick (formerly called Extreme Unction – last rites that prepare soul for eternity; can now be given to any sick person)

Liberal Theology

- Liberalism places a premium on man's reason and the findings of science.
- Friedrich Schleiermacher (1763-1834)
German

Emphases of Liberalism

- The Bible is an ordinary book (they deny inspiration [e.g. JEDP theory]).
- Man is basically good (they reject original sin).
- Christ was an ordinary human (they deny the deity of Christ).
- Emphasis on the immanence of God, the view that God is everywhere and in everything (they do not distinguish between the natural and the supernatural – hence no miracles).
- The kingdom will be brought in through human effort (social gospel).

Neo-Orthodox Theology

- Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) Dane; founder of existentialism (emphasis on the spiritual encounter; it stresses the personal experience).
- Karl Barth (1886-1968).

Emphases of Neo-Orthodoxy:

- The Bible is a witness to the Word of God. The writers of Scripture simply related their spiritual experiences. In reading their account a person can also experience the revelation of God. At that moment the Scripture becomes the Word of God to that person.
- They reject general revelation (Bible is the only witness).
- Emphasis on the transcendence of God (He is not knowable).
- Christ is knowable. A knowledge of Christ is both objective (based on historical events) and subjective (experienced internally by the believer).
- All mankind is elect in Christ (universalism).

Liberation Theology

- Most popular in Central and South America. Focus is on the poor and oppressed (including African-American; Latin-Americans; gender).
- A theological movement that has attempted to unite theology with an ideology emphasizing social/economic concerns (usually Marxism).

Emphases of Liberation Theology:

- The Gospel helps the oppressed. God liberated Israel from oppression in the OT. Jesus came to liberate the oppressed in the NT.
- Christians are to be involved in creating governments. They are to follow the example of Jesus and liberate the oppressed.
- Church must serve the world through love.
- Primary focus is on peace, justice, and liberty.
- Theology is not an academic subject but a revolutionary spirit that endeavors to change the world.

Other systems of theology:

1. **Philosophical, Natural Theology** which is the attempt to attain an understanding of God and his relationship to the universe by means of rationalism, without any appeal to special revelation.
2. **Lutheran Theology** builds around three fundamental doctrines: *sola Scriptura*, *sola gratia*, and *sola fide*.

Other systems of Theology:

3. **Reformed Theology** builds around the central theme of the sovereignty of God.

4. **Arminian Theology** builds around themes of free will, human will, divine foreknowledge, universal common grace, and the fairness (justice) of God.

5. **Wesleyan Theology** is Arminian but has a stronger view of both the reality of sin and dependence on divine grace.

Other Systems of Theology:

6. **Liberal Theology** seeks to articulate Christianity in terms of contemporary culture and thinking; they attempt to maintain the essence of Christianity in contemporary terms and images. Scripture, reason, tradition, and experience tend to be viewed on the same level with each other.

7. **Existential Theology** builds around “*demythologizing*” Scripture (whereby we reject not Scripture but the worldview of a past epoch), explaining anything supernatural as a myth, and seeing the Christian faith as a subjective experience, rather than objective truth to embrace (e.g., doctrine of salvation).

8. **Neo-orthodox Theology** builds around more of a hermeneutical approach than a system of theology but it rejects both liberalism and fundamentalism by emphasizing theology as an encounter between God and man.

Other Systems of Theology:

9. **Liberation Theology** builds around social change and how these changes might occur through political action (e.g., Christian Marxism). There are several types:

10. **Black Theology** is a form of liberation theology that centers around black consciousness and social issues.

11. **Feminist Theology** is a form of liberation theology that emphasizes “female critical consciousness” and freedom from gender biases, both personally and socially.

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Let's take a closer look...

- Covenant Theology & Dispensationalism.
- Why? Popular among evangelicals.
- Noteworthy contributions to Anglo-American History, Identity, and Public Policy.
- Both are historical developments of Reformed Theology.

Covenant Theology:

12. **Covenant Theology**, a form of reformed theology, centers on one overall covenant known as the covenant of grace or the covenant of redemption. This covenant, made among the members of the Godhead including the following three elements:
 - A. The Father chose a people to be his own;
 - B. The Son was designated with his agreement to pay the penalty of their sin;
 - C. The Holy Spirit was designated with his agreement to apply the work of the Son to this chosen people.

Closer Look at Covenant Theology:

1. The covenant of grace explains the unity of redemption through all the ages beginning with the Fall: it is worked out in history.
2. God has one people, the church, for whom he has one plan in all the ages since Adam: to call out this people into one body in both the Old and New Testament ages.
3. The plan of salvation is one of grace, being an outworking of the eternal covenant of grace and comes through faith in Jesus Christ.

Dispensationalism as a system of Theology:

Traditional-normative dispensational theology is a system that embodies three essential, fundamental concepts (*sine qua non*):

1. The consistent use of a plain, normal, literal, grammatical-historical-literary method of interpretation;
2. Which reveals that the Church is distinct from Israel;
3. God's overall purpose is to bring glory to Himself (Eph. 1:6, 12, 14).

A closer look at Dispensationalism:

Fundamental and unique to dispensationalism is the belief that they consistently seek to give each word the same meaning it would have in its normal usage.

1. It is also known as plain interpretation because we recognize symbols, figures of speech, types, etc. These are interpreted plainly in order to communicate their intended meaning to the reader. In other words, symbols, figures of speech, and types are normal literary tools that are used to clarify or emphasize thoughts and ideas.

A closer look:

2. Literal, plain, or normative interpretation results in accepting the text of Scripture as its face value.
3. The text taken at face value leads one to recognize the distinctions in the progress of divine revelation whereby God uses different economies or dispensations in the outworking of His program.

A closer look:

Dispensationalists validate the assumption of using a plain, normal, literal, grammatical-historical-literary method of interpretation with the following three reasons:

1. **Philosophically:** Language was given by God for the purpose of communication with humanity. Therefore, God would give His linguistic communication in the most understandable way-literally and normally. It seems unlikely that God would go to all the trouble of revealing Himself to people in a manner that only caused people confusion and uncertainty in their understanding of who God is and how He works.

A closer look:

2. **Biblically:** The O.T. prophecies concerning Christ's birth and rearing, ministry, death, and resurrection were all fulfilled literally.
3. **Logically:** In order to maintain objectivity the literal method of interpretation must be employed. This ensures that impartiality is maintained and prevents the interpreter from overlaying biblical truth with personal thoughts.

A closer look:

Thus, normative, traditional dispensationalism is the result of the consistent use of the basic hermeneutical principle of literal interpretation. And though dispensationalists have not all been consistent in their usage at all times, this claim for literal interpretation can be made by no other system of theology.

III. Dispensational Divisions:

A. The *sine qua non* is what distinguishes a dispensationalist from all others:

1. Consistent use of a normative interpretation;
2. Leads to a distinction between Israel and the Church;
3. God's overall purpose is to glorify Himself.

The recognition of distinctions in the progress of revelation reveals different dispensations that God uses in the outworking of His plan for the ages.

III. Dispensational Divisions:

- B. Dispensations (Greek: *oikonomia*) refer to economies or different ways in which God works with man in salvation history (see Eph. 1:10; 3:2; 1 Tim. 1:4).

- C. In the traditional, normative dispensational scheme, each dispensation begins with (1) a responsibility for man by God, and (2) ends with failure by man and a period of divine judgment. God is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow, yet dispensational theology tends to emphasize the diversity of ways in which God works with humanity

III. Dispensational Divisions:

1. First Dispensation of Innocence: Genesis 1:28-3:6:

Adam was the key person and his responsibilities involved the upkeep of the garden and not eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. As a result of failing the eating test came far-reaching judgments on him, his wife, all of humanity, the serpent, and the entire creation.

III. Dispensational Divisions:

2. Dispensation of Conscience (Gen. 4:1-8:14):

The conscience is whereby God chose to govern people. In other words, human responsibility was to be obedient to the dictates of their consciences. During this period there was murder (Gen. 4:8), unnatural affection (Gen. 6:2), and widespread evil desire and purpose of heart (Gen. 6:5). God closed this period with the universal flood. God spared Noah, his wife, his sons, and their wives by grace (Gen. 6:8).

III. Dispensational Divisions:

3. Dispensation of Civil Government (Gen. 8:15-11:9):

This period began after the Flood and included the animals' fear of people, animals given to people to eat, the promise of no more flood, and the institution of capital punishment. God gave people the right to take human life which established the right to govern others. From the beginning people failed this test when Noah became drunk with wine and thus was incapable of ruling. This period ended with the tower of Babel.

III. Dispensational Divisions:

4. Dispensation of Patriarchal Rule or Promise (Genesis 11:10-Exodus 18:27):

During this period God chose one family and one nation which He used as a representative test of all. Until this dispensation all humanity had been directly linked to God's governing principles. The patriarchal obligation was to believe and serve God, and God provided many material and spiritual provisions. A specific land was promised and blessing as long as the Israelites stayed in that land. The nation's failure ended in slavery in Egypt.

III. Dispensational Divisions:

5. Dispensation of Mosaic Law (Exodus 19:1-Acts 1:26):

The people were responsible to do all the law (James 2:10) but they failed (Rom. 10:1-3). Failure brought judgments: the ten tribes were carried into Assyrian captivity, the two tribes to Babylon captivity, and they were ultimately scattered throughout the world (Matt. 23:37-39) because of their rejection of Jesus Christ.

III. Dispensational Divisions:

6. Dispensation of the Church (Acts 2:1- Revelation 19:21):

Human responsibility is to accept the gift of righteousness which is freely offered by God to all (Rom. 5:15-18)- both Jews and Gentiles. No longer does God deal with just one nation but to anyone who believes. This dispensation will end with the second coming of Jesus Christ.

III. Dispensational Divisions:

7. Dispensation of the Millennium (Rev. 20:1-15)

After the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, the millennial kingdom will be established in fulfillment of the biblical, unconditional covenants of the Old Testament (Abrahamic, Davidic, Land, and New Covenant). The Lord Jesus will rule from Jerusalem on David's throne and His government will last for one thousand years, and human responsibility will be obedience to the King and His Laws. Satan will be bound, Christ will rule, righteousness will predominate, and obvious disobedience will be dealt with swiftly. This period ends with an unsuccessful rebellion against Christ's government. This results in those rebels being cast into eternal punishment.