

## THE COVENANTAL RAMIFICATIONS OF HYPER OR ULTRA DISPENSATIONALISM.

\* Please see the comments at the end of this page regarding the terms Hyper and Ultra.

One's particular dispensational view should extend far beyond the historical question of where the church started in the book of Acts. It starts with a basic position regarding the covenants. What makes a Covenant theologian acquire his Postmillennial or Amillennial stance is directly related to his covenantal views. The same goes for Dispensationalists, who hold that both the Church and Israel benefit from the application of the New Covenant in different contexts, and Hyper Dispensationalists who deny that the church is presently under the New Covenant.

In order to be a Hyper Dispensationalist, one must either 1.) Define a covenant as a simple promise (and thus, allow for a mystery promise, hidden from Old Testament saints,) 2.) Embrace two New Covenants; or 3.) Embrace a Covenant of Redemption. To properly understand this claim, we must talk briefly about definitions.

### A Proper Dispensational View of Covenants.

It should be noted that one's definition of what a covenant actually is lies at the bottom of this discussion. While it is not the scope of this article, it should be noted that covenants may be defined in three contexts. There is a sense in which any promise made could be called a covenant. Such covenants are simple promises, period. Such promises have nothing to do with God's ongoing program or with salvation. Secondly, there is one covenant in particular which is made to all men, animals, and their seed, the Noahic covenant. This ongoing covenant is between God and His creation. Its obedience is obligatory for every man. Some believe this covenant must also be administered by human governments, and thus derive a dispensation of human government from this covenant. The demands of this covenant will ultimately be satisfied by the work of the Kinsman Redeemer when all of creation is reclaimed during the Day of the Lord. This covenant is not associated with the redemption of mankind.

Then, there is a third kind of covenant. These covenants are made with men and their seed, but they also require administrations or priesthoods for their application. While we may not assert it with absolute authority, it may likely be that there was an Adamic Covenant made with Adam after the fall which falls into this category. This is evidenced by the presence of the blood sacrifice and the presence of early prophets and priests (such as Melchizedek). Most importantly, these covenants were the mechanism through which fellowship and blessing were established and salvation was prefigured.

In this third category, the covenants which are made to men and their seed, which require household administrations or priesthoods, and which relate to fellowship and blessing, prefiguring our salvation are the Abrahamic Covenant, the Mosaic Covenant, and the New Covenant. It is very important for the Bible student to understand that both the Mosaic and the New Covenants are, in themselves, different administrations of the Abrahamic Covenant. The Mosaic Covenant was temporary and pre-messianic. The New Covenant is permanent and messianic. Both, fulfill the Abrahamic Covenant. The New Covenant is administered in two phases, first, by Christ *through* His body, the church, and second, by Christ directly *in* His physical body.

### The Proposed Hyper Dispensational Covenant.

Notice the following definition by a well known Hyper Dispensationalist.

*"Covenant of Redemption. God promised eternal life before the world began. '...a faith and knowledge resting on the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time.'" (Titus 1:2) This may be the same covenant written about in Hebrews 13:20: "May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep." Mark McGee, [http://www.mindspring.com/~mamcgee/grace\\_covenants1.html](http://www.mindspring.com/~mamcgee/grace_covenants1.html)*

In order to remedy the problem which remains when we deny that the New Covenant is presently in place we have constructed a covenant based on Titus 1:2 and Hebrews 13:20.

This implies two covenants were initialized simultaneously by blood at the cross...

1. The New Covenant – which is not effected for at least 2,000 years in the future – an everlasting covenant
2. The Covenant of Redemption - which is not even so named, also an everlasting covenant, and a mystery covenant which is apparently administered as the dispensation of the grace of God.

Thus two economies will exist forever and two peoples and administrations will exist forever, in spite of the fact that the dispensation of grace flatly refutes this (one blood.) There must be dual eternal states.

Yet ironically, Heb 13:20 (considered Pauline by the Hyper Dispensationalists) stresses the high priestly ministry of Christ in the clear context of the New Covenant – Hebrews 8-10 – note 10:16. You can't have your cake and eat it too. Either Hebrews 13:20 is talking about the New Covenant – a theme thoroughly treated in Hebrews – or it is an incidental, mysterious add-on reference to the Eternal Covenant.

In short, a covenant is more than a promise. It is a foundational promise on which other promises are based. We cannot call every promise of God a covenant because covenants are promises. Covenants are made to men and their seed – that is a key identifier of a true covenant. We may rightly assume there was an Adamic covenant because the evidence of responsibility for blood sacrifices was obviously carried forward by Adam to his seed. We may not, however, rightfully declare all the aspects of this covenant relationship – because it simply is not recorded. Substantive covenantal studies cannot begin until Noah.

There is no such thing as an eternal covenant, though blood-based salvation was surely promised in eternity past and realized through the New Covenant.

### **Why these things matter.**

The "grace" people corrupt the doctrine of grace. Consider how the "grace" people corrupt the doctrine of grace. Here is a typical hyper dispensationalist quote from an instructor at Grace Bible College & Seminary in Grand Rapids, MI.

*"Everything you and I and every other Christian need to know for the Grace Life are found in the writings of Paul." (sic) Mark McGee*

While we would not dispute that the riches of grace are taught and expounded by Paul, this is in error for the following reasons.

**1. The logical result of this statement, taken at face value leads to the impression that the rest of scripture is not profitable to the grace life.** Yet Paul says it is, and the scriptures further argue that man is to live by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God, not just Paul's. We know that hyper dispensationalists do not teach this, but they cannot escape the implication that folks need not go elsewhere in the Bible in order to have a full, enriched Christian life. Either we need a proper understanding of the whole Bible (rightly interpreted in light of grace) to fully enjoy the grace life or we do not.

**2. The fact that is not revealed in this short statement is that most hyper dispensationalists also reject the writings of Paul as being authoritative for the grace life, unless they are corroborated by the prison epistles.** For example, because Baptism is not taught in the prison epistles, these folks teach

that Paul "stopped" baptizing at the end of the transitional period. This is held, in spite of the fact that Paul clearly tells us why he refrained from baptism in Corinthians. It was for practical reasons, not theological ones. The same holds true for the Lord's Table, a doctrine taught by Paul but rejected by Hyper Dispensationalists. We have now technically limited our source of the grace life to a handful of books.

**3. This statement implies that grace is not taught elsewhere, especially in the general epistles.** The word grace and the concepts of grace applied in the life are clearly taught in the general epistles. James, for example, clearly refutes salvation by works and stresses the perfect law of liberty – a law which descends from grace in contrast to the Mosaic law. Peter's thesis on suffering and glory clearly enhances and even expands Paul's teaching on the same. Peter extends the messianic implications of suffering and glory. John demolishes Gnostic thinking through his unequivocal assertions regarding our position in Christ. Each of these authors repudiates the enemies of grace. Ignorance of each of these authors would impoverish my grace life in one way or another.

**4. Christologically, it is not enough to build our image of Christ simply on Paul's letters.** To be properly equipped to carry out His program for this age, we must absorb ourselves in the Christ of Revelation – His plan and His program. A broad understanding is required. Our Savior is also our Messiah. He is not just the Jewish Messiah. Our placement in Messiah's body makes His task incumbent upon us. In this age, the suffering Servant is a light to the nations. In the age to come, He will also bring justice to all the earth through His people. Understanding the role of Messiah and the messianic truths revealed *all* of the scriptures, are foundational to understanding who we are, where we are going, and why. They are systemic to understanding how grace functions in the believer's life. These are not merely Jewish truths that can be relegated to a past or future age. We are in the middle of a great program.

Thus, this attitude robs from believers all the treasures of Christ, which are embedded in the non Pauline books by devaluing their importance. It is childish and immature. In our passionate defense of grace, we must take care not to diminish or corrupt its full implications.

## ON TERMINOLOGY

The terms hyper dispensationalism and ultra dispensationalism are unfortunate designations which have "stuck" on the Grace Gospel Fellowship people for many years, due to the influence of men like H.A. Ironside. The terms should be discarded because they are irrelevant, misleading, and unfair. The problem is that few have offered better designations.

These folks are neither **\*\*Hyper** nor **Ultra** because both terms imply that they are simply extending the principles of literal interpretation and dispensationalism to their ultimate conclusions. It would even imply that they are being consistent. That is like being an "extreme literalist." One can be a letterist, but he cannot be an extreme literalist. Either you are a literalist or you are not.

**The core of the Grace Gospel teachings is based on a misunderstanding of the covenants.** The irony lies in this. While they represent the polar opposite of Covenant thinking, they make the very same mistake Covenant theologians make. The Covenant theologians have manufactured two (sometimes three) imaginary covenants that were made in eternity past, the Covenant of Works and the Covenant of Grace. From these premises all other covenants are treated and, unfortunately, blended into one program. The end result is great confusion between what God is doing with Israel and the Church and the consummation of those programs.

But the GGF have also manufactured their make believe covenant. By combining a general statement made in Titus 1:2 and the benediction of Hebrews 13:20, many of them manufacture a primordial Covenant of Redemption. They must do this because they must remove the New Covenant administration from the dispensation of grace at all costs. Others have not gone to this extreme. They simply imagine two New

Covenants, one for the Church and one for Israel. Both imaginings (a Covenant of Redemption or a New Covenant of Grace) lead to abysmally conflicting results.

Regarding a proper name for the movement, then, we would do well to stop calling these dear brethren by such inflammatory terms as "hypers" or "ultra's." It is neither to our advantage or theirs to use such terms. At the same time, it is not fair to use their own designation chosen for themselves. They see themselves as owners of the term "The Gospel of the Grace of God." All who are saved by grace through faith embrace that gospel. The fact that they have further defined it to their own ends does not disenfranchise all grace believers from its use. This is no more honest than the Church of Christ people claiming they are the only church of Christ.

In reality, those who refuse to see the New Covenant as the driving promise behind the grace administration must be one of the following:

**Acovenantalists** – See no necessity for a driving covenant or to govern the grace age or a need to equate covenants with any promise made in any context to anyone.

**Bi-New Covenantalists** – Seeing an New Covenant for the Church and a yet to be implemented New Covenant for Israel.

**Redemptive Covenantalists** - Those who construct a primordial covenant through combining Titus1:2 and Hebrews 13:20.

\*\* Some students do distinguish between the terms hyper and ultra, but they represent a small group. Most do not differentiate.