

Tony Evans on “Transdispensationalism

In his book, [Totally Saved](#), **Tony Evans** attempts to answer the question, “What about those who have never heard?” in the appendix section. Evans argues for an explanation which he calls “**transdispensationalism**” (rivaled only by transubstantiation in a contest for most theological syllables). What I did not know was that the appendix in which this material is found was NOT printed in the future [paperback edition](#). **Jim Sutherland**, who recognized this problem, [wrote](#) the following:

Not knowing if this appendix omission was due to criticism of Moody Press for printing the appendix, or due to a change in Dr. Evans’ position, I tried for over 4 months to determine from Dr. Evans if he still would continue to teach and promulgate this particular doctrine. I could get no reply, so must assume that he may continue to teach and promote “transdispensationalism.” What was said of learned Greek father Origin could be said of Dr. Evans, that in his pastoral concern he has turned a hope into a doctrine.

So what exactly is transdispensationalism? It is a whacky word for a whacky idea. But instead of attempting to sum up what Evans argues, I am reproducing the section of the appendix where Evans himself explains the idea (bold faced mine):

Now there’s a third way God can deal in grace with those who can’t believe because they have never heard the gospel. He can apply another dispensation and its criteria to them. A dispensation is simply an economy or an administration of God, a way in which He deals with people based on the information he has given them.

For instance, people in the Old Testament were saved without hearing the name of Jesus, because Jesus hadn’t come to earth yet. But they were saved because they believed in the revelation of God.

The Bible says Abraham believed God and was accounted as righteous, or saved, for believing in God’s promise of a son and a seed (Genesis 15:6). This was long before the Mosaic sacrificial system was ever begun.

*Abraham believed without hearing about Jesus, but I am not saying that people can be saved apart from Jesus. Never. Nobody can get saved without Jesus, because He is the Savior of all men, as we read in 1 Timothy 4:10. Everybody is saved through Christ, even those who lived before Jesus came, because in the mind and heart of God, Jesus was already sacrificed to pay for sin before the world was ever created (see Revelation 13:8). **So a person can be saved without knowing Jesus’ name, but not without Jesus’ provision for sin.***

In the case of a person who never hears the gospel and never knows the name of Jesus, but who responds to the light he has, God treats that person like an Old Testament saint, if you will. That is, if the person trusts in what God has revealed, God deals with that person based on the knowledge he has, not the information he never received. I call this **transdispensationalism**.

*By this I mean if a person is sincerely seeking God and desiring to know Him, and is responding to the truth he knows, if there is no missionary or direct manifestation of God, then **God judges that person based on his faith in the light he has received**. And as in the case of Abraham, **God will retroactively count this person as righteous by applying the death of Christ from the dispensation of grace**.*

John MacArthur, in a question and answer session was asked about his reference to the idea of transdispensationalism in a message to which he [replied](#):

“Obviously, there is no biblical defense for that, and none is attempted in the book—none. There isn’t even a verse to defend that. Furthermore, living up to natural human light, apart from the revelation of the true and living God, wouldn’t save anybody in any dispensation. But, it is a very—it is a very strange thing and, to this degree, to the degree that He gives salvation to those who have never heard the gospel, it’s a departure from what we believe the scripture teaches. . . . There was a radio interview that followed that book that’s available. You can get the transcript of that radio interview, in which the host was interviewing Tony Evans and said to him, “You’re saying, if a Hindu looks up and says, ‘I know you’re up there somewhere. I don’t know who you are, but I’d really like to know you,’ God will count that as sufficient as salvation?” And the answer to that was “Yes.”

Evans recognized a future objection: “Tony, if you say people can be saved by general revelation, why preach the gospel? Why bother sending missionaries around the world and translating the Bible?” Evans gives two (really bad) answers to this objection:

1. Because Christ has commanded us to go and tell the whole world the good news of His salvation.
2. Because the process I just described for those who haven’t heard of Christ is *far from automatic*. Whatever we may try to deduce from Scripture about those who have never heard about Christ, we know without a doubt that those who hear and believe the gospel will be saved. (emphasis mine)

One answer to this question is “because I said so,” and the other is “well, it might not actually work.” After having read this piece one will easily see that there is no substantive biblical warrant for such a position. However, as I have come to find out, this is an argument being made by several inclusivists. In a follow-up post, I will provide quotes as

well as the line of argument for what Millard Erickson called “chronologically displaced persons” (which is the same thing as Evans’ transdispensationalism).