

**EPHESIANS: THE CHURCH FROM START TO FINISH**  
**"Part VII: The TRUTH About 'Dispensations'"**  
**(Ephesians 3:1-21)**

Introduction: (To show the need . . .)

The Pastor of this Church was trained at a seminary that promotes the "**dispensational**" view of Scripture! That fact is a *problem* to some as we can illustrate by the following quotations:

- (1) Philip Mauro, in 1928, wrote: ". . . evangelical Christianity must purge itself of this leaven of *dispensationalism* . . . The entire system of 'dispensational teaching' is *modernistic* [a term for Liberal Theology] in the strictest sense." (Mauro, The Gospel of the Kingdom, p. 8-9 as cited in Ryrie, Dispensationalism Today, p. 11)
- (2) The Presbyterian Journal called dispensationalism "a conservative 'heresy'" (1/2/63, p. 8 as cited in Ryrie, *Ibid.*, p. 12)
- (3) The work, The Church Faces the Isms by the faculty of the Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary (ed. by Arnold B. Rhodes, 1958) includes dispensationalism along with Seventh-day Adventism and Perfectionism in its list of "isms". (*Ibid.*, cited by Ryrie)
- (4) In 1945, Theologian Oswald T. Allis (Prophecy and the Church, p. 262) warned that dispensationalism is a "danger" and is "unscriptural". (*Ibid.*, cited by Ryrie)
- (5) Daniel Fuller, son of a famous radio Bible teacher, wrote in his dissertation at the Northern Baptist Theological Seminary in 1957 that dispensationalism is "internally inconsistent and unable to harmonize itself with the Biblical data . . ." (*Ibid.*, cited by Ryrie)
- (6) John Bowman ("The Bible and Modern Religions: II. Dispensationalism," Interp. (April, '56), p. 172) associated dispensationalism with Hitler and National Socialism, Roman Catholicism, Christian Science and Mormonism! (*Ibid.*, cited by Ryrie)
- (7) The most serious charge is picked up by John Bowman (*Loc. cit.*, p. 178): he claimed that dispensationalists teach salvation by **works** for all who live in the dispensations besides Promise and the Church, *Ibid.*, cited by Ryrie, p. 110.

**Well, with such parties opposed to it, and with the charge of teaching a works gospel against it, what can 'dispensationalism' possibly BE? If Pastor Don Shell went to a seminary that teaches it, does he hold to a cultic or other very *errant* view?! Where does that put Nepaug CHURCH at this point?!"**

(We turn to the sermon "Need" section . . .)

**Need: "I heard that 'dispensationalists' believe Christ saves those in the Church era by faith while men in other alleged 'ages' are saved by WORKS! As Dallas Seminary teaches 'dispensationalism', is the PASTOR who went there *errant*?! What does Scripture say?"**

- I. **Scripture teaches that dispensations EXIST, for Paul NAMES the Church to be a distinct "dispensation" from the Mosaic Law:**
  - A. Paul **named** the Church as a "**dispensation**" of God, Ep. 3:1-6 (KJV)
  - B. This "dispensation" was unknown to men until Christ came, Eph. 3:5.
    1. Scholars **opposed** to "dispensationalism" take the word "as" in v. 5 in a **restrictive** way to mean there was **some** awareness of the Gentiles being part of Israel in Old Testament days, Allis, Prophecy & the Church, p. 90ff, cited in Ryrie, Dispens. Today, p. 133.
    2. However, that "as" may be taken **adjectively** to mean the giving of new insight, making the Church **distinct** from Israel, *Ibid.*, Ryrie, p. 134, citing Walv., The Mill. Kingdom, p. 232ff. In Col. 1:26, Paul clarifies his Eph. 3:5 use of "as", saying the Church was **hid** in past ages. Thus, the Church was **not known** by men until Christ came!
  - C. This "dispensation" is viewed by Paul as the combining of Gentiles and Jews into one body, Eph. 3:6; 2:11-16. Since the **Church** creates a **new entity** from the Jew **or** Gentile acc. to Eph. 2:14-16, the **Church** is this new "dispensation" that is **distinct** and **newer than** Israel.
  - D. Paul's **actions** also revealed his belief that the Church was a **new** "dispensation": he **accepted** his imprisonment for the belief held by his **Jewish persecutors** that he taught the Church was **free** from the **Law**, Eph. 3:1, 13; 2:15 & its Acts 22:17-22 setting [B.K.C., N.T., p. 418]!
- II. **From Scripture, we define and discern seven such "dispensations":**
  - A. The word "dispensation" in Eph. 3:2 is from *oikonomia*, meaning a **lifestyle administration**, cf. Lk. 16:2-4, UBS Grk. N.T., p. 669, 278f.
  - B. We learned from Eph. 2:15-22 that a **key** characteristic of such **administrations** is that there are **different rules** of God in each one.
  - C. Combining all of this information, we **define** a "dispensation" to be God's assigning a people His requirements and blessings under the lead of an administrator who dispenses them for a specific period of time.
  - D. Applying this definition to Scripture, we see **seven** dispensations:
    1. The Dispensation of Innocence, Gen. 1:1-3:24 where man operated without sin under Adam as God's leader over the earth, Gen. 1:28.

2. The Dispensation of Conscience, Gen. 4:1-8:14 where God directed man to check his sin ultimately by his God-given conscience.
3. The Dispensation of Human Government, Gen. 8:15-11:32 where man under Noah was to check sin ultimately by human government.
4. The Dispensation of Promise, Gen. 12:1-Ex. 2:25 where God turned from the failure of such efforts to use a nation thru Abraham
5. The Dispensation of Law, Ex. 35:2 thru much of the N.T. gospels (Gen. 35:1-Ex. 35:1 = transition from promise to law) where God organized Israel under Moses to disciple the wayward Gentiles.
6. The Dispensation of the Church, [Mtt. 27:50 and Mk. 15:37 and Lk. 23:46 and Jn. 19:30 to Acts 19:7 is a **practical** transition from Law to the Church (though the Church starts in Acts 2)] roughly Acts 19:7 to Rev. 3:22 where God turned from failing Israel to reach the lost world under the Apostles through the Church.
7. The Dispensation of the Fullness of Times, [the Tribulation (Rev. 4:1-19:21) and Blessing (Rev. 20:1-7 et al)] as God ends history under Christ for its failure to heed the truth, and ushers in Eternity.

### III. In adopting "dispensationalism", we clear up serious questions:

- A. Man is **always** saved by *faith* in what God **reveals** (Rom. 4:1-3 for Abraham and Rev. 14:6-8 for Tribulation saints), and Christ's death is **always** the **basis** of salvation (Rom. 3:25 for the justification of men **before** the Church & Rev. 7:14 for those who will be justified **after** the *Rapture*): thus, "dispensations" do **not** promote different *ways* of **salvation**, but are God's **often modified living arrangements** for men in history that reveal His great quest to reach an **ever failing** world!
- B. Adopting "dispensationalism" does not mean we feel only **parts** of the Bible are useful, for **all** Scripture is for *our* benefit, Rom. 15:4; yet, we heed the **authority** of the *edicts* of the dispensation applicable to *us* above **edicts** found in other eras that oppose today's rules, Eph. 2:15ff.
- C. **Also**, adopting "dispensationalism" is necessary to assert **inerrancy** as this view **alone** explains otherwise hopeless **logical contradictions** in the Bible (like its opposing diets, Gn. 1:29; 9:30; Lv. 11; 1 Tim. 4:3f)!

Application: *As a dispensationalist, the pastor teaches that there is, there always has been and there always will be: (1) ONE Savior, Jesus Christ; (2) ONE salvation, by Christ's death and (3) ONE means of salvation, by faith alone in God's revelation. (4) As a dispensationalist, he defends the Bible's INERRANCY by recognizing practical, intentional CHANGES in God's living arrangements for different men at different times in history!*

Lesson: *The Bible ITSELF teaches dispensations, differing lifestyle arrangements to which we are obliged to heed in order to please God!*

Conclusion: (To illustrate the sermon lesson . . . )

According to Leviticus 4:1-12, if a one of God's people sins, he has to take the following steps to find forgiveness from God:

- (a) He has to bring a young bull without any blemish to the temple of God in Israel, taking it up to the door of the structure.
- (b) There, he must lay his hand on the bull's head, identifying the animal with his sin, and then kill the animal.
- (c) Next, the Jewish priest at the site has to take of the bull's blood and bring it in a bowl to the temple site where he sprinkles some of its contents seven times before the Lord in the front of the veil separating the holiest of holies from the holy place.
- (d) Next, the priest has to anoint the horns of the altar of incense before the veil with blood from that bowl, and pour the rest of the bowl's container of blood at the base of the altar of burnt offering.
- (e) Then he must burn parts of the animal on the altar until all is charred: these involve the fat of the animal, including the internal fat deposited over its kidneys and the liver.
- (f) After this, the skin, meat, head, legs and intestinal contents are to be carried outside of the city to be burned on a wood fire in a ceremonially clean place until all is reduced to ashes.

**Now, if one is NOT a dispensationalist, and thus believes he must perform this ritual TODAY, he faces some great obstacles:** (a) First, there is no temple in Jerusalem and no qualified, sanctified Levitical priesthood in place, negating the possibility of getting one's sins removed! (b) Second, it is financially prohibitive to travel to Jerusalem from New Hartford every time one sins, and come to such a location prepared to offer a bull for a sacrifice! (c) Third, the Islamic peoples maintain their "holy" Mosque of Omar on the temple mount! It would thus be **politically** nearly impossible for a "pro-Israeli" *American* to get by with his **life** even *trying* to perform such a ritual at this **spot**!

**The ONLY solution is to recognize that in CHRIST, the Perfect Sacrifice, the Lamb of God, the LAW is done away as our authority, and that for cleansing from sin today, all we need is to confess our sin to God in Jesus' name, 1 Jn. 1:9; Eph. 2:11-22.**

**Well, that takes being a DISPENSATIONALIST! Since this view is what Scripture teaches, we hold to dispensationalism and take care of our sins by way of prayers of confession to Christ!**