

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY (ORGANIZED BIBLE KNOWLEDGE)
Part IX: Dispensationalism (Doctrine Of Varying Divine Eras For God's People)

I. Introduction

- A. The word, "dispensationalism" raises concerns among some, for it is thought to represent a belief that excessively divides up Scripture, making some of it useful for us and other parts off limits to Christians.
- B. We study this doctrine to test its validity, and show why we adopt *regular* dispensationalism at Nepaug.

II. Dispensationalism (Doctrine Of Varying Divine Eras For God's People)

- A. Scripture **itself** teaches the existence of dispensations (as follows)
 - 1. The King James Version uses "dispensation" 4 times in 1 Cor. 9:17; Eph. 1:10 and 3:2 and Col. 1:25 (Strong's Conc., p. 268). These translate the Greek word, *oikonomia* as "dispensation," Ibid., p. 51.
 - 2. That word means "management of a household, arrangement," Arndt & Ging., Grk.-Engl. Lex. of the N.T., p. 562. A derivative of this word, *oikonomos* as used in Luke 16:1-13 and 12:42-48 et al. of a "steward" shows by *oikonomia* is meant a stewardship where a householder places a select servant over His other servants for which such a head servant gives an account.
 - 3. The **way** Paul uses the word *oikonomia* we know there are **at least three** dispensations in Scripture:
 - a. Ephesians 1:10 mentions a post-Church dispensation of "the fullness of times."
 - b. There had to be a dispensation before the Church as God had believers before then. That being so, and if Paul refers to the Church era as a dispensation in 1 Cor. 9:17; Eph. 3:2 and Col. 1:25, there must be at least three distinct dispensations, cf. Charles C. Ryrie's Dispensationalism Today, p. 50.
- B. Jesus **Himself** clearly taught the presence of dispensations in Scripture (as follows):
 - 1. Jesus considered Himself sent only to Israel in Matthew 15:24.
 - 2. However, Matthew 28:19-20 shows Jesus sending His disciples to the world's nations.
 - 3. There has to be a dispensational change between these two passages for Jesus to be without error!
- C. By inductive Bible study, we identify the dispensations of Scripture as follows: (1) The Dispensation of **Innocence**, Genesis 1:1-3:6 (Pre-Adamic Fall); (2) The Dispensation of **Conscience** under Sin, Genesis 3:7-8:19 (The Fall to the Noahic Flood); (3) The Dispensation of **Human Government**, Genesis 8:20-11:32 (The Flood to Babel); (4) The Dispensation of **Promise**, Genesis 12:1-Exodus 19:2 (Abraham to the Mosaic Law); (5) The Dispensation of **Law**, Exodus 19:3 through the Gospels to Acts 2:1 (Law to the Cross, but transitioned for 43 days to the Day of Pentecost); (6) The Dispensation of **Grace**, the Church Era, Acts 2:1 to Revelation 3:22 (Pentecost to the Rapture) (Keep in mind Acts is a transitional book from Law to Grace) and (7) The Dispensation of the **Millennial Kingdom**, Rev. 4:1-20:10 (The Tribulation is a preparation for the Kingdom as the Kingdom gospel is then preached, Mtt. 24:13-14 and Rev. 11:15.)
- D. Dispensationalists like us do not hold to differing ways of salvation: Old Testament as well as Tribulation saints are saved as are we through Christ's cross (Rom. 3:25-26; Rev. 7:14). Yet, due to the progress of God's revelation in time, saints in history **believe differing contents** of information: Abraham believed God's promise about his seed to be saved (Gen. 15:5-6), Christians trust in Christ's death and resurrection for salvation (1 Cor. 15:1-11) and Tribulation saints will believe the Gospel of the Kingdom, Rev. 14:6-7.
- E. Dispensationalists like us do not "pigeonhole" Scripture: we hold **all** Scripture is useful in **principle**, but all **non-Church** Scripture **content** must be **filtered** by **Church** era writings for **specific application**! For example, when we read God's call to keep the Sabbath Day in Exodus 20:9-11 as a testimony to God as being the Creator, we note we cannot apply it directly as Colossians 2:14-17 teaches the Sabbath Day ordinance is not for the Christian. However, we can apply Exodus 20:9-11 by standing firmly in favor of God as being the Creator God of the universe in upholding a literal interpretation of Genesis 1-2!!
- F. Dispensationalists like us do not err as Hyperdispensationalists and some cults do: we hold only to **seven** dispensations in accord with the meaning of *oikonomia* and our need to avoid contradictions in Scripture. Dispensationalists holding to more than 7 dispensations historically err from "normal" interpretation.

Lesson: The Bible and Jesus TEACH the existence of differing dispensations in Scripture, and so should we! Yet, we hold ONLY what Scripture reveals on dispensations using "normal" interpretation!

Application: We must be dispensationalists because Scripture teaches as much, but ONLY as far as SCRIPTURE goes (no more than seven dispensations) so that we avoid error on the subject.