

26-10-06-Dispensations

This morning I'm going to introduce a new idea concerning Dispensations. It isn't my original idea. Last summer in Wisconsin Dan Gross introduced this idea to me. He didn't include all I'm going to say about it, but it was definitely a new idea.

Dominic, the one to whom we are donating to bring him here from the Philippines, is the one who introduced it to Dan.

We call ourselves Dispensationalists. Specifically Mid-Acts Dispensationalists. For years, being brought up in a Fundamentalist church, I was taught that there are seven dispensations. They were the standard Scofield dispensations.

1. Innocence
2. Conscience
3. Human Government
4. Promise
5. Law
6. Grace
7. Kingdom

These are still the standard for most Baptist and Fundamental churches, although there have been alterations in them over the years by different groups and churches. While Scofield put the beginning of the dispensation of grace at the cross, later teachers moved it to Acts 2 at Pentecost.

Peter Ruckman taught at a Bible college in Pensacola Florida, and while he hung on to the Acts 2 beginning, his teaching moved many of his students to move the beginning of the church to as late as Acts 10. This is when Peter has the vision and goes to Cornelius.

Others have played around endlessly with dispensations, each developing their own take on the seven dispensations. In this one you see they put the first two together and add Tribulation as a dispensation.

Here's one that Tracy will appreciate. It is the chart of charts. Now this one is from an organization that said they were Grace believers, but they still hang on to the Scofield method of dispensational understanding with the exception that they start the Body of Christ a little later.

Next is from another Grace organization that utilizes the slide-out dispensational chart. The one on the left is when it is folded; the one on the right is when it is unfolded.

This is a larger image of the unfolded chart. If you can read it, it still has the seven dispensations the same as Scofield. The little green arrows on the top are where it's folded to hide the dispensation of grace.

Now sadly, I even dabbled in identifying the dispensations. This is what I had come up with, and it seemed perfectly reasonable to me at the time.

Adam to Moses: **Romans 5:13-14** (For until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law. **14** Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression, who is the figure of him that was to come.

Moses to John the Baptist: **Luke 16:16** The law and the prophets *were* until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it.

John the Baptist to Peter: **Matthew 16:16-18** And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. **17** And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed *it* unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. **18** And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

Now I understood when I taught this that the rock that Christ would build his church upon wasn't Peter. The rock was what Peter had proclaimed, which is the Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the Living God. But that statement was made to Peter, and along with Gal. 2:8 that we see in a second, it seemed that this so-called dispensation was given to Peter.

That's what I thought at the time. Fortunately I didn't make a chart and engrave it in stone.

Peter to Paul: **Galatians 2:7-8** But contrariwise, when they saw that the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto me, as *the gospel* of the circumcision *was* unto Peter; **8** (For he that wrought effectually in Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision, the same was mighty in me toward the Gentiles:)

Paul to Elijah: **Malachi 4:5-6** Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD: **6** And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.

Elijah to Christ: **Isaiah 9:6-7** For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. **7** Of the increase of *his* government and peace *there shall be* no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.

Christ to the Father: Basically this is covered in Revelation 20. The thousand-year reign of Christ. We call it the millennial reign, or the Millenium. But that word isn't in the scriptures, so I guess that's another one we'll have to leave behind for the theologians.

And finally, The Fulness of Times: **1 Corinthians 15:23-24** But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming. **24** Then *cometh*

the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power.

Ephesians 1:10 That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; *even* in him:

That was my pathetic foray into the dispensations. But it had almost as many problems as all of the others. Let's look at an obvious one, then look at some of the one that isn't so obvious.

First, when you look at the standard dispensational chart that most dispensationalists use from C.I. Scofield, the problem that should stand out is that it's missing a dispensation.

Does anyone see the dispensation of the Fulness of Times?

Ephesians 1:9-10 Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: **10** That in **the dispensation of the fulness of times** he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; *even* in him:

That is plainly identified and it can't be the kingdom, because all things aren't gathered together in Christ. So most dispensational charts miss this one.

Second, and this is the one we're going to get to, does God call any of these seven a dispensation? Only one. The dispensation of the grace of God.

Now, looking at my masterpiece, there's a problem that should stand out to us after listening to Dave for the past few weeks. If I may put an addendum to the DG rule, I think it should be this.

Deuteronomy 4:2 Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish *ought* from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you.

Revelation 22:18-19 For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: **19** And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and *from* the things which are written in this book.

If something isn't there, don't make it up. In my little list – notice it isn't a chart – I have eight dispensations. How many dispensations are found in our scriptures?

Two.

That's what Dan brought up to me this summer that Dominic had brought up to him. Dispensationalists argue about what the dispensations are whenever there are only two in the Word of God.

That is the extent of it. Now right away our human wisdom kicks in and we start to say: Well yeah, but others are implied by necessity. There have to be more than two because God is dealing with mankind in more than those two instances. Right? The Law was clearly a dispensation, because God was dispensing His program to the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

There's another word we use a lot that isn't in your King James Bible – program.

But God was dispensing a manner by which men could be saved, right? Only if the law could save you.

But God was dispensing something!!!!

Well, here's an interesting thought. You don't have to say it out loud, but just take a moment and define the word dispensation in your head. I'll wait while I try to learn some Greek.

That is the Greek word that the KJ translators translated 'dispensation.'

My best try at pronouncing it is the way it's spelled in italics – oy-kon-om-EE-ah. It is where our English word economy comes from.

But they also translated it something else. It is used only six times in the New Testament. Paul uses it four times, and each one is translated dispensation. Now let's look at the other place it was used:

Luke 16:1-3 ¶ And he said also unto his disciples, There was a certain rich man, which had a steward; and the same was accused unto him that he had wasted his goods. **2** And he called him, and said unto him, How is it that I hear this of thee? give an account of thy **stewardship**; for thou mayest be no longer steward. **3** Then the steward said within himself, What shall I do? for my lord taketh away from me **the stewardship**: I cannot dig; to beg I am ashamed.

In Luke that word was translated stewardship. What is a stewardship?

STEWARDSHIP, *noun* The office of a steward.

Well that's not helpful. What is a steward?

1. A man employed in great families to manage the domestic concerns, superintend the other servants, collect the rents or income, keep the accounts, etc.

So stewardship is the office of one who is basically in charge of all of the affairs of a great family, or a very wealthy family. He administers all of their affairs and delegates duties to other servants

Now I'm certainly not going to try to change the King James Bible, so I want you to think about this. Why couldn't the translators use the word stewardship in the verses in Paul's epistles.

1 Corinthians 9:17 For if I do this thing willingly, I have a reward: but if against my will, **a dispensation of the gospel is committed unto me.**

Ephesians 3:2 If ye have heard of **the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward:**

Colossians 1:25 Whereof I am made a minister, according to **the dispensation of God which is given to me for you,** to fulfil the word of God;

In each of these verses, a dispensation is given to Paul. Why couldn't it be translated 'stewardship'? Paul was certainly the one who was in charge of administering the affairs of this new revelation. He even says this in:

2 Corinthians 11:28 Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches.

But the problem of translating it stewardship is first you have to have someone to administer to. You have to have a great house that you are over. When God told the church in Antioch to "*Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them,*" there wasn't a house to administer to at all. He had no stewardship until there was a house that needed to be taken care of.

The message had to be delivered broadly among the heathen, and the building had to be built on the gospel of the grace of God before his office could be rightly called a stewardship.

The message had to be dispensed.

What is the non-theological definition of dispensation? This is from three different dictionaries:

DISPENSATION, noun [Latin See Dispense.]

1. Distribution; the act of dealing out to different persons or places

a: the act of dispensing

an act or instance of dispensing; distribution.

Synonyms:

bestowal, dissemination, dispersion

something that is distributed or given out.

Today, perhaps, it would be okay to call Paul's epistles the stewardship of the body of Christ. During his ministry, however, he was dispensing it. A dispensation was given to him. It wasn't an administration, as other Bibles put it, because he was building the house that needed to be administered.

What I want you to consider for this morning is this: What if we are still stuck in some manner of C.I Scofield's definition of how to define the word dispensation.

*A dispensation is a period of time during which man is tested in respect of obedience to some **specific** revelation of the will of God. Seven such dispensations are distinguished in Scripture.*

That definition has been massaged and edited over the years, but it always comes down to defining 'dispensation' of how God is dealing with mankind in a certain period of time.

This is the basic theological definition of a dispensation:

Stewardship: God acts as a master of a household, while humans serve as stewards responsible for managing what God has revealed in that specific era.

Progressive Revelation: God's plan unfolds across sequential stages, where expectations or rules of life adapt to the new truth revealed.

The Pattern: Each era typically features a cycle of divine revelation, human responsibility, failure, and judgment, followed by grace leading into the next phase.

What if that definition is wrong? What if there are actually only two dispensations, and both are revealed to us in God's Word? If we aren't going to add or take away from His words, couldn't that be true?

What if Paul's office as the apostle of the Gentiles was to dispense the gospel of grace to the heathen, and as they believed, to administer and begin to be a steward to them. What if that is what the dispensation of the grace of God was that was given him. What if it called a dispensation because it is different from everything else.

What if it is called a dispensation because in other ages "he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began," but "the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints."

Luke 1:70 As he spake **by the mouth** of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began:

Acts 3:21 Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken **by the mouth** of all his holy prophets since the world began.

You see in these verses that he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets which have been since the world began. That means even before Moses, even before Job, He was speaking by holy prophets back to Adam. That message goes back to Adam. It isn't a dispensation; it is

simply what God was doing. It was simply progressive revelation through the ages. There wasn't a new or different way of dealing with mankind, there was just additional knowledge throughout time.

The dispensation of grace given to Paul was necessary because it was different. And because it was different, it was a dispensation. Not simply more revelation about what God has been doing all along, but entirely new. And that's why it's called a dispensation.

I had planned this to be a one-off message, but I think I'll have to delve into it a little deeper. Admittedly, I may be as wrong about this as I was about my eight dispensations. But if we aren't to add or take away from the words of God, maybe there are only two dispensations because everyone has been defining dispensation according to theology and not according to Sola Scriptura.