

26-09-13-Why I Am No Longer a Dispensationalist

Over the past few months, Tracy has taught the five solas of the Reformation on Wednesday nights. The backbone, or the foundation of the five solas was Sola Scriptura, or scripture alone. This was very important in recognizing that the Roman Catholic church was teaching many things that aren't in the scripture. And although most, if not all, Protestant churches today don't really follow the doctrine of scripture alone, it is still the fundamental teaching that separates Protestants from Roman Catholics today.

Also over the past few months, Dave has been teaching the importance of where we get scripture, from the King James Bible. He came up with the DG rule, which is that you don't change the wording in the King James Bible just because you believe it is outdated.

Last week I told you that Dominic had pointed out to Dan Gross that there are only two dispensations that are named in the King James Bible. Dan had pointed that out to me last summer. After thinking about this for a while, I started examining whether or not the theological definition of a dispensation is the actual Biblical 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.

This is the theological definition of a dispensation. A very simple way of putting it is that a dispensation is how God is dealing with mankind during a certain age or period of time.

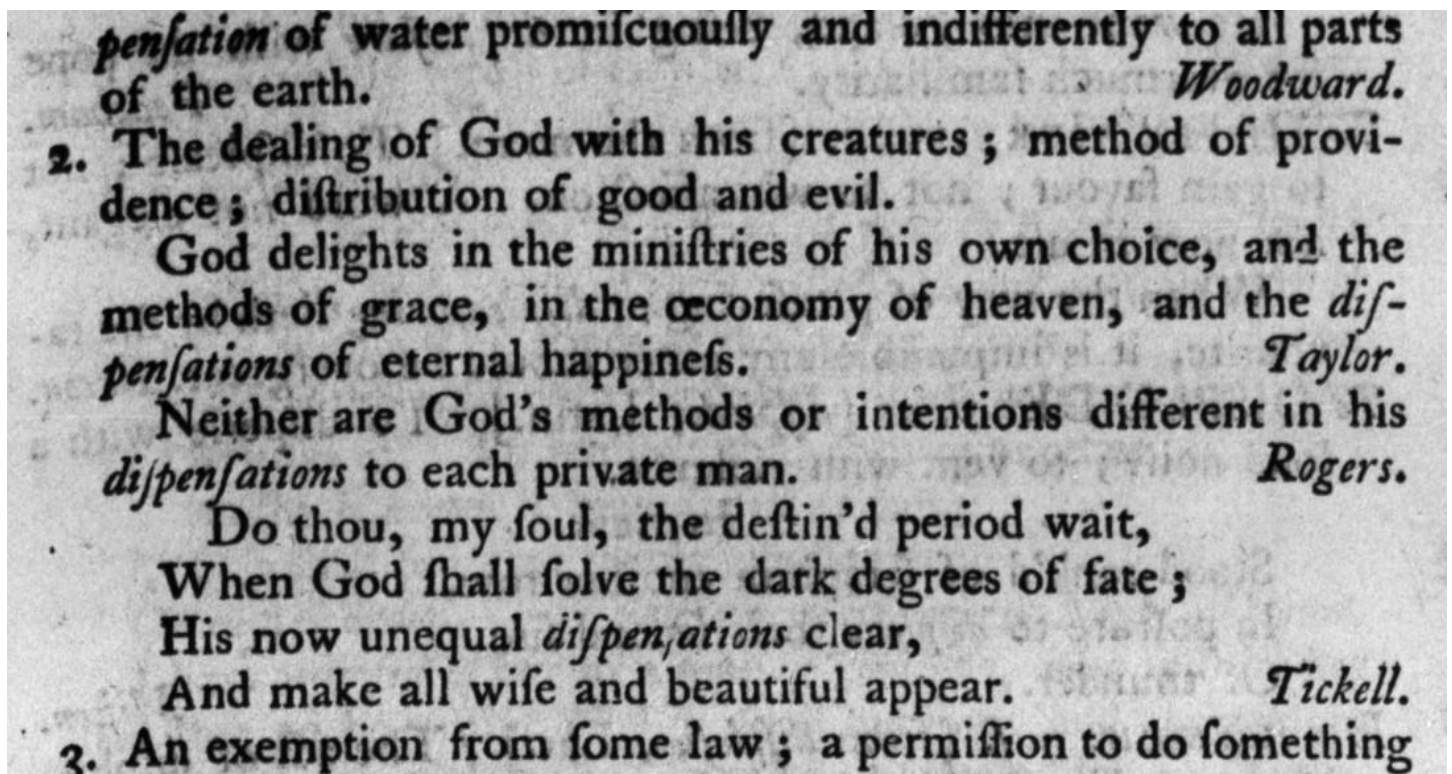
But where did that definition come from? It was certainly around when Noah Webster published his dictionary in 1828. His second definition is:

2. The dealing of God to his creatures; the distribution of good and evil, natural or moral, in the divine government.

Neither are Gods methods or intentions different in his *dispensations* to each private man.

Now he definitely got the second part right: God isn't dealing with man individually. But the first part is basically how God is dealing with mankind – or his creatures. He doesn't write during a certain period of time, which is the prevalent view, but it is still the theological definition.

So, going back further, I found this from Samuel Johnson's 1755 dictionary:



So it became obvious that this idea of a dispensation meaning the manner in which God deals with mankind went back well before Darby. There were English references to it being used in that manner as far back as 1658, as far as I could find.

So what about that theological use, that it means the manner in which God deals with his creatures during a certain age, in the Greek. You remember this word from last week: **οἰκονομία** (*oikonomía*), *oy-kon-om-ee'-ah*. It is the word from which we get our translation of dispensation. It was defined as a stewardship. It was specifically the office of a steward. Was that word ever used in the Greek in the theological way that it is used today in English today, or was it used in the way that it is defined to us in English?

Well, obviously here I had to rely on AI to give me an answer, since I don't speak Greek or even know the alphabet. So after what turned out to be a twenty-five page discussion when printed out in a Word document, this is what it came up with:

Ignatius and Justin Martyr in the second century began to use the word, not as a stewardship or dispensation given to Paul, but to describe God's saving plan in Christ. This really isn't too far off from what we are actually saying when we talk about the dispensation of the grace of God – it is basically God's saving plan in Christ. The AI found this significant.

Then in the late second century, Irenaeus broadens the concept into God's historical salvation plan, and uses it to describe the Mosaic law. But the problem with attributing this definition of *oikonomia* to Irenaeus is that none of his writings survive in Greek. They all survive in what some later scribe translated into Latin.

And this is what survives: ***qui per Moysem legis dispositionem fecerit***
roughly:

*“who through Moses made/established the **dispensation/arrangement of the Law.**”*

So one statement in his voluminous writings translated into Latin from the original Greek by a scribe many years later is hardly evidence that *oikonomia* was being used by theologians to mean God’s dealings with man.

Then Clement of Alexandria in the late 2nd to 3rd century says exactly these words translated from Greek that our AI thought was significant: “an economy/administration according to providence.” Again, the AI believed this was a deviation from the norm. I don’t really see it, but the AI is pretty excitable, and a little arrogant in my opinion.

Which brings us to our infamous friend Origen. He explicitly calls the Law and the prophets an *oikonomia*. Now, of course, we can’t say that he was the historic originator of using the word translated as stewardship and dispensation in this way. But it wouldn’t be surprising.

Among his beliefs:

- Universal Reconciliation
- The pre-existence of human souls before their conception
- Purgatory
- That Christ is a subordinate of the Father
- Baptism necessary for salvation of your soul
- Infant Baptism
- An allegorical rather than literal understanding of scripture

So historically, we can say at the least, that the use of the word translated dispensation began to be used as a theological term to describe God’s dealings with man somewhere in the late second or early third centuries.

I personally believe that theological definition is outside of scripture and should be rejected if we are to follow scripture alone and use the King James Bible as our source for scripture. So, finally, let’s look at some scripture.

Tracy often points out how to rightly divide scripture. Genesis 1:1 and Revelation 21:1: heaven and earth. The majority of scripture is written for those with an eternal destiny on the earth in Christ. Paul’s epistles are written for those who have a heavenly destiny in Christ. The same purpose – in Christ, but different destinations: heaven and earth.

But what about God’s dealings with mankind. Remember last week, we looked at:

Luke 1:68-70 Blessed *be* the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people, **69** And hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David; **70** As **he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began**:

God has spoken of a horn of salvation by holy prophets. How long has he done that?

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**.

God has spoken about the times of restitution by the mouth of his holy prophets. How long has He done that? And just as important – how many of His holy prophets did he speak through about the times of restitution?

Moses started to write it down, but his holy prophets were speaking it by their mouths since the world began. So when God created Adam, he had a plan of restitution. Originally it seemed as though he was going to concentrate this restitution on the earth.

Genesis 1:26-28 ¶ And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.

God is going to create man. He is going to give him dominion over all the other living creatures that he created on the earth. For what purpose?

27 So God created man in his *own* image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. **28** And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, **and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.**

He's setting up His army for the taking back of the earth. They are to go out and subdue it. He is giving Adam dominion over the animal kingdom. If you have dominion over something, it must be domesticated. Adam had the animal kingdom at his disposal until he and his wife were able to replenish the earth. We'll see what happened to that relationship in a bit.

The mission that God gave him was to subdue the earth. He wasn't going out to start farming and planting fruit trees. He was supposed to go out to subdue it. To subdue something means that it's going to put up a fight. Why would the earth need to be subdued? What was going to put up a fight?

Well, we find that out in chapter 3. Satan and his army weren't going down without a fight. And here's something Dave pointed out a while ago. How would they even know who it was they were supposed to subdue?

Genesis 3:4-5 And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: 5 For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as **gods**, knowing good and evil.

How did Eve know what gods were? Dave said a while ago, and I agree with this, that when Adam and Eve ate of that fruit, the door to the spiritual world was closed to them. Before that, they saw the gods – the angels and other spiritual beings. That was the temptation – you can be like those guys! But when they sinned, or shortly thereafter, their eyes were closed to the world that is now unseen.

And also it says they were naked and not ashamed. If they were only aware of themselves and their Creator, who would they have to be ashamed in front of?

So God gave Adam and Eve a mission. But it wasn't a stewardship. They weren't going to dispense anything. They were supposed to go out and subdue. They were to be conquerors. If anything, they were to be the heads of an army that was going to bring restitution to the earth.

After they sinned, what is commonly called the dispensation of conscience supposedly began. This one is really puzzling. Who was to dispense what? Who held the office of a steward. No one was given anything to dispense. We do, however, have a prophet who is foretelling the restitution of all things.

Jude 14-15 And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, **15 ¶** To execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard *speeches* which ungodly sinners have spoken against him.

But we don't learn about that until Jude is written. And Enoch certainly wasn't given a dispensation of anything.

Now let's look at Noah and human government. After the flood, dominion over the animal kingdom was taken away from mankind. Remember Adam had dominion over all of the beasts of the earth.

Genesis 1:30 And to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth, wherein *there is* life, *I have given* every green herb for meat: and it was so.

He was their master and they were subject to him. They all ate green herbs. That would seem to be still in effect later when Noah brought them onto the ark. How else are you going to get a couple tigers or a couple bears into the ark?

After the flood, that dominion was taken from mankind. In its' place was put fear of man.

Genesis 9:1-3 ¶ And God blessed Noah and his sons, and said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth. **2** And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, and upon every fowl of the air, upon all that moveth *upon* the earth, and upon all the fishes of the sea; into your hand are they delivered. **3** Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you; even as the green herb have I given you all things.

Now an adversarial relationship was put between man and beast. This is also where what is called the dispensation of human government began.

Genesis 9:5-7 And surely your blood of your lives will I require; at the hand of every beast will I require it, and at the hand of man; at the hand of every man's brother will I require the life of man. **6** Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man. **7** And you, be ye fruitful, and multiply; bring forth abundantly in the earth, and multiply therein.

Now man could govern man with the threat of the ultimate punishment. But what was God dispensing to Noah? What was he the steward over? You'll notice that God didn't tell Noah to subdue the earth anymore. He simply gave him the means by which he could prevent the violence and debauchery that had occurred before the flood.

God did make a covenant with him, but Noah didn't have to do anything to receive that covenant. He didn't have to dispense anything or be a steward over anything. He simply listened while God told him what the covenant was.

He also wasn't given stewardship over the earth, and wasn't given a dispensation of human government. God didn't tell him how to carry out any administration over others. He actually lost the ability to be the master over all the beasts of the field. Instead, they were going to fear him and he could eat them.

Now what about the dispensation of promise? Was it a dispensation?

Genesis 12:1-3 ¶ Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: **2** And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: **3** And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.

What was Abraham going to dispense here? Was he supposed to go out and bless peoples and nations? That blessing came from God. There was nothing about dispensing anything or being a steward over the promised of God. It was a covenant – a promise.

Even in the passage we often go to in Genesis 15 when God tells Abram: "Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be. And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness," God doesn't tell Abram He is making him a minister of the promises of God. How can this be a

dispensation or a stewardship when Abram isn't dispensing anything or being a steward over anyone?

Oh, but now the dispensation of the law. That has to be a dispensation, right? God gave Moses the law and he dispensed it to the children of Israel and he became a steward over it and over the people. That is definitely a dispensation.

Well, what saith the scriptures?

2 Corinthians 3:6-11 ¶ Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for **the letter killeth**, but the spirit giveth life. **7** But if **the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones**, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not stedfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance; which *glory* was to be done away: **8** How shall not the ministration of the spirit be rather glorious? **9** For if **the ministration of condemnation be glory**, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory. **10** For even that which was made glorious had no glory in this respect, by reason of the glory that excelleth. **11** For if that which is done away *was* glorious, much more that which remaineth *is* glorious.

There is no doubt that Moses was given an administration. He administered the law. If anyone tells you that God was dealing mankind through the salvation that the law gave, you can show them

Romans 3:19-20 ¶ Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. **20** Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: **for by the law is the knowledge of sin.**

If you are going to call what Moses gave a dispensation, it would be much more appropriate to call it the dispensation of death, or the dispensation of condemnation.

If there is no salvation in the law, how can it be a dispensation. For that matter, the only salvation that can be found in any of the so-called dispensations is the one made to Abram. And as we've seen, Abram didn't dispense anything, nor was mad a steward over anything.

Nothing in any of these so-called dispensations has any power to save. If dispensation means progressive revelation of God's plans and purposes for man, nothing that has been revealed so far as a dispensation reveals any of it. How do we know that?

Romans 3:23-25 For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; **24** Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: **25** Whom God hath set forth *to be* a propitiation through faith in his blood, **to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God;**

If you really want to hold on to that idea of a dispensation being how God is dealing with mankind during a certain age or period of time, then according to this verse, from Adam until the resurrection of Christ would have to be called the dispensation of the forbearance

of God. We'll continue this study, but for now why I am no longer calling myself a dispensationalist:

1 Corinthians 9:16-17 For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel! **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.**

A dispensation of the gospel was committed unto Paul. Paul dispensed it. That dispensation has been dispensed. We have it. It is called the gospel of the grace of God. We don't live within the made-up theological definition of a dispensation. We live by the gospel of the grace of God. It is complete and completely dispensed to us by our Apostle as it was given to him.

The word 'dispensationalist' isn't in the King James Bible.

I would, from now on, rather refer to myself as a rightly dividing scripture believer. My divisions are the ones that Tracy teaches: heaven and earth. I'm not going to make a chart.

And my pronouns are still 'he' and 'him.'