

26-10-11 – “Dispensation” Definition Endeavor #1

Last week we looked at the dispensations in God’s Word, and what was the same in the two that are specifically called dispensations. As we went through them, I concluded that if we were to define a dispensation scripturally, that what was equivalent would be between them would be necessary in defining the word.

There were four points, then, that I believe will help us define the word ‘dispensation.’

1. A dispensation is charged or given to only one individual.

Ephesians 3:1-2 ¶ For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, **2** If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which **is given me** to you-ward:

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:

The ‘he’ here is God the Father. He is the one who is doing the gathering together. Paul is the one to whom the dispensation of the grace of God was given to. So each of the two is charged to one entity: God the Father and Paul.

2. It must give, not just new information never revealed before, but must also reveal to mankind a difference of destiny in the plan and purpose of God, which had not yet been known.

Ephesians 1:3 ¶ Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings **in heavenly places** in Christ:

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:

The dispensation given to Paul gives the body of Christ a destiny that was never before proclaimed. Up until Paul, the destiny for believers was a kingdom from heaven coming to the earth. Paul revealed that there was another destiny – heavenly places.

The dispensation of the fulness of times reveals that those two destinies are gathered together in Christ. That the two destinies are bound together in Christ.

2 Timothy 4:18 And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve *me* unto **his heavenly kingdom**: to whom *be* glory for ever and ever. Amen.

The body of Christ is the heavenly part of Christ’s kingdom. The earthly kingdom and the heavenly kingdom will be one kingdom in Christ.

3. When a dispensation is meted out by the one it is given to, it is meted out to all.

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:

Ephesians 2:12-16 That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: **13** But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. **14** ¶ For he is our peace, **who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us;** **15** Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, *even* the law of commandments *contained* in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain **one new man**, so making peace; **16** And that **he might reconcile both** unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby:

In the dispensation of the fulness of times, God gathers all things in Christ. In Paul's dispensation there are no "strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world." All are included in this dispensation.

We looked at how there are differences in offices, duties and responsibilities in the body of Christ. But all are included in the provision, made by Christ on the cross, to become a member of that body. There will also be differences of duties and responsibilities when the dispensation of the fulness of times is given, but all will be in Christ.

4. A dispensation is the fruition of something that God is accomplishing for mankind.

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:

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;**

We saw last week that even the 1000-year reign of Christ is part of times. Times is also often called seasons. The Day of the Lord begins within times and seasons.

Acts 1:6-7 ¶ When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? **7** And he said unto them, It is not for you to know **the times or the seasons**, which the Father hath put in his own power.

1 Thessalonians 5:1-2 ¶ But of **the times and the seasons**, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. **2** For yourselves know perfectly that **the day of the Lord** so cometh as a thief in the night.

You can also write down I Timothy 6:15, if you're keeping notes.

The dispensation of the fulness of times is obviously when times and seasons end. There will no longer be changing governments or powers. There will only be the final and full completion of times.

Paul's dispensation also completed something essential in God's purpose and plan – it completed the Word of God. It filled it full. The Word of God is now complete.

Now there is one more that I will add to this list. It seems to me that it should be noted because it stands out to me. You can agree or disagree on this point, but I want to bring it up.

5. The one to whom the dispensation is given, as it is revealed, or after it's revelation, gives the information found in that revelation over to another, or others, to carry out those instructions.

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:

God the Father gathers all things in Christ. Christ will first deliver the kingdom up to God, who will gather all things in Christ, and give Christ dominion over all things.

1 Corinthians 15:23-28 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. **25** For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. **26** The last enemy *that* shall be destroyed *is* death. **27** For he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith, all things are put under *him*, *it is* manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him. **28** And **when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him**, that God may be all in all.

Philippians 2:9-11 Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: **10** That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, **of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth**; **11** And *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ *is* Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

There are many more verses showing that God gives all power and authority in heaven and earth to Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is in subjection to God, so God the Father and Jesus Christ both received the glory. But it is Christ which carries out the instructions and revelations given by God in the dispensation of the fulness of times.

Paul also gave charge to others, but especially Timothy, in continuing to carry out the instructions given to him in the dispensation of grace. We'll look at Timothy first, then the others. He tell Timothy to charge others:

1 Timothy 1:3-4 As I besought thee to abide still at Ephesus, when I went into Macedonia, that thou mightest **charge some** that they teach no other doctrine, **4** Neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith: *so do*.

He gave Timothy the duty to charge that they teach no other doctrine than Paul's. If you look on the screen under the 13th definition of charge, he told Timothy to charge those that are rich in this world that they be not high-minded.

You also see that the definition of the charges that Paul gives to Timothy amounts to an adjuration. An adjuration is the act of binding someone by an oath. So when Paul says to Timothy, I charge thee, he is binding Timothy by an oath. When he tells Timothy to charge them, he is telling him to bind them by an oath.

1 Timothy 1:18-20 ¶ **This charge I commit unto thee**, son Timothy, according to the prophecies which went before on thee, that thou by them mightest war a good warfare; **19** Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck: **20** Of whom is Hymenaeus and Alexander; whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme.

He charges Timothy to war a good warfare, to hold faith. Paul gives Timothy four charges. Paul tells Timothy three times to charge others. The only others that Paul charges are the Thessalonians.

1 Thessalonians 5:27 I charge you by the Lord that this epistle be read unto all the holy brethren.

The responsibility for carrying out the duties and instructions given in Paul's dispensation are given over to the body of Christ in general, but it seems when you read through the two letters to Timothy, that he was to basically take Paul's mantle in having care over all the affairs of the churches.

This requirement for the definition is probably a bit more tentative than the first four, but I think it should probably also be added.

So now, taking all of these – I call them requirements, but they are, at the least, equivalents – I'm going to take my first cautious attempt at defining the word dispensation.

A dispensation is previously unknown information about another destiny in God's plan and purpose that is entrusted to a single individual or entity. That single individual or entity is charged with the dispensing of that information to all others, and fulfills a vital component within God's ultimate will. The information contained in a dispensation is then entrusted to another, or others, to the ultimate glory of God.

Now, that is not conclusive. It may change. But when I look at that word, and only use scripture to define it, that is what I come up with. I'm not saying it is perfect, or even correct, but if we aren't going to add to or take away from the word of God, then that is what it seems like it should be.

It would be pretentious of me to declare that is what it is without getting the opinions and criticisms of others, so I will be seeking those from anyone and everyone.

I also believe, since a dispensation is given to only one, that when that information has been dispensed, the dispensation is over. From that point on the information revealed in that dispensation is carried on by those who received the information.

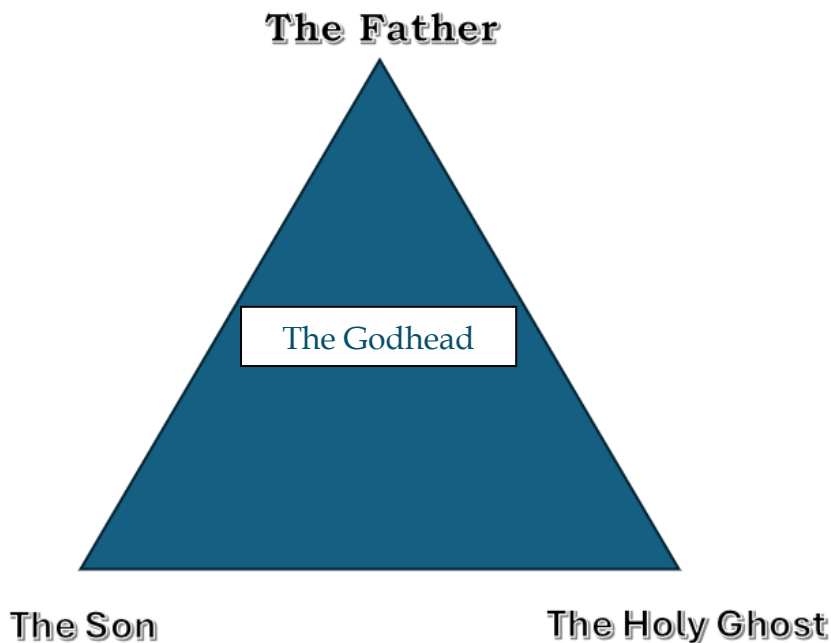
In other words, I don't believe we are living in the dispensation of the grace of God, I believe we are living by the dispensation of God. The information has been dispensed. We have it. It was completed by the dispensation of God given to Paul to complete the Word of God.

I want to look at the three instances where Paul uses the word concerning himself, and pick out something that I had never seen before. I think it is important. It has to do with the glorification of the Godhead, and Tracy uses a similar illustration all the time. So let's look at the three passages that we have about Paul's dispensation.

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 3:1-2 ¶ For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, **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;**



Now I'm sure most of you have seen this illustration done by Tracy many times in different messages. He often uses it when showing how each Part of the Godhead glorifies the other Parts.

When considering the dispensation given to Paul, I want to illustrate how each part of the Godhead was involved in presenting that

dispensation.

In I Corinthians 9:17, a dispensation **of the gospel** was committed to him, who is the absolute centerpiece of the gospel? Jesus Christ. So What Part of the Godhead is glorified in that dispensation? The Son – Jesus Christ.

In Ephesians 3:2, what is that dispensation called? The grace of God. What Part of the Godhead is glorified there? God the Father.

In Colossians 1:25, what does that dispensation fulfill? The Word of God. Who communicated the Word of God to the writers of scripture? The Holy Ghost. Who receives the glory in that dispensation? The Holy Ghost.

Paul refers to the dispensation given to him three times. Each time he refers to it, it is glorifying a singular Part of the Godhead: The gospel glorifies the Son. The grace of God glorifies the Father. The Word of God glorifies The Holy Ghost.

If you think about it, the dispensation of the grace of God encompasses three different themes. It is the grace of God that gives us the gospel and the Word of God.

It is the gospel that explains the grace of God, not only to the body of Christ, but also to Israel. Romans 3 explains how God could justify a person before the death and resurrection of Christ.

It is the Word of God that reveals the grace of God and the gospel of Jesus Christ.

All of these three have been given, have been distributed to mankind, have been dispensed, have been completed, and have been filled full. Hopefully everyone here has possession of all three.

It is therefore my belief, for now, anyway, that the dispensation given to Paul was Paul's responsibility, and was completed when he finished 2 Timothy. From that point on, I believe we live our life by taking all that was dispensed by Paul, and rightly dividing it according to what was dispensed to Paul.

We divide the Word of God by what was written to God's earthly people and by what was written to God's heavenly people.

But I believe we could also divide it by completed dispensations. There was one dispensation completed by Paul. That is to us.

There is another dispensation that has not been dispensed yet. There are a few scattered passages allowing us to know that it will come to pass, but very little information is given concerning what will be dispensed at that time. We know, however, that it will not only involve God's earthly people and God's heavenly people, but it will gather them together in Christ. So if we want to divide God's Word dispensationally, I would put Ephesians 1:10 as the second dispensation and divide it accordingly.

There are no other dispensations given in the scripture, so the rest of the scripture would be divided accordingly. It would be to God's earthly people.

You can still break your neck in the book of Acts, because it is describing what Paul is beginning to dispense as God's earthly people are set aside.

So I will stick to dividing it the way Tracy taught, after dividing it dispensationally, then prophecy and mystery, then time past, but now and the ages to come. The reason I believe that using heaven and earth is the best way is that there are intersections between God's

heavenly people and God's earthly people. There will also be unification of God's heavenly people and His earthly people in the second dispensation.

Dispensationalism adds dispensations that aren't there according to man's wisdom to God's Word.

Mid-Acts Dispensationalism concedes other dispensations that don't exist in scripture, but many times don't try to specifically identify them, like I did when I claimed that title, to my shame.

Prophecy and Mystery can be confusing because Paul prophesied, and because Paul is responsible for explaining a portion of the prophecy of the earthly people.

Time past, but now, and the ages to come is pretty good. The problem I find with that is that you have to continually explain how books like I John, Hebrews, and both of Peter's can be about the ages to come when they were written to an audience 2000 years ago.

Heaven and Earth simplifies that by simply saying they were written to God's earthly people.

Thus endeth the dispensation teaching, and so beginneth the dispensational learning.

Next week we are going to do something different. We are going to look for ways that I am wrong. We will open the service up to all comments, questions, disagreements and other ideas concerning what a dispensation is. I have, foolishly, printed out my beginning definition for anyone who wants to take it home and try to pick it apart. Because if it can be picked apart, it has to be edited or trashed, depending on how valid each part is.

I made it double-spaced so that you can write nasty notations between the lines.