

26-10-04 – Dispensational Descriptive Distinctives

Last week we began trying to define the word dispensation from the scriptures.

First, we looked at why I don't believe the standard definition of the word is correct.

One thing I failed to mention, and it is important in understanding why I believe this is true. When you actually try to pin down what the standard definition is among dispensationalists, you find that there really isn't one. There is a general idea, but no real definition that you can point to and say: "Yep, that's the one that is scriptural."

For example, beginning with Scofield: "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."

Charles Ryrie: "Dispensationalism views the world as a household run by God. In His household world God is dispensing or administering its affairs according to His own will and in various stages of revelation in the passage of time. These various stages mark off the distinguishably different economies in the outworking of His total purpose, and these different economies constitute the dispensations."

This next definition is from a group that tries to be more scriptural, and they say that there are only three dispensations: the Jewish, the Christian, and the future millennium – which I'm guessing they attribute to the dispensation of the fulness of times:

"A bible dispensation is a period of time in which God has given responsibility to a particular corporate group of His own choosing for His testimony on the earth. In the given time, this group represents God before the world, testifying of His glory."

You can see the different definitions, and there are many, many more. But the problem with all of these is that their definitions are the creations of man. They are assumptions based on their views of rightly dividing God's Word.

For example, take Ryrie's definition: Charles Ryrie: "**Dispensationalism views the world as a household run by God.** In His household world God is dispensing or administering its affairs according to His own will and in various stages of revelation in the passage of time. These various stages mark off the distinguishably different economies in the outworking of His total purpose, and these different economies constitute the dispensations."

Is there any scripture that says that the world is a household run by God? That is an assumption based on one Greek definition of the word 'oikonomia,' which is stewardship. He applies it to household because in the parable of the unjust steward in Luke, that is how it is used to describe the office of the steward that was head of the affairs of a householder. Yet he ignores the fact that everywhere the word is used in the New Testament, it is the responsibility of only one person.

If we want to define the word from sola scriptura – scripture alone – we have to look at what the scripture is actually saying about that word.

Last week we looked at how God has dealt with mankind from the beginning of this world. We found that from Abel throughout the Old Testament, God has always dealt with mankind through faith. We then looked at John the Baptist, Jesus, Peter and the Apostles, and throughout the New Testament God has always dealt with mankind by faith.

So applying the principles of scripture alone, where is God administering anything else than faith for the salvation and redemption of mankind? There has to be something different than just faith alone, because that is always, and always will be, how God deals with mankind.

Then we looked at

1 Corinthians 9:16-18 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. **18** What is my reward then? *Verily* that, when I preach the gospel, I may make **the gospel of Christ** without charge, that I abuse not my power in **the gospel**.

Paul says that a dispensation of the gospel is given to him. It is a gospel given by dispensation. The question is: why?

We looked at the other gospels given throughout the New Testament, and one given to Abraham. Every one of them required faith alone. Even the one given to Abraham.

Abraham's gospel, according to Galatians 3: 6-8, can be found in these two passages:

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.**

Genesis 15:4-7 And, behold, the word of the LORD *came* unto him, saying, This shall not be thine heir; but **he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir.** **5** And he brought him forth abroad, and said, **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.** **6** *And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness.* **7** ¶ And he said unto him, I *am* the LORD that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give thee **this land to inherit it.**

So the gospel given to Abraham was that he would bless those that blessed Abram and curse those that cursed him. And that he would have his own seed to inherit these promises, and that that seed would be as numerable as the stars of the heaven. This is where we begin to see the difference in the gospel given to Paul and the different gospels taught throughout the scriptures.

In Abraham, all the families of the earth would be blessed. To Abraham and his seed would be given a land. All the families of the earth would be blessed or cursed according to the promise made to Abraham.

All gospels, given from the beginning, required faith alone in what God had revealed to them at that time. But all of those gospels were concerning God's plan and purpose for the earth. From Genesis 1:2, the scriptures are dealing with mankind and their earthly destiny in a new earth.

To David it was revealed that it would be a kingdom on the earth. Throughout the prophets we find that this will be a kingdom that would be established on the earth and be an everlasting kingdom. That the dead would rise and dwell on the earth. Christ revealed it would be a heavenly kingdom that would come to the earth. This was all progressive revelation about God's ultimate plan and purpose for the earth. Every gospel given was about the earth.

But we never read that any of it was a dispensation, or that it was committed to any individual man as a dispensation of God to be delivered to others.

Then Saul was chosen by God, was renamed Paul and was given a dispensation of the gospel. That gospel is the one that made plain that every other gospel revealing how man can receive eternal life, including Paul's, was always by faith alone. So why was Paul's gospel given by dispensation? What made his gospel unique from those before him?

Paul's gospel of salvation wasn't unique in the requirement of faith alone. It was unique because his revelations dealt with God's eternal purpose in the heavens. Of course, he gives a massive amount of new information. He also explains many things that are part of God's plan for the earth. For example, he explains how God could save those who lived before Christ could be saved:

Romans 3:24-25 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;

By the way, that is God the Father's faith in the blood of Christ – that it would be shed for those who came before him – so that when Abraham believed in God, he could count that for the righteousness of Christ.

He explains further, in Romans 9-11, why the purpose for the earth was put on hold, and also that it will resume. He tells us that there aren't two different purposes, but that there is only one purpose, in Christ, for two places.

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:

But the most important thing about the gospel committed to Paul, the reason a dispensation was given to Paul, was that his gospel had a different destiny for those who believed it. That destiny makes know the mystery of God's will, that all things will be gathered together in Christ. Those both in heaven and those who are on earth.

One purpose – two places.

So the conclusion I came to last week, which I've amended, is this:

In defining the word 'dispensation,' the first requirement for its' definition: 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.

I'm sure this will be revised and refined more. And it is only the first requirement. Now we'll move to the next requirement. And hopefully you're still in Ephesians:

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:

Now, first, I hope you can see that this verse reveals a difference in the plan and purpose of God that had not yet been known. When 2 Corinthians 5 was written, the destination of the body of Christ was revealed to be eternal in the heavens. Those in Corinth would have known of their eternal destiny. They would also have known that they were in Christ. But would they have known that they were destined to be one in Christ with those on earth? And also one in Christ with all things in heaven and earth?

Not until it was revealed here.

Now the second thing I want to look at: "**10** That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things."

All things. Is there anyone excluded from this dispensation of God the Father?

Oh, and I actually forgot one, which I brought out in the first lesson of this series. It should actually be the first requirement in defining the word dispensation. I'm going to break Tracy's rule here and show you quickly on the screen:

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 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 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;

Every dispensation in scripture is given to only one being. Only two beings in scripture are given the charge of a dispensation: Paul and God the Father. And that is important because it shows that the current definitions of dispensation are not scriptural.

Now back to where we left off: “**10** That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things.”

All things. Is there anyone excluded from this dispensation charged to God the Father? He gathers all things in heaven and earth in Christ. This is totally inclusionary – no one is left out. More on that in a minute.

Now, Paul’s dispensation:

Ephesians 2:11-13 ¶ Wherefore remember, that ye *being* in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; **12** 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.**

Ephesians 3:1-7 ¶ 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: **3** How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words, **4** Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) **5** Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; **6 That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel:** **7** Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power.

Gentiles at one time were left out because they were strangers from Israel, and the promises made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. But now we are fellowheirs with Christ, and partakers of his promise through Christ.

What is that promise?

2 Timothy 1:1 ¶ Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, according to the **promise of life** which is in Christ Jesus,

Galatians 3:14 That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive **the promise of the Spirit** through faith.

The promise is eternal life that was promised to Abraham and recorded in the scriptures by the Holy Spirit.

So Gentiles are included in Paul's dispensation. But what about the Jews? Are they now foreigners and strangers from this promise?

Galatians 3:28-29 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. **29** And if ye *be* Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

If there is neither Jew nor Greek, male nor female, is there anyone who is excluded in the dispensation of the gospel given to Paul? Everyone is included in this gospel. You don't have to become a proselyte of Israel. You don't have to even know Israel existed. No one is left out.

So, in the dispensation of the fulness of times, and in the dispensation of the grace of God, everyone is included.

The first objection for this to be necessary would be that in the dispensation of the fulness of times, unbelievers aren't included. But it says all things in heaven and in earth – it says nothing of the lake of fire, which is neither in heaven or earth. All things, in the context, are all things which have been redeemed by Christ.

The second objection would be that a Gentile could be saved in time past, as we illustrated last week. That is absolutely true. But they could only be saved by trusting in the God of Israel. Today there is no God of Israel.

Ephesians 4:4-6 *There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; 5 One Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 **One God and Father of all**, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.*

Gentiles could be saved by faith in the God of Israel in time past.

Today, anyone can be saved by faith in God the Father of all through Jesus Christ.

2 Thessalonians 2:16-17 ¶ Now our **Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace**, **17** Comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work.

So I believe that in finding a scriptural definition of dispensation, the third thing that would have to be included is that its' tenets, message, or instructions go out to all and includes all. That is, the message, instructions, and charges in a dispensation are distributed out by the one to whom the dispensation was given unto everyone. These messages and charges may be distributed corporately or individually.

An example of this: Paul gives Timothy five individual charges. These can apply generally to others, but none of us are going to Ephesus to charge some that they teach no other doctrine.

And he writes specific instructions for those who are elders. But the instructions that come from Paul's dispensation and the eternal salvation offer within it, are for all.

And it would seem evident that there will be different charges and instructions given when God gathers all things in Christ. Because we all stand before the judgement seat of Christ. And those who work for Christ in the ministry especially will have their work judged by what foundation they built on.

The point being, is that when a dispensation is meted out by the one to whom it is given, it is meted out to all. There are no strangers and foreigners.

Next, we'll look at these two passages:

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;

Does anyone see anything similar in these two verses, other than what I have covered?

They are both filling something up. They are both completing something.

In the dispensation of the fulness of times, times and seasons are full. They are complete. This will be the order of things that will be eternal.

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.

The day of the Lord begins within times and seasons. We live within times and seasons. Christ is going to show who is the only King of kings within times. I take that to mean during the one-thousand-year reign of Revelation 20.

1 Timothy 6:13-15 ¶ I give thee charge in the sight of God, who quickeneth all things, and *before* Christ Jesus, who before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession; **14** That thou keep *this* commandment without spot, unrebukeable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ: **15** Which **in his times** he shall shew, *who is* the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords;

Notice it says: "In his times." This is the continuation of the day of the Lord, which I believe continues into eternity. But here we still are within times during Christ's reign on earth.

The dispensation of the fulness of times comes when these times are full. There will be no more times. Whether there will be time itself, I don't know. Times, which are often

associated with seasons, often mean the state of things during a period. Such as the times of the Gentiles, or in time past, or the last times or latter times. These will all be over, filled full, complete.

Paul's dispensation also completes something: "according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to **fulfil** the word of God."

It doesn't matter what scholars say. God said through His Holy Spirit that Paul's dispensation was given to him to fulfill the word of God.

Most would say that just means he fulfilled the word that God had given him. The next verse says: "Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages."

But even if you read it that way, that still means that the mystery given to Paul fulfilled the word of God. And if you look at the last verse in the chapter, he was still working toward that when he wrote Colossians.

Colossians 1:29 Whereunto I also labour, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily.

So when Paul finished writing down the dispensation given to him, the word of God was complete.

I want to show you something Dan Gross does a lot.

2 Timothy is the last book Paul wrote. It has some important verses for us.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 All scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: **17** That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

This is a passage we often quote and believe. It is written almost at the end of Paul's last book. Now look at it again, and just read the first four words: "All scripture *is* given. . ."

So I would make the fourth requirement in defining the word dispensation:

A dispensation makes something full. It completes something in God's plan. It is the fruition of something that God is accomplishing for mankind.

So, in my view, a scriptural definition of the word dispensation must take at least these four things into account:

1. A dispensation is charged or given to only one individual.
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.
3. When a dispensation is meted out by the one it is given to, it is meted out to all.
4. A dispensation is the fruition of something that God is accomplishing for mankind.