

DISPENSATIONALISM

What is a dispensation? *Dispensation* comes from the Greek word *oikonomia* meaning to manage, regulate, administer, and plan. The central idea in the word dispensation is that of managing or administering the affairs of a household. The various forms of the word dispensation are used in the New Testament twenty times.

Dispensationalism views the world as a household run by God. Just as a parent would govern his household in different ways, according to varying necessity, yet ever for one good end, so God has at different times dealt with men in different ways, according to the necessity of the case, but throughout for one great, grand end. A dispensation then is a particular way of God's administering His rule over the world as He progressively works out His purpose for world history.

Essential characteristics of dispensationalism:

1. A dispensationalist keeps Israel and the Church distinct.
2. A dispensationalist consistently interprets the Bible literally.
3. A dispensationalist believes that God's purpose is to manifest His glory.

Although God has employed several dispensations, there is only one way of salvation. Salvation has always been by the grace of God through faith in the Word of God, and God has based salvation on the work of Jesus Christ.

The Dispensations:

- (1) Innocency--Genesis 1:28-3:6; (2) Conscience--Genesis 4:1--8:14; (3) Civil Government--Genesis 8:15--11:9; (4) Promise--Genesis 11:10--Exodus 18:27; (5) Mosaic Law--Exodus 19:1--Acts 1:26;
- (6) Grace--Acts 2:1--Revelation 19:21; (7) Millennium--Revelation 20

We are now in the dispensation of Grace, which will end with the rapture of the church. The return of Christ for the church is imminent; that is, it can occur at any moment during the church age. The rapture will be followed by a seven year period known as the tribulation, then Christ will return to the earth to begin His millennial reign. During this thousand year period God will literally fulfill His promises to Israel. After this time, some will again rebel against God, and finally those who have rejected Christ will be cast into the lake of fire, and the eternal state will begin.

Charles Ryrie suggests three ways that a dispensational view helps the Bible student:

It makes necessary biblical distinctions: e.g., Israel, the Church, and the Kingdom; God obviously deals differently with Adam in Eden, Israel under Law, the present day of grace, and the Millennium. Thus the need for 'rightly dividing the Word of truth.'

It provides a philosophy of history: in three areas:

1) The progress of revelation--covenant theology "by an artificial system of typology, and allegorizing interpretation, sought to read back practically the whole of the New Testament into the Old" (Jas. Orr).

2) A unifying principle: covenant teaching makes it soteriological--the covenant of grace; the dispensational view says it is theological--the glory of God.

3) What is the ultimate goal of history? Dispensationalism says it is the millennial kingdom; covenant theology sees it as the eternal state.

It provides consistent hermeneutics: It allows for the plain and literal interpretation of Scripture. There is no need for allegorizing, especially the prophetic Scriptures. Because the Old Testament prophecies that were fulfilled by Christ were literally fulfilled, there is no reason to believe that those prophecies that have yet to be fulfilled will be fulfilled in any other way but literally.