

## A Study of “Dispensationalism” {part two}

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Intro:

We come to our second study in Dispensationalism.

In this we are not looking at “Progressive” or “Ultra” but “Classic” Dispensationalism!

In pursuing this study we are doing so primarily looking at the book by Charles Ryrie entitled, “Dispensationalism”.

Last week we looked at chapter one of his book where he sought to show the helpfulness of that system.

In chapter two he seeks to define the term and nature of a Dispensation.

Hence chapter two is called:

“What is a Dispensation”

He begins by addressing those who criticise the “time” or “age” aspect of Dispensationalism.

He points to the definition in the Scofield reference bible which we gave last week which says:

*“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”*

He says that the opponents of Dispensationalism unfairly use this as an easy argument against the Dispensational position. He says:

*“Nondispensationalists use it as a convenient and useful scapegoat simply because it does not (and could not in two sentences) convey all that is involved in the concept of a dispensation”*

In response:

We say, not only is it fair to use Scofield's definition but it is an accurate representation of the view held by most ordinary dispensationalists! It was the view I held when I was taught that theology.

Also:

The only way to really determine a theology is not to judge it merely by the theological text books but = what do the ordinary people in the pews of churches that sit under the teaching of these men believe?

Illus:

The Roman Church and its view of Justification by faith.

If we were to read the agreement between Rome and Lutheranism some years back we might conclude that Rome believes in Justification by faith alone!

But would that be an accurate representation?

Q. What do the ordinary people in the pew believe?

That is the test!!

That determines what is preached from their pulpits!

He does admit:

*“However, there is a certain justification to the criticism, for a dispensation is primarily a stewardship arrangement and not a period of time” {page 28}*

He then gives a detailed definition:

*“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. **The understanding of God’s differing economies is essential to a proper interpretation of his revelation** within those various economies” {page 29}*

So:

According to Ryrie, we need to understand Dispensationalism if we are to understand the Bible!

This sounds too much like many which say, we must understand their system if we are to understand the bible!

**In a section dealing with the issue of Progressive Revelation He notes:**

*“Nondispensational interpreters (of the covenant theology school) have been guilty of reading back (and sometimes forcing) the teaching of the New Testament into the Old, especially in an effort to substantiate **their doctrine of salvation in the Old Testament.**”*

We respond with the following points:

1} What is our doctrine of Salvation?

Simply, Salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone!

2} Is that not the doctrine of Salvation which Paul stated was the same in both testaments?

Consider:

In Romans 4 Paul proves and defends and to use Ryrie’s word “substantiates” his doctrine of Salvation from the Old Testament!!!

Q. Is Paul guilty of “forcing” the teaching of the New Testament into the Old?

3} What is Dispensationalisms doctrine of Salvation in the Old Testament?

We will see that it involves the law, or a combination of Law and Grace. But that will be for a further study.

**In a Section headed “Characteristics of a Dispensation”**

He writes:

*“but with the coming of Christ, the requirement for justification became faith in him”*

*{page 34}*

Read Psalm 2 {esp. The end clause}

He goes on to one of the principle purposes of Dispensations = that being the idea of God testing mankind under various economies of Salvation.

He writes:

*“Such tests are not for the purpose of enlightening God but for the purpose of bringing out what is in people, whether faith or failure” {page 34}*

Consider:

No one has faith in themselves!

This is one of the fundamental problems and errors of Dispensationalism. It is semi-pelagian in nature!

Note:

Faith is a gift of God! Not something that is in man that needs to be brought out by a test!

Compare:

*Php 1:29 For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake;*

Also:

*2Ti 2:24 And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient,*

*2Ti 2:25 In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; **if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth;***

It gets worse on this point,

He writes:

*“The failures are in at least two realms – the realm of governmental economy and the realm of salvation. In both areas not all people have failed, but in both realms most have”*  
{page 35}

We cannot pass the Salvation Test! We have already failed! God must overcome our failure not just externally but internally!

Compare:

*Php 1:6 Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ:*

**He finishes off the chapter with what he calls:**

**The SINE QUA NON of Dispensationalism.**

**Or, The Indispensable parts of Dispensationalism**

He lists three essential parts of Dispensationalism.

Someone must believe these to be a dispensationalist!!

### **1} Israel and the Church are Distinct.**

He quotes,

L.S. Chafer:

*“The dispensationalist believes that throughout the ages God is pursuing two distinct purposes: one related to the earth with earthly people and earthly objectives involved which is Judaism; while the other is related to heaven with heavenly people and heavenly objectives involved, which is Christianity” {page 39}*

Read:

Hebrews 11: 13-16 and 24-26

He also quotes Daniel Fuller:

*“the basic premise of Dispensationalism is two purposes God expressed in the formation of two peoples who maintain their distinction throughout eternity” {page 39}*

2: 11-22

Of this point he says:

*“This is probably the most basic theological test of whether or not a person is a dispensationalist, and it is undoubtedly the most practical and conclusive” {page 39}*

The second essential ingredient is:

### **2} The Literal interpretation of Scripture.**

He writes:

*“Consistently literal, or plain , interpretation indicates a dispensational approach to the interpretation of scripture.” {page 40}*

Please apply that to Ephesians 2: 11-20.

The problem with this is that often the literal interpretation is applied where it suits.

Read Isaiah 19: 24-25

The Third essential ingredient of Dispensationalism is:

### **3} Its purpose, The Glory of God.**

He says that this is not so for the Covenant Theologian = though he does admit that those who hold to covenant theology do speak often of the Glory of God.

He argues that for those who hold to Covenant theology that their main focus is Salvation!

We respond:

- 1} We believe that Salvation itself is always with reference to the Glory of God.
- 2} We teach limited Atonement – so the salvation of man is not the key issue.
- 3} Question one in our Catechism declares that the glory of God is our chief end.

May God help us to understand and benefit from the study of these things.

Amen.