

“Does God have a Plan?”

Luke 16:1-8; Ephesians 1:7-10; 3:1-7

East Berlin Community Church

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Introduction

- Building a shopping mall involves a detailed architectural plan
- Human history is far more complex than a shopping mall

“Does God have a plan?”

A. SECULARISTS: There is no divine plan, only the choices of men.

1. The world as we know it is the product of blind chance or the choices of men.
2. We believe that God has an intelligent plan established in eternity being worked out in time.
 - Isaiah 46:9-11-- *“Remember the former things of old, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand and I will do all My pleasure,’ calling a bird of prey from the east, the man who executes My counsel, from a far country. Indeed I have spoken it; I will bring it to pass. I have purposed it; I will also do it.”*
 - Acts 15:18 -- --*“Known to God from eternity are all His works.”*

B. COVENANT: God’s ultimate plan is the salvation of mankind.

1. **Explanation of Covenant Theology**
 - a. Covenant of works and covenant of grace.
 - b. God has only one redeemed people, thus the Church replaces Israel.
2. **Strengths of Covenant Theology**
 - a. Prominence of salvation by grace through faith
 - b. Simplifies the prophetic outlook for there is no rapture, no tribulation period, no millennial kingdom, no future for the nation of Israel. The world will get progressively worse after which time Jesus will return to judge the living and dead, judge the world with fire, then create a new heavens and new earth.
3. **Weaknesses of Covenant Theology**
 - a. To hold such a view, one must spiritualize large portions of the prophetic Scriptures and are thus guilty of inconsistent interpretation.
 - b. Does not allow for “progressive revelation” of Scripture.
 - c. And if God’s goal is the salvation of mankind, then God has failed to accomplish His plan for not all mankind will be saved.

C. DISPENSATIONAL: God’s ultimate plan is to reveal His Glory.

1. **“Dispensation” means to “manage or administer the affairs of a household”**
2. **Non-theological understanding of what it means to live under a dispensation.**
 - Luke 16:1-8 -- *“He also said to His disciples: ‘There was a certain rich man who had a steward, and an accusation was brought to him that this man was wasting his goods. So, he called him and said to him, ‘What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your stewardship, for you can no longer be steward.’ Then the steward said within himself, ‘What shall I do? For my master is taking the stewardship away from me. I cannot dig; I am ashamed to beg. I have resolved what to do, that which I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses.’” So, he called every one of his master’s debtors to him, and said to the first,*

“How much do you owe my master?” And he said, “A hundred measures of oil.” So he said to him, “Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.” Then he said to another, “And how much do you owe?” So he said, “A hundred measures of wheat.” And he said to him, “Take your bill and write eighty.” So the master commended the unjust steward because he had dealt shrewdly. For the sons of this world are more shrewd in their generation than the sons of light.

3. **Is there evidence from Scripture that the term “dispensation” is applied to God’s plan for the ages?**
 - a. Ephesians 1:7-10 -- *“dispensation of the fullness of the times”* refers to a time still future when everything and everyone will be brought under the lordship of Jesus Christ.
 - Ephesians 1:7-10-- *“In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, having made know to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him.”*
 - b. Ephesians 3:1-7 -- *“dispensation of the grace of God”* refers to the present time period in which believing Gentiles and believing Jews are brought together in one body, the Church. The “Church” age.
 - Ephesians 3:1-7-- *“For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles—if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you, how that by revelation he made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), which in other ages was not made known to the sons of man, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel, of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power.”*
 - 1) Paul distinguishes this period from the previous period.—Ephesians 3:5
 - 2) The “church” is not found in the Old Testament. It is a “mystery”.
4. **Theological definition:** *“A dispensation is a distinguishable economy in the outworking of God’s purpose.”*
5. **Six Characteristics of a “Dispensation”**
 - a. Differing governing relationship between God and the world.
 - b. New responsibility on the part of mankind.
 - c. New revelation necessary to affect the change.
 - d. A test. *Will man respond favorably to how God rules over them?*
 - e. The failure of man for he always fails the test
 - f. Judgment in the end.
6. **Strengths of Dispensationalism**
 - a. Consistent literal, historical, grammatical interpretation of Bible
 - b. Takes into account the progression of revelation
 - c. Keeps Israel and the Church distinct
 - d. Larger purpose: The “Revelation of the Glory of God”
 - Habakkuk 2:14 -- *“earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.”*
7. **Personal Application: God has a personal plan for your life!**
 - a. Jesus Christ is our LORD. We’ve been bought at a price.
 - 1 Corinthians 6:20 -- *“For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.”*

- b. We are stewards, entrusted with the *“words of reconciliation”* so that we are not *“ambassadors for Christ”*
- c. We’ve been given new revelation from God, recorded in the New Testament.
- d. Whatever we say or do, we are to do for the glory of God, making it our aim to be well pleasing to Him. -- 2 Corinthians 5:9-- *“make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him”*
- e. We will one day stand before the LORD to give an account of our stewardship.
 - 2 Corinthians 5:10— *“for we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.”*
- f. What does Christ require of us? Faithfulness!
 - 1 Corinthians 4:1-2-- *“Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover, it is required in stewards that one be found faithful.”*