

God's Plan for the Ages

Understanding the Dispensations

Lesson 1 – Foundations for Dispensational Truth

Introduction

When you hear the word 'Theology' what comes to mind?

Theology – the study of _____ (Theo = God, logos= discourse or study)

Most of us don't consider ourselves theologians, but as believers all of us are (to some extent) and should be. We want to know about the God who knows us, to know His plan for our lives and His purpose for History (*His-Story!*). A right understanding of the Scriptures is the key to this. In this series we will examine God's plan for the ages, from a dispensational framework of theology (*more will be explained on this later*).

1. The word 'dispensation' is a _____ term.

Colossians 1:25 – *"according to the **dispensation of God** which is given to me for you"*

dispensation - Greek οἰκονομία (oikonomia)

- oikos, which means house
- nomos, which means law or rules.

Literal concept - *"house rules"* or *"house order"*

We get the English word **economy** from it.

It appears 6 other times in the Bible (Luke 16:2,3,4, - stewardship, 1 Corinthians 9:17, Ephesians 1:10 – dispensation).

2. The need to rightly divide the word of God is a biblical _____.

2 Timothy 2:15 - *"**Study** to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, **rightly dividing the word of truth.**"*

'rightly dividing' – to cut straight (cloth/material).

The idea is to divide with precision and accuracy so that the pieces all fit together.

We understand from this that there are divisions in the word of God.

- Old Testament/New Testament
- Law/Prophets
- History/Wisdom Literature
- Gospels/Epistles (Letters)

There are also distinctions in the way a word or term is used in the Scriptures:
For example, the term "Salvation" or "Saved"

- Can refer to national (Israel) or personal (David) salvation.
- Can mean physical (from trouble - temporal) or spiritual (eternal)
- Can be spoken of in 3 tenses – past (have been saved), present (being saved) and future (will be saved).

3. **We must understand that all the Bible is _____, but not all the Bible is _____.**

2 Timothy 3:16, Romans 15:4, 1 Corinthians 10:11 – all scripture is for us.

But not specifically written to us. The Bible contains 66 books, written by around 40 authors over 1500 years. Each book had a target audience.

We must make proper distinction to understand what applies to us in this dispensation.

Compare these commands in Scripture:

- **Leviticus 20:10-13**

What was the punishment for those in Israel who committed sexual immorality in the Old Testament? _____

- **1 Corinthians 6:9-11, Ephesians 2:3-5**

What about those in now in Christ who have committed sexual immorality? _____

- **Leviticus 11:3-4,7**

What restrictions were upon the Israelites with regards to food? _____

- **1 Timothy 4:4-5, Colossians 2:16**

What restrictions are upon Christians with regards to food? _____

- **Deuteronomy 18:20**

What was to be done with false prophets/teachers in Israel? _____

- **Romans 16:17, 1 Timothy 6:3-5**

What are we to do with false teachers in the church today? _____

If you fail to rightly divide the word of truth, understanding that all the bible is *for us*, but *not to us*, then you will make the mistake of taking practices that were given to the people of God in one dispensation (e.g. Israel) and trying to apply them to another (e.g. the Church). The result will be confusing and very problematic.

4. **The foundation for a dispensational understanding of the Bible is to study it using a normal, grammatical, historical, contextual method of _____.**

The method of interpretation of scripture is known as *hermeneutics*.

Normal (Literal) – A Literal interpretation seeks to understand the Bible in its plain, natural, normal sense. It looks for the clear and obvious meaning of a text. God does not want to hide His truth from the believer; He wants to communicate His truth to His own in a very clear way. God means what He says and says what He means. Though the Bible contains symbols and metaphors, we are not looking for hidden meanings under the normal reading. As someone has wisely said *“When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense!”*

Grammatical – we follow the grammatical rules of literature, analysing and understanding the relationship that words, phrases, or sentences have toward one another. There are different ‘genres’ or types of writing and this must be considered. (e.g. narrative, poetry, teaching, etc.).

Historical – we must be always aware of the historical background because the Bible was written within human history. We must seek to be informed about the historical events and culture in which the passage was conceived.

Contextual - every passage is part of not only its immediate context, but also a broader context. The words used are important, as is the context of those words. We must guard against building elaborate doctrines on obscure or isolated passages.

We must also be consistent in our method of interpretation, rather than changing our approach to suit or support our views. God’s Word is internally consistent. There are no errors or contradictions. If we think we see paradox or inconsistency in Scripture, there is something we are not understanding correctly and need to study it further. God cannot lie!

5. **The realisation that God has been _____ revealing His truth to men throughout history.**

Matthew 13:17 – Jesus revealed things to his disciples previously not revealed to (or fully understood by) the prophets.

John 16:12 – There were things that Christ would not reveal to His disciples until after his resurrection.

Colossians 1:26,27 – A mystery – something hidden from those in the Old Testament times but revealed to us now in the Church Age.

What Bible do you have?

| | |
|-------------------------|---|
| Adam | "I had no Bible at all, but I walked with God in the cool of the garden." |
| Abraham | "I had no Bible at all, but at different times God would appear to me and speak to me" (see Genesis 17:1; 18:1; etc.) |
| Moses | "My Bible contained 5 books-Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy" |
| David | "My Bible contained the same 5 books that Moses had as well as Joshua and Judges and many of the Psalms which I wrote, etc." |
| Ezra | "My Bible contained most of the Old Testament books but not all of them" |
| John the Baptist | "My Bible contained all of the Old Testament books but none of the New Testament books" |
| Paul | "My Bible contained the Old Testament books and most of New Testament books but not all of them" |
| John | "My Bible contained all of the Old Testament books and all of the New Testament books. Shortly before I died God used me to write the last New Testament book." |

Conclusion

Why study the dispensations?

- The study of the dispensations enables us to **better understand the perfect plan of God.**
- The study of the dispensations **is fundamental to our study and interpretation** of the Bible.
- A study of this present dispensation, and previous ones **will keep us from the errors** of applying those who wish to turn the dispensational clock back or ahead.
- Understanding **the distinctives of this present dispensation** is essential to good stewardship.
- Understanding what God is doing in this present dispensation provides the Christian with **much guidance in the area of God's will for his life.**