

# DISPENSATIONALISM



**Fellowship Bible Church**



# ***DISPENSATIONALISM***

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## **Bible Study Guide**

*From the leadership development ministry of*

**FELLOWSHIP BIBLE CHURCH MISSIONS**

# Acknowledgments

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The lesson outlines and notes in this booklet were prepared and edited by Tim McManigle, Director of FBC Missions.

# *Table of Contents*

## **DISPENSATIONALISM**

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	Page
Lesson 1	2
Lesson 2	5
Lesson 3	8
Lesson 4	10

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Revision 1

# Dispensationalism

## Lesson 1

### A. Seven Pictures of the Believer

- In *2 Timothy 2*, the believer is shown in 7 different characters:
  - In verse 1 A son
  - In verse 3 A soldier
  - In verse 5 An athlete
  - In verse 6 A farmer
  - In verse 15 A workman
  - In verse 21 A vessel
  - In verse 24 A servant
- Notice what it says about different ones:
  1. A son (verse 1) Grace goes with sonship/a son receives his inheritance as a free gift, he does not work for it.
  2. A soldier (verse 3 & 4) A soldier endures hardship and avoids worldly entanglements.
  3. A vessel (verses 20 & 21) A vessel must be cleansed.

### B. Rightly Dividing the Word

- I would like to focus on one particular character, and that is the workman in verse 15. Notice that a workman must rightly divide the Word of God. Give some thought to this. The Word has RIGHT DIVISIONS, and any study of the Word that ignores these divisions will for the most part be profitless and confusing.  
*1 Cor 10:32*--Three distinct groups of people/Jews, Gentiles, and the Church. We'll look more closely at these later.

### C. Israel/The Law Contrasted with the Church/Grace

- If we were to take a close look at Scripture we would see that over half of the Bible relates to the Jews, and they are dealt with by God in a rather unique way. They were separated from the mass of humanity and given specific promises not given to any other people groups. It is interesting that the other nations are mentioned only as they have involvement with the Jews.

I want to say this: all the promises of God to Israel relates to the earth; if they were faithful and obedient, they were promised earthly riches and power, but if unfaithful and disobedient, they would be scattered among all peoples. *Deut. 28:1-2, 15, 58-59, 64.*

As we look further into Scripture, we see another distinct body, which is the Church. This body also has a peculiar relation to God and like Israel has received specific promises from Him, but similarity ends there.

1. Instead of being formed from the descendants of Abraham alone (Jews), it is a body made up of all people both Jew and Gentile.
  2. Instead of the relation being maintained by covenant (law), it is maintained by (grace) through faith.
  3. Instead of obedience bringing the rewards of earthly greatness and wealth, the church is taught to be content with food and clothing and to expect persecution and hatred. *Phil 1:29, 1 Tim. 6:8, Hebrews 13:5*
- We could say that Israel's promise land is temporal and earthly, while the church's Promised Land is eternal and heavenly. Israel's promise land is a place of physical abundance, whereas the Church's Promised Land is a place of spiritual abundance.
  - Something else for us to think of is that the Church did not exist before or during the earth life of Christ. *Matt 16:18*--notice the future tense, "I WILL build My Church;" not I have built or am building.
  - I want to make note of this; the Church is not once mentioned in Old Testament prophecy. The birth of the Church is in *Acts 2*, and its termination is in *I Thess 4*.
  - If we were compare what Scripture says about Israel and the Church, we would find that in origin, calling, promises, principles for conduct, and future destination, all is contrast. For example:
    1. **CALLING**--Israel was called to an earthly kingdom: *Gen 12:1; Deut. 8:7-9* The Church is called to a heavenly kingdom: *Phil 3:20; I Cor 4:11*
    2. **CONDUCT**--Israel's principles for conduct--*Deut. 7:1-2; Ex 21:23-25* The Church--*Matt 5:39 & 44; I Cor 4:12-13*
    3. **WORSHIP**--Israel was to worship in one place and at a distance from God. *Lev 17:8-9; Luke 1:8-10* The church worships wherever 2 or 3 are gathered and has boldness to enter into the holiest. *Matt 18:20; Heb 10:19*
  - In the predictions concerning the future of Israel and the Church, the differences are even more clear. The Church will be taken away from the

earth entirely, (*1 Thess. 4:16, 17*) but Israel will one day have her greatest earthly splendor and power in the Millennial Kingdom (*Luke 1:30-33*). As *2 Tim 2:15* states, a workman must rightly divide the Word. There is a clear division between Israel and the Church; between law and grace.



## **Dispensationalism**

### **Lesson 2**

#### **A. Christians are not under that “old Jewish legal system.”**

- Let’s begin by looking at Romans 6:14 – “We’re not under the law, but under grace.” It might be helpful to define the term “law” as used here in Rom. 6:14.
- Basically, the term “law” as used here is referring to that old Jewish legal system, which required the people to hear the word, obey and then they would receive the blessing. Deut. 28:1-2 – Basically we could say that until the time of Christ, the Jews were working for God, because law begins by asking the question, “What must man do?” However, as we can see from Rom. 6:14, Christians are not under any “legal system” to gain acceptance or approval from God.

#### **B. A word of caution:**

- Not being under the law does not mean that we are free to feed our fleshly desires – Gal. 5:13. However, it does mean that we are free to walk with God, and live a life free from sin’s power through His strength and not our own, Rom. 6:14a.

#### **C. A common error in Christianity:**

- There appears to be a common error in Christianity today which is *co-mingling law and grace*. Lewis Sperry Chafer, in his book, “Grace the Glorious Theme” makes this comment: “*If it is not 100% grace, then it is law.*”

#### **D. It is impossible to mix law and grace.**

- Nowhere in Scripture do we see the mixing of law and grace – it is impossible. Romans 11:6; Matt 9:16, 17 – Jesus didn’t come to patch up the old. He was offering something completely new. The new teaching of grace will not fit in the old teaching of the law.

#### **E. Example – The two-fold ministry of Christ:**

- These two principles, *law* and *grace*, are totally separated even in the teachings of Christ. In order for us to get an understanding of this, let's take a look at the two-fold ministry of Christ.
- Romans 15:8, 9 – Notice vs. 8 – to the Jews He was to fulfill the promises made to the fathers, however, vs. 9 He was the minister of mercy to the Gentiles. Jesus had a rather unique relation to the nation of Israel. He was the one who fulfilled the great Messianic promises given only to the Jewish people.
- I find it very interesting what he said at the beginning of His ministry. Matt 15:24. He made a similar comment to His disciples in Matt 10:5-7. As a Jew, He personally acknowledged, kept, taught and enforced the law. But as the Savior and hope of the world, He established a new way of life which belongs to believers under grace. Speaking to a Jewish ruler, Jesus made this comment. Matt. 19:17. But when speaking to a group that would be saved by grace he said, John 6:27-29.
- Let's give some thought to this: Law begins by asking the question, "What must man do?" Luke 10:28 – Grace, on the other hand, begins with the question, "What has God done?" A good example would be John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that He gave." These two opposing principles, law and grace, are not to be reconciled – there is a clear division between them.

#### **F. The great debate:**

- Let's turn now to a rather interesting scripture, Acts 15:1, 2 & 6-10 The dispute here is over the law and to place it on the children of grace is to test or provoke God. Notice vs. 10 again: it is an unbearable yoke ...it is unbearable!

#### **G. Christ's yoke is an easy yoke:**

- However, look at what Jesus says about walking by faith and living under grace. Matthew 11:28-30. I want to point out a couple of things in this scripture:
  1. Verse 29 – "take my yoke upon you." What is the only yoke that Jesus puts on us? It is a yoke of faith. Again, Col. 2:6
  2. In that same verse HE says "learn of Me for I am meek and lowly in heart." Jesus doesn't put a lot of demands on us; 2 Peter 1:3. Note the

“learn of me” in Matt. And the “through the knowledge of Him’ In 2 Peter.

3. Verse 30 – His yoke is easy, as opposed to the unbearable yoke of the law back in Acts 15:10.

#### **H. Conclusion:**

Scripture is very clear Christians are not to be entangled with the yoke of bondage (the law). I would like to end this scripture – Galatians 5:1.

# Dispensationalism

## Lesson 3

### A. Legalism

- I would like to begin by saying that LEGALISM in the church has probably done more to hinder it's progress and destroy it spiritually than anything else. A good definition for legalism is: "obeying rules to gain approval and exalt self."
- Instead of walking in a God-given path of separation from the world, the church has attempted to use Scripture written to the Jews for the purpose of justifying and pursuing earthly treasures such as health, wealth, power, magnificent church buildings, among other things. If we look closely at Scripture, we will see that it divides time into 7 unequal periods called dispensations. These periods are marked off in Scripture by a change in God's method of dealing with people because of sin, and each one ends in judgment.

### B. The Seven Dispensations

- Five of these dispensations have come and gone, we are in the sixth probably toward the end, and have before us the seventh and last the millennium. Very briefly the 7 dispensations are as follows:
1. **MAN INNOCENT** From the creation of Adam to his expulsion from Eden. Adam was created innocent and ignorant of good and evil; he sinned and then this dispensation ended in judgment; put out of the garden. *Gen. 1:26; Gen. 2:16-17; Gen. 3:6 & 22-24*
  2. **MAN UNDER CONSCIENCE** After the fall, man now had a knowledge of good and evil. (*Gen. 3:7, 22*) This dispensation began with Adam's expulsion from Eden and ended in judgment at the flood. *Gen. 6:5 & 11-12; Gen. 7:11-12 & 23*
  3. **MAN IN AUTHORITY OVER THE EARTH** Human government resulted as man attempted to become independent of God. This dispensation began at the flood and ended in judgment at the Tower of Babel where the languages were confused and the people scattered. *Gen. 9:1-2; Gen. 11:1-8*
  4. **MAN UNDER PROMISE** Out of the scattered descendants of Babel, God entered into a covenant with one man, Abram. Some of the promises to Abram

were unconditional (grace) and these have been or will be fulfilled by God. Other promises were conditional upon faithfulness and obedience (law).

Everyone of these conditions was violated. This dispensation went from Babel to God's judgment, bondage in Egypt. It is interesting that Genesis opens with "in the beginning, God created," and ends with "in a coffin in Egypt." *Gen. 12:1-3; Gen. 13:14-17; Gen. 15:5; Gen. 26:3; Gen. 28:12, 13; Ex. 1:13-14.*

**5. MAN UNDER LAW** In the wilderness of Sinai, God proposed the covenant of law. Instead of the people pleading for a continued relation of grace, they self confidently answer, "all that the Lord has spoken, we will do." (*Ex. 19:1-8*) The history of Israel is one long record of repeated violations of the law. This 5<sup>th</sup> dispensation began at Mt. Sinai and ended at the cross. *2 Kings 17:1-9; Psalms 106; Acts 2:22-23; Rom. 3:19-20; Gal. 3:10*

**6. MAN UNDER GRACE** God given righteousness, rather than God required righteousness. From the cross to the rapture. *Eph. 2:8-9; I Thess. 4:16-17*

**7. MAN UNDER THE PERSONAL REIGN OF CHRIST** This period of time is known as the millennium. The seat of Jesus' power will be in Jerusalem and the saints, including the church, will reign with Him. Eventually Satan is set loose for a season and he finds the natural heart of man as prone to evil as ever. He gathers the nations to battle against the Lord and His saints. This last dispensation closes like the others in judgment. The Great White Throne is set, the wicked dead are raised and judged and then comes the new heaven and new earth. *Rev. 20:2-3 & 7-15; Rev. 21 & 22*

- As we continue studying the dispensations in the next few lessons, we will be primarily interested in the last 3:
  1. Man under law--Law of Moses
  - Man under grace--Present church age
  - Man under the personal reign of Christ--Millennial Kingdom

## Dispensationalism

### Lesson 4

#### A. Paul, The Apostle of the Dispensation of Grace

- The 13 epistles of Paul (Romans to Philemon) present an interesting message to the church, the body of Christ. Keep in mind that aside from Christ, there are two primary unfolders of divine truth in the Bible--Moses in the Old Testament and Paul in the New Testament.
- Here is something for us to give some thought to: The 12 Apostles, and we are including Mathias, *Acts 1:22-26*, were eyewitnesses of Christ's resurrection. They were with Jesus personally, and knew Him as a man. When He died, they saw it; when He was buried, they knew it as a fact because they saw it; and when He was raised, they found it out by visiting His empty tomb. They also saw the physical, risen body of our Lord, and it was with them, that Jesus walked on earth 40 days after His resurrection.

#### *Acts 1:3*

But it appears that the Lord bypassed these 12 when it came time to reveal the great doctrines for the church. Just as God chose Moses to be the revealer to Israel of the 10 commandments and all connected with the law dispensation, so He chose Saul of Tarsus to be the primary unfolders of the truths connected with Christ's death, burial and resurrection, plus all the mysteries and doctrines concerning the church. *Acts 9:15; Eph. 3:1-3*

#### B. The Limitations of the Non-Pauline Epistles

The other Apostles speak little of these things. Notice Peter's comment about learning from Paul. (*2 Peter 3:15-16*) Give some thought to the Epistles of the other disciples. **James 1:1**--James addresses his epistle to "the 12 tribes." *1 Peter 1:1*--Peter writes to "the strangers who are sojourners of the dispersion." That is to the dispersed Jews who acknowledged Jesus as the Messiah.

The word "cross" is only mentioned once in the Epistle of James, Peter, or John. Paul is the unfolders of what God did at Calvary. Paul is the primary declarer and revealer of the Gospel to us, **Gal. 2:9**. It is interesting that Scripture even refers to it as Paul's gospel. *Acts 20:21; Rom. 2:16; 16:25; 2 Tim. 2:8*

### **C. The Grace Message Expanded and Expounded by Paul**

If we were to take Romans to Philemon out of the Bible, it would leave a big gap in our understanding of Christian doctrine. For instance, if we were to take Paul's epistles out of the Bible, we could find little about the Church, the Body of Christ, for no other apostle mentions the Body of Christ; we couldn't find one of the great mysteries, such as the rapture of the Church (*I Thess. 4; I Cor. 15*), or the present hardening of Israel (*Rom. 11*). We couldn't find the exact meaning of any of the great doctrines such as propitiation, reconciliation, justification, identification, redemption, or sanctification.

Where would we be in our battle over sin's power without *Romans 6* or *Gal. 2:20*?

Some Scripture to look at regarding Paul ministry: *Eph. 3:1-8; Gal. 1:11-16; 2:9; Col. 1:23; Rom. 15:15-16; I Cor. 3:6, 10; 15:8-10; 2 Tim. 4:16-17*

Please don't misunderstand, I am not saying that Paul had a different grace message, but rather that he preached a stronger grace message. I would say that Paul was chosen by God to take the message of grace to the Gentile church, and that he was taught this message by a resurrected Jesus Christ unlike the disciples who learned from Jesus while He remained on earth. In *Gal.2:9*, Paul mentions that James, Peter and John would go to the Jews, while he would go to the Gentiles. My thinking is that the Jews were unable to accept Paul's strong grace message.

### **D. Conclusion**

- I come to this conclusion by tracking his life through the book of Acts with his repeated encounters with the Jews. *Acts 9:23, 24; 13:50; 14:2, 19; 17:5, 13; 18:12; 20:19; 21:27; 23:12; 25:7*. Not only did the Jews misunderstand Paul, but unfortunately, so do many Christians today. Another interesting Scripture - *Act.15:1-10*
- It could be possible that, in particular, James, Peter and Jude, who wrote their epistles early during much of the transitional period for the Jews, were unable to communicate a strong grace message also, because the Jewish audience to whom they wrote were not prepared to accept it.
- In closing, I would like to say this: we don't have a problem believing that God gave a covenant to one man, Abraham; nor do we have a problem believing that He gave the law to one man, Moses. However, we really

struggle believing that one man, Paul, has been set apart and given specific revelation for the Church.





