

“The Essentials Of Our Faith”

Session VI

October 17, 2010

The First Three Dispensations: “Distinguishable” Stages In God’s Eternal Plan!

In many ways the most important verse in the Bible is the first verse, Genesis 1: 1.

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”

This introductory statement determines the truthfulness and accuracy of every statement which follows in Scripture.

- “In the beginning” God was present → He is the eternally present, self-existent One! He owes His existence to no other person or power!
- “God created the heavens and the earth” → The self-existent God of eternity is the “Maker” of all things, animate and inanimate, from the immeasurable expanse of the universe to the invisible particles of sub-atomic structure.

“To whom then will you liken Me that I would be his equal?’ says the Holy One. Lift up your eyes on high and see who has created these stars. The One who leads forth their host by number, He calls them all by name; because of the greatness of His might and the strength of His power. Not one of them is missing. . . . Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth does not become weary or tired. His understanding is inscrutable!”

Isaiah 40:25-26, 28

God, the Creator, is indeed “inscrutable” or beyond our understanding! He simply “speaks” and His commands shape the material and immaterial world!

To discover, then, that this God, this “Creator” of all, is also “shaping” or “unfolding” an eternal “plan” or “purpose” for His creation is consistent with His very nature!

“To whom would you liken me and make me equal and compare to Me, that we would be alike? . . . Remember the former things long past, for I am God, and there is no one like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things which have not been done, saying, ‘My purpose will be established, and I will accomplish all My good pleasure!’”

Isaiah 46:5, 8-10

The “Dispensations”: Distinguishable Economies (Stages) in the Eternal Plan of God

I. “Innocence”:

A. “Revelation”: Genesis 1:28 – 3:6.

→ Time period = From the “creation” of mankind to the “fall” of man from God.

B. “Responsibility”: To maintain “innocence” by obeying God!

→ “Rule of Life” = “Innocence”; a “positive holiness”; “fellowship” with God;

→ Mankind was responsible to maintain this “sinless” standing;

→ God’s command: “Do not eat!” (Gen. 3:1).

“Before man fell, he was favorably disposed toward God. Adam and Eve fellowshiped with God. They obeyed God by cultivating the Garden of Eden in accordance with His will. They did not run and hide from Him when He approached them. These things indicate that man originally had a disposition which was favorably oriented toward God. It should be noted, however, that this favorable disposition was unconfirmed. This means that man was not locked into it forever. He could lose it by his own choice. . . . The only way that man’s favorable disposition could become confirmed was for man to be confronted with an alternative to being favorably disposed toward God and then for him to choose to remain favorably disposed.” --Renald Showers

C. “Failure”: Mankind failed the test!

→ “They ate!”

→ They chose to trust themselves rather than God!

“Satan entered the garden and confronted him with an alternative to being favorably disposed toward God. The alternative was for man to reject God’s rule over him and assert his own self-rule – just as God is His own Self-Ruler. . . . He displayed his choice outwardly by eating the forbidden fruit in violation of God’s command.” --Renald Showers

D. “Judgment”: Spiritual and Physical “Death”!

- Adam and Eve were permanently removed from the garden;
- A “Curse” on all mankind and all creation!

“Man’s failure resulted in judgment . . . Man died spiritually as soon as he made his fateful choice (Gen. 2:16-17). A great separation took place between man and God. Man lost his favorable disposition toward God and replaced it with a disposition of enmity against God (Rom. 8:7) . . . This disposition of enmity was a confirmed disposition. Man was so thoroughly locked into it that he could not rescue himself from it. Only the redemptive work of God could accomplish such a rescue.” --Renald Showers

“In addition to spiritual death, man became subject to disease, deformity, accidents, and physical death. The woman was cursed with pain in childbirth and with the desire to rule the man. The ground was cursed, thereby making man’s work of growing food much more difficult. Man lost his perfect environment . . . Instead of living in a world system ruled by the benevolent God who loved him, man was doomed to live in a world system ruled by a tyrant who would use man for his own selfish ends.” --Renald Showers

E. “Grace”:

- God’s provision for man’s need in the person and work of Christ!

“In the midst of this dismal tragedy, at the end of the first dispensation God gave a ray of hope. In Genesis 3:15 He pronounced the first promise of the Redeemer who would be born of woman into the world during the course of history. As God progressively worked out His purpose for history, two of the great things which He would accomplish through the Redeemer would be the provision of redemption for fallen man and the defeat of Satan.”

--Renald Showers

Note: A new dispensation begins when there is a change in mankind’s responsibility before God → some “old” aspects are removed or changed; some “new” aspects are added! Primarily there is a new “Rule of Life”.

II. “Conscience”:

A. “Revelation”: Genesis 4:1 – 8:14.

→ Time period = from the “fall” of mankind to the universal “Flood”.

B. “Responsibility”: (Note: Each of these is “new”!)

--To do what is right by “human conscience”, Gen. 4:9

--To be governed by the “restraint” of the Holy Spirit, Gen. 6:3;

--To approach God by “blood sacrifice”, Gen. 4:2-5.

→ “A New “Rule of Life” = To live by the dictates of “human conscience”;
To do what is right!

Illustration: Cain was held responsible by God to do what was right in relation to his brother, Abel, Gen. 6:3 (“*am I my brother’s keeper?*”).

“Erich Sauer suggests that this dispensation might be called the dispensation of “Self-determination”. Clarence Mason calls it the dispensation of “Moral Responsibility”. . . . During this stewardship man was responsible to respond to God through the promptings of his conscience and part of a proper response was to bring an acceptable blood sacrifice as God had taught him to do (Gen. 3:21; 4:4).”

--Charles Ryrie

“For when the Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them.”

Romans 2:14-15

→ “A New “Rule of Life” = To live by the “restraint” of the Holy Spirit!

“In Genesis 6:3 God talked about His Spirit ‘striving’ with man during the days prior to the Noahic Flood. The verb which is translated ‘strive’ signifies ‘to rule’. Thus, the Holy Spirit was also a ‘ruling’ factor during the second dispensation.”

--Renald Showers

→ “A New “Rule of Life” = To approach God on the basis of “blood sacrifice”!

“In Genesis 4:3-7 God accepted Abel’s blood sacrifice but rejected Cain’s bloodless sacrifice. This implies that the special revelation which God gave to man for the second dispensation was that man was to approach God only by means of a blood sacrifice (Heb. 11:4). Sinful man, no matter how sincere could not come to God in his own way. He could come only in the one way that God had ordained.”

--Renald Showers

C. “Failure”: Mankind failed the test!

→ Universal “Wickedness”!

“Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.”

Genesis 6:5

D. “Judgment”: The Worldwide “Flood” in the day of Noah!

→ All mankind was destroyed except for eight members of Noah’s family.

“We also have the record of those who did not respond and who by their evil deeds brought judgment on the world. Cain refused to acknowledge himself a sinner even when God continued to admonish him (Gen. 4:3,7). So murder came on the scene of human history. Unnatural affection and wide-spread evil desire and purpose of heart (Gen. 6:5). The longsuffering of God (I Peter 3:20) came to an end, and He brought the Flood as judgment on the universal wickedness of man.”

--Charles Ryrie

E. “Grace”:

→ God’s provision for man’s need in the person and work of Christ!

“But Noah found favor (grace) in the eyes of the LORD . . . Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his time; Noah walked with God.”

Genesis 6:8-9

--**Note:** This is the first use of the word “grace” in the Bible.

“Ark: type of Christ as the refuge of His people from judgment (Heb. 11:7). In strictness of application this speaks of the preservation through the “Great Tribulation” (Matt. 24:21,22) of the remnant of Israel who will turn to the Lord after the Church . . . has been ‘caught up’ to meet the Lord (Gen. 5:22-24; I Thess. 4:15-17; Heb. 11:5; Isa. 2:10,11; 26:20,21). But the type has also a present reference to the position of the Believer ‘in Christ’ (Eph. 1). It should be noted that the word translated ‘pitch’ in Gen. 6:14 is the same word translated ‘atonement’ in Lev. 17:11. It is atonement that keeps out the waters of judgment and makes the Believer’s position ‘in Christ’ safe and blessed.”

--C.I. Scofield

III. “Human Government”:

A. “Revelation”: Genesis 8:15 – 11:9.

→ Time period = From the worldwide “Flood” to the call of “Abraham”.

B. “Responsibility”:

- To control human behavior by the authority of “human government”, Gen. 9:6;
- To “scatter” and “multiply” throughout earth, Gen. 9:7;
- To do what is right by “human conscience”;
- To be governed by the “restraint” of the Holy Spirit;
- To approach God by “blood sacrifice”.

→ A New “Rule of Life” = To live by submission to “human government”;
To control violence and corruption by “authority”!

“The new revelation of this time included animals’ fear of man, animals given to man to eat, the promise of no further floods, and the institution of capital punishment. It is the latter that gives the distinctive basis to this dispensation as that of human government. God gave man the right to take the life of man, which in the very nature of the case gave man the authority to govern others. Unless government has the right to the highest form of punishment, its basic authority is questionable and insufficient to protect properly those it governs.”

--Charles Ryrie

“Capital punishment necessitates a human government agency to administer the sentence of execution. God required that the murderer’s blood be shed by man. In Romans 13:1-7 the Apostle Paul indicated that governmental authority derives its existence from God, that it was ordained for the purpose of restraining evil, and that it functions as the minister of God when it uses the sword for punishment.”

--Renald Showers

C. “Failure”: Mankind failed the test!

“Failure to govern successfully appeared on the scene almost immediately, for Noah became drunk and incapable of ruling. The people, instead of obeying God’s command to scatter and fill the earth, conceived the idea of staying together and building the ‘Tower of Babel’ to help achieve their aim. Fellowship with man replaced fellowship with God.”

--Charles Ryrie

D. “Judgment”: The “scattering” of mankind by the “confusion” of human language, Gen. 11:5-9.

“Up to this time Noah’s descendants spoke only one language (Gen. 11:1). This universal language enabled them to work together on their building project. God judged these rebels by confusing their language. For the first time man began to speak different languages. This brought the building project to a halt because the builders could no longer understand each other’s speech. It also caused Noah’s descendants to separate from each other and relocate to different areas of the earth. . . . Through time this beginning of different languages caused the development of nations. Thus, different languages and nations began as the result of man’s rebellion against God’s rule and God’s judgment of that rebellion.”

--Renald Showers

E. “Grace”:

→ God’s provision for man’s need in the person and work of Christ!

“ . . . God graciously intervened in that he did not utterly destroy the nations but chose to deal graciously with Abraham and his descendants.”

--Charles Ryrie

What Does This Mean For Us Today?

1. The basis of knowing God remains “_____” in His Word!

- The great enemy to “_____” is human “_____”!
 - Mankind does not believe that the _____ has been affected by the “_____”!
- (See: Jeremiah 10:23; 17:9)

2. The basis of approaching God remains “_____”!

- Human pride and rebellion give “_____” to human “_____”!
- God has _____ had any other _____ of “Atonement”!
- This fact is uniquely _____ to the modern _____!

3. The basis of human “_____” is the _____ of human government!

- “_____” comes by “_____” to _____!
- The “Last Days” will be marked by “_____”, II Thess. 2:1-12.