



SECOND CORINTHIANS

The Comfort of God FOR and THROUGH His People



Part II —Excursus A: “Understanding the Bible’s Philosophy of History” — 6 January 2023

Introduction: Rightly Dividing the Word

I Tim. 2:15—Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.

“*rightly handling*”—ὀρθοτομέω (*orthotomeō*)—to cut or divide in a manner that is straight. Used of a tentmaker who makes straight rather than wavy cuts in his material. It pictures a builder who lays bricks in straight rows and a farmer who plows a straight furrow.

Main Point: How we _____ the Scriptures is directly related to how we understand the Bible’s overall structure and our own place within it as we seek to live faithfully in our day.

Understanding the Structure of the Bible

“The Bible deals with the issue of meaning. It offers a systematic interpretation of history. It covers the entire scope of history from beginning to end, including the *what* and *why* of the future. It presents a unifying principle which ties together and makes sense of the whole gamut of events, distinctions, and successions. The Bible demonstrates that history has an ultimate goal or purpose. Because the Bible does these things, it can be said that the Scriptures present a philosophy of history. However, since the Bible is God’s written revelation to man, it is God’s philosophy of history. That means that it presents the ultimate, authoritative philosophy of history.” —Renald Showers, *There Really is a Difference*

- Our understanding of the Bible’s philosophy of history should be derived from the very _____ of biblical revelation:
 - (1) *The Bible is inspired by God and is therefore _____* (2 Tim. 3:16)
 - (2) *The Bible is authoritative and is therefore _____* (Deut. 30:11-14)

Result: *The necessity of interpreting the words of Scripture consistently in their literal or normal sense.*

The _____ — _____ *Hermeneutic*

“Interpretation that gives to every word the same meaning it would have in normal usage...It is sometimes referred to as grammatical-historical interpretation since the meaning of each word is determined by grammatical and historical considerations. The principle might also be called normal interpretation since the literal meaning of words is the normal approach to their understanding in all languages.”
—Charles Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*

- Our understanding of the Bible’s philosophy of history should recognize the _____ unfolding of biblical revelation.
“Progressive revelation is the recognition that God’s message to man was not given in one single act but was ‘unfolded’ in a series of successive acts and through the minds and hands of many men of varying backgrounds. . . . The pages of the Bible present ‘not the exposition of a revelation completed, but the records of a revelation in progress. Its parts and features are seen not as arranged after their development, but as arranging themselves in the course of their development, and growing, through stages that can be marked, and by [additions] which can be measured, into the perfect form which they attain at last.” —Charles Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*

Result: *A dispensational understanding of the Bible’s philosophy of history.*

“Dispensational theology...[is] as a system of theology which attempts to develop the Bible’s philosophy of history on the basis of the sovereign rule of God. It represents the whole of Scripture and history as being covered by several dispensations of God’s rule.”
—Renald Showers, *There Really is a Difference*

- A dispensational understanding of the Bible’s philosophy of history recognizes _____ stages in God’s dealing with humanity.

What is a dispensation? *A particular way of God administering His rule over the world as He progressively works out His purposes for world history.*

“The word translated *dispensation*...is *oikonomia*, from which the English word *economy* is derived. The NT word is a combination of two words—*oikos*, which means *house*, and *nemō*, which means *to dispense, manage, or hold sway*...The word...[has] three appearances (Eph. 1:10, 3:9; I Tim. 1:4) [where] it is translated *dispensation, fellowship, and...administration*...In these three passages it refers to a particular way of God’s administering His rule over the world.” —Renald Showers, *There Really is a Difference*

The Primary Characteristics of a Dispensation:

- (1) *Each dispensation is characterized by a unique ruling factor or combination of ruling factors.*
- (2) *In each dispensation man is responsible to obey God according to these ruling factors.*
- (3) *New revelation is given in order that man might respond rightly to God.*

The Secondary Characteristics of a Dispensation:

- (1) *Each dispensation applies a test to man to see if he will be a faithful steward of God’s revelation to him.*
- (2) *Each dispensation demonstrates the failure of man to obey God by faith.*
- (3) *Each dispensation involves divine judgment because of man’s failure.*

EXAMPLE: The Dispensation of the Mosaic Law

From the Riverwood Bible Church Doctrinal Statement:

1. We believe that God structured His plan for the ages of human history in the form of Biblical dispensations, beginning with the dispensation of Innocence with unfallen humanity and culminating with the dispensation of the Millennium on earth, having the Lord Jesus Christ ruling as Lord of Lords and King of Kings, and that the three major ages of the Mosaic Law (Exodus 19 – Acts 1), the Church (Acts 2 – Rapture), and the Millennium (Revelation 19-20) must especially be clearly distinguished.
2. We believe that though one, and only one, plan of salvation exists in every dispensation, the Word of God outlines a clear and different way of life for believers in each age. (Ephesians 1:10; 3:2-9; Colossians 1:25-27)

“...dispensationalism does not teach multiple ways of salvation. That God deals with His creation, especially people, differently from one era to the next does not imply that the means of salvation changes as the administration changes. Rather, like all Christians, dispensationalists believe that salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. Of course, it is not the case that people in every age were aware that salvation was provided through Christ, but their ignorance of the name of Jesus did not excuse them nor were they responsible for a content of beliefs that had not yet been revealed.”

—Glenn Kreider, “What is Dispensationalism?” in *Dispensationalism & the History of Redemption*

The Indispensable Factors of Dispensational Theology (*Sine Qua Non*) [Ryrie & Showers]

1. The distinction between _____ and the _____.
2. The _____ use of the grammatical—historical hermeneutic.
3. The recognition that God’s _____ is the ultimate purpose of history.

Rom. 11:33-36—³³ Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! ³⁴“For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?” ³⁵“Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?” ³⁶For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.

Key Elements of the Biblical Storyline from a Dispensational Perspective [Vlach]

1. The Centrality of an Mediatorial Earthly _____ of God
2. Focus on the Biblical _____ and All Their Dimensions
3. Continuing Significance of Ethnic/National Israel
4. Distinction Between Israel & the Church
5. Continuing Significance of Geo-Political _____
6. Premillennialism

“...Dispensationalism is more than a salvation of individuals system. It is a kingdom system that tries to detect all that God is doing with His creation from Genesis 1 through Revelation 22. This involves matters concerning earth, all created things, land, Israel, nations, covenants, spiritual blessings, and physical blessings. This is what sets Dispensationalism apart from its rivals which focus mostly on individual salvation and spiritual realities.”

—Michael Vlach, *Dispensational Hermeneutics*

Concluding Thoughts

1. A consistent literal/normal interpretation of Scripture allows God to speak for Himself and reminds us that the Bible is primarily about _____ and not _____.
2. A recognition of important biblical distinctions guards us from _____ and _____ that can arise from misunderstanding and misapplying God’s promises.



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Main Point: How we interpret the Scriptures is directly related to how we understand the Bible’s overall structure and our own place within it as we seek to live faithfully in our day.

Understanding the Structure of the Bible

“The Bible deals with the issue of meaning. It offers a systematic interpretation of history. It covers the entire scope of history from beginning to end, including the what and why of the future. It presents a unifying principle which ties together and makes sense of the whole gamut of events, distinctions, and successions. The Bible demonstrates that history has an ultimate goal or purpose. Because the Bible does these things, it can be said that the Scriptures present a philosophy of history. However, since the Bible is God’s written revelation to man, it is God’s philosophy of history. That means that it presents the ultimate, authoritative philosophy of history.” —Renald Showers, *There Really is a Difference*

- Our understanding of the Bible’s philosophy of history should be derived from the very nature of biblical revelation:

(1) *The Bible is inspired by God and is therefore authoritative* (2 Tim. 3:16)

(2) *The Bible is authoritative and is therefore understandable* (Deut. 30:11-14)

Result: *The necessity of interpreting the words of Scripture consistently in their literal or normal sense.*

The Grammatical—Historical Hermeneutic

“Interpretation that gives to every word the same meaning it would have in normal usage...It is sometimes referred to as grammatical-historical interpretation since the meaning of each word is determined by grammatical and historical considerations. The principle might also be called normal interpretation since the literal meaning of words is the normal approach to their understanding in all languages.”
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- A dispensational understanding of the Bible’s philosophy of history recognizes distinct stages in God’s dealing with humanity.

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2. The consistent use of the grammatical—historical hermeneutic.
3. The recognition that God’s glory is the ultimate purpose of history.
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