***The Doctrine of the Dispensations

Colossians 1:24-29

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Our subject is "The Mystery of the Church," segment number ten, in Colossians 1:25-29.

**The Doctrine of the Dispensations**

You are fortunate to be here tonight, as always, but tonight we are touching upon a doctrine of stupendous significance – a doctrine that makes all the difference in the Bible being a meaningful book, being able to understand what the Bible has to say, and a book in which nothing can be made straight, and nothing can be figured out. The apostle Paul, in this passage in Colossians, has led us right into that tremendous doctrine. If there ever was anything that the Protestant Reformation and the Reformers never got straight, this doctrine that we're going to look at tonight is one of them. They got it so botched up that they built whole denominational structures upon their mistaken understanding. And now, they dislike this doctrine, with all the intensity that you could imagine. Most churches will have nothing but bad things to say about what you're going to learn out of Scripture tonight.

The reason for that is that if this is true, then they have built denominations upon a false structure, and their whole denominations would have to go. They wouldn't be able to have their altars up there anymore. They wouldn't be up there burning their candles. They couldn't be shooting the incense. They couldn't be spraying the holy water around. They couldn't be having pastor-priest-like characters standing up in front of that altar, seemingly interceding for the congregation to be able to make it with God. They wouldn't be able to have their holy days. They wouldn't be able to have all the festivals and feasts. The whole thing would come apart, because they made a great mistake about a doctrine which is so prominent in Scripture, the doctrine of the dispensations.

Once they mess that up, naturally they didn't know the difference between Israel and the church. Therefore, they put a hybrid combination together. They can't fix it now. The whole denomination would come apart if they tried to fix it. So, they doggedly hang on to it.

A few years ago, one of their core beliefs and positions that they held was that God is through with the Jewish people as a nation. They would never have a country again. They would never be a nation. And when you said, "Well, but the Bible says that Jews would have a nation forever. They would be eternal. Is God lying?" And He said furthermore, that if they disobey Me, I will discipline them. In fact, He said," I'm going to scatter them all over the nations of the world. If they persist, I'm going to just scatter them all over the nations. I'll take them out of their country. But I will never take their country away from them permanently. They will never cease being a nation before Me, and they will be brought back together again at My appointed time. They will be in their land. They will be a nation once more."

What about that? God said that's what He's going to do. Yes the anti-dispensationalist says, "Well, you don't understand that. You're trying to take it literally. That has all happened in heaven. Israel is a nation in heaven. The church is now the new Israel, and all the church people who go to heaven, all these saved people – that's Israel. The kingdom of God is in heaven. The throne of King David is in heaven." And they have to spiritualize the Scripture? OK, now we understand where you're coming from, and the devil has had another victory.

The apostle Paul has pointed out to us, here in Colossians 1:24, that he rejoices, and he accepts willingly personal sufferings of various kinds in order to proclaim the message of grace salvation and super-grace spiritual maturity living. This is what life is all about. And my heart goes out, in such sympathy to so many church people, and so many who have gone through these hallowed sacred halls of the Berean campus, and who have drifted off into the nothingness of the religious world, and the manipulation of their emotions, instead of having the solid foundation of the principles of the Word of God, so that they may rise to possessing the mind of God, and so that they may rise to being super-grace Christians – that magnificent point where you become a real man and a real woman: maximum manhood; and, maximum womanhood.

The apostle Paul says, "It's worth all the suffering, for me to be able to lead people out of this dark morass of the world system, and lead them into the fields of glory, where they are indeed the royal family of God, and their acting and living like it." Paul says, "I'll take whatever I have to, in the course of my earthly ministry, to make that possible.

Paul's suffering in God's service was viewed by him as filling up. And he uses the Greek word to indicate that – filling up the other side of a balance beam in which, on one side, is all of the earthly suffering. This is not the cross suffering. It is the earthly suffering of Jesus Christ in the process of His ministry – all the abuse; all the rejection; and, all the emotional stress and strain and the mental stress that He had to go under as the Sinless Son of God in the process of doing His work of proclaiming the Word of God, and to tell Israel that salvation is now at hand, and to proclaim Himself to them as their Messiah.

On the other side, Paul says, "Here I am now. And I'm going to fill the other side, and balance off, what Christ has done. That is the duty of every Christian. You take the gaff, and you suffer the flak in order to be a witness for Jesus Christ. If those words don't strike you as something that you understand, then you're probably not much of a witness. You're probably never handing out an evangelism brochure. It's a little scary to do that. It's a little scary to look at people. I know what happens. People look at you kind of startled, and they look at that title, and they don't quite know how to take it, because, all of a sudden, you've raised a question whether their destiny is settled, especially if they're a good American citizen. They don't think they need to doubt where they're going to spend eternity. Nut, Paul says, "I'll take that. That is a bit of suffering. I'll pay the price." His whole life was indeed balancing his side with what Christ did.

Now, I must stress again: when did Jesus Christ satisfy the justice of God against us, which demanded that death be experienced for sin? On the cross? It was not when He walked the highways and byways of Israel. It was not when He was going about in His earthly ministry. He was not then that He was suffering for sin. But once He got on that cross, and more specifically, at 12:00 noon, all the sin of the world was placed on His shoulders. And that's when He couldn't take it any longer, practically. That's when He screamed out repeatedly, "Oh, My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me," because at that point in time, God the Father and God the Holy Spirit, Who He was addressing, turn away from Him, because now He was spiritually separated from them. Christ spiritually, as He would (at the very end) die physically.

So, Paul compares this suffering to Christ's suffering. He's talking about suffering on this earth – the kind you experience when you go about doing the Lord's business, when you go about saying: "Nothing will stand in my way of seeing to it that certain things are done in my life, and I don't care what it is. In the lives of my children, when club meeting time comes, I'll move hell and high water – whatever it takes. That kid is going to be there in club, and is going to be a participant. And our lives are going to not revolve around the world system, and the activities of the world – trivialities. The Lord keeps saying, "Get your eyes off of the things of this earth, and get your eyes on the things above, where things count. What good will these things be, that you are so up to your eyeballs in on this earth, that you don't have to do, because you have a choice. Focus upon your eternity." When you do that, now you'll start finding yourself inconvenienced. Now you will find yourself having to take steps to accommodate your life to the things of God.

**Suffering**

That's the first step in suffering. It's a disruption. Any time you have to disrupt your life; your desires; or, your ways, that's suffering. It could go all the way to your life being taken. But suffering is not just some great, horrible thing. It starts off in very easy ways. And those are ways such that most Christians never get beyond them.

Jesus Christ, all during His earthly ministry of calling Israel to repentance for their sin, and to receive Him as their promised Messiah, experienced the harshness of human rejection. And thus, the sinless Son of God, the God-Man, suffered enormously. The suffering of Jesus Christ for the sins of mankind, I've indicated, was done on the cross. It was not while He was walking about Israel, preaching and teaching and trying to get people to understand that the Abrahamic Covenant was about to be fulfilled. Because they blew it, it wasn't. It was delayed now for almost 2,000 years.

Now, the sufferings of Paul, in his Christian service was, of course, not for the purpose of adding to the payment of sin, which Christ had made. We walked you that through that very carefully this morning. The Lord Jesus, in His sacrifice and death on the cross, completely satisfied the justice of God toward every lost sinner. No human suffering needs to be, or can be, added to the reconciliation that God provided. Nothing can be added to what God Himself has already provided. Christians, who are faithful witnesses of God in salvation, and in teaching doctrine, will also experience personal sufferings, just as Jesus did. This suffering in daily service is to match the earthly witnessing ministry of Christ. Christians suffer in connection with their mission for God, as Jesus did for His.

That's what's behind Paul's statement, Colossians 1:14: "Now I rejoice in my suffering for your sake, in my flesh." His suffering was physical, as well as in other ways: "And I do my share on behalf of His body (which is the church), in filling up." And there's that word for balancing both sides in filling up my side of the balance scale – that which is lacking in Christ's afflictions." When Christians suffer for calling the lost to be reconciled to God, we should also remember, as we showed you this morning, that the Lord Himself suffers with us, because we are His body, and He is our head.

The daily costs that Christians pay for telling the truth, and for proclaiming through doctrine, will be honored by the Lord, at the Judgment Seat of Christ, with eternal rewards – marvelous treasures for you to enjoy forever. . . Sometimes, people who have experienced the kind of instruction that you get here, wonder: "What on earth possesses people to want to waste their lives in religious circumstances, where anything but in-depth teaching of the Word of God is found?" In this place, you will not be treated as if you did not have a brain. You will not be treated as a fool. You will not be treated as someone who is to have your emotions played upon, so that you go out and think you've had a wonderful relationship with God. You are going to be given the opportunity to enter in, thoughtfully, into everything that God has prepared for you. That is your right. That is your privilege. And that is my duty.

In Colossians 1:25, Paul goes on to say: "Of this church, I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, of which (referring back to the church in verse 24) church." And the personal pronoun "I" is in the Greek. Usually (very often), it is just part of the verb. And you know it as, for example, first person singular. But when you want to say, "I (me, myself, and I, and no one else)," Paul is very determined to stress that something has been given to him by God, in a very special way, of a knowledge and understanding of God's work, and God's program, and God's doctrinal teachings, that was not commonplace among the apostles. They didn't all have this given to them. Paul said, "Of this church body, so distinct from Israel, I was made a minister (a 'diakonos')," which means one who serves: "I was made a servant of what?" Of a carrier, or a communicator, of very special truth concerning this body called the church, according to." This is the proposition "kata," which indicates the basis of Paul's ministry. The idea is "relative to:" Of this church, I was made a special minister. I personally, relative" And now he points to the special commission given to him: "Relative to the stewardship."

**The Dispensations**

Here we are led, by the Spirit of God, right into the magnificent doctrine of the dispensations. We will touch upon this only in terms of the dispensation of the church – the age of grace. We will not touch upon all the other dispensations, beginning in the Garden of Eden, and ending up in the kingdom period, except in a general overview. And there is a great deal that you should understand about the dispensations. Fundamentally, it is God's revelation of His plan for human history. That's why it's so important. If you don't understand God's plan for human history, then you don't know where history is going. And then you will botch it up, like the reformers did, getting things mixed together that should have been kept separate.

So, the edited tapes are completed, if you want to get the full gamut on this. These tapes are a revelation to people. We very often get letters. I get letters that say, "I never understood why the Bible was so contradictory to me, and made me so uneasy. Then all of a sudden, you've laid out the dispensations, and I see now that you have to rightly divide the Word of Truth, and apply the right Scripture to the right period of time, and to the right people."

So, he has a (here it is translated as) "stewardship." In the King James Bible, those translators in 1611 used the word "dispensation." And I tell you that, so that if somebody tries to give you the idea: "Well, you don't even find that word in the Bible," yes you do. You find it repeatedly in the King James Bible. But a more explanatory translation is "stewardship," because it is a certain responsibility.

This word that is here is the Greek word "oikonomi." This word indicates an arrangement, and thus the word "dispensation." That's what dispensation means. It means an arrangement somewhere, like in your front room – how you set up your furniture. When your wife gets the inspiration, if that's the word for it, that she wants to put the piano over here, and the sofa over here, and this over here, she is arranging a new dispensation. And that (one-time dispensations) are not too good, because you're huffing and puffing. And what are you doing? You're rearranging the room. You're rearranging the household, so to speak. That's what a dispensation is about. It's how God arranges His household at a certain point in time.

All of us can very quickly and easily understand the Garden of Eden. Anybody who has a smattering of the Bible will say, "Yeah, I know what the arrangement was. Adam and Eve had this garden. They were without sin, and they had everything they needed. It was a perfect environment. They had all the food they wanted, and they just took care of the garden, and made things better. They were there all by themselves. Every evening, Lord Jesus Christ would come in and meet with them in the cool of the day and they would sit down, and He would teach them principles of doctrinal truth about spiritual things, which they had no way of knowing. And they were eating it up. And they just had a terrific time together: Adam; and, his wife, Eve. They couldn't do one thing. There was a restriction." As a matter of fact, every dispensation has someone who is the agent of God, and every dispensation has a point of testing. And the point of testing is to see whether a man, on his own, without God, can attain to righteousness.

So, God said, in this first dispensation (it's really the first phase of the dispensation of the gentiles – the dispensation of the gentiles had three phases to it, and this was phase one): "I'm appointing that tree right there in the middle of the garden, and you will not eat of it. That is the point of testing. And we are going to demonstrate whether a human being, on his own, is able to live righteously without the enablement of God." And when the dispensation demonstrates failure (disaster), it comes to an end. So, all of us can easily see that the arrangement in the Garden of Eden was certainly different than the arrangement under which we live today.

This word "dispensation" means a "stewardship." It connotes a plan of management or an administration. It indicates a way of life. This word is used in the Bible for the plan of God for the course of human history. God has revealed to us in Scripture: period; period; period; era; and, era, right down the line. That's how they're going to progress, from one to another, in which God is going to prove something in every dispensation.

Now, let's go to the other end of the line. The last dispensation is the dispensation of the kingdom. How much brains does it take to realize, that when you look back at the first one, in the Garden of Eden, that the kingdom dispensation is going to be radically different – a radically dramatic, different way of life. Obviously, God has rearranged His household again, and He has put up a new testing point. And, as hard as it is to believe that dispensation is going to be blown, just like all the rest, even though you have Christ Himself running the world, and though you have a society in which righteousness is enforced in the era of the kingdom, you'll never have any special counsels investigating anything in the government. It's not going to be tolerated in the first place. The king, and His angels, and the church – the agents of Almighty God running the millennium, which is us, will see to it that the King's standards are enforced. So, it's easy to see at the other end of the line, that certainly is different than the arrangement under which we live today.

This word, "oikonomi," by the way, is where we get the English word "economy." You can see how "oikonomi" means economy; and, the economy means an "arrangement." It is like some areas where you have political economy. That's the way of doing things. And you have home economy. Usually, it is "home economics" – how to do things in the house: cooking; and, so on. That word "economy" is an "arrangement."

Now, the specific dispensation of which the apostle Paul was speaking of here, of which he was made a steward to reveal it, was the age of the church. That is indicated to us, if you'll just follow down. Colossians 1:25 says, "I have been made a minister of the dispensation from God bestowed upon me, and so on. Then he goes on in verse 26-29, and it tells you what that dispensation is – what distinct arrangement of God's household on earth he's referring to.

**The Mystery of the Church**

Notice that that is a mystery. Aha! It's a secret. This dispensation was a secret until this point in time, when revealed to Paul. It is never found in the Old Testament. What we did find in the Old Testament was that Israel was going to be cut off. And then we found that Israel was going to be restored. What we did find in the Old Testament was that Christ was going to come as the suffering Lamb of God, and He was going to come as the conquering line of the tribe of Judah. But the prophets did not understand that those were two separate comings, and that there was a vast period of 2,000 years between those First and Second Comings, and that the two dispensations were totally separate. And they didn't understand that what God was doing now had never been revealed. What was in between those two comings was a secret. That's what "mystery," here is the Greek word, means. That is the secret which has been hidden from the past ages and generations. And it has now been manifested to His saints: "To whom God wills to make known what is the riches of the glory of this secret among the gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory."

The secret had to do particularly with gentiles. The church is made up mostly of gentiles, though Jews and gentiles can go nowhere else but into the church, if they're saved now. But the concept – "Christ," the Second Person of the Trinity: "In you, as the hope of your eternal glory?" That, to a Jew would have almost been a blasphemous. God living in me? That certainly was an idea that was never found in the Old Testament.

"We proclaim Him (Christ,)" Paul says, "admonishing every man, and teaching every man, with all wisdom, that we may present every man complete in Christ. What is he doing? He says, "I'm teaching them doctrine. I'm feeding their souls on the mind of Christ through the Word of God, so that they have the wisdom that they may be presented as a mature ('complete' means as a mature) person in Christ." Where? At the Judgment Seat of Christ. That's why the suffering – balancing the scale of the suffering that Christ said on this earth, is so important for you and me. We are trivializing and wasting our lives, if we are not organizing it around our service to the Lord Jesus, and around our devotion and dedication to living up to the integrity and the standards commensurate with God, our Heavenly Father's moral code, and teaching everybody God's wisdom, so that you can be mature in Christ. And for this purpose. Here we come back to the suffering.

Paul says, "Also, I labor. Boy do I tire myself out. I knocked myself out. I'd rather go here and do this, but no, the church needs me. This is the work of the Lord. I'd rather not have to talk to this person, but this person needs to know about Christ. I'd rather go my way, but this person needs to be alerted to someplace where their souls can be fed with something more than straw and corncobs – according to His power. For this purpose, also, I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me (within the power of the Spirit of God), which is the way all of us work as Christians."

Now, this is what Paul is saying. I have received from God something bestowed upon me." And the word "bestowed" is in the emphatic position in the Greek. Paul received a special, personal commission from God to reveal the truth about this new, secret body of believers called the church. What about the grammar? This bestowal is in the aorist tense. When was this commission bestowed upon Paul? On the Damascus Road, when he was saved. It's the aorist tense. That's a point in time. It's passive. Paul did not take this on himself. The passive voice tells us that it was given to him. God did the commissioning. And it's a spiritual principal (a participle). It's declaring a spiritual principle. He says, "And this was bestowed on me for your benefit – for the benefit for you. That's what the Greek says: "For you believers, so that you may know what the power is, and what the principles are for living the magnificent life in the church age, under the principle of grace.

The problem we always struggle with, as Christians, in dealing with other Christians, is that most of them are not grace-oriented. They don't know how to live, nor is their mind focused upon living on the principles of grace.

So, the doctrine of the dispensations – is this idea even in the Bible. Well, we'll begin this evening. Let's see whether it is. The doctrine of the dispensation is a very pivotal truth. And it is very clearly, I can assure you, revealed in the Bible. But as have I indicated, even if somebody recognizes this, and they realize that something is wrong from their reformation heritage, the truth of the matter is that they can't accept this, because they have built churches on a misapplication of the dispensation of the church. This doctrine of dispensationalism deals with God's plan for the ages, which then evolves into human history. This is important to understand – that this is a divine plan for the progression of human history.

**Literal Interpretation**

When we understand the eras into which God classifies human history, our own present and future role in God's timetable is made clear. That's why we who understand this, understand the distinctiveness of the church age, and what pertains to that body of believers. And we are not running, chasing rabbits, trying to live like Jews under the Mosaic Law. Seeing human history from the divine viewpoint will guide us to do what 2 Timothy 2:15 says: "Rightly divide the Word of Truth." If you do not understand the doctrine of dispensations, there is no way you will rightly divide the Word of Truth. The result will be that you'll be applying Scripture to the wrong people, and you'll be applying it to the wrong time period. And you will botched the Bible up every time. And I'll guarantee you that the first thing that will fall is the principle of literal interpretation. And once you walk away from literal interpretation, the devil is rubbing his horny, long-clawed hands and saying, "Hot dog, now I've got him," because the devil can play the emotions.

Every Christian who will stand at the Judgment Seat of Christ and realize, young and old, that they played the fool, will realize that they did it because they let their emotions control their lives, and Satan was able to manipulate them into error.

If you understand that God has a timetable, then you know what is going on, and your place in it. People who do attack and ridicule the doctrine of dispensations are really ignorant of what the Bible teaches on this subject. They've never been taught it. They've heard somebody say something. They've created their own caricature of dispensations. One of the things they love to say is that: "dispensationalists say you are saved by works in some dispensations, and grace in others." Of course, that's never true. That is not that is not what dispensationalism biblically teaches. They don't understand how important this is – to being able to interpret Scripture.

However, dispensationalism also suffers sometimes at the hands of its friends, who don't really understand the doctrine or its significance, and how to deal with it. So, we don't want you to be in that category.

Does God have times and epochs in His plan of dealing with mankind from Eden to the Second Coming? He does indeed. Now that you've brought your Bible, please turn to Acts 1:1-7. This book was written by Dr. Luke to a friend named Theophilus, to explain the early history of the Christian church. Verse 1: "The first account I composed (referring to his gospel of Luke), Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach until the day when he was taken up, after he had, by the Holy Spirit, given orders to the apostles whom He the chosen. To these, he also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of 40 days, and speaking of the things concerning the Kingdom of God." Once Jesus was resurrected from the dead, He was now able to shift gears, and start teaching the apostles about the principles of doctrines relative to the church. Up to then, he told them, "I have many things to say to you, but you won't understand them.

Now, His program (God's working) with Israel was in abeyance. The whole program was halted. Of course, anybody knowledgeable in God's pattern of history for Israel, and the revelation of Daniel of 490 years, said, "Wait a minute. How can this stop? Seven years have not been fulfilled of God's promise, that at the end of that time, all the promises to the Jews in the Abrahamic Covenant would be fulfilled. But we know now that those seven years will be fulfilled in the most terrible times upon on the face of this earth, when the tribulation begins.

However, . . ., Jesus said, "Now, boys, I want you to listen carefully. I'm going to start introducing you to the new thing that you will be preaching, and the new era that I am bringing in, and which will be delivered in detail to our brother, the apostle Paul, by God's direct personal instruction to him, which will happen when he is saved, in the Arabian Desert – for three solid years of instruction.

Verse 4: "Then gathering them (the apostles) together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, which He said, 'You've heard of Me,' for John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now" (ten days later, as a matter of fact). They received the baptism of the Holy Spirit. This was brand new in human history. No believe had ever experienced that. Now they were baptized into the body of Christ, and this magnificent thing – this new thing, the church, began. So, suddenly the dispensation had changed. The Mosaic system was out, and in came the grace system.

So, when they had come together, they were asking him, "Lord, is it at this time that you are restoring the kingdom to Israel?" They want to know: "Lord, the Jews rejected you. Palm Sunday was "Adios, muchacho day." Everything stopped for them, to the very day. 483 years of the 490 had been fulfilled: "Are you going to do it now, Lord? Jesus really didn't answer the question. He said, "Look, it is not for you to know certain periods of God's work in human history at this point in time. It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority."

**Times**

The Greed word for "times" here is "chronos." This refers to "time as a succession of events," or "a sequence of events." You notice, of course, from "chronos," that this is where we get our word "chronology" in English, which has to do with the sequence of time. Jesus did not answer the question as to whether the restoration of Israel's earthly kingdom was the next event in line, because that's what they want to know: "Is this what's coming next? The kingdom is going to be set up now, after all, in spite of what these yo-yos did to you know?" He said, "No, it's not for you to know the sequence: bing; bing; bing."

**Epochs**

He said, "Furthermore, it's not for you to know something else, and that is the epochs." The Greek word for this is "kairos." "Kairos" refers to time organized by various components into an era. "Chronos" is bing and bing and bing – a series of events. "Chronos" is this period; this period; and, this period. It is dispensational arrangements of time. That's what we're dealing with. "Kairos" reviews time as broken up by God in definitive segments and it is synonymous with the concept of dispensations.

So, God has a plan for human history. He has a plan that will include periods of time; periods of time; and, periods of time, and they will go: one; two; three. It begins in the Garden of Eden, and goes right down the line to the Kingdom age. And they will follow in a chronological sequence: one after another. But there will be vast expanses of time that will be following each other. So, God, in His plan for human history of mankind, has distinct eras of time which follow in a specific order.

Now, Jesus, in Luke 1:7, told the disciples that this divine plan of the ages was not for them to know, but that it was under the Father's authority: "It is not for you to know these times or epochs, which the Father has fixed by His own authority."

Now, as the revelation of New Testament Scripture was written and unfolded, this plan was made known. It was not then for them to know, but in God's good order, it was made known, of course, through the apostle Paul. This is indicated in 1 Thessalonians 5:1-2: I'll give you a little isagogics (background of the times). The apostle Paul went to the Christians who lived in the city of Thessalonians, and got them together from the various churches. All of their pastor-teacher-elder-bishop-overseers (one from each church) came with them. And Paul taught them, but he was only there for six weeks.

Now, what would you teach a group of believers if you're only going to be there for six weeks? What would be really important for them to know, so that they could relate their lives to what is going on in society day-by-day? The apostle Paul says, "You must know prophecy." That is thing of which the average church member is so ignorant, such that you want to sit down and cry – the prophetic Scriptures. Where is God going? What is His plan for human history?

Well, He told these Thessalonians all about it. And these letters, 1 and 2 Thessalonians revealed to us how much prophecy he taught them, and the problems that this brought up. Somebody came along and said, "We've been told that the rapture has taking place, and we've been left behind." Paul said, "No. Here's when you know that the rapture has taken place." And then he goes on, and gives them a sign. The antichrist will be on the scene – the man of sin, and so on. But they're asking questions that they could have only asked because of the instruction in prophecy.

Now, in 1 Thessalonians 5, Paul says, "Now of the times and epochs." Uh-oh. He uses the same words that Christ used? You betcha. These are the same words that are in Luke 1:7. There, the Lord said, "Not now. I'm not going to tell you about this, but there are periods of time (dispensations) which will follow one another in orderly chronological sequence." Now, the same words from Luke 1:7 are found here: "Now, concerning the times and the epochs, brethren, you have no need of anything to be written to you." Hot dog! He told them about the ages: "For you yourselves know full well that the Day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night."

**The Day of the Lord**

Somebody was telling him if that they were already in Day of the Lord. Perhaps you may remember specifically the definition of "the Day of the Lord." It is a very distinct, technical word, reoccurring many times in the Old Testament. The Day of the Lord has two phases. The first phase is the tribulation. The second phase is the millennium. The day of the Lord lasts how many years? Can any person tell me? The tribulation and the 1,000-year millennium: the seven-year tribulation, and the 1,000-year millennium. If you can add that up, it's 1,007 years. That is the length of time of the Day of the Lord.

So, he says, "Now, I told you about this, and I told you that it's going to come like a thief in the night." But he says, "That isn't what happens." Then he goes on to explain to them how they will know that it is happening. In the next verse, he goes on, and he says, "I'll tell you one sign. The tribulation is approaching when people say, "We've got peace, peace, peace. Then suddenly, destruction will come upon them, like birth pangs upon the woman with child, and they shall not escape."

He goes on to say, "But you're not that stupid. You're not in the darkness. We've explained all this to you." So, the point here is that the same times and epochs that he said are coming, in, Luke 1:7, Paul has said, "Now I can explain those to you." The Thessalonians are said to know about this accurately. Paul, who had been appointed by the Holy Spirit as an apostle, probably to replace Judas, had been given the revelation about God's plan for the ages. He had been given God's plan of the ages, and he'd been told that you have a special commission in the dispensation of the church age, which has now begun on the day of Pentecost. Therefore, he had taught this to the Thessalonian Christians.

Peter, in his writing, in 2 Peter 3:14-16 says, "Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace – spotless and blameless." This context deals with the purging of the heavens and the earth. And it begins again with verse 10: "The day of the Lord is coming like a thief," and so on. And it talks about the terrible things that are going to happen upon this earth – the horrible things that will happen in nature; the destruction; the death; and, the widespread billions of people being killed, all in the tribulation era. Peter says, "Beloved, since you looked for these things, be diligent to be found in Him, spotless and blameless, keep your life compatible with the integrity of God. You've been reconciled to God. You have not been reconciled to the standard of the world's morality. You've been reconciled to the standard of absolute righteousness in Christ." Verse 15: "And regard the patience of our Lord to be salvation, just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, wrote to you, as also in all his letters, speaking to them of these things." What things? The progression of the epochs of the dispensations: "In which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and the unstable to start (oh boy, do they), as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction."

Now, Peter knew what Scripture was – the whole Old Testament. Did you notice here that he called the writings of Paul Scripture? Here is one of the evidences that the New Testament is also inspired just as it claims. And Peter said, "Yes, it is." The books that we accept as the New Testament canon – these have been inspired by God. Peter is declaring that the revelations to Paul, and recorded by him in Scripture, were to be learned. Peter says, "Paul has got some great insights from God, and some of these are really mind-boggling." What Peter says is that we have to learn from Paul's writings, which are Scripture, the doctrines relative to the progression of the eras: the eras; the epochs; and, the dispensations – God's plan for the ages.

Next time, we will walk you through the use of this word "dispensation" in Scripture, in our modern translations, like the New American Standard, which is the best, and other words, like "stewardship," and so on, are used. But the Greek word is the same. It means the same thing. The King James translators 1611 – they used the word "dispensation," which was the word that was appropriate to them. It all means the same thing – an arrangement of your household, and somebody who is the steward and responsible for what goes on, and God demonstrating that, without Him, nobody makes it into heaven. Without Him, nobody can be righteous. It is only God who can enable you to do that. That is why the dispensations are important – applying the right Scripture, and the right people, at the right point in time. If you do not do that, then you will get Scripture contradicting itself. And you will create a mongrel hybrid thing that has no power in your life, in the hands of God the Holy Spirit.

That's why so many of these denominations who never understood the doctrine of dispensation, that came out of the Reformation, are all gone. They're shot. Liberals have taken them over, because they had no structure by which they could sustain themselves, which is based upon rightly dividing the Word of Truth. We shall look at this in detail, and then give you a grand tour from above a flight over the epics of time.

Father, we thank You for the things that always inform us that, we need to know, and are so thrilling to our souls. We thank You, our Heavenly Father, that You have taught us this night, and for these who have heard, and for the hundreds and hundreds of people who, through the tapes, will hear what we said here this night. We thank You that we have been privileged to live in the age of grace. We pray, Father, with all those great blessings, and all the positions that we have in Christ, that we will be willing to take the trouble to put ourselves out for You – the first step of suffering, to be on deck when it's time for our duty, and when it's time for us to be supportive of a Christian service opportunity in our personal lives, and in the life of Berean Church. We pray, our Heavenly Father, that You will bestir our hearts to take the evangelism brochures. And we pray that we'll make a great impact on some lives, and that, out of that, we will see new faces popping up among us, as people are reaching out for substantive, significant knowledge of the mind of God. We have been made in Your image. We are not incapable of learning. We thank You for what we have learned this day, plus our offerings, as we bring them to You now, in Christ's name. Amen.

Thank you so much for being with us. Please greet one another before you leave.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1995

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