***The Dispensations, No. 2

Colossians 2:18-19

COL-202***

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2 Timothy 3:16: "All Scripture is inspired by God, and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work."

Matthew 4:4: "But He answered and said, 'It is written: Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every Word that comes out of the mouth of God.'"

Matthew 13:16: "But blessed are your eyes, because they see; and your ears, because they hear. For truly I say to you that many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it."

We direct your attention this morning in your Bibles to the book of Colossians 1:15-29, as we continue on our subject, "The Mystery of the Church, segment number 17.

**Dispensation**

The dispensations of God in the history of mankind may be classified in various ways. Each classification, however, is based upon a distinctive way of life, ordained by God for a specific era of time. That's what makes a dispensation. One classification of the dispensations is on the basis of who the stewards were at a particular point in history, who were responsible to God for the way of life in that dispensation, and for carrying out that ordained order in relating to God. We have suggested to you dividing the dispensations according to who the stewards were – in charge at any particular point in time.

**The Age of the Gentiles**

So we have pointed out to you, on this basis, that the first dispensation is the age of the Gentiles. This lasted for about 2,000 years, and it was broken down into three basic phases, all of which were part of the Gentile dispensation, but a little different phase of it.

1. **The Phase of Innocence**

First was innocence. This was an age of positive volition in the Garden of Eden. That dispensation came to an end, as all do, with a failure of obeying God's ordered lifestyle.

1. **The Phase of Conscience**

Secondly came the age of conscience. The phase of conscience was the age of negative volition. This was an era of time that was expressed, for example, in the books of Judges. Judges 21:25 is the very last verse of the book of Judges. It said, "In those days, there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes." Now that was the condition in the phase of the Gentiles' dispensation of conscience. Everybody followed his conscience. He let his conscience be his guide. And what was the result? The result is indicated to us in Genesis 6:5, for example: "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." When you follow your conscience, you will follow your sin nature, and every thought will be evil.

Now God is approaching, straightening all this out with a great Noahic worldwide flood. Also notice Genesis 6:11, following the era of conscience: "Now the Earth was corrupt in the sight of God, and the earth was filled with violence." So when you follow conscience, you will not come to the righteousness that God requires to be related to Him. That's the point of every dispensation – to be related to God in an acceptable way, by operating on His basis of absolute righteousness. Adam and Eve blew it. The era of conscience blew it till the earth became so corrupt that God had to take eight people, who were faithful, and born-again, and put everybody else to death with the Great Flood.

1. **The Phase of Nationalism**

The third phase of the era of the Gentile dispensation was, following the flood, when God established civil authority; human government; and, nations – the age of nationalism. This was to put a break upon further expressions of evil. It broke down, and it failed. It ended up in the Tower of Babel. God confused the languages, and force them to spread out.

**The Age of the Jews**

So we come to the second dispensation in the age of the Jews, which was also a period of 2,000 years.

1. **The Phase of the Patriarchs**

It had phase one – the patriarchs, from Abraham: Abraham; Isaac; and, Jacob. Now God takes off one tributary of the human race, and says, "I'm going to make a special people (an earthly people), which will come down to provide the Messiah Savior, which I've promised," back in Genesis 2:15 to Adam and Eve.

Now comes this era of the patriarchs: these elderly men – these rulers. And it was no-go. They could not live a standard of life which was acceptable to God. They had these wise leaders, but they still broke down. They did not follow a path of righteousness.

1. **The Phase of Law**

So God moved them into phase two – the law. He gave them the Mosaic Law – 613 rules and guidelines, so that you could know exactly what to do, and you would be a righteous person. And as you know, that was a total failure, because there was no power in man to override the sin nature, and to do the things that were right. And what he did was all the things that were wrong. So, this base also of the dispensation of the Jews came to a total failure.

1. **The Phase of Innocence**

Finally, there is a third phase to the dispensation of the Jews. But this is interrupted. Part of it comes later. This part of the dispensation of the Jews has not yet been fulfilled. It is the seven-year tribulation period which is yet in the future. But it comes after the church-age, because the church-age was interjected at this point. So, that comes later.

**The Dispensation of the Church**

Now we are in the dispensation of the church. This dispensation also (we suspect) is about 2,000 years. We are getting very near the end of this one. This is the era where Jews and Gentiles are no longer treated as separate people, but are combined into one body from the day of Pentecost on, called the body of Christ, the Church of the Lord Jesus. This is the era of the maximum grace of God. It's the era of maximum personal freedom from the old sin nature. It is the one-time, now, in human history, when human beings can rise above that propensity to evil that we're born with, and can beat the devil hands-down every time. All it takes is what it took the Lord Jesus Christ, in His humanity, to be able to make it. And that is a deep knowledge of doctrine; positive volition to it, because you're feeding upon it Sunday-by-Sunday, and day-by-day in your own studies; and, staying in temporal fellowship – confessions of known sins (1 John 1:9), so that God the Holy Spirit can shine the light of doctrine upon your life, and control your decisions; your will; and, your thoughts.

This is the era in which we live now. It's a magnificent time in which to have been born. How much do you know about it? How much does the average Christian know about the power structure – the dynamic structure of life in the church age, with the magnificent relationships of God that are now possible which a Jew would have thought blasphemous to even consider.

**The Dispensation of the Millennium**

The fourth dispensation is the dispensation of the age of the kingdom. It will be a thousand years long. We refer to it as the millennium. Therefore, it is also yet in the future. It comes after the end of the tribulation era, when Jesus Christ returns a second time to this earth. The whole world will be administered in a world government by Jesus Christ. There will be spiritual blessings everywhere. The knowledge of doctrine will be everywhere. People will know all the things that a person should know. This will be common knowledge. It will be on the nightly news. It will be in all the publications. People will talk about doctrinal orientation principles. There will be great physical well-being. People will not be sick. There'll be a great health program that God Himself will take care of. There'll be material prosperity worldwide. This will be life at its very best. It will be an era of righteousness, with no corruption; no mobsters; no mafia; and, no evil will be tolerated by the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, Jesus Christ, ruling from his throne in Jerusalem. The angels will be there to administer this righteousness, and the church-age believers (you and I) will be there, running the world as the administrators of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, these dispensations were designed to show man that, on his own, as in the dispensation of the kingdom, when the end comes, the rebellion against Christ will be horrendous. So, even the kingdom age will end in disaster and failure. And again, God will prove that He is just. Remember this. This is the angelic conflict. Satan says, "You're not fair, God – making that place called the lake of fire, and throwing me and the demons in without giving us a chance." God says, "Do you impugn My dignity and My justice? I'll demonstrate to you my justice." These dispensations have demonstrated how fair God is with those who are true to Him and His word, and how fair God is to those who rebel against Him. You will reap what you sow. And God's justice will see to it for your blessing, or for your punishment – either way that you choose to follow it.

So, the dispensations have demonstrated a pattern of human failure. Each time, they had a way of life, very explicitly laid up. And each time, that way of life, which would have related them in righteousness to God – they could not live up to. Nobody, therefore, in fact, lives up to God's standard of righteousness.

This is pointed out to us very explicitly in Romans 3:10-18. And you must remember, as I read this passage, this is the world about you. Whether you're young or old, this is the world you deal with. Stop thinking that the people around you are something sympathetic to God: sympathetic to the things of God; or, that they have your attitude as a Christian. The apostle Paul says, "As it is written, there is no righteous: not even one. There is none who understands. There is none who seeks for God. All have turned aside together. They have become useless. There is none who does good. There's not even one." Oh, they think they do good – human good. But that's not good. That's not really good. That's not divine good. Only God can produce good.

So, all these people who are not believers, or who are carnal Christians, are useless human beings. There's the word. Verse thirteen: "Their throat is an open grave with their tongues, they keep deceiving. The poison of asps is under their lips, whose mouth is full of cursings and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood. Destruction and misery are in their paths. And the path of peace have they not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes." That is American society, in general, today. And only the salting (preserving) effect of fundamentalist biblical Christians holds back the judgment of God, which is inevitably coming. And it's creeping up on us. The acts of God in American life today are awesome. On the national scale, they are being demonstrated clearly to anybody who has half a brain, and eyes to see, that He is bringing this nation to its knees very gradually, and giving them the kind of rulers and government that it deserves for their abandonment of the Word of God, and for their turning their back upon God Himself.

Now, you should remember that these verses, while they do describe unbelievers, also describe the Christian who is out of fellowship with God. The carnal Christian is operating on the old sin nature. He does exactly all of these things. He does all of these vile things, because the sin nature is just waiting within all of us, to be able to express itself.

So, every dispensation, because of this condition of man, was a failure. The Gentiles were once the stewards of God's world household. They failed to live up to God's standard of righteousness. They failed in the perfect environment of Eden. They failed when they were allowed to be free to follow the leadings of their conscience. They failed when they were given authority of civil government over society. The Jews replace the Gentiles as God's stewards on earth. They failed under the rule of the wise, elderly patriarchs. They failed under the specific laws of the Mosaic Law that was given to them. And they will fail in the era of the tribulation, when the Jews will be the center of world interest. They will be in their homeland. And they'll be under the protective custody of the Antichrist. And they will still not manage to live up to the standards of righteousness to bring down the blessings of God upon them.

So, the Gentiles and the Jews were dismissed as God's stewards. They were replaced by Christians in the dispensation of the church. And the point of testing today is the gospel of the grace of God. Every dispensation has its point of testing. In the Garden of Eden, it was not eating of the fruit of a certain tree. Today, it is: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved."

Now, this arrangement of God's world is one that is now in effect – the church-age. And knowing the divine set up of the world, the one that is now in effect, is very important for living our lives as Christians to the fullest, in God's plan, which He ordained at the moment you were conceived: for us to capitalize on the grace assets; and, for us to receive the inheritance of heavenly blessings already assigned for our earthly enjoyment, but which cannot be turned loose unless you are able to function under the way of life of the church age.

I've been very emphatic that this confusion about the dispensation of the church is a very dangerous condition for any Christian to be in. And if you are unaware of what is going on, and if you are unaware of the doctrine and the power of the Spirit of God combination, and personal fellowship, and the power of the Spirit of God, these things that are distinctive to living life now, you will make one botched-up move in your life after another. You'll pursue a wrong career. You'll marry the wrong person. You'll fail to raise your children properly. You'll associate with the wrong people. You'll be disoriented to social matters. You'll be out of touch with economic realities, and you'll be all for socialism and government power to redistribute wealth. You'll be everything that is against the principles of the Word of God, and against the core principle of the age of the church as your personal freedom.

Now, Satan does his best to keep Christians in the dark concerning the features of the age of grace. And he zeros in on the person who is the key to the believer's life in being able to be informed, and that's the pastor-teacher. And the pastor-teachers are few and far between, who understand their job of feeding the flock, and who do not crumble under the intimidation of having empty chairs to preach to, and not enough funds to carry on the work, and more vision than they can live long enough to execute. But nevertheless, for those who will listen, the Lord Himself had the same problem. When people heard that He wasn't going to be their King, and make material prosperity for them, they quit following Him. When they heard that they were going to have demands upon their lives, and that they were going to live for God, and not do something else with their lives they said, "Adios, Lord Jesus. That is not for me.

However, it always says that some of the priests; some of the people; and, many of the women listened. And they followed Him, and they believed Him. Those are the people who now have a magnificent life in heaven with Him. Those who walked away from Him, did it to their great loss – not to the Lord's loss, but to their own.

So the pastor-teacher has to remember what his calling is. He has to act as the drill sergeant who lets the troops know what God expects them to do – not on the basis of his opinions, but on the basis of his Scriptures. That's why we are Bereans. We receive whatever the word of God teaches us. We do it willingly. And when somebody tells us something on religious matters, we do not accept it unless we confirm it – that this is the mind of God as revealed in Scripture.

What does the devil do? Well, obviously, he tries to keep us from being instructed in Bible doctrine, and especially to Scripture relating to the church-age – these provisions for our life now. So, what he does is denies people expository preaching – explanation of Scripture. You can go to church all over this metroplex, and you will find, few and far-between, where a pastor stood up and said, "We are now in this book. We are at this verse. Please turn there your Bible. Here's what God has said here." And he's explaining that verse to people. If he does that, they're not going to come back, because what they want is emotional exercise. They want an emotional fanaticism drilled into them. They want to be entertained. And I'm the world's worst entertainer.

So, if that's the point of the service, it's never worth coming. But entertainment is what people want. They want their emotions tickled, and didn't Paul tell us that? Yes, that's exactly what he said. They're going to find teachers that say what they want to hear, that will tickle their ears. That's why people will not attend Berean Church, where their ears are not tickled, but they are bombarded with the Word of God.

Satan undermines our grasp of the church-age by causing us to mix the law features in with the dispensation of the Jews. Boy, how many churches do that? They're always talking about tithing. They're always talking about altars. They have pastors that wear priestly robes. And they go through various liturgical procedures. And all they need is a lamb to slaughter on their altar, and they'd be right back into Judaism. The devil loves to mix the previous dispensation with the age of the church, because what that does is creates immature believers, and it enslaves you. It denies them freedom and liberty that they can know to live above sin – not freedom and liberty to do wrong, but to be able *not* to do what is evil.

The devil encourages us to violate the divine institutions – the four institutions that apply to believe and unbeliever alike, that keep society together: volition; freedom of choice; and, family and marriage – the uniting of a man and woman in a lifelong relationship. The family comes from that marriage, and the rearing of those children as on loan from God to prepare them for adult service. We also have nationalism – nations subjecting themselves to the law of God, as they create laws for governing the people of their society.

What the devil does is he leads us out of the church age blessings, by causing us to want to meet life in the power of our human intellect – our human abilities, rather than by the filling of the Holy Spirit. The charismatics go on an emotional binge, and they think they're finding truth with God. They think they're worshiping God. They think they're finding a relationship with God. And all the devil has done is made spiritual fools out of them.

Paul says, "We do not come to God by the mind of man: "The mind of man knew not God. Now, either he's telling us the truth, or he's lying.

The Pope has just put out an encyclical entitled "Faith and Reason." In it, he has stated that man's mind is uncontaminated by sin, and that we must be careful of biblical fundamentalists who teach us that the only thing we know about God is "sola fide" – back there on our banner: "Scripture only," in so many words, in this declaration of the pope. And he says that we have to be careful of people who think that the Bible is all you need to understand the purpose and the will of God, and they ignore what? Church tradition. This means Roman Catholic tradition – tradition of men. That was the problem that Jesus faced with the Jewish leaders in which the apostle Paul says, "Be careful of tradition – that it doesn't contaminate your knowledge in relationship to God."

Roman Catholics also believe in the Magisterium – the teaching (the authority of the Magisterium). That's a Roman Catholic term for the College of Cardinals, and it's a term for the teaching authority of the church, which ultimately is expressed by the pope when he sits on his throne. And when he speaks on that throne as the vicar of Christ on this earth, he can speak no error. All that he says is true. And the pope is saying, "The problem in the world today is that we have people, such as you and I, who think that the Bible, along with Martin Luther, is the only source of the knowledge of God. Therefore, we cannot worship God. We cannot know about God. We cannot understand how to live in the grace dispensation, unless we understand the principles pertaining to these things which God has revealed.

So, what the devil does is he leads you to think that your mind can rationalize what's right; what's wrong; how you should act; and, how you should not act. It cannot.

**Thomas Aquinas**

Now, this comes in Roman Catholic theology because of one of the church fathers, Thomas Aquinas, who taught that while man's nature was fallen and contaminated in his will and his emotions, he was not completely fallen in his intellect. Therefore, Aquinas put the poison into the thinking of Catholic theologians that you can come to a knowledge of God by reason. But the Word of God says, "No, you cannot, because the mind of man is fallen along with everything else.

So, the Catholics do not believe as we do, in following the filling and guidance of the Holy Spirit. The filling of the Spirit means He's in charge, because you have confessed known sins. But the Catholics believe in the emotional domination of the soul as the way to find the truth. The truth of the matter is, brethren, that God has a script such that He is prepared for the drama of the dispensations. The church dispensation is the scene that we're in today. Therefore, you need to know your part. You need to know your lines. You need to know your stage movements, in order for you to perform your role in this dispensation of the church, and to secure the enormous blessings, both in time and eternity, that have been set aside for you.

Now, you can go ahead and fritter away your life in the things of the world, and come up with nothing. That's what grace means. You can be a failure, or you can be a winner. You can go ahead and follow the crowd, and what's hep out there, and what's cool. Or you can take the wisdom of those who have experience and knowledge of the Word of God, and whose age you have never been, and learn the way of God. That will bless you now and forever.

What Christians need is discerning eyes that doctrine gives so that the Holy Spirit can illuminate their lives to the truth, and enable them to spot the devil's moves when he's about ready to knock them out of their church dispensation blessings; to knock them out of the power system of the church age under the Holy Spirit; to knock them out of the prosperity materially, that God is eager to give them; and, to knock them out of divine good service, and waste their lives in the compassion of this world – in human good. That is what Satan is all about.

Please notice Ephesians 6:11: "Put on the full armor of God, that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil." That is the problem for Christians – to be able to have eyes that spot, in a split-second, the schemes of the devil that he is throwing against them.

Something happens, and you make a decision, and all of a sudden: "Why did I do that? What on earth possessed me to do that?" What possessed you was your sin nature. And the scheme of the devil was able to bring you down.

Please notice 2 Corinthians 2:11: "In order that no advantage be taken of us by Satan, for we are not ignorant of his schemes." If you are ignorant of his schemes, he'll take advantage of you. And that is what expository preaching is all about – trying to get people aware of the fact that they would not be ignorant of what the devil is trying to do to them. So, hopefully, parents will not be nervous and eating their hearts out about their children, and about what their kids are going to do, because their children have been respectful for the teaching they received about the schemes of the devil.

In Luke 11:34 Jesus says, "The lamp (the illuminating source of your body) is your eye." If you are blind, you're in darkness. If you're spiritually blind, you're in darkness. If you're spiritually blind about the principles of the age of grace, the church age, you are in spiritual darkness, no matter what kind of religious life you have. The lamp of your body is the eye. When your eye is clear, your whole body is also full of light. But when it is bad, your body also is full of darkness. And if you have spiritual cataracts over your eyes, and blurring your focus, the schemes of the devil will not come through to you clearly when he comes after you.

When I was a teenager (a few years back), there was a black man who came on the scene in the heavyweight division of the prize fighting Game. And he was a marvel. His name was Joe Lewis. Joe Lewis had the amazing capacity, for some reason (yes, he had a sledgehammer punch), but there seemed to be something else. He had an amazing ability to be able to take out an opponent very often in the first round. I would sit by the radio, listening, and getting ready for the big fight that had been announced, before television. And before that first three-minute round was over, and sometimes within the first 20 seconds, he had floored his opponent, and the fight was over. And sometimes he would be in great grandiose settings like Las Vegas. And everybody came for twenty seconds of a fight, and the opponent would be down. It was just amazing. You could hardly get your money's worth. Before the guy could get beaten up, he was down and gone. Everybody was out. You couldn't even buy a hot dog from the vendors before the fight was over.

One day, his trainer, early on, discovered something about Joe Lewis. They were up in his apartment, and his wife or someone was playing the phonograph. And at that time, they had the 78 RPM records. They went around sometimes like almost twice in every second. They were fast moving – not like the 33-1/2 slow ones. And his wife was listening to this record player, and she said, "What is that?" And Joe leans over, and his trainer watching him, and the record is spinning around. Have you ever tried to read a label, even at 33-1/2 speed, let alone at a 78 RPM speed? He read the title; who it was that was singing; and, who the orchestra was. He read all the stuff on the label. The trainer looked at him, and he was dumbfounded. How could you do that?

Well, as he sat and thought about this, it finally hit him. Joe had some kind of a visual ability that enabled him to see split-second situations, and he could pick up the split-second, when that circle came around such that he could read what was on that center label. And he said, "This is the key to our success. And sure enough, Joe Lewis could always, with those eyes that could catch split-second distinctions, could see that momentary point, that always comes in a fight, when his opponent lowers his guard. And he saw it so quickly that he could move immediately with his sledgehammer punch, and the fight was over. He could see the split-second opening – the opportunity. Those who fought him did not have the eyes to see the split-second opportunity, when Joe Lewis' movement, in the movements of the fight, lowered his guard, such that he was not in his best position. And because they did not have that visual acuity, they couldn't beat him. But he could beat them every time.

That is what we are talking about as Christians. In the age of grace, God has given us magnificent facilities for seeing spiritual things, and for understanding. And it begins right here, sitting in these chairs on Sunday, under the pastor-teacher, doing his instructing job, that gives you the orientation, with the indwelling Holy Spirit, to be able to guide you in your life. If you want to do right, you will know what it is. Jesus said, "Abide in Me. If you desire the truth, you shall know the truth." He will give you that split-second visual ability to see the scheme of the devil that's coming, charging in on you, and you're not going to stand there and take the hit.

The dispensation of the church was a complete secret in Old Testament scripture. It is referred to, therefore, in the New Testament, as a mystery. In previous dispensations, it was never made known. Today, we live in the dispensation of the church, nearing the end of what is probably a 2,000-year period. The dispensation of the church began on the day of Pentecost. It will end at the rapture of the church, when Christians are caught up to meet Christ in the air. He doesn't come to the earth at that time, but He takes them back to heaven.

Most church groups today diminish and confuse the privileges; the powers; and, the potential of the church-age by mixing the church way of life with the dispensation of the Law. Therefore, most Christians never live under the power of the church-age, and the distinctiveness of the Holy Spirit, which we shall get to in short order on another occasion.

The confusion and the tragedy that results, when you mix law and grace, prevents an understanding of the doctrine of the dispensation in which we live. The church age is unique. It is the greatest way of life on earth thus far. And to live through this age, and be a whimpering twit (a loser) is unforgivable for a member of the royal family of God. If you are such a twit, it is for one of two reasons: someone hasn't told you the principles of the way of life of grace, and the power system to enable you to do that; or, you have chosen to be negative to living that way of life. You've decided to go with the world; to do its religious things; and, to go the emotional route rather than the objective route of getting your joy and your excitement out of the power system of the grace age, the way of life in the church.

The apostle Paul, here in this book of Colossians, goes on explaining this particular dispensation, which was given him to reveal as his burden in life. And I'll show you in a moment that he got so excited about speaking about it, that this university graduate (this wise man) got his grammar all botched up. It's like when you start a sentence one way, and then you get so excited, and you stop, and you start off in another way. And the whole thing is disjointed, and you have to put a dash or something to show that something has changed. That's how you speak in a moment of excitement. The apostle Paul, when he realized what had been given to him, could hardly contain his joy. Yes, the Christian life is a life of great joy, and great emotion, but it is emotion under the power of the spirit of God – not emotion under your old sin nature.

The first part of Colossians 1:25 says: "Of this church, I was made a minister according to the dispensation from God bestowed on me for your benefit, that I might fully carry out the preaching of the Word of God:" Why was I given this special information about the church-age that the other policies were not? "That I might fully carry out." The Greek word looks like this: It is the word "pleroo." "Pleroo" means "to carry a thing to completion." It refers here by Paul to "teaching completely the revelation about the church dispensation which he received from the Lord Jesus Christ." Why couldn't he study this in the Old Testament and learned about it? Because it wasn't revealed there. Nobody knew about it. It was a total secret in all past ages. Paul says, "Now I have the information, and I'm going to' pleroo' it. That's what my life is all about. I'm going to give it full knowledge. I'm going to carry it all out.

Now, in the grammar, this is in the aorist tense, which means that the point of preaching and writing the New Testament scriptures, of which the apostle Paul wrote a major portion, he fulfilled his mission of revealing what life is in the church. That's what the epistles are all about. And Paul said, "At a point in time, when I was writing these epistles, I was revealing in one after another what it means to be a Christian, and live under the dynamic power system of the Holy Spirit." It was in the active voice in the Greek, which means that it's done personally by Paul, who knew more about this dispensation than the other apostles, because it wasn't revealed to the others the way it was to Paul. And it's in the infinitive mode, which in the Greek indicates that this is God's purpose, and therefore, Paul's purpose. What? To define this stewardship (this dispensation) of the age of the church, as it was revealed to Paul.

So, he says, at the end of verse 25: "That I might fully carry out." And the words "preaching of" are not in a Greek, but they're put in there to help us understand: "To fully carry out the preaching of the Word of God." The Greek word for "the Word of God" is "logos." And this word refers to the thinking of God. The Word of God is the mind of God. And to stress what this word is, he says that it is: "The Word of God." And in the Greek, you can say this in a certain way to stress (to put a heavy emphasis) as to whose word this is. And that's what Paul is saying: "I didn't make this stuff up about the dispensations. I didn't make all this up about the church-age. I didn't make this up that we're different from the Mosaic Law era. This is what *God* has said.

So, in the Greek, you say it as: "The Word, the God." And it's awkward in English. But when you say it that way in the Greek, it is in a position that emphasizes whose word it is. And the Holy Spirit led the Apostle Paul to put it in just such a way, and it is: "The Word of *the* God, which indicates the Father. When it says "The God," it's God the father.

So Paul lived. What did he live for? He lived to fulfill his ministry of revealing the church dispensation. That required two specific things that he had to let people know about now. If you're going to talk about the church, point number one, is in Acts 20:24. The apostle Paul has gathered all of the pastor-teachers (the elders). That's who the elders are. They're the pastor-teachers from the various churches in the city of Ephesus. They're on the seashore. He's on his way to Jerusalem with a special offering for the famine that the saints there are going under, which he has collected. He meets with these pastor-teachers. In the process of this, in reviewing his ministry and what their faithfulness should be now, as pastor-teachers, when he has left, says in Acts 20:24, "But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, in order that I may finish my course, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus." What's he talking about? My life, and my knowledge of the age of the church – how a human being can live as no human being ever lived before in the history of the world, under the power of God, under a relationship to God that is so intimate that it's beyond human comprehension.

"Which I received from the Lord Jesus (when Jesus taught him out there for three years in the Arabian Desert) to testify solemnly." Here's the first thing, if you're going to talk about the age of grace, the gospel of the grace of God. We have seen that in every age (every dispensation), people are saved by the gospel of the grace of God. And Paul says, "That's the first thing I had to make clear, because I still have people (particularly Jews) as well as the pagans, who think that it's a matter of how you work – your good works that get you with God." Then he had to teach the full revelation of the church-age lifestyle. That was the other thing that was his mission.

Drop down to Acts 20:27. Paul says, "For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God." And notice what he says in verse 26, just before: He prefaces that with: "I gave you the full doctrine of the church-age. Therefore, I testify to you this day that I'm innocent of the blood of all men." Nobody is ever going to stand up in heaven and say, "Paul why, in heaven's name, didn't you tell us about how to live by the power of the Holy Spirit, under the guidance of doctrine in the church-age, and be related to God the Father; God the Son; and, God the Holy Spirit, as no human being ever could be related? We didn't know about that. We wasted our lives out there in emotion, and in doing the religious stuff that all people were doing. And God was not in this. Why didn't you tell us?"

Paul says: "That blood, so to speak, of someone who has died in their opportunity, is not going to be on my hands. If you did not attend the classes when we met for the instruction of the Word of God, I explained these principles. If you chose to stay at home; if you chose to go someplace else; if you chose to entertain yourself; or, if you chose to sit home, and you're mad because you heard something you didn't like the last time, it's your own fault.

So how did he do? He said, "This is all that I live for." In 2 Timothy 4:7, life comes to an end. This is the last book he wrote. Shortly after this, he was beheaded by the Emperor Nero, and he went home to be with Jesus Christ. In 2 Timothy 4:7, how did he do with the mission? "I have fought the good fight. I finished the course. I have kept the faith." "Kept the faith" here means "Bible doctrine:" "I've kept the truth about the age of the church. I have told people about grace salvation, and warned them about trying to do something to be saved. And I told them how to live under the grace age of the church, so that they have magnificent blessings on this earth *now* and great eternal treasures stored in heaven, because they have served God with divine good." And do you know how he fulfilled his mission? I like to put it this way: "Paul fulfill his divine mission by not doing something else."

The reason that some of these people aren't in church this morning is because they're doing something else that they shouldn't be doing – by choice. Sometimes not by choice, then you can't be. You fulfill your mission in life by not doing something else. Some people are so frantic in their lives, and so loaded down up to their eyeballs, that the only time they have a moment of freedom is Sunday. So, they stay home instead of going to church. They're two exhausted with all the things that they think are so important, that they feel their lives with during the week. And they're knocking themselves out getting all the material things that they want to accumulate, such that one good fire would take care of in a hurry; or, one good hurricane would take care of very nicely. And then what? There's only one life to live; twill soon be passed; only what's done for Jesus will last.

God, our Father. We want to thank You for the Word of God. It's always explicit. It's always clear.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1995

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