

Living The Christian Life Series

“Lesson 3 – God’s Time Plan for Humanity”

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Series Text: Romans 12:1 *I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.*

Applicational Text: II Timothy 2:15 *Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.*

Introduction:

In our study of this series “Living The Christian Life” in Lesson 1 we determined that it is our “Worldview” that shapes our lives and we identified the necessity of developing a worldview based on the Bible if we are going to be successful in Living the Christian Life. In Lesson 2 we examined the Table of Contents of the Bible which we identified as the “Owner’s Manual” for Living The Christian Life. Now, we need to understand God’s Time Plan for Humanity as revealed in His Word.

A careful study of the Bible reveals that God has divided time into various segments in which He has appointed administrators and given them specific revelation and obligation. In our study last time we saw that an expanded translation of II Timothy 3:16-17 said ***All Scripture [is] God-breathed and advantageous for the purpose of teaching; for the purpose of reproof; for the purpose of correction and restoration; for the purpose of training in conformity to the specifications of the plan, In order that the man of God might have the potential to be well fitted, having, as a matter of principle, been completely equipped for every good task.”***

All Scripture is profitable, but all Scripture is not directly applicable. For example, although the Scripture gives specific instruction concerning the offering of five daily sacrifices (Leviticus 1-7), we no longer do that because Christ fulfilled all of that for us and we are told in Hebrews 6:6 that to offer those sacrifices today would be ***“to crucify Christ afresh and put Him to an open shame.”*** While the passage in Leviticus is advantageous to us for the purpose of teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness, we are not to offer those sacrifices today.

To properly understand how ***“...to rightly divide the Word of Truth...”*** (II Timothy 2:15) we must understand God’s outline of time and appointment of administrators must take a

dispensational approach to Scripture. The word “Dispensations” is the theological word used to describe the way in which God has structured time. Let’s look at it...

I believe the doctrine of dispensations is one of the least understood and yet one of the most important doctrines of God’s word.

It is not easy to define dispensationalism. Many definitions have been given but most are unable to cover the many facets related to dispensations. We might say that a dispensation is a period of human history expressed from a divine viewpoint. However, that definition is lost on those who do not understand the distinction between human viewpoint and divine viewpoint.

I. Dispensationalism:

For sake of our study we will define dispensationalism as follows:

Dispensationalism is the term applied to the view of biblical interpretation which understands time as having been divided into various periods of time (dispensational ages) in which man's obedience to the revelation of God is tested. The Word of God shows the appointment of various administrators (stewards) with increasing degrees of revelation in various periods of time.

There are three Greek words which are important to our understanding of this biblical teaching. All three of these words are found in Colossians 1:25-26

Colossians 1:25-26

Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God;

Even the mystery (doctrine) which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints:

The first word is the Greek word "**oikonomian**". It is translated "**dispensation**" in verse 25. The second word is "**ai-oh-non**". It is translated "**ages**" in verse 26. The third word is "**geneon**". It is translated "**generations**" in verse 26.

The word "**oikonomian**" which is translated "**dispensation**" means stewardship or administrative responsibility. It emphasizes the way God works. The word "**ai-oh-non**", translated "**age**", designates a period of time. It emphasizes the particular time frame in God's plan. The word "**ge-ne-on**" translated "**generation**" identifies people in a certain period of time, thus, the emphasis is on the identity of the stewards.

Hebrews 11:3 says:

"Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of the things which do appear."

The word "**aion**", translated "**ages**" in **Colossians**, is translated here in Hebrews as "**worlds**." The writer of Hebrews is saying that the ages were framed by God. The word which is translated "**framed**" is the Greek word "**katertisthai**." It means **outlined**. In other words God outlined the various ages some time in eternity past before they began. The only way we can understand God's Word, is to understand its relation to these various ages.

God, the owner of the universe and the author of a plan, has entrusted His estate unto various, people (stewards) to manage during specific periods of time.

The problem related to dispensationalism is two-fold. The first aspect of the problem is a willingness to interpret and apply scripture in a dispensational framework. You see, all scripture is not directly applicable to every generation or dispensation. If it was, we would still be under the restrictive commands of the Mosaic Law. We would observe Saturday as the Sabbath and both our day of worship, and our form of worship would have to be changed to conform to the Law. You couldn't prepare food, do any work, or travel more than two miles on the Sabbath.

The second aspect of the problem is to correctly identify the various ages or periods of time. Herein lies much debate. This is a very important area because the application of scripture hinges on it. However, the careful student will find that the ages are clearly marked.

Most Christians have not studied the doctrine of dispensations or given much thought to it. When you first introduce it to them, many of them perceive two dispensations - The Old Testament and the New Testament. However, there are seven distinct dispensations outlined in the Word of God. Those who take a dispensational approach to biblical interpretation are marked by three basic characteristics.

The first characteristic is that they recognize that there is a distinct difference between the nation of Israel and the Church. When the Bible speaks of Israel it is speaking of Israel and not the Church. When the Bible speaks of the Church it is not speaking of Israel. The dispensationalist view I hold is characterized by a careful distinction between Israel and the Church. This view recognizes the administrative role of Israel being interrupted on the Day of Pentecost in 30 AD and the administration of the church beginning on that same day. (Israel's administration was interrupted as Daniel prophesied seven years short of the 490 years promised and will be completed at the end of the Church Age during the seven years of Tribulation.)

The second characteristic of this view of dispensationalism is a belief in a literal interpretation of scripture. There are signs and symbols used in scripture, and these should be recognized whenever they appear. But, otherwise, the Bible should be taken literally. The context indicates the course to be followed in each situation.

The third characteristic is of primary importance. Dispensationalist, such as I, do not believe that the salvation of man is the ultimate purpose of God. If you believe that the

salvation of man is the ultimate purpose of man, then there are a multitude of scripture passages you are unable to explain. No, I believe that the ultimate purpose of God is clearly seen to be the manifestation of God's glory and the ending of a conflict between God and Satan which precedes the time of man. Having these three characteristics requires a belief in more than two dispensations. Seven is the sacred number of completion. In our study, we will see that God has outlined seven distinct periods of time. Each period is marked by increasing revelation and responsibility. It is also important to see that dispensations have to do with time and not eternity. If a dispensation is a period of time when stewards manage the estate of God, then eternity cannot be identified as a dispensation because the owner of the estate (God) will be managing the estate at that time.

There are various titles which have been used to identify each dispensation. We will identify them in the following way:

- **First Dispensation - The Age of Innocence**
- **Second Dispensation - The Age of Conscience**
- **Third Dispensation - The Age of Civil Government**
- **Fourth Dispensation - The Age of Promise**
- **Fifth Dispensation - The Age of Israel**
- **Sixth Dispensation - The Age of The Church**
- **Completion of Age of Israel – seven year tribulation**
- **Seventh Dispensation - The Age of Christ**

There are eight covenants identified in the Word of God. Four covenants were made with individuals and four were made with particular groups of people. The word "*covenant*" does not appear in God's Word until the third dispensation. However, a covenant is an agreement between two parties. God's covenants always originate with Him. There are two types of covenants - conditional and unconditional. In a conditional covenant God gives a command which is accompanied by a promise of blessing if certain conditions are met and a warning of discipline if the conditions are not met. In an unconditional covenant God gives a promise of blessing and provides that blessing regardless of the actions of the other party. Unconditional covenants are based upon God and His Word.

II. Dispensational Overview:

1. **Paul taught Dispensations. Ephesians 3:29, "If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward".** (1st class conditional clause) **This means that Paul himself had taught about dispensations.**
2. **Dispensations are periods of human history (categories) expressed in terms of Divine Revelation (Divine viewpoint).**
3. **God administers the human race. (Dispensations). The human race is an estate. God administers that estate in a certain way.**
4. **God's administration refers to delegation of authority in each dispensation. God appoints the administrator (believers). Romans 3 :2; Acts 15:14.**

5. Administrators may fail or succeed; regardless of which, God's plan moves on. (Essence of God). Esther 1:2; 2:8. In Esther 2:8, "and it came to pass" indicates God's plan is always carried out.
6. There is only one administrative authority for each Dispensation. (I Samuel 12:22.)
7. The seven dispensations and their administrators are:

<i>Age of Innocence -</i>	Adam and Eve
<i>Age of Conscience-</i>	Adam's descendants
<i>Age of Civil Government</i>	Noah's descendants
<i>Age of Promise</i>	Abraham's descendants
<i>Age of Israel</i>	Children of Israel
<i>Age of The Church</i>	Church Age Believers
<i>Completion of Age of Israel</i>	Children of Israel
<i>Age of Christ</i>	Christ And His Bride
8. Every dispensation involves revelation which was not given in the Previous dispensation, as well as a recognition of that which was accumulative.
9. Promises based on divine principles found in any dispensation (grace promises), are always applicable to any believer in any dispensation. Isaiah. 41:10.
10. The ultimate in Dispensations is the application of Doctrine to experience, so that at all times your life is personally oriented to life - in living the Christian life. If you understand the chronology of times you don't confuse "Law" with "Grace," you aren't trying to make the "Church Age" world a "millennial" world and so on.

Summary:

A. **Definition:** A dispensation is a period of human history under specified administrators expressed in Divine Viewpoint.

B. **Key Vocabulary:**

1. **Chronos:** This word means chronological or time in its sequence of events. For example, the dispensation of Israel has a sequence of four main events: period of the Patriarchs, Period of the Law, and the period of the 5th Cycle of Discipline, Tribulational Completion of Administration. Chronos is often translated "*times*." (1 Thessalonians. 5:1).
2. **Kairos:** Means to take a period of time and break it up into ages.
3. **Oikonomos:** Means stewardship and is often translated Dispensations. It actually means administration.

4. Aion: It is translated dispensation but it is also translated age, sometimes it is spelled "eon". Biblically it designates an era in which God works through an administration.

III. Seven Biblical Dispensations:

Now, with this introduction we are prepared to investigate each of seven specific administrations (dispensations) identified in the Word of God.

The Age of Innocence From Creation of Adam to the Fall (Genesis 1:28 through Genesis 3:6)

This age began with God's instruction to Adam to replenish and subdue the Earth. It ended with the sin of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. During this dispensation the Lord visited with Adam and Eve and gave them personal instruction as they managed God's estate. We know very little of the degree of the revelation they received during that time.

The Age of Conscience From the Fall to the departure from the Ark (Genesis 3:7 through Genesis 8:14)

This age began with the sin of Adam and Eve in the Garden and ended with the departure of Noah and his family from the ark after the flood waters had subsided. It was during this dispensation that revelation was given concerning man's redemption and specific basics concerning animal sacrifice.

The Age of Civil Governments From the departure from the Ark to the call of Abram (Genesis 8:15 through 11:32)

This age began with Noah and his family descending from the ark. They were given new revelation and were told to go forth and replenish the earth again. It was during this period of time that God established nationalism and scattered the people across the face of the earth. This dispensation ended with the calling out of Abram.

The Age of Promise From the Call of Abram to the giving of the Law (Genesis 12:1 through Exodus 18:27)

This age began with God's call to Abram and is marked by God's further revelation and promise to Abram and his descendants. Known as the age of promise, this dispensation ended with the giving of the law at Mt. Sinai.

The Age of Israel

**From the giving of the Law at Mt. Sinai to the Day of Pentecost in 30 A.D.,
plus the seven years of Tribulation following the rapture of the Church
(Exodus 19:1 through Acts 1:26 minus millennial passages)**

This age began at the giving of the Law at Mt. Sinai and is marked by a tremendous increase in revelation. The Israelites, as God's stewards, were given the Law. The Law was divided into three sections: Codex 1: The Moral Law; Codex 2: The Ceremonial Law; Codex 3: The Civil Law. Great spiritual insights were given to these stewards by which they were to manage God's estate. This age did not end but was interrupted by the Church Age. Allow me to explain. According to the Book of Daniel, The Israelites were promised 490 years to manage God's estate upon their return from the Babylonian captivity. Daniel's prophecy concerning that promise shows that the 490 years were divided into 3 distinct periods of time. The first 49 years were to be years of trouble. It took exactly 49 years to rebuild the Temple and the walls of the city. Those 49 years were years of trouble. The second period of time would end at the 483rd year with the death of the Messiah.

Historical documents unearthed by archaeologists reveal the death of Jesus Christ, on the Roman cross, to have occurred, exactly to the day, four hundred and eighty-three years after the decree was signed to accomplish the return of the Israelites to the land. Then Daniel spoke of a final period of seven years of tribulation. The Age of Israel was interrupted on The Day of Pentecost in 30 A.D. It was on that day that the stewardship of God's estate was given to the Church as per Acts 1:8 compared with Acts 2:1-47. Historically The Day of Pentecost was a celebration to mark the end of the Jewish harvest each year. But, prophetically, it spoke of the end of the stewardship of the Jews. There is a final harvest of the summer fruits which will be accomplished during the tribulation, the final seven years of Jewish stewardship of God's estate. The final seven years will begin at the Rapture of the Church.

The Age of The Church

**From the Day of Pentecost in 30 A.D. until The Rapture of the Church
(Acts 2:1 through Revelation 5:14 minus Millennial Passages)**

This age began on The Day of Pentecost in 30 A.D. and continues until the Church, the body of Christ, is made complete. Christ will then return for the Church which will become His bride. This age is divided into 7 periods of time prophesied by the letters to the seven churches in Revelation chapters 2 and 3.

The seven churches of Revelation chapters 2 and 3 are given as a panoramic prophetic view of the impending history of the church age. Although they were literal churches which existed at the time the account was written, it is evident that they represent a panoramic view. Each name has significance of a particular period in church history. The churches also formed a geographical circle beginning at Ephesus and ending with Laodicea.

1. Ephesus -- Pentecost in 30 A.D. to 160 A.D.
2. Smyrna -- 160 A.D. to 312 A.D.

3. Pergamos -- 312 A.D. to 600 A.D.
4. Thyatira -- 600 A.D. to 1517 A.D.
5. Sardis -- 1517 A.D. to 1750 A.D.
6. Philadelphia -- 1750 A.D. to 1950 A.D.
7. Laodicea -- 1950 A.D. to Rapture of Church

(Note: It must be stated that some of these dates are educated estimates.)

"EPHESUS: Pentecost 30 A.D. to 160 A.D." (Revelation 2:1-7)

The word "*Ephesus*" means "desired one" and represents the church of the first century (30 A.D. to 160 A.D.). The city of Ephesus was a major seaport. Paul, Timothy and John each served as pastor of this church.

"SMYRNA: 160 A.D. to 312 A.D." (Revelation 2:8-11)

The word "*Smyrna*" is the name of a resin of the ancient world which, when crushed, produced a costly fragrance called "Myrh." This identifies the church from 160 A.D. to about 312 A.D. during which the church was persecuted (crushed). Out of that persecution (crushing) came a fragrance of commitment and service. The city of Smyrna is located about 35 miles north of Ephesus. It was also a wealthy seaport that was called the Ephesian Gate. Today it is a city of 200,000 -- one third of which professes to be Christian.

"PERGAMOS: 312 A.D. to 600 A.D." (Revelation 2:12-17)

The word "*Pergamos*" means "illicit marriage" and portrays the church from 312 A.D. to about 600 A.D. when the church became illicitly married to the Roman government under Constantine. Pergamos was the capital of Mysia, a Roman province, in north-west Asia Minor. When the cult of the Magians was driven out of Babylon they went to Pergamos to establish their headquarters. In 133 B.C. the king of Pergamos, Attalus III willed his kingdom and title into the hands of the Romans. His title was "Chief Bridge Builder." The title meant "the one who spans the gap between mortals and Satan and his hosts." In Latin this title was written "Pontifex Maximus."

"THYATIRA: 600 A.D. to 1517 A.D." (Revelation 2:18-29)

The word "*Thyatira*" means "continual sacrificing." Thyatira was a small town about 40 miles south of Pergamos and was noted for its production of purple dye used for the robes of royalty. Thyatira represents the church from about 600 A.D. to about 1517 A.D. This is the church of the dark ages in which the grace of God was set aside for a system of penitence, sacraments and works. The church denied the completed work of Christ and required continual sacrificing. It was during this period of church history that Mary was elevated to a position above Jesus by the Roman church.

"SARDIS: 1517 A.D. to 1750 A.D." (Revelation 3:1-6)

The word "*Sardis*" means "escaping ones" and represents the church of the reformation from Martin Luther nailing his famous "Ninety-Five Theses" to the door of the church in Wittenburg, Germany. It ended about 1750 A.D. The city of Sardis was 30 miles south of Thyatira and was surrounded by geographical barriers which caused the inhabitants to become over confident and apathetic.

"PHILADELPHIA: 1750 A. D. to About 1950 A.D." (Revelation 3:7-13)

The word "*Philadelphia*" means "brotherly love" and identifies the church from about 1750 A.D. to about 1950 A.D. This was the church in revival. Philadelphia was 30 miles south of Sardis and was subject to earthquakes. Today the city is called "Ala-Sheher" which means, City of God.

"LAODICEA: About 1950 A.D. to Rapture" (Revelation 3:14-22)

The word "*Laodicea*" means "governed by the people." This represents the church from about 1950 A.D. until the rapture. This is the church which has embraced "secular humanism" and is governed by the people. Never has there been such a thirst for power by church members, for control, as is manifest in this age. A Southern Baptist state paper printed a letter suggesting eliminating pastors in local churches and allowing the people to run the churches. This is a manifestation of the Laodicean Age. The city of Laodicea was located forty miles southeast of Philadelphia. It was a city of millionaires at the time this letter was written in 95 A.D. It portrays the church of the last days.

These seven churches were literal churches with the problems identified in their respective letters. However, in each letter the admonition is given to all who have an ear to hear what the Spirit said to the churches. They present a careful prophetic history of the Church Age. It is clear to see that we are living in the Laodicean phase of the Church Age.

Completion of The Age of Israel

From the Rapture of the Church until The Second Advent of Christ

(Revelation 6:1 through Revelation 19:10)

This is the completion of the Age of The Law and the final seven years of the Jewish stewardship which is described under the Age of The Law. This period is marked by judgment and tribulation and ends at the second advent of Christ during The Battle of Armageddon.

The Age of Christ

From the Second Advent through the Great White Throne Judgment

(Revelation 19:11 through Revelation 20:15)

Christ will bring His bride, the Church, back with Him and we will rule and reign with Him during a period of 1,000 years. All unbelievers will be removed from the earth at the beginning of this age. The curse, except death, will be removed. Satan will be bound in the Bottomless Pit and Christ will sit upon the throne of David and rule over the entire world. It will be a time of perfect environment. Those believers alive on the earth at the beginning of this age will apparently retain their natural bodies and will beget children. At the end of the 1,000 years Satan will be released from the Bottomless Pit and will deceive a great host of those who were born during this age. Satan will make one final attack against God and will be cast into the Lake of Fire. The Great White Throne Judgment of Revelation 20 will

be held to sentence every unbeliever from the beginning of time to the Lake of Fire. These heavens and this earth will melt with a fervent heat and a new heaven, and a new earth will usher in eternity.

Conclusion:

Our Applicational Text in II Timothy 2:15 says, *Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed. rightly dividing the word of truth.*

In order to Live the Christian Life we must understand the Word. In order to understand the application of the Word in Living The Christian Life we must understand the dispensational fix of each passage. Therefore, we must understand the calendar God posted in establishing The Seven Annual Feasts which reveal The Person, The Character, and The Work of the Messiah and see their fulfillment in the virgin birth, the sinless life, the sacrificial death, the victorious resurrection, the glorious ascension, the present intercession, and the soon coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. During this church age we are identified as the “body of Christ” so we need to understand His Calendar in order to effectively Live the Christian Life. By understanding this Calendar given to Israel we will better understand our function in Living The Christian Life. Next time we will review this calendar in an overview of the Seven Annual Feasts of Israel.

But it begins at Salvation:

- *For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God...*
- *The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life...*
- *With the heart man believes unto righteousness...*
- *But with the mouth confession is made unto salvation...*
- *For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved!*

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

(Romans 12:1)