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"Preaching grace in the Dispensation of grace"

A Bible Study

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Our Lord's First Sermon

A LESSON IN DISPENSATIONAL TRUTH
BY RICHARD JORDAN

"And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee: and there went out a fame of him through all the region round about.

"And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified of all" (Luke 4:14, 15).

As He entered into His public ministry, our Lord began immediately to show His beloved nation how to "rightly divide the Word of truth" and thus to understand just where they stood in the program of God. Notice how this is demonstrated in His first recorded sermon:

"And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up for to read.

"And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Isaias..." (vs.16, 17).

Having found the passage we know as Isa 61:1,2, we should take careful note of just how much of the passage He read--and why:

"...And when he had OPENED THE BOOK, he found the place where It was written,

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised,

"To preach the acceptable year of the Lord.

"And HE CLOSED THE BOOK and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him." (Vs.17-20).

If you will turn to Isaiah 61:1, 2 you will quickly see why He had their undivided attention: He had stopped reading and "closed the book" right in the middle of a sentence! But why? The answer to this question points up the importance of "rightly dividing the Word of Truth."

Our Lord had "divided" the Word right in the middle of the sentence for a very obvious reason. Look at the next verse in Luke 4 carefully:

"And he began to say unto them, THIS DAY IS THIS SCRIPTURE FULFILLED IN YOUR EARS" (v.21).

Indeed, the Spirit of the Lord was upon Him. He had anointed Him "to preach the gospel to the poor." He had sent Him "to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised" and, "to preach the acceptable year of the Lord." But-had He continued reading to the end of the sentence He could not have said, "This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears," for the verse in Isaiah goes on to read:

".....AND THE DAY OF VENGEANCE OF OUR GOD" (Isa. 61:2).

The "acceptable year of the Lord" had indeed come and the Lord was there among His people proclaiming the good news. He stopped reading and "closed the book" in the place He did, however, because "the day of vengeance of our God" had not yet come. Thus our Lord began His ministry demonstrating Himself to be a dispensationalist, carefully rightly dividing the Word.

Nor did He, by rightly dividing Isaiah 61:2 set aside as untrue the last part of the verse. Later He warns Israel of the consequence of rejecting Him and their opportunity to receive the long promised blessing of God on the nation—"the acceptable year of the Lord" -pointing out the dire results:

"For these be the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled.

"But woe unto them that are with child and to them that give suck, in those days! For there shall be great distress in the land, and wrath upon this people" (Luke 21:22, 23).

It was because this good news was to be rejected by Israel that Isaiah had gone on to predict "the day of vengeance of our God." And reject they did, demanding His crucifixion. John 19:15 records:

"But they cried out, AWAY WITH HIM, AWAY WITH HIM, CRUCIFY HIM. Pilate saith unto them, Shall I crucify your King? The chief priests answered, WE HAVE NO KING BUT CAESAR."

This, according to prophecy, was to be followed by the pouring out of God's wrath (Psa. 2:1-5; 110:1). Hence Peter-another dispensationalist-stood at Pentecost and quoting Joel 2:28-32, warned that "the great and terrible day of the Lord" was ahead for them, and gave them a renewed opportunity of repentance.

Joel's prophecy basically predicted two things: first, the pouring out of God's Spirit upon His own and, then, the pouring out of His wrath upon His enemies. The former, as Peter said, took place at Pentecost, but not the latter. The Spirit was poured out but the wrath of God was-and is still-yet to come. The prophetic program has been interrupted. Again, we must rightly divide the Word.

The reason for the interruption is not difficult to find: Rather than destroying, He saved Saul of Tarsus, the leader of the rebellion against Him (I Tim. 1:13-16), and commissioned him to proclaim "the gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20:24). Thus was ushered in "the dispensation of the grace of God" (Eph. 3:1-3) under which we live today.

The "acceptable year of the Lord" ended for the nation Israel with her rejection of her risen, glorified Lord. But rather than respond immediately in wrath and vengeance, God Himself has temporarily interrupted the prophetic program, holding back "the day of vengeance," all because He had an unprophecied, secret purpose to unfold regarding the Body of Christ, a company of believers to be saved by grace through faith alone and given a heavenly position and prospect.

We should be ever so grateful that our Lord "closed the book" just where He did-and that He has not yet opened it again to proclaim "the day of vengeance of our God"! Already the dispensation of grace has lasted over 1900 years! Such is God's longsuffering to a Christ-rejecting world. And what is their response to such gracious forbearance? Solomon wrote:

"Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil" (Eccl.8:11).

The wrath has been delayed-but this in no wise means it is not real! Little wonder Paul so pointedly says:

"Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?"

"But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God" (Rom. 2:4, 5).

Paul understood that the delay in the outpouring of God's wrath would not last forever-he, too, was a dispensationalist! Every additional day is a day of grace-of unmerited favor from God. No unsaved person should put off trusting Christ this very moment.

And surely this is why Eph. 5:15-17 exhorts believers:

"See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise,

"Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.

"Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is." Christ, Peter and Paul each clearly understood the principle of rightly dividing the Word of truth. Do you? This is the only way to understand and enjoy the Bible-and to live in obedience to it.

CHRISTIANS CALLED TO ACTION? BY: RALPH BALOG

On January 15, 1990, The Spotlight, a national conservative political news papaper, strayed from its field of expertise and published an article of over 900 words entitled: "Christians Called to Action." There was not even one Scripture given for this "call to action." I Cor.14:8 states: "For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?"

The purported purpose of the article was to alert Americans to the "Red danger and the imminent loss of all our freedom." But its real intent was to bash dispensationalism from a humanistic and secular viewpoint.

Pat Brooks, the author, is clearly wide of the mark when he states, "Emphatically, dispensationalism is not the faith once delivered unto the saints but a clever counterfeit." The apostle Paul, by divine inspiration, writes in Eph. 3:2: "If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward". Again we hear Paul in I Cor. 9:17, "For if I do this thing willingly, I have a

reward: but if against my will, a dispensation of the gospel is committed unto me."

Something is amiss with Mr. Brooks for he continues in his article to state, "we [New Puritan Library] are making our No. 1 priority the publishing of books that blow dispensationalism out of the water". Sorry, Mr. Brooks, but we who follow Paul, as he followed Christ, are not in water! Water baptism was not part of Christ's commission to Paul, the apostle for this age of grace (I Cor. 1: 17, Eph. 4:5). No. Dispensations are in the Bible to stay.

It appears Mr. Brooks is miffed with the Acts 2 dispensationalists. He lists Hal Lindsey, Jerry Falwell and Jack Van Impe, as well as Dallas Theological Seminary, as dispensationalists he cannot tolerate. Mr. Brooks gives the general public his viewpoint as to what dispensationalists believe. He states:

"Two beliefs of dispensationalists are litmus tests:

"1. That believers will be removed from the earth in a pretribulation rapture;

"2. That the Jews are God's chosen people Israel, and that the Zionist state of Israel is the fulfillment of Biblical prophecy."

We who hold that the Body of Christ had its historical beginning with Paul in Acts 9 give an amen to number 1 above. We would agree with the part of number 2 which states, "That the Jews are God's chosen people Israel". To say that all dispensationalists believe "The Zionist state of Israel is the fulfillment of Biblical prophecy" is a grievous error, however.

More basic, however, is the fallacy of choosing Acts 2 as the historical beginning of the Body of Christ. This plays into the hands of Covenant Theologians, such as Brooks, for they recognize that no new program began in Acts 2. Rather it was a continuation of the kingdom ministry our Lord had trained His apostles to carry out, and thus they feel confirmed in their viewpoint that there have been no changes in God's dealing with man-kind throughout the Old and New Testaments.

Our apostle Paul was raised up as another apostle by the glorified and ascended Lord Jesus Christ (Gal. 1:11,12,15,16; 2:7-9, I Cor. 15:8, Eph. 3:1-9, I Tim. 1:16, etc.). Memorize I Tim. 1:16: "...a pattern to them which should hereafter [not before] believe on Him to life everlasting." No wonder Paul wrote in II Tim. 3:10-14, "But thou hast fully known my doctrine... But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived."

We are not "cop-out dispensationalists" as Mr. Brooks charges. We are ambassadors for Christ (II Cor.5:20). Naturally a righteous God will recall His ambassadors before he declares war on a Christ-rejecting world. We call this event the rapture. Should God lay a hand of great tribulation judgement upon any member of the Body of Christ on earth, it would also be upon His Son, for we are "members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones". (Eph.5:30). But, of course, all members of the Body will then be in the presence of the Lord. Yes, even saved members who don't believe they will be! Such is the security of all believers.

If Mr. Brooks would become immersed in the Pauline epistles, Romans through Philemon, he would understand that the prophetic clock has not ticked even one second for the Old Testament nation of Israel for nearly 2,000 years. We have been living between verse 18 and 19 of Acts 2 all this time. Check it out. Verse 18 has been fulfilled, but God in His matchless grace has for now held back the judgments that will most assuredly come as per verse 19.

When we stand with Paul we are able to view the world from a heavenly perspective. We have the "mind of Christ" in His Word, rightly divided. No one can "walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God" (Col.1:10) who does not rightly divide the Word. One has rightly stated, "The most damnable heresy that can be taught today is to be Scriptural but not dispensational." It is one thing to be totally ignorant of Paul's gospel. It is another to know it and be silent. But God's Word rebukes anyone who would oppose God's dispensation of grace as Christ revealed it to and through the Apostle Paul. Gal. 1:8, 9 twice pronounces a curse on any man who preaches a message other than what Paul preached.

Brethren, the greatest opposition to the message of grace is not from without-but from within. Stand fast. Keep a warm heart and a ready Bible to share with both unsaved and saved alike. I Tim. 2:4 shows that salvation is only a part of God's plan for mankind. He will also have all men "to come unto the knowledge of the truth." This truth is, of course, the gospel of the grace of God (Acts 20:24).

Christians, let Mr. Brooks' "call to action" go unheeded for your own spiritual good. Rather, follow Paul who writes:

"Brethren, be ye followers together of me, and MARK THEM WHICH WALK SO AS YE HAVE US FOR AN ENSAMPLE" (Phil. 3:17).

WHAT WE TEACH
at

Grace School of the Bible

We believe the Eph. 4:1-6 sets forth the doctrinal basis necessary for fellowship in the dispensation of grace. Since, however, there are many areas of doctrine which are of specific interest to believers we have a formal, detailed statement concerning what we teach. We are publishing this statement in serial form in the Journal. The following is part five:

DISPENSATIONAL DISTINCTIONS

1. We teach that in order to be properly understood, and produce fruit, God's word must be studied from a dispensational viewpoint (II Tim.2:15). We must realize that although God never changes (Heb. 13:8, Mal. 3:6) man does change. We further teach that it is not enough to simply preach the Word, we must preach the Word rightly divided if we are to be pleasing to God.

2. We teach that the key to rightly dividing the Word of Truth is to understand the erection, breaking down and re-erection of "the middle wall of partition" (Eph. 2:1-4). In "time past" God erected a middle wall of partition around Abraham and his physical offspring through Isaac and Jacob and dealt exclusively through that group of people (Eph.2:11,12,Gen. 12:1-3, Ex. 11:7,John 4:22). "But Now" in this present age the middle wall of partition has been broken down and God is no longer dealing with man on the basis of national distinction (I Cor. 12:13, Gal. 3:26-28, Eph. 2:11-18). The middle wall of partition will be erected again in "the ages to come" and God will fulfill His promises to Israel (Rom. 11:26-29). We further teach that the middle wall of partition was erected with the call of Abram (Gen. 12), was broken down with the raising up of the Apostle Paul (mid-Acts) and will be re-erected at the rapture of the Body of Christ (Rom.11:25-27).

3. We teach that the church, the Body of Christ, and the dispensation of grace began in mid-Acts with the salvation and commissioning of the Apostle Paul. We teach that the Apostle Paul is the one and only man to whom the ascended Lord Jesus Christ gave the revelation of the mystery concerning the Body of Christ and the dispensation of grace (Rom. 11:13, Eph. 3:1-9, Gal.1:11,12; 2:1-10). We further teach that until this message was revealed to and through the Apostle Paul it was never revealed to man (Rom. 16:25, 26, Eph. 3:1-9, Col. 1:25-27).

4. We teach that God's blessings for and dealings with the nation Israel differ from His blessings for and dealings with the Body of Christ. God's blessings for Israel involve both physical and spiritual blessings (Gen.15:18-20, Ezk.36:26-28). As a result, God dealt with Israel in both a physical and spiritual way. God's blessings for the Body of Christ involve spiritual blessings (II Cor. 4:16-18, Eph. 1:3) and thus God deals with the Body of Christ in a spiritual way. Physical

blessings for the Body of Christ are always the result of the activity of these spiritual blessings (Eph. 2:10, Phil.4:19).

5. We teach that the future destiny of Israel differs from the future destiny of the Body of Christ. The hope of Israel involves resurrection into a literal, visible, physical, earthly, Davidic kingdom which Jesus Christ will return to earth to rule over (Dan. 2:44,45; Zech. 14:4,9, Rev. 20:4-6). The hope of the Body of Christ involves being resurrected and raptured away to meet the Lord in the air (I Cor. 15:51-53, I Thess. 4:13-18). We further teach that the tribulation and millennium deal exclusively with Israel and that the rapture of the Body of Christ occurs before either of these events take place (I Thess. 1:10; 5:9, II Thess. 2:1-3).
