

2026_08_23_Dispensationalism

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[0:00] All right, so this morning we are continuing our series on the topic of dispensationalism. Big word, kind of somewhat an academic word in a lot of ways, but it is a biblical word.

We've defined it in our first message, and we've talked through different aspects of dispensationalism, but I'm just going to do a quick overview of what we've talked about so far. So the definition, dispensationalism, is just a framework for understanding the Bible storyline, how to understand the big picture of the Bible.

And a big part of dispensationalism is making contrasts, making distinctions. Kind of the opposite of dispensationalism, and there's a framework called covenant theology that those two systems are frequently compared to each other.

Covenant theology is more about making a unification, kind of making things, seeing things as more of the same, whereas dispensationalism makes distinctions and contrasts. And the memory verse that we have been, that we have had for the church this month, 2 Timothy 2.15, study to show thyself approved.

[1:16] I'm doing this from memory, by the way. I hope everybody's impressed. Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

Rightly dividing the word of truth. And that's kind of been our core passage for this series. We need to rightly divide. We need to make the correct, appropriate distinctions. Not the wrong ones, because you could make the wrong distinctions, but we want to try to make the right distinctions. We've talked about a dispensation being an administration. In some ways, you can think of about an era, an era that has to do with, there's usually a time period involved, but also people groups. And then covenants, ways of working, a unique way of operating during each dispensation. One of the things that we've looked at, especially because it's a big part of the Bible, is the covenant that God made with Abraham.

Abraham and his children. That God would make Abraham and his children his special people. He would make them a holy or a set-apart, a special nation.

[2:30] But for him to do that, there was a condition. There was a condition that was part of this covenant. That you had to keep the covenant. That you had to keep the commandments. He started with circumcision.

That was the one command that God gave Abraham. In order to be a part of God's family, in order to be his special people, Abraham and all of his children after him would need to be circumcised. Otherwise, they would be cut off from the people. And then, years later, comes in a man named Moses. Moses. And Moses becomes really the primary administrator, if you will, of this family. And God introduces even more parts of the covenant. The covenant is expanded. In Exodus 19, verse 5, this is right before the Ten Commandments are given.

This is what God says through Moses. Now, therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to me above all people.

[3:37] God said, I want to make Israel, the children of Abraham, my special people. But you need to keep my covenant. And then, after Moses, there were more messengers, many prophets.

And then, eventually, we turn the page, that divider, that New Testament divider in your Bible, into the Gospels, and we see more messengers.

John the Baptist, and even Jesus himself. They are also messengers, and messengers, by the way, of the same covenant that Moses administered.

And even on to the 12 disciples. But then, there is a transition that we recognize. That Israel rejected the king that was promised to them.

Jesus came, came as their Messiah, announced himself, and he was rejected. And so, God put his plan, his prophesied plan for Israel, on hold, and established a new plan that was not really new. [4:50] It was a plan that had been formed from the foundation of the world. But it was different. A different plan. And it was a plan to establish a new group of people.

A new people of God. This new group was to be made up of both Jew and Gentile. That's very different from the children of Abraham, what God had promised to Abraham, that it would be through his seed.

And then also, in order for the Jew and Gentile to be part of the same group, it says in Ephesians, Paul says in Ephesians, that he took a middle wall of separation out of the way. And that middle wall of separation was the law.

The law of covenants, of commandments, of ordinances. It was taken out of the way so that two people could become one people in this new group called the body of Christ.

And God raised up a man, a specific man, named Paul. Originally, we see him called Saul, but later on, we see him called Paul. And he calls himself the apostle to the Gentiles.

[6:04] God called him to preach both to Jew and Gentile, but Paul calls himself the apostle to the Gentiles. And we see him as, really, like Moses, the administrator of a new era or a new age of grace.

He says this in Ephesians 3, verse 2, that a dispensation of the grace, a dispensation of the grace of God was given to me for you Gentiles.

How that by revelation he made known to me the mystery. So there was this mystery plan that was hidden from the ages, but it was revealed to Paul, and he was given a dispensation or an administration of the grace of God, which was different from the law of God.

Law and grace are opposites, which was given to him for the Gentiles. And again, not just the Gentiles, but it was more of a Gentile-focused or centric people group, but it was made up of Jew and Gentile.

And so today, where are we at in this storyline? Where do we fit into the story? Today, we are part of that age of grace. We're part of that new group, the body of Christ that is made up of both Jew and Gentile.

[7:25] And why is all of this important? The reason it's important is because as we read the Bible, we can think of the Bible as letters written to us or for us.

Well, which one is it? Is it for us or to us? Because you can read a letter, right, that was written to you. It's got your name on the envelope. It says, dear so-and-so, and that's your name.

That's a letter written to you but you can also benefit from reading a letter written to someone else, right? Even though it doesn't have your name on the envelope, it doesn't say at the top, dear so-and-so, that's not your name but you can still benefit from it and learn about who wrote it and what his plans are and what he's doing in the world and that's how it is with the Bible.

But we need to make the correct distinctions as we read, understanding what is written to us, what has our name on it, as Gentiles under the age of grace, sorry, Jew and Gentile in the age of grace, and then what is written for our benefit.

We get to read the whole Bible and benefit from it. Today, we're going to focus on a very specific distinction and I think it is the most important distinction to be made when it comes to these two groups, the children of Abraham and this new group, the body of Christ.

[8:55] And the distinction is what must I do to be saved? That's the question. What must I do to be saved?

What are the terms for salvation? How do we form a relationship with God? How do we inherit eternal life? How do we find forgiveness and righteousness?

All of those are part of that one same question. What are the terms in order to become part of the family of God? And it's the most important question I think anybody can ask.

What must I do to be saved? What must I do to inherit eternal life? What must I do to be reconciled to God? We should make sure that we get it right.

You know, there's a debate among Christians about whether the terms for salvation have changed throughout the history of the Bible, throughout the storyline of the Bible.

[9:59] And there are many Christians that say, well, the terms have always been the same. It's always been the same. And for those who agree with us that the terms are that salvation is by God's grace alone, through faith alone, would say, well, that's the way it has always been.

That salvation has always been by grace through faith alone. And so we're going to consider that this morning and then ask why it matters.

You know, kind of, you know, isn't it most important how we get saved today? Right? That's the most important thing. Why does it matter so much how people might have been saved in the past? And, well, instead of, kind of, I'm going to go ahead and address that. It matters because if we look back and see a way that people were saved back then and it's different from how we're saved today, but we think it's the same, that could cause some confusion, don't you think?

Could cause some confusion. So, we're going to do a quick review here of what the old covenant, the covenant of Moses, had to say about salvation and the terms of salvation.

[11:26] When it comes to salvation, there are many terms used. Forgiveness, which is related to salvation. Righteousness is a word that's used.

Eternal life is another term that's used. So, we're going to see these different terms used throughout the scriptures. Turn your Bible to Deuteronomy chapter 6 and verse 25.

Deuteronomy 6, 25. I'm going to read a lot of verses, but some of these we've already read in the past. So, I'm going to have you turn mostly to the new ones.

And I might just quote some of the ones that we've already looked at previously in this series. But Deuteronomy chapter 6, 25. Deuteronomy is a book about the law.

It's the second giving of the law. Moses is repeating the law that God gave to him. But he says this in Deuteronomy 6, verse 25. After giving all these terms of the law, he says this, then it will be righteousness for us if we are careful to observe all these commandments before the Lord our God as he commanded us.

[12:38] It will be righteousness for us if, there's the condition, if we obey, we will be the people of God. If we obey, it will be righteousness for us.

But again, only if we do these commandments. Turn to Leviticus chapter 18, Leviticus 18. If you're in Deuteronomy, see Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and then Deuteronomy.

So, let's see, back two books. Leviticus 18, Leviticus 18. This is a verse, by the way, that is quoted in the New Testament several times.

I'll give that, one of those quotations here in a second. But I want to look at the original passage from the law of Moses. Leviticus 18, verse 5, it says this, You shall therefore keep my statutes and my judgments, which if a man does, he shall live by them.

He shall live by them if he does them. This is, and the way that's stated is a little bit funny, I think, to our ears, but you could translate it or read it as such.

[14:00] Which if a man does, he shall have life by them. And that's the way that Paul reads it when he quotes this passage in Romans 10, 5.

This is what he says, For Moses writes about the righteousness which is of the law. The man who does these things shall live by them. That's how the law works.

If you do these things in the law, then you will have life. Then we have the prophets who are reinforcing the same message.

In Ezekiel chapter 18, the prophet Ezekiel makes, in chapter 18, makes emphatic statement after statement after statement that it's the soul who sins who will die.

The soul who sins will die. But then he says this in verse 21, Ezekiel 18, 21. But if a wicked man turns from all of his sins and does what is lawful and right, he shall surely live.

[15:06] He shall not die. If you want life instead of death, do the things in the law. Do what is lawful and do what is right.

Then we have the ministry of Jesus. And remember, we talked about Jesus being, he was sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

He came not to undermine the law or to destroy it, but he came, he said, to fulfill it. Many people kind of get the idea that the age of grace, the age of grace came with the ministry of Jesus.

Jesus came to the Jewish people under the covenant of Moses. And so, we see him upholding what Moses said.

And so, there was a rich young ruler that came to Jesus, if you remember this story. And he said, this is in Matthew 19, by the way, Matthew 19, verse 16. I think many of you may be familiar with this, so you don't necessarily need to turn there, but, Matthew 19, verse 16.

[16:15] This rich young ruler comes and he says, good teacher, what good thing shall I do that I might have eternal life? What do I do to have life?

Eternal. And so, Jesus said to him, why do you call me good? No one is good but one. That is God. But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments.

That's what Jesus taught. Enter into life, you must keep the commandments. He gave the same answer that Moses gave. In another place, this is in Luke chapter 10, verse 25, there was a teacher of the law who really asked Jesus basically the same question.

Luke 10, 25, and behold, a certain lawyer stood up. A lawyer was basically a Bible teacher and tested him. I think the rich young ruler had more benevolent, he was, he had the right attitude. This guy, I think, was really, I think maybe trying to trap or it says here, test Jesus. And he said, teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? Same question.

[17 : 29] And Jesus said to him, what is written in the law? What is your reading of it? So he answered and he said, well, you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and your soul and your strength and all your mind and love your neighbor as yourself.

And Jesus said to him, you have answered rightly. Do this and you will live. Just as the law of Moses said, do these things in the law and you will have life.

life. This is the teachings of Jesus. For a lot of people, they can barely, they really wonder about that.

Is Jesus teaching people to keep the law of Moses? We continue on with Jesus' twelve disciples after the cross.

Jesus ascends into heaven. He leaves his disciples behind, his twelve apostles and sends them to continue preaching the same message that he was to Israel.

[18 : 34] And at Peter's very first sermon on the day of Pentecost, he preaches to the people of Israel, again, not Gentiles, he is preaching to Jewish people.

And he was telling them about Jesus, their Messiah, who came and they neglected him, they rejected him, they put him on a cross and crucified him. This was their promised Messiah.

And it says that they were cut to the heart. And they asked him a question in response to his sermon. This is Acts chapter two, verse thirty-seven. When they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and they said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, men and brethren, what shall we do? What shall we do? In the next verse, Peter responds and tells them what to do. Repent and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus for the remission of your sins.

There is an ordinance, there is a ritual that you need to do in order to receive the forgiveness of sins. Now, that's, some people think different from the law, but really, ritual washings were a huge part of the law of Moses.

[19 : 59] Mostly for priests at the time, but this was something that was instituted by John the Baptist and Jesus as another ritual that was focused on and geared towards the people of Israel.

But, the response, what shall we do? Repent and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins.

Years later, we see that there are still thousands of Jews still keeping the law of Moses. In fact, Paul, after he's on, he takes three missionary journeys, then he comes to Jerusalem.

He had visited there before but then he comes back for the final time before he is arrested and he gives a testimony to the men there, the leaders in Jerusalem and he tells them about how many Gentiles have come to faith in Jesus Christ, how many have believed and the response comes from James.

James was the leader of the Jewish Christians there in Jerusalem and here James also gives a testimony in response and he says this in Acts 21 verse 20 you see Paul he says how many myriad of Jews there are here in Jerusalem by the way who have believed and they are all zealous for the law all these Christian Jews here in Jerusalem are zealous for the law and we see this same James in our Bibles we have a letter from James and James writes his letter and in it is a controversial passage and James is talking about the value of faith and how important faith is but then he also says well but faith also needs something else and what is that it also needs works you also need to do certain things and he actually makes reference to the royal law speaking of the law of

[22 : 17] Moses and in it he says this James 2 24 you see then that a man is justified or made righteous by works and not by faith only you see then that a man is justified by works and not by faith only and that has caused a lot of confusion because that seems counter to what we read in much of the New Testament but remember we have different messengers we have different audiences or people groups and James was a messenger from this household of Israel speaking to the people of Israel in fact if we read the top of the letter the beginning of the letter James chapter 1

verse 1 here's how it begins James a bondservant of God and of the

Lord Jesus Christ to the 12 tribes which are scattered abroad when we need to make sure that we understand as we read the Bible who is being written to this is James a messenger as part of the household of Israel writing to the household of Israel but then there is this change that comes this change in terms when it comes to the question what must I do to be saved what must I do to gain righteousness what must I do to inherit eternal life and in Philippians chapter 3 Paul teaches he's talking about he's talking about what Christ has done and what he values in his life and he talks about how he grew up in the religious faith of Israel how he grew up under the covenants and he gives all of his bona fides his resume for how well he's done under that covenant he says this concerning zeal persecuting the church concerning the righteousness which was of the law I was blameless it's Philippians chapter 3 verse 6 but then he continues on in verse 7 but what things were gain to me these I have counted loss!

for Christ yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord for whom I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish that I may gain Christ and be found in him not having a righteousness which is from the law but that which is through faith in Christ the righteousness which is from God by faith here that Paul again this is Philippians chapter 3 Paul is talking about two kinds of righteousness there was a righteousness that was under the law and he is willing to throw that away to consider it rubbish to consider it garbage even though it was a law that God gave to his special people Israel but he's willing to set it aside and give it away because he has found something even better a righteousness that is apart from the law a righteousness which is from

God by faith two kinds of righteousness one is earned and one is a gift you know David King David who was himself a prophet and also a psalmist wrote this in Psalm 143 verse 2 he says this do not enter into judgment with your servant crying out to God for in your sight no one living is righteous no one living is righteous but they had the law they had the law to make them righteous but even David himself recognized that that was not sufficient and so Paul in Romans chapter 3 and go ahead and turn your Bibles to Romans chapter 3 Paul repeats this same concept the same idea from David in talking about the law

[26 : 53] Paul says this Romans chapter 3 verse 20 Paul says in Romans just like David did by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in his sight and he continues on he says for the law provided the knowledge of sin the law could tell us the difference between right and wrong but it really could not empower us to do what was right it could just give us the knowledge that we were doing the wrong thing and then he says this in verse 21 again Romans chapter 3 verse 21 but now and those two words are so important and you see them in several places throughout the

Bible but now that is a transition phrase that's saying there was a way things were done back then but now something has changed there is a new administration with new terms but now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ to all and on all who believed he continues on for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God being justified freely by his grace that is very different from what justification looked like under the law was it free nope it was conditional it cost something you had to earn it you had to do something in order to receive that well not a gift right in order to receive that offer but now he says you are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in

Christ Jesus whom God set forth as a propitiation by his blood through faith to demonstrate his righteousness because in his forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed to demonstrate at the present time his righteousness that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus again justified freely by his grace not justified conditionally by our works and what's the basis what's the basis why can God do this now why is this different because Jesus accomplished something for the sins of the world he died he shed his blood for the sins of the world previously Paul says here God had passed over the sins that were previously committed he didn't deal directly with them he made provision there was provision made with the animal sacrifices but there was no settled account for sin but now but now the solution is revealed there is a new kind of righteousness one that is given for free by faith alone if you turn just to the next chapter in

Romans 4 verse 4 Paul addresses this concept of works of doing things Romans 4 verse 4 now to him who works the wages are not counted as grace but as debt if you work for something and you get something in return that's not a gift right a gift is free you don't have to do anything for it but if

you work for something well it's owed to you it is a debt and he continues on but to him who does not work but believes on him who justifies the ungodly his faith is accounted for righteousness to him who does not work read it again to him who does not work his faith is accounted for righteousness what did Moses say it shall be righteousness for us if we do the work the man who does these things he shall live by them

Ezekiel the man who does what is lawful and right shall surely live even Jesus himself in his ministry to Israel if you do these commandments you will live Peter what shall we do what shall we do you must do these things repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of your sins and James himself you see then that a man is justified by works and not by faith only and Paul says but to him who does not work but believes on him who justifies the ungodly his faith is accounted for righteousness that's different isn't it it's very different and it makes all the difference in the world in the terms of how we come to God there's a I want to speak about somebody that I think most of you know so back 500 years ago there's a man named

[32:46] Martin Luther he was a monk a catholic monk and really struggled with how do I know that I can be saved how can I know that I have eternal life and he studied and he studied the scriptures he didn't get the answers or compelling answers from the catholic church but he found in the letters of Paul specifically this concept this idea of a righteousness of a foreign righteousness of a righteousness that's not my own but a righteousness that is a gift and he became what many call the bulldog of the reformation to separate from the catholic church who taught a works based salvation and to instead teach this idea that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone grace alone through faith alone and that was a central part of his message but we see that even

Martin Luther was a bit confused because he writes and he wrote a catechism but he taught that and I'm going to quote this from his larger catechism we must be baptized or we shall not be saved we must be baptized or we shall not be saved and that's what he taught that in order to find salvation in Christ you had to be baptized today we call that idea baptismal regeneration and it continues to be a teaching of the Lutheran church that in order to find salvation you must be baptized and what did he do he pointed back to what Jesus said to his disciples in that great commission he who believes and is baptized will be saved but he who does not believe will be condemned you see

Martin Luther failed to rightly divide where was this dispensation of law where did it begin and end and where is this dispensation or this age of grace and so even though he was a champion of faith alone he himself brings in smuggles in a work a ritual just like the old covenant rituals and smuggles it in to the age of grace but that's not how grace works I'll finish up with this turn to Romans chapter 11 Romans chapter 11 grace is something that only really benefits you if it's undiluted if it's pure if there is no mixture

Paul says this in Romans 11 verse 6 and if by grace then it is no longer of works otherwise grace is no longer grace but if it is of works it is no longer grace otherwise work is no longer work you say listen there is a distinction here if you add works to grace then you no longer have grace and if you add grace to works you no longer have works it's either one or the other so what Paul teaches is not grace plus the law it's not faith plus works it's faith plus nothing faith plus nothing and so by making this clear difference this clear distinction between the message that we see from Paul and his clear words in his letters and the writings the scriptures that are geared towards the Jewish people under their dispensation of the law we can help to clarify the difference between what grace is

Martin Luther said well baptism is just a means of grace that's what he called it baptism is just a means of grace and that's that's just a different way of saying it's a work a work of grace can you have a work of grace no it's one or the other there are the only means of grace that you'll find in in the scriptures when it comes to the age of grace is faith and trust in the shed blood of Jesus and so we can read Paul's words we'll finish up with this Ephesians chapter 2 verse 8 Paul says this to make very clear how salvation works for us in the body of Christ for by grace you have been saved through faith and that not of yourselves it's not anything that you do it is the gift of

[38:16] God freely given not of works lest anyone should boast he makes it very very clear for by grace you have been saved through faith and that not of yourselves it is the gift of God it is a free gift no works required lest anyone should boast the Jewish people were given a temporary provision of the law a temporary provision until grace would come until faith would come Paul says to the Galatians but now the body of Christ has something different it is not a provision a temporary provision but we have peace with God we have eternal life with God right now if we trust in his

blood let's finish up with that and thank God for his grace that he has provided to us father thank you so much for what you've done for us help us to understand what grace is clearly to not bring in mixture so that we can stand confidently on your grace knowing for sure because there's no conditions besides our faith we don't have to do things help us to settle that in our hearts father to know what you've accomplished for us through the shed blood of Jesus

Christ that we might have confidence in you that we might have confidence that we have peace with God and rest in the salvation and the life and the righteousness that you have gifted to us for free we thank you for that in Jesus name amen let's all stand up on our feet we'll finish with the doxology by the way if this series brings up questions you've got those little note cards write them down and we'll try to talk about them or address those at the end of the series