
GOD'S DISPENSATIONAL DEALINGS IN HARMONY WITH THE COVENANT OF GRACE

It is a joy to realize that there is a Covenant of Grace. The Scripture emphasizes the word "covenant". We find it seven times in the chapter concerning the rainbow and God's covenant with the earth; and still more frequently in God's dealings with Abraham. We recollect the stress on the first covenant as one of "works", and how blessedly Galatians iv. unfolds the covenant of promise, and Hebrews 10. adds "He taketh away the first that He may establish the second." There is no need, no room for the third, for that which is the second and the new, is also the everlasting covenant. We rejoice to confess this fixed covenant of **grace**, not a mixture of grace and works, but of pure grace, as the pure gold of the tabernacle: there is no alloy; there can be no fusion, that would be confusion. If law were intermingled, it would undo and negative

the power of grace. God never blends thus. Grace reigns through righteousness. In brief, the covenant of grace reveals that before the ages God in mercy had in front of Him the names of His chosen, His redeemed. Though they were not yet created, yet their entire future was before Him—and their names were personally written in the Lamb's book of Life, in accord with His own unchangeable purpose, to bring many sons unto glory. And so, in the fulness of time, the Lord Jesus, God manifested in the flesh, came forth, and fulfilling the purpose of the Covenant, gave Himself as the Covenant Sacrifice, that by His precious outpoured blood there might be the secured salvation of all elected and redeemed by God, and that they might be drawn by the invincible power of the Holy Spirit, and with an effectual calling, not merely an external compulsion, but in-working in them and causing them to respond to the more-than magnetic might of mercy, that, though by nature dead in trespasses and sins, they might be united with Christ on resurrection ground, and with a life eternal, and with a righteousness which could not be more righteous, for it admits of no defects, since we are "made the righteousness of God in Him."

Covenanted Saving Grace

Thus we behold, and possess, an eternal security, for God is the Author of an eternal salvation, and, as grace also appoints the path and the means, it is "unto all them that obey Him." Salvation is not a plan to give to dead sinners a blessing while they remain dead. But the same grace that works **for** them works **in** them, and a living people, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, are enabled to show forth the virtues and the praises of Him Who has called them "out of darkness into His marvellous light." This glorious covenant has no uncertainties, no "if's" about it,

but is characterized by the word "shall", and not by "if." It is no contingency dependent upon the creature. God waiteth not for men, nor tarrieth for the sons of men in the purpose of His love. He hath said, "My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure," and if one whose name is in the Lamb's Book of Life were finally omitted from that complete number, the loss of the Lord Jesus would be greater than the loss of the one removed from the blessing, for He would not "see of the travail of His soul," and would be unsatisfied. But, thanks be unto God, not one shall be absent. The Lamb's Book of Life is **full** of names; nothing but names. Nothing of our works can be found there. It is indeed a book of **Life**; and sovereign grace will cause and compel to come, that God's house may be full, and that a great number which no man can number will, in the ages to come, realize and enjoy, (as well as themselves **be**), the fruit of the riches of God's grace. This is no subject for mere academic study; it is to warm the heart of every redeemed one, awakening responsive obedience in the Spirit. Truth is never isolated, it is one harmonious whole. Grace teaches us that we are to "live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present age, looking for that Blessed Hope." So we have the entwining of all the Truth, that there may be not only in every meeting, but in every personal meditation, the desire that "fruit," which God mentions from the 1st of Genesis, to the last of Revelation, may be the characteristic of all in the bonds of the everlasting covenant. We rejoice that nothing in God's dealings in various dispensations will undo His gifts and calling; these must be without any change of His perfect mind and will. But He has been pleased to unfold to us in the Scripture that He has **varied** dealings temporarily. If we look back to the earlier Scriptures, we find such. There can be no doubt that God dealt differently

with Adam **ere** he sinned in Eden, and **afterwards**. Plainly there was a distinction, as Romans v. shows, between the period from Adam to Moses, and the time after when the law was promulgated as a covenant of works. A further dealing is seen when, in the language of Galatians iii, faith came. Therefore, Scripture maintains **different dispensational dealings** of God. Who can ignore the fact that once the message was not sent to all the nations as it is now? To deny dispensational dealings in the past is impossible. Why should it be a difficulty to recognize such in the present, and in the millennial future? All give us panels in God's picture, that we may thus view something of His perfect outworking of His perfect plan. But the whole panorama is absolute grace from everlasting to everlasting. This is evident, because all who were saved and delivered, before Abraham were not blessed outside "the Seed" of Abraham (Gal. 3. 16). All who were graciously drawn to the Lord ere He died upon the Cross, were saved as we are by His precious blood. There is none other hope, there is none other name. With God "time" has not the same aspect as with us. We can **guess** the future, God knows it. We wonder what will happen. God is never uncertain. Our actions may be very variable. Men sometimes make a promise, and forget and break it. It was impossible for the covenant made with the Lord Jesus to be broken; everything was "ordered in all things and sure" from the very beginning. All who were saved ere the covenant of grace was more fully manifested, were saved by the same grace. It is needful to realize this. This alone is in harmony with the absolute view of the attributes of God. With Him there can be no lack of perfect wisdom and co-ordination, with Him no failure in perfect truthfulness. With Him there can be no faltering in complete knowledge. Every attribute in Him is not only an attribute, but a

part of His very nature, all in perfect and absolutely full harmony.

Blessings Applied in Stages

The unfolding may be step by step. **We** have life and incorruption brought to light through the Gospel (2 Tim. 1. 10), but not brought to God's light. There may be a mystery, or secret, which in other ages was not known to the children of men as now revealed; but it was hid in God, and fully known to Him. And, therefore, we have brought before our worshipping hearts the definite future of all from God's unchanging standpoint, and this thought permeates everything. **Then** we see God's outworkings for our benefit, step by step, giving us oftentimes the "earnest" before the fulness, even in our own personal lives. We find this as to our own bodies We already possess the sonship; we have received "the Spirit of sonship, whereby we cry, Abba, Father." But do we not read that we are waiting for the sonship, for the "adoption"? Namely the redemption of the body (Rom. 8. 23). Yet "**we have** redemption" (Eph. 1. 7). It is plain that the blessings are **applied** in stages. And that which is true of the individual is true in the outworking for multitudes. Therefore, God gave among Israel a "miniature " of His complete plan. In the covenant of works we see this. At the beginning Adam was under a covenant, but this was more fully set forth to Israel. So with His display of grace in the types, far more completely to **that** nation (Ps. 147. 20). Everything harmonizes with the dispensational dealings of God, nor do we find any difficulty in seeing His anticipatory and part-application, until the fulness arrives. As we have seen in "redemption," we have **not yet** received the perfectness in our experience, or in our bodies, which is our birthright. It is good for us to be tested in this life

of **faith** until we receive the complete provision which has already been secured for us, yea before we were born, by the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. Does not this principle answer most of the problems of any finding difficulty as to God's varied dispensational dealings?

Three difficulties may come into prominence. First, the old-time saints:—"What distinction do you make between them and the believers of today if you have dispensational dealings? Secondly, the position of Israel. And, thirdly, the aspect of **rewards**, for those who enter the Kingdom.

1. The Position of Old-time Saints

Some will hesitate, and say, You will take away their unity with the saints of the present day, and thus bring in a fundamental distinction. If we introduce an **eternal** distinction, it would be so! But is it not quite clear that certain things which were mentioned then the prophets themselves were not even able to understand? "Unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the Gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven " (1 Pet. 1. 12), and there was a difference in their position, and are we not reminded that now "we have not received the **Spirit of bondage** (servitude) again to fear; but we have received the **Spirit of sonship**" Rom. 9. 15)? "The heir, so long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant," until the time appointed by the Father (Gal. iv. 1). Here we have a most illuminating setting forth of God's plan. The fact that we were told these earlier saints were **heirs** implies that they belong to the same family, but they were **dispensationally** in the position of servitude. We have now "come to the heavenly Jerusalem, and to the spirits of just men **brought to the goal**" (Heb. 12. 22-23, lit.). Such were

not **brought to the goal when** they fell asleep. The dispensational dealings were transitory. We do not find the "kingdom of the heavens" then; it was still future in the preaching of John the Baptist. Yet we read in Matthew 13. 11, that we **shall** see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the "kingdom of the heavens." To this they did **not** come at death. "David is not ascended into the heavens" (Acts 2. 34). The English word "is" suggests another tense which the Holy Spirit carefully avoids here. He says, "David did not ascend into the heavens," which is quite clear, in that God is simply referring to what took place **when** David died. Nothing is said of the subsequent transfer, of which Hebrews 2. 15 speaks. And so throughout. How could old-time saints have possessed the **fulness**? One may ask, Why? Is not Christ to be the **First fruits** from among the dead? Could they possess **union** with Him before He had first died, and had been **raised up**? They could be and were chosen in Him; but redemption had not taken place until the fulness of the time had come; and union with Himself could not take place till He was raised up. Possibly there will be a difference of thought when I add that to me the statement "Upon this Rock I will build My Church" (Matt. 16. 18), does not mean "continue building" but the bringing in of a "new thing" of which we are reminded, when at Pentecost there was a new meal offering. Those were types of the Church in the Old Testament. I rejoice that the Church which is His Body must include the old-time saints brought into living union when the fulness of time came. But, I repeat, can we make the Church, which is His Body, exist till He had first, and in His own Body, died and risen again, that there might be this living relation to Himself? In other words, God, as Sovereign Lord, gave to previous saints life because of the absolute assurance of the

finished work of the Lord Jesus, and in the appointed time they received this in union with Him. **Then** in the future will they be further blessed **with us**—"God having provided some better thing," which embraces us too, "that they, **without** us, should not be brought to the goal" (Heb. 11. 40)—of **resurrection glory** (Rom. 8. 23). Here is the consummation, the absolute eternal unity of the redeemed with their Lord.

Resurrection in Union with Christ

I do not know, beloved fellow believers, how we all view this. I am convinced that the Old Testament, yea, the first five Books are full of Resurrection. The Sadducees made a grave mistake. Abraham died with faith in the promise of God. "To give **thee** this land." Four hundred years of sojourning and servitude must elapse, so he knew he could not possess it then ; he claimed the resurrection fulfillment, and a raising in glory always implies union with Christ.

We have types in the tabernacle. Where there is gold alone, there is union. There is no union with the wood, which portrays the earthly humiliation of Christ. But gold **by itself** sets forth resurrection. The mercy seat contained **no wood**. The cherubim are not joined to the ark, but to the mercy seat. The branches in the lampstand are joined to pure gold (cp. John 12. 24). Leviticus 18. 5, has no "if" in the Hebrew. "The Man shall do" is a prophecy of Christ, and Romans 10. 5 is literally, "**Having** done" (earthly life), "He **shall** live" (resurrection).

One having completed obedience cannot **die** for **himself** (sin's wages). He must be a Substitute, and, because obedient, He cannot be holden by death. He must **live**, without further death (Rom. 6. 9). Because He lives, those for whom He died as Substitute **must** live also in union with Him, else substitution

fails. Thus it embraces living union with Christ. There cannot be two grades of the substitutionary death of Christ. He could not die to make some half-saved, and blessed in a lower degree. Thus old-time saints and we are finally united, and millennial saints too, in the oneness of the redeemed. Our dispensational waiting in this body of flesh is no hindrance to His complete work. The dispensational waiting of others was prefigured by men in the cities of refuge, of preservation and yet limitation. Such could not go out to **possess until the high priest died**. Everything is in Divine harmony.

2. The Position of Israel

So with respect to Israel as a nation, God was pleased to choose them as His; the only nation that had a special and approved priesthood. Is there a blessing for Israel in the future? Yes, Isaiah 14. 1. Though the fig-tree aspect is removed (Matt. 21. 19), i.e. privilege, and ordinary nationalism (cf. Matt. 24. 32), the pardoned and reserved ones (Jer. 50. 20), are grafted into their own olive, of which Christ has become the Root (Rom. 11. 17, 18), a living union. The concluding in unbelief is the background of mercy of exactly the same character as towards Gentiles. The two lines of prophecy: (a) individual election, and (b) a nation, i.e. of elect individuals, will coincide in the blessing to Israel. But their bodies will not reach the glory until the climax, in eternity. In the old dispensation we had one picture anticipatory, of the earthly Millennial authority of Christ. In the present we have rather a foretaste of the heavenly Kingdom of Christ in the Millennium. The two aspects, the heavenly and the earthly, will be brought together in the thousand years, to reach afterwards the final fulness of Ephesians 2. 7 and Revelation 21. 1-7. There we behold beyond the past, and beyond the present,

the elect from Israel, and all nations brought into that glorious completeness of the Lamb's Book of Life, which His substitutionary work guarantees. Thus God's dealings with Israel are a temporary out-working of a perfect plan, revealing the nature of man, and God's long-suffering. But in the millennial age there will be one wondrous step forward, the converging of two lines of prophecy. And afterwards all His redeemed, whatever their temporary position, will be glorified together, with a perfect inner union, though individually distinct in their consciousness and eternal blessed experience.

3. The Giving of Rewards

The suggestion is that the covenant of grace takes away all thought of rewards. If it is according to works, then it is no more of grace. That is perfectly true. As a complete deliverance from judgment, the fulness of God's loving kindness shines out, when we are brought into the family blessed by God. Then He appoints rewards in the new sphere according to faithfulness. This is not the blessing that is secured by covenant love, but in connection with the different positions that He appoints, that there may be a manifestation of His righteousness, to give to every man according to his works (Rev. 22. 12, cf. 2 Cor. 5. 10), within the limits of the family, for His obedient people. And so, dear fellow believers, there is no contradiction. Rewards never encroach on grace. And just as we could not do a single work if we did not first receive grace, so we could not be present to receive a reward at the Judgment Seat, were it not for absolute grace from above. It is true we have the responsibility, but grace brings us into the position to exercise that responsibility in the Spirit. In the new sphere it is not a question of salvation or eternal judgment, but a question of pleasing the Lord.

Practical Results

If we once lose sight of God's dispensational dealings and the harmony of His working, we have a threefold hindrance. If we see no dispensational change introduced at Pentecost, we easily think of **earthly** planning, and believers taking part in earthly politics and warfare and arrangements of men. But when we see our heavenly calling, everything becomes transfigured. Ours is not an earthly city, or earthly temple, or earthly kingdom. Our worship is above; we enter into the holiest of all. This makes the path of the redeemed ones clear. Secondly, the realization of the dispensational dealings affords a beautiful view of obedience. There is the response of love. As we see the Church called out from among all nations, in view of the Judgment Seat, we are not inclined merely to say, "Christ has secured all, and we can now settle down." No, we "press toward the mark." We shall not misuse rewards then; there will be no self-centredness. Every reward will be used to ascribe glory to Him. What an incentive to us now to realize this! Thirdly, a right dispensational view enables us to recognize the **truthfulness** of God, and to pray more for Israel. There are many who virtually say, God made a promise to **Israel**, and does not keep it to them; He made a promise to **Jerusalem**, and takes it away ; He speaks of occupying the throne of David, but that will not exist. If the thought be, this is the throne in the hearts of the redeemed, the promise can be explained away, and the unbeliever may almost doubt our honesty. God's dispensational and final dealings bring everything into harmony. And though we cannot yet see the blending of all the lines of His purpose, we find them usually to be two-fold. The Deity and Humanity of our Lord, Divine sovereignty and human accountability illustrate. Now we know but in part, but then shall know more

fully. We are content to wait for the further unfolding. We know Him Who has come and will come; we are looking indeed for that Blessed Hope. We rejoice in His absolute faithfulness to carry out the plan for Israel also, and when those who have suffered with Him shall also reign with Him on the earth (Matt. v. 5). We look beyond once more to "the ages to come" when He will show the riches of His grace, and when His redeemed ones, known from eternity, will be known to eternity, with no intrusion of sin, or sorrow, or fear, or possibility of loss, their joy will transcend all human measure—His joy their joy, and His will their will. "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? Or who hath been His counsellor? Or who hath first given to Him, and it shall be recompensed unto Him again? For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things. To Him be glory for ever. Amen."

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(An address spoken in January 25th, 1946)
