

HISTORY OF REDEMPTION

BY

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Lesson 18

Dispensational and Covenantal Theologies

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We will pray and then get started. We are going to try to do a comparison today of the covenants and dispensations. The first hour I am probably just going to put on the board and then the second hour we will use the project to do more of a comparison. The first hour we just want to kind of review in our minds what the dispensations and covenants are. Then we want to come back and actually try to make a comparison of them and some principles to follow when looking at Scripture.

So, let's open up in prayer and give our attention to the Lord and to study and to thinking about Scripture.

Lord, we just want to pause and thank You that You are our God. And we know that history is so real because it is You. It is Your story. It is You unfolding what You are doing from the beginning. Lord, and as strange as it can be and as mysterious as it is, still, in spite of it all, we know that You are above all and all things are of You and through You and to You. You are in complete control, ultimately, of everything that is happening and that has happened. So Lord, enable us to just get the big view of things and try to put things together so that our basic, hermeneutic principles would be correct and we could rightly divide the word of truth. So Lord, help us to see these things for what they are and to appreciate both. To keep seeking and keeping our eyes on You, and letting You be the center, and that all of our thinking from Genesis to Revelation would be Christocentric. And that we could find peace and harmony and unity in the one new Man, Jesus Christ, no matter what view we might take, in terms of history or interpretation.

Lord, for Your glory we pray these things in Jesus' name,
amen.

There are basically seven dispensations and seven covenants. Now, there is one dispensation that is part of the Abrahamic covenant, which would be called the Palestinian covenant that would be included with Abraham. So, I hate to call it that. Actually, I would rather call it the land covenant. But as we look at these things we will go through dispensations first.

There are two words that we need to know. The word for dispensation is *oikonomia*. It is about from the noun *oikas*, which means a house. *Oikonomia* means a household or a stewardship. The word *oikonomia* or dispensation is found in 1 Corinthians 9:17. It is found in Ephesians 1:10, Ephesians 3:2 and 9. It is found in Colossians 1:25. And it is found in 1 Timothy 1:4. I will say them briefly again. 1 Corinthians 9:17, Ephesians 1:10, Ephesians 3:2 and 9, and Colossians 1:25 and 1 Timothy 1:4. That is the word *oikonomia* for dispensation.

The word "covenant," *diatheke*, is found in Galatians 3:15; Hebrews 9:4, 16, 17; 2 Corinthians 3:14; and Matthew 26:28. So we are going to try to do a comparison of these two schools of thought.

The seven dispensations that we will go through are: first the dispensation of innocence. That is found in Genesis 1–3. And you know, when you think of a dispensation you are talking about a management, a stewardship. Paul said he received the stewardship of the gospel. He called it the dispensation, or the administration or the management; and so it is just, the word for a household or the management of a household.

And the thought behind dispensationalism is that God manages His household differently through periods of time. In other words, in one period of time God manages His household this way. Then God switches and in another period of time called, "the period of conscience," God will manage His household differently in a period of conscience.

Then when He switches to human government, God manages it differently. And so God goes through these different phases of time and during each time God manages His household differently. Not unlike what might happen to a normal household.

When you first get married you manage your household one way, because it is just the two of you. You even cook differently. Sometimes you don't cook; you just go out and eat. But once you get pregnant and have children—I mean even before that— let's say you get a dog. That's what I did. That is how I prepared for training children, I got a dog. It was actually pretty good preparation. And if you met my boys you would know why. So, I mean, it changes your life when you do anything. Then when you get pregnant and have kids, you manage your household different. Then your kids start school. Then they go to college. Then you don't have a household because you are paying for the college. Then they graduate. They get married. Then they have kids. And you have grandkids.

And so, all through life, during different periods of life you start managing your household differently just because of the time period that you are in with your life. Then you become a senior citizen and you get discounts on your meals. I am looking forward to that. I have only got like two and a half years to go. Now I go out and I see all these senior specials and it is like I cannot get them. I have to pay full price, you know. And I am thinking, "Man, in two and a half years I can get this special." But then they will probably move it to five years back or something. But your life changes at different times.

The idea is this: God does the same exact thing through every dispensation. He does basically these five things. The first thing God does is God gives a distinct revelation, a divine revelation. He communicates to mankind some divine revelation. Now, what happens is, after He communicates that revelation, then secondly, God gives a specific test concerning that revelation. It is a test of obedience, usually. Then thirdly, what takes place is man usually fails. Well, always fails the test. I mean, failing tests has been part of our history so don't worry about it. It is the history of mankind. We have failed more tests; that is just what we do, we fail tests. But after the failure, the fourth thing that takes

place is that God brings a judgment; He has to because of His righteousness. He brings a judgment for the failure. But after the judgment God always provides a new beginning, which is called the new dispensation.

So, in other words, during the time of innocence, God makes His revelation of Himself. Then He expects a certain test, as when He expected them (Adam and Eve) not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. But they did it anyway, they failed the test and because they failed the test, there was a judgment. They were kicked out of the garden. But then God started a new period of time, a new management, a new way to deal with mankind.

You see, that same progression happens during each of the seven dispensations. God deals the same way every time. And there is the same story every time until you finally get to the very end and God creates a new heaven and a new earth. And because we are changed and we have resurrected and glorified bodies, and Satan is finally where he ought to be, then there is a new heaven and a new earth wherein dwells righteousness. And there is no more failure. There is no more need for tests. You know what I mean? All of that is over.

And so that is the dispensational view of history. So let's take a look at it.

The first period is called "innocence." Now, that is Genesis 1:28 to Genesis 3:24. And in innocence, what do we mean by innocence? Do we mean innocence in the sense that a baby is innocent? When you look at a baby and you say, "Oh, how sweet! Oh, how innocent!" Is a baby really innocent? No. A baby is underdeveloped. Given him time, let him develop. Will he be innocent? No. He is just underdeveloped. You say, "Oh, how sweet, how innocent!" That is not what we mean by innocent here.

Adam and Eve were truly innocent. They were not just underdeveloped. They were innocent. They did not know evil. And so God put them there and He put them under a test of obedience. They could have become righteous. Were they righteous? No. They

were not righteous either. You mean, Adam and Eve were not righteous? No. They were not righteous. Adam and Eve were innocent, not righteous. If they would have obeyed, they would have been what? Righteous! If they would have done the right thing, they would have been righteous.

That is why even in the New Testament, we read what? “Be not deceived. He that doeth righteousness is righteous” (1 John 3:7).

They were innocent, not knowing right or wrong. They were completely, truly innocent. But they had a choice of doing the right thing to become righteous, or doing the wrong thing, disobey and become unrighteous. And we know what happened. They failed the test and they became unrighteous. They went from innocence down to unrighteousness because they failed the test.

Now, God gets glory when we obey. When we do the right thing, God gets tremendous glory. Even today, when we are born again and we are living in this situation that we have of the flesh and the spirit and all that, God still gets glory every time we obey. He is glorified. When we disobey then, of course, His name is smeared. But when we obey His name is glorified.

So they are in this perfect environment in the Garden and so the dispensation ends, you might say, with failure because man has got to make a choice. He makes the wrong choice. “His eyes are opened and he knew nakedness” (cf. Genesis 3:7). So Adam hid himself from God. God comes and says, “Adam, where art thou?” And that really is the question isn’t it? Where are you? Are you in Adam or are you in Christ? Well, he was in Adam. He failed. He became unrighteous.

And of course, God did not leave him there, did He? God went and made coats of skin. They covered themselves with fig leaves because they knew they were naked and had to do something about it, so they tried to cover their failure. They tried to cover their disobedience and their sin, which is what you try to do. You try to cover up all your

failure and disobedience and sin. You don't want everybody to know. But God says that won't work. He says, "But I will make coats of skins" (Genesis 3:21). An animal had to die. His blood had to be shed. God is the first one to kill an animal. And He covered them (Adam and Eve) with these skins.

So, what do you call that? According to our definition of grace in the Old Testament, what do you call that? God doing it, right?—God is doing it. He is doing grace. That is the thing that He does. God starts a new dispensation and it is called "conscience." He sticks them out of the Garden of Eden and He says, "I am not through with you yet." So conscience goes from the Garden of Eden until the time of what? Conscience dispensation will start in the Garden and where will it end? It will end at the flood, okay? So it will go from the Garden to the Flood.

And what takes place here, if you will turn in your Bibles to Genesis 6, you can see a couple of interesting things. And the knowledge of good and evil awakened what we call conscience. And his approach to God is now going to have to be based on a system of sacrifice. God started it by killing the first animal, shedding its blood, and clothing them with skins. But the problem with the situation under conscience is what we read in Genesis 6:1–2, that they began to break down every God-given barrier. Man, because his heart was evil continually and corrupt, started breaking down these barriers.

Then in verse 3 we read that God was still gracious and that He postponed judgment for 120 years. He did not want to judge. That was not what He really wanted. It was not His nature. It was not His desire to judge. But He says, "I will be patient." And He was patient for 120 years before He had to bring judgment during this time of conscience.

In verse 5, you cannot help but realize how degenerate man is becoming. It is just getting worse and worse and worse. Then by the time you get to Genesis chapter 6:11–12, they are almost to the point of saying, "God, we don't want anything to do with You. Just depart from us. We don't even want to know You." Then in 6:4, you read what? "There are mighty men of renown." What does that mean? I think it means ultimately that we

had reached the high point of civilization. Man had developed his civilization to a very highly educated point. And it wasn't just that there were great men that were tall and giants, it includes the fact that civilization had really developed. And there was a high point.

Now God is warning and saying, "Man, if you don't change I am going to bring judgment." But does man pay any attention to the warning? No, he doesn't. But in the midst of all this, according to Hebrews 11, there is a blessed hope. And the hope is the fact that Enoch was translated out of that whole situation. So, isn't that the way it is going to be in the last days? It says, "As the days of Noah were, so shall the coming of the Son of Man be" (cf. Matthew 24:37). In the last days we are going to be breaking down every God-given barrier. Are we breaking down the barriers? Sure we are. Every God-given barrier that has been given we are breaking it down today in our developed, highly developed civilization with all these men of renown. And the more we have men of renown and the more educated we get, it seems like the more barriers, God-given barriers, we are just breaking down.

And that is why I tend to lean towards thinking we need to stand for some standards even in the church. Not because we don't believe in grace; we do believe in grace. But when people are in leadership and they are to be governing the church, because of the high standards that need to be kept, they need to be dealt with and we need to get rid of their position. It is not that they cannot still serve in the church. They can still serve in the church. But I lean toward the fact that people who sin, ought to be dealt with and they should not be allowed in leadership anymore. Why? Because we are breaking down almost every God-given barrier there is. At some point, somebody has got to stand up and say, "Let's hold the standard high. Let's keep it high." Not because we do not believe in grace, but because it was so important to counteract the broken down barriers that God has given.

And so, a lot of times, when somebody says, "What is your opinion about something?" My opinion won't be from a specific Scripture verse, it will be from my understanding of

Scripture as a whole. It is from what I see happened from Genesis to Revelation, going through these periods of time.

But side by side through all of this corruption during the time of conscience, God has developed what? He developed a way to relate to Him. But it is on the basis of animals being killed and their blood being shed. There is a sacrificial thing going on and being developed side by side. So it is pretty amazing. So that is conscience. Does God finally bring a judgment for man's failure? Yes. He brings the flood and He wipes the place out.

But after the flood, does God start over again? Yes. After the flood God says, "Okay, we will start a new period." And it is called human government. Well, it certainly relates to Noah. The first one is called a covenant of works. The second one is the covenant with Adam. And the third one, the covenant of Noah, you might say. It is the covenant of human government.

Now the key to it, you might say, is found in Genesis 9:6. He says, "Whoever sheds man's blood, by men shall his blood be shed. [Why?] For in the image of God made He man." In other words, capital punishment has to do with the value of human life. And because human life is so valuable because it is created in the image of God, God says there has to be human government established. And the purpose of the human government being established is to promote the value of human life.

And God says, "How do you do that? How do you promote the value of human life?" He says, "You put a high premium on it this way: If a man kills another man that man has to be killed. That is how you do it." And so He institutes human government. Not so that people, as individuals can take revenge, but so that human government can deal with the issue of capital punishment and promote the value of human life. And if you take a human life then you should lose your human life, because that is how valuable human life is. And if you don't hold that kind of a standard then the value of human life is lowered. And pretty soon it is not a big deal and people are not valuable. And hence, that is one of the big problems we have today in our society with the whole issue of abortion. Is that if

we are allowing human lives to be taken, then we are devaluing human life. But God set in human government that if you take a human life, you ought to lose your human life. Why? It is because man was created in the image of God.

So Noah comes out of the ark and God starts a new thing. The first thing Noah does is he builds a what? He builds an altar and he offers sacrifice. And the Lord it says, “smells the sweet savor of that offering” because we know that ultimately pointed forward to Jesus Christ, the sweet savor offering. But what is happening here under this new test of obedience here is that man is responsible to obey government. But does man obey government? No. What man proves is that he won’t govern for God. But not only will man not govern for God, what will man do? He won’t even govern himself properly. He fails the test.

And so, what God does is He brings a judgment upon them in such a way that He has to send the flood. And man is completely judged. And He rejects, you might say, all the people that reject His government. But then He selects, after this, a certain man. After He judges them, He selects a man named Abraham and begins a whole new thing called promise. And Abraham was just a Gentile. He was from the Ur of Chaldees. God selects this guy and says, “Because of grace I will start over again and I will do this new thing.” So man failed to govern for God and man failed to even govern himself properly.

Now during that time of human government, who else rose to the scene that was of renown? Nimrod, whose name means rebel or rebellious one, is the epitome of all those who rebel against God. He is the spirit of antichrist. He is the spirit of lawlessness, of *anomia*. And so we see this counterfeit taking place. But we know it will finally be fulfilled because Isaiah 9 says the government shall rest upon His shoulders. That is upon the Messiah, upon Jesus Christ.

But during this time of human government, man fails again. So God says, “Well, okay. I have got to deal with man differently.” So far God has tried innocence. That did not seem to work for man. He has tried conscience. That did not work for man. He has tried human

government. That is not working for man. So God says, "I will try promise." So He calls out Abraham and says, "I will deal in a new way." And at Genesis 12 we begin God's selection after His rejection of man in general. He said, "I cannot accept man in general because their heart is evil continually. They have built this Tower of Babel and they are totally against Me. Now I am just going to select one man and his family and I am going to start a whole new thing."

So He did. He selected Abraham. And God said in Genesis 12 (seven times), "I will, I will, I will, I will"...that is grace. God is going to do it. And His promise is that He will bring the Messiah. And that sacrificial death of the Messiah will be the ground of blessing for all mankind.

Now, all Abraham did in Genesis 15:6 was what? He just said, "Amen." He said, "Okay, if that is what You want to do, amen. I believe it. Let it be. Amen." He just gave consent and acknowledged that if that was what God was going to do, that was what was going to happen.

Now, did Abraham have a seed? The promise was to Abraham's seed. What kind of seed did Abraham have? Did he have an earthly seed? Yes. But did he also have a spiritual heavenly seed? Yes. Remember Abraham had two kinds of seed. He had a true earthly seed, but he also had a heavenly seed. And so the promise was to Abraham, both to his natural seed and to the spiritual seed, the heavenly seed that would come later. And so He made this promise to Abraham.

And He offered the people a relationship and it was based on this wonderful promise. But the people did not want to relate that way to God, unfortunately. And they did not follow God. They continued to get worse and worse and worse and worse. And so God said, "Well, I have to help these people. I have to add something to enable these people." And so He added the law. Now, why did God add the law? What does the New Testament tell us? It was largely because we did not know how to act. We would not act right. We would not act morally. And God said, "Well, I will give them the moral law and even the

ceremonial law so they will know how to act and walk with Me because they don't seem to be able to have that gracious relationship that I want them to have."

So God added the law. And so He started a whole new way of relating to men because men said, "We don't even want God to talk to us anymore." They even said, "Moses, you go talk to Him. We don't even want to hear from Him." And so God gave the law and a new period began. They really rejected the grace relationship that God was giving them. So He added the law.

The problem with the law, of course, was they could not keep the law either. The law was moral, just, good, holy, all of those things. But man could not keep the law. So God brought judgment upon them when they disobeyed the law. They failed continually. And it lasted all the way until finally He sent His Son, whom He promised to Abraham. And they proved that they did not want the promise because they did not want the Son who was the promise. And the prophets all along the way stoned and killed the people who even prophesied about the Son who was the promise that was coming. And then when the Son came, they actually killed the Son. So they did not want that relationship with God.

But God still says, "I am going to deal with you and I am not going to give up on you." And so after the law, He sent His Son and we entered the period, in terms of dispensational thought, the period of grace, when Jesus Christ came. "Moses brought the law, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ" (cf. John 1:17). And so, a whole new way of relating to people began. And we live in that period now, called the age of grace. When you look at things from a dispensational viewpoint, we are in the period from Acts 2 until Revelation 19.

So, the point of testing during this period is what? What test has He given man that man continues to fail, largely? What is the test point during the period of grace? It is to receive Jesus Christ. That is the test. All you have to do is receive Jesus. But is man, as a whole around the world, is he receiving or failing the test? He is failing the test. They are still

rejecting Jesus Christ even though God is graciously offering a relationship based on grace through Jesus Christ. Man is failing that test.

Now according to dispensational thought and view, man fails the test and judgment has to come, why? Because what is the condition of the church, according to dispensational thought, at the end of this grace period? What is the last church that was given in prophecy according to Jesus Christ? *Laodicea*. So the church ends in a period called *Laodicea*, which means the professing church is basically something that has lost its salt and it ought to be trodden under foot of men because it is worthless. And the church age ends as a worthless failure.

And then God has to bring an apocalyptic judgment on the earth. Judgment begins at the household (same word as management, dispensation), the household of God. And if it begins there, he says, where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?" (cf. 1 Peter 4:17–18). So at the end of this period of grace comes a judgment because man has failed again. Even the church has failed. Or the professing church, at least, has failed to be what it was supposed to be. And that is the view.

And so then God does what? The last dispensation, God says, "Well, I am going to relate to man differently." So that is the kingdom. That is the thousand year reign. Jesus Christ returns and He sets up a thousand year reign. During the thousand year reign, man has to go to Jerusalem and has to submit to Jesus Christ and His rule, during the thousand year reign. If he does not, he does not get rain for his crops. His land is not blessed. His nation is not blessed. And of course, Satan, fortunately, is bound for a thousand years during this time. But we know that he is loosed at the end so that he can, what? He can bring that test again. There is a little bit of a test all during the thousand year reign because even though Christ is ruling with a rod of iron, men still have to go to Jerusalem to worship. And if they don't, they won't get blessed. If they do, they will. That is the way it is.

But at the end, when Satan is loosed and tempts them, does man pass the test or fail the test? Man fails the test again. So God has to judge Satan, the beast, the false prophet, you

know, the antichrist. They are all thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone and all the men that rejected God's plan are thrown in there too. And then God finally starts the final new thing, which is the new heaven and the new earth wherein dwells righteousness. So that is the dispensational view. That is the way they view history, is going through these time periods. Okay?

Now, let's just, let's quickly try to go through the covenant view and then we will take a break. Then we will come back and discuss it all. Let's start with the covenant view and the *diatheke* or the cutting through. The covenant view believes that there is really just one covenant. Okay? That is important to know. There is really only one covenant. And that is the covenant of grace. But the covenant of grace is unfolding like a flower. And it starts with works: Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David and the new covenant. It just begins and it slowly is just one unfolding flower.

In other words, the dispensational view does what? They make a break between this time period and this time period and this time period and this time period. There is a break between each one. In the covenant view there is no break. It all builds upon this one. This one builds upon this one. It keeps building and building and building until it is finally unfolded and you see this just been one new covenant all along. There is no break.

So when you start thinking covenant theology, you have got to get rid of your breaks, as far as time period or else you cannot think like a true covenant theologian. Okay, there is no break. There is just one covenant, and it is called the covenant of grace. And so it builds on top of the previous covenant there. It is progressive.

The Father chose. The Son paid the penalty. And the Holy Spirit will apply the work of the Son. And that is just the new covenant. It is a bond in blood. The bottom line of a covenant is what? What is a covenant? It is an agreement. Probably a better word is that it is an agreement, but it is a relationship. There is a relationship built on blood. *Diatheke* means, "cutting through." They cut the animal in half. They walk through the bloody path. It is a relationship based on blood.

And so, what we see here I think one of the best definitions of the covenant thought process was given by Charles Spurgeon. And let's just read what Charles Spurgeon had to say (in his sermon) about the eternal covenant between the persons of the Godhead, because that is where it begins. And Spurgeon says this, under his definition of the covenant of grace. First of all, the Father speaks. Let's read there what the Father speaks. This is what the Father says when He speaks.

The Father says,

I, the Most High Jehovah, do hereby give unto my only begotten and well-beloved Son, a people, countless beyond the number of the stars, who shall be by him washed from sin, by him preserved, and kept and led, and by him, at last, presented before my throne without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing. I covenant by oath, and swear by myself, because I can swear by no greater, that these whom I now give to Christ shall be for ever the objects of my eternal love. Them I will forgive through the merit of the blood. To these will I give a perfect righteousness; these will I adopt and make my sons and daughters, and these shall reign with me through Christ eternally.

That is what the Father said. And it is based on what?—the blood.

Then what did the Son say? Jesus Christ, the Son said this:

My Father, on my part I covenant that in the fullness of time, I will become man. I will take upon myself the form and nature of the fallen race. I will live in their wretched world, and for my people I will keep the law perfectly. I will work out a spotless righteousness, which shall be

acceptable to the demands of thy just and holy law. In due time, I will bear the sins of all my people. Thou shalt exact their debts on me; the chastisement of their peace I will endure, and by my stripes, they shall be healed. My Father, I covenant and promise that I will be obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. I will magnify thy law, and make it honorable. I will suffer all they ought to have suffered. I will endure the curse of thy law, and all the vials of thy wrath shall be emptied and spent upon my head. I will then rise again; I will ascend unto heaven; I will intercede for them at thy right hand; and I will make myself responsible for every one of them, that not one of those whom thou hast given me shall ever be lost, but I will bring all my sheep of whom, by thy blood, thou hast constituted me the shepherd—I will bring every one safe to thee at last.

That is what the Son covenants by blood.

And then, finally, the Holy Spirit covenants this:

I hereby covenant, that all whom the Father giveth to the Son, I will in due time quicken. I will show them their need of redemption; I will cut off from them all groundless hope and destroy their refuges of lies. I will bring them to the blood of sprinkling; I will give them faith whereby this blood shall be applied to them, I will work in them every grace; I will keep their faith alive; I will cleanse them and drive out all depravity from them, and they shall be presented at last spotless and faultless. (Charles H. Spurgeon)

So, what is man's part then? If this is the eternal covenant, what does man do in relationship to what God has covenanted to do? He simply consents. He simply agrees. He receives. He accepts it. This is sort of like in Genesis 15 when Abraham said, "amen." God said that He would do it; Abraham said, "Amen."

So the covenant of works—the first one we would look at would be—Adam's relationship to God in the Garden. And you know, Romans 5:12–21 speaks of the new relationship that is based on the second Adam, or the last Man, you might say—Jesus Christ. And there are definite responsibilities here and there is obedience. I mean even in the covenant relationship there is this obedience. If this is the eternal covenant, what does man do in relationship to what God has covenanted to do? He simply consents. He simply agrees. He receives. He accepts it.

Now many covenant theologians do not include the covenant of works within the covenant thought process. Which I do not think you can do. I think you have got to include it because there has to be consistency. If you are expecting the dispensationalist to take all seven of their periods, then you have to expect the covenants to take all seven of their periods. The reason that many covenants won't include the covenant of works is because it is based on works. It is based on obedience for man; because if the first covenant was based on obedience of man, and man failed it and did not really enter into it fully, then there is the opportunity for maybe a later covenant to also be based on the obedience of man.

Now, of course we understand that the only way man can be obedient is if Jesus Christ lives in him. We cannot be obedient on our own. But still we speak of the obedience of one Man, the Man Jesus Christ. So from the very beginning of the covenant of works, we see God does expect obedience from mankind, even in this gracious covenant.

And that is why I see grace is for the purpose of obedience. Why do you have grace? You have the dynamic of the Holy Spirit, the power of the life of the risen Christ who is ascended and praying for you; so you can obey and keep the law, so you can keep the

covenant, so you can keep the relationship. God has intended that from the beginning. It is based on His relationship with His own Son. And Spurgeon brought that out well in his understanding of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit and what they covenanted before the foundation of the world. And so, He does still expect us to have a true relationship of obedience there.

So that unfolded into the Adamic covenant which God made with Adam in Genesis chapter 3. Now Adam is outside the Garden, but the covenant is just unfolding, getting larger and becoming more visible. And the responsibilities still carry over. It is just the basis of man's relationship has changed a little bit, but obedience is still expected. And although man cannot relate to God anymore on the same basis except through Jesus Christ, he still has to relate to God based on obedience. The problem is, man is not just partly impotent; he is totally impotent to do it. But because of God's gracious covenant, it can eventually take place through Jesus Christ. And so God graciously gives in Genesis 3:15, the promise of a Redeemer. And so the covenant view is just seeing that God has unfolded from works to Adam and in Genesis 3:15 He brings the promise of a new Redeemer.

And then God unfolds His covenant further, because only grace can rescue man. God enters into a covenant with Noah and Noah's covenant builds on the other covenants. The heart of the Noahic covenant is a covenant of grace, the same thing. God spares him and his family. And it says, "Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord" (Genesis 6:8). Right? So it is still a covenant of grace. And He just says, be fruitful, replenish the earth; multiply, your seed upon the earth again." And He says, "don't take anybody's life." But it is still a covenant, a relationship that He has with man. Do (observe) capital punishment and you can eat meat from now on, too. God added a few things in His relationship. He said, "All right, you don't have to just eat vegetables anymore. You can eat meat. Just don't eat it with the blood."

So the relationship is unfolding. God has still got the covenant; He is just showing more things in terms of relationship with man. His covenant with Abraham is also a serious

covenant based on blood. And Abraham has to sacrifice even his own son. And he gets to the point that Abraham is going to sacrifice his son and God stops him and says, "I have provided a sacrifice. It will even be Myself because I am still pointing forward from the same covenant in the beginning. I am still pointing forward to the time I am going to bring My Son and He is going to fulfill what is called the new covenant."

And so do you see how the covenant just keeps unfolding? It is just like a flower that is growing. It is the same covenant of grace. It has not changed. It is just that, you know, God reveals a few more things about it as time goes on. And just because you are in a gracious covenant with God does not diminish your responsibility towards God or towards man. Some people think it does, but He still wants obedience and He wants it to be a joyful kind of obedience. You cannot enjoy the covenant apart from true submission and obedience. Abraham could not enjoy it unless he submitted and obeyed God and nobody else can enjoy it unless they submit and obey God. Jesus was the one Man that was obedient and now He is in us and His same Spirit is in us crying, "Abba, Father." We want to obey and submit to God because of the gracious covenant that was made there.

Then He comes to Moses, after saying that Abraham would be the new guy and be the key for a relationship with the world because He would bring the Messiah through this guy. And so He gives a little more information on how He is going to unfold the new covenant by saying, "You are the guy. It is your family. It is your descendants. It will come through you."

But then He turns because of who man is and what man is and He makes a covenant with Moses. And the Mosaic covenant is from Genesis 19 through Exodus 24 primarily. You see four key viewpoints and several points that are important about this covenant. The Abrahamic covenant was not annulled. His promise to Abraham was not annulled by the law. If you are thinking from the covenant viewpoint, then we are just having a further unfolding of the original covenant, not an additional thing. The dispensationalists say, "Well, the law was added." But the covenant viewpoint is, no, not really. Not in that

sense. They are saying that the promise is the same. And it is temporarily replaced, you might say, by a different kind of relationship.

Secondly, the law was not something new. It was not something added. God's requirement of obedience was the same. It never changed. God is just unfolding more clearly what He expects. That is the covenant viewpoint. He was not adding something but He was just explaining obedience more clearly by giving the law.

Thirdly, the law does not end, or at least the moral law does not end with the Mosaic covenant. You know, it continues on, because moral law was never given as a way of salvation. So the covenant viewpoint says, "Look, God never gave the law as a way of salvation to begin with, so why would the law ever end." So they see the law continues on—the moral law, not necessarily the ceremonial law—because they see that as more cultural. But the moral law continues on. It has never changed. It is just an unfolding of what God expects. And He is making clear the kind of relationship and obedience He wants. So this covenant just builds on the former covenant. It is not something added that goes away.

And then fourthly, he says the law was given and God made it more specific so that we could see the need that we have, that we could see the reality of sin. That we could humble ourselves and be taught better how to obey God, because that is what God wanted from the beginning in the covenant relationship.

Then finally, to get to David and God makes a new covenant with David in 2 Samuel 7. And God says that this is uniquely messianic: "Not only have I chosen a nation through which the Messiah will come, but now I have chosen a family. And the Messiah has to come from this guy's family. I am being more specific in My relationships." Because He is trying to narrow it down to His Son Jesus Christ. And so they are only fulfilled in the seed of David. And of course the big question between covenant and dispensation theology kind of comes there because is it literal or is it figurative? Is it literal seed or the

figurative seed there? So He promises, from David's family, I will bring forth the Messiah.

And then finally, we get to Matthew and that is the difference. Dispensationalists will say, "We went from Exodus 19 to Acts 1 and then the new dispensation of grace started here." But the covenant theologian will go, "No, no, no. We went from Exodus 19 to Matthew 1. And the seed of David showed up in Jesus Christ and we got the new covenant. End of story." You see? There is a difference in the way they are viewing history. One says, "We go to Acts chapter one." And the other one says, "No, no, no, no! We went to Matthew chapter one and the seed of David showed up, just like we start in Matthew when it says that Christ is from the seed of David." Therefore, it is like that is the big deal and that is the end of the story. So, the covenant view is like everything starts there in Matthew 1. But the dispensational view is like: "No, no, no! It does not start until Jesus ascends to heaven and sends the Holy Spirit. And then we begin the new age, the grace age." So you see how they differ.

But this one (the covenantal view) is just an unfolding of the former promises that were made to Adam and to Noah and to Moses and to Abraham, down to David. And then finally the new covenant in Jeremiah 31 is made to Jesus Christ. And that will be fulfilled in and through Jesus Christ and it will be ratified by His own blood.

Look at a comparison of their views. I just want you to understand, if you can, the two views, because you are going to be faced with this when you talk to people the rest of your life, however long you live, in the church. These are the two basic camps of understanding Scripture. Some people are covenant theologians and some people are dispensational. And then there is a whole bunch of people in the middle that are a mixture. But these are the two big things. So it is good for you to understand how people are viewing history and how they are viewing Scripture this way.

<u>Dispensational Views</u>	<u>Covenantal Views</u>
1) Innocence / Edenic	1) The Covenant of Works
2) Conscience / Ante-Deluvian	2) The Adamic Covenant
3) Government / Post Deluvian	3) The Noahic Covenant
4) Promise / Patriarachal	4) The Abrahamic Covenant
5) Law / Mosaic	5) The Mosaic Covenant
6) Grace / Present	6) The David Covenant
7) Kingdom / Future	7) The New Covenant

You can see that innocence is the time that relates to works. Conscience is the time that relates to Adam. Human government is the time that relates to Noah. Promise is the time that relates to Abraham. Law is the time that relates to Moses. Here is where the problem comes in right here. This is the big problem because you cannot say grace is necessarily the time that relates to David. Can you? Grace is the time that relates to what?—to the new covenant. You don't necessarily relate that to a new covenant. Well, dispensationalists do. But the kingdom relates, maybe more, to the promise to David and sitting on his throne. And so when you get to this point, they match really well, till you go right on down here. Till you get to this point everything is pretty, it is fairly easy to find a good relationship between these two camps of thought. But when you get right here they crisscross and they divide in their theology. And so whereas, grace relates more to the new covenant and the kingdom would relate more to David.

This is where they start changing in the way they relate to one another. So they view it just as an unfolding of one covenant to the next to get to the new covenant. But these guys say, "No, no. That is not what happened in history. What happened in history is after the law, came Jesus Christ who brought grace. And later He is going to come a

second time. This is the first coming and this is the second coming. And He is going to bring a kingdom after that.”

But the covenant theologians go, “No that is not the way you are supposed to look at it. You know, don’t worry about that.” And that is why a lot of the covenant theologians tend to be more amillennial in their thought processes. There is not going to be a future thousand year reign because of the way they view Scripture. On a lot of things we agree up to that point. Then there seems to be the real issue and the battle in the theology is what happens in these last two little sections.

So you kind of have to decide, well, which one are you? You know, where are you at? But you definitely, if you understand the thought processes of the one people that look at divisions and periods of times of history, you look at it one way. And the people that look at it as one eternal covenant from the beginning, unfolding and just the same covenant just unfolding like a flower until it finally is in full bloom in the new covenant, then they have a different view of Scripture. So, let’s make a comparison of the two systems and some of their main tenets.

Comparison of Theological Tenets	
<u>Covenant</u>	<u>Dispensational</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • God has one people: OT and NT compose the body of Christ • God has one plan: throughout all the OT and NT ages • Salvation: one plan of grace throughout history since the fall • Eternity: all who make up the body of Christ will be together in one place in His presence • The Church: includes all redeemed people since the fall • Christ: offered a spiritual kingdom and not an earthly one 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • God has two people: Israel in OT and the Church in NT • God has two separate plans: one for Israel; another for the Church • Salvation: early view had two plans & modern view is by faith in Christ • Eternity: Church rules w/ Christ in the New Jerusalem; while Israel is head of the nations • The Church: born day of Pentecost; OT saints not in the body of Christ • Christ: offered real kingdom to Jews; kingdom postponed until Millennium

First of all concerning God's people, covenant theology has this view that God has one people, the church, with two manifestations of it. One is in the Old Testament and the other is in the New Testament. And what God has been doing since the fall of man, concerns the calling out of a people to be His own. And the saints of God of the Old and New Testament compose the one body of Christ. And so they do not see the church as being a new thing, but they see the church as always existing. The church existed in the Old Testament. And the church existed in the New Testament.

Dispensational theology, however, has two people. There is Israel in the Old Testament, the earthly people and there is the church, in the New Testament, the heavenly people. There is an antithesis between the two people and the two do not meet, as far as equaling each other in the two periods of dispensation—the Old and the New.

So you see concerning God's people, the covenants see one people; the dispensationalists see two people—an old and a new—Israel and the church.

Then, concerning God's plan for His people, covenant theology says that since God has one people, the church, it has one plan for every age. Since Adam fell until the very end of time, it unfolds like a flower and there has only been one plan. There has not been a bunch of plans, just one.

Whereas with dispensational theology, its view says, "Since God has two people (Israel and the church), God has two plans. He has a plan for the earthly people (Israel, the kingdom) and He also has a plan for the church. And so they view, the church as this parenthetical period until God gets back to Israel. It is called the kingdom. And it is explained in Romans 9 through 11. So God's plan is to call out an earthly people for Himself, or a heavenly people for Himself, in the New Testament era.

The covenant view says that there is one plan. The dispensationalists say, "No, there are two plans. There is one for the Old Testament Israel that will still be fulfilled. But there is

one separate plan for the church.” They have a different thing and they get raptured and they go to be with the Lord and they come back. So, they see two different plans.

Now concerning salvation, covenant theology says that God has had one plan of salvation for His people that began to be worked out since the fall of Adam. It holds that the plan is a plan of grace and that each covenant is an outworking of the everlasting covenant of grace, as we read that Charles Spurgeon so well put. The content of faith of both Testaments has been the Lord Jesus Christ. Though obviously, the New Testament era has a deeper concept of understanding in its content of faith concerning Christ.

So passages like John 5:39, where Christ commanded the Jews to search out the Old Testament Scriptures because they testify of Him; and John 5:46 where Christ said Moses and the prophets wrote of Him; and Luke 24:27 where Christ began at Moses and the prophets and expounded the Scriptures of things concerning Himself, convince the covenant theologian that the Old Testament does have in its content the revelation of Jesus Christ. Therefore, faith had for its content the person of Christ also. Thus, to deny that the faith of the Old Testament saints was faith in a Messiah is to make them completely ignorant of the interpretation of the Old Testament revelation which they had received. Thus, covenant theology holds to one plan of salvation for God’s one people as He works out His one plan throughout history since the fall. See, that is their view.

Now dispensationalists, their view has been in some controversy. It believes in one plan of salvation or two. Modern dispensationalists argue for one plan of salvation—salvation by faith. Yet some like Charles Ryrie argue for a salvation by faith, but meaning a salvation by faith in God without any content of Christ. The controversy over whether dispensational theology has held to two plans of salvation may well go back to statements made by early dispensationalists. For example, the Scofield Reference Bible states:

As a dispensation, grace begins with the death and resurrection of Christ. The point of testing is no longer

legal obedience as the condition of salvation, but acceptance or rejection of Christ.

So they view that in the Old Testament it was legal obedience. Whereas the covenant says, no, it was faith in the Old Testament too.

Lewis Sperry Chafer writes this, as a dispensationalist:

With the call of Abraham and the giving of the law and all that has followed, there are two widely different standardized divine provisions whereby man, who is utterly fallen, might come into the favor of God. Under grace, the fruit of the Spirit is that which indicates the present possession of the blessing through pure grace. While under the kingdom, the blessing shall be to such as merit by their own works.

So in other words he says, like during the covenant of works, that when we get to the kingdom reign it will be very similar to what the covenant of works initially was when God first started with Adam. God will go back and relate to the people under the same kind of thing. That is what Lewis Sperry Chaffer says.

In this age, God is dealing with men on the ground of His grace as it is in Christ. His dealings with men in the coming age are based on a very different relationship. At that time the King will rule with a rod of iron. There is no word of the cross. There is no word of grace in the kingdom teachings but it will be ruled with a rod of iron. So he says that is going to be just like the initial covenant of works. Any view of two plans of salvation would be strongly denied by modern dispensationalists. If you went to Dallas Theological Seminary today, they would say, no, there is just one plan.

Now, concerning the eternal destiny of God's people, covenant theology says that since God has one people, one plan for all these people, and one plan of salvation concerning the redemption of His people, God has also one place in eternity for them all. That place in eternity and for eternity will be in His presence for all those who make up the one body of Christ.

Dispensational theology says—in some, not all. Some dispensationalists hold that the church will sit with Christ the King on His throne in the New Jerusalem, as He rules over the nations of mankind, while Israel will continue as head of the nations on earth. So Israel has one position, the church has another position. The distinctive of these two people continuing throughout eternity is the conviction of many dispensationalists, but not all. So some dispensationalists believe that, others don't.

Concerning the birth of the church, covenant theology holds that the church existed prior to the New Testament era, even back to the Old Testament period, including all the redeemed people of God since the fall of Adam. Certainly this view would agree there are two testaments, but not two people of God. There are two different sets of ordinances for the two testaments, but a local manifestation of the body of Christ. But there is still only one body.

What took place on the Day of Pentecost was not the birth of the church as the body of Christ, but the empowerment of the New Testament manifestation of the body of Christ.

Whereas the dispensationalist says: "No, the church was born on the Day of Pentecost and it did not exist before that time or that point of time in history. The body of Christ is strictly New Testament, not to be found in the Old Testament. The Old Testament saints do not make up, or are not part of the body of Christ. The New Testament believers are the bride of Christ. They are something new, something different."

But the covenant says: "No they were not. We are all the same."

But the dispensationalist says: “No, it is a new thing. It started with Pentecost.”

The covenant says: “No, it did not start with Pentecost. That is just another unfolding of the flower, another form or manifestation of the old church.”

All right, what about the purpose of Christ’s first coming? When Christ came the first time, the covenant theologian says that the purpose of Christ’s first coming was to establish the new Israel; that is the New Testament era of the New Testament manifestation of the church. Actually, this was a continuation of God’s past plan with a definite historical change. And the church was now related to God in a new and better covenant, yet which was still a manifestation of the old covenant of grace. The kingdom, which He preached, was not the offer of an earthly kingdom, but the authority of the king over the life of the one who would accept Him. Thus the kingdom Christ spoke of and offered was a present spiritual invisible kingdom. Christ never offered an earthly or visible kingdom. You see that?

But the dispensationalist says: “No, the purpose of Christ’s first coming was to establish an earthly kingdom in the fulfillment of Old Testament promises to Israel. Christ came forth preaching and offering the kingdom to the Jews. And had the Jews accepted His offer, an earthly visible kingdom would have been immediately established. Then He would have fulfilled that promise. But they didn’t. They rejected it and therefore He turned to the gentiles. So their view of Christ’s first coming is different as well.

Now, regarding the postponement of the kingdom, covenant theology has no concept of a postponed kingdom because it does not believe that Christ offered the Jews a literal and physical kingdom at the first coming. So the covenant says there is going to be no future kingdom because He did not even offer it when He came the first time. There is not such thing.

The dispensationalist believes the kingdom that Christ offered the Jews at His first coming has been postponed until the millennial reign because the Jews rejected the King.

Then God moved to put, you know, plan one, the kingdom, in temporary abeyance, while at the same time He began the unfolding of plan two, the church. The church is only a parenthetical period until God can get back to plan one, the kingdom. Before God returns to unfurl plan one, plan two must be brought to a close by the Rapture of the church from the earth. The Rapture will be followed by a Great Tribulation period. Thus, the church's Rapture is a pre-Tribulational rapture, which will bring judgment on a Christ-rejecting gentile world and the purification and preparation of His people, the nation of Israel. And then they will receive the King when He comes back the second time.

So their view of the postponement of the kingdom is different too. The covenant says that there is no postponement because there is not really an earthly kingdom. But the dispensationalists say: "No, there is an earthly kingdom. It has been postponed and like what you read in Romans 9 through 11, it insures that He will work with them again." And so their view of history is different.

Concerning the church as the work of God, the covenant theologian believes the calling out of an elect people—that is the formation of the ecclesia—has always been God's primary work. Therefore those of covenant persuasion, who hold to a Rapture of the church from this world, would place it at the end of the Tribulation period. They would argue that it is only the dispensationalist's strong antitheses between Israel and the church which created a pre-Tribulation. That is the dispensationalist has to get the church, plan one, out of the world before the Tribulation so God can get back to plan one, the conversion and purification of Israel.

On the other hand, the one holding to a covenant view may—not all do—see that God will deal with Israel again in the future. But what He does, He shall do through the New Testament manifestation of the church. Therefore, some covenant theologians would argue that the church will pass through the Tribulation and will be God's instrument of redeeming Israel. Those saved during the Tribulation will be added to the one church and will be part of the one body of Christ. These men would argue that it is not the Rapture passages of the Bible which would lead a dispensationalist to a pre-Tribulation Rapture,

but his concept of the church as standing totally antithetically to Israel and not capable of being on earth during the time God works with this so-called earthly people.

But the dispensationalist says that the church is a parenthetical work of God. Hypothetically, if there had been no rejecting of the kingdom by Israel, there would have been no church. Before God gets back to that primary work (the kingdom of Israel), the secondary work must be graciously brought to an end by the Rapture of the church at the beginning of the Tribulation period. So, they have a different view, obviously, of God's relationship to the church.

**“Behold, the days are coming,
says the LORD, when I will
make a new covenant with the
house of Israel and with the
house of Judah.”**

Jeremiah 31:31

Now regarding the fulfillment of the new covenant, covenant theology is convinced that the promises of the new covenant in Jeremiah 31:31 are fulfilled in the New Testament.

Dispensationalists, like Darby, held that the new covenant in Scripture was made with Israel and Judah and not to the church. Fulfillment will be at a later time, to them. Mention of the new covenant in the New Testament has no reference to the church.

C. I. Scofield held that there is one new covenant with a double application—one to the church now and one to Israel in the future. Another view believes that there are actually two new covenants in the New Testament—one with Israel and the other with the church. The biblical references must be divided into three distinct and separate applications: those in the Gospels (which refer to the new covenant), along with the references in Hebrews 8, 9, 10 and 13, have application to the new covenant with the church. Those references in Hebrews 8:7-13 and 10:16 would refer to a new covenant with Israel. Finally, Hebrews 12:24 would refer to both of them being brought together. So they disagree on the fulfillment of the new covenant as well.

Now regarding the problem of amillennialism versus pre-millennialism, covenant theology, historically has found, for the most part, an amillennial theology, defining the kingdom as strictly spiritual, invisible and present now in this era. However, it is not correct to say that all covenant theologians are amillennial. Some, in recent years, have been strong pre-Millennialists. That is to say, they not only hold the kingdom to be present now in its spiritual form, but they would also hold that there will be an earthly kingdom in the future, but without the return of the Old Testament memorials, which dispensational pre-Millennialists would see. They would also hold that God will deal with Israel once again, but not outside of the church. So there are some covenant theologians that do believe there will be a future millennial reign. It will be brought about by the church and that is why it is post-Trib.

The dispensationalist theology has always gone hand in hand with pre-millennialism, though in many senses, a different brand that one would find in a covenant pre-Millennialist. It would be true to say that all dispensationalists are pre-Millennialists and that most dispensationalists are pre-Tribulation Rapturists. But it would not be true to say that all pre-Millennialists are dispensationalists, or that all pre-Millennialists are covenant theologians because they are not. So, they disagree in how that will be formed at the Second Coming.

The Second Coming of Christ. The covenant theology views the coming of Christ as the culmination of God's one total plan, the calling out of a people for Himself based on His everlasting covenant of grace. Some believe His coming will lead immediately to the final judgment and the eternal state. Others believe His coming will be followed by the millennial period and then the final judgment of all men will take place, followed by the eternal state.

Whereas, dispensationalists see the Second Coming of Christ fulfilling a manifold purpose that consisted of His coming for His heavenly people, the church, at the Rapture. It also consists of His coming in power and great glory to bring final judgment on a gentile, Christ-rejecting nation—all the nations that rejected Christ. The two comings are separated by a tribulation period where God purifies His people, the Jews, and begins His judgment on the nation. The Second Coming in power and great glory will be followed by the millennial period, which will then lead to the final judgment of all men and then the eternal state.

So you can see, all the way through, almost every major issue, the view is different. And why is it different? In the conclusion, there is just a different view of history. And the dispensationalists see a time of innocence that goes into a time of conscience, to a time of human government, to a time of promise, to law, to grace and then finally the kingdom, and then the new heaven and the new earth. Whereas the covenant says, no, it is just an unfolding of works from Adam to Noah to Abraham to Moses to David and finally to Jesus Christ Himself. And then He will return and bring about the new heaven and the new earth.

So, you know, let me come back to the original statement. All men have a theology—women too. All women, all men have a theology. Many have embraced one of these two systems. Others have little or no idea of what constitutes their theological system. Nonetheless, they do have a means of understanding God. They do have a system of theology and a world view. Everybody in this room has a world view. Whether you can identify it or not, you still have it. It is there. You have a theology whether you know it or

not. It is just some people have take the time to identify what they believe; others have not.

So, perhaps the discussion has left you a bit bewildered. Well, if great men of God have disagreed and still do disagree on systems of theology—and it must be admitted that the two systems we have discussed are not the only systems of theology, but they are the two basic ones. Then a student may wonder how he or she could ever come to any definite conclusion concerning one system of theology. Perhaps we should look at just a couple basic guidelines to follow in developing a system of theology. Just a couple!

First, in the initial stages of your Christian life, do not make the concern for the development of a system of theology the matter of primary importance. You know how skilled man is at putting first things last and last things first. When some become Christians, and maybe even before, they seem to desire a quick easy handle on understanding the Bible and its overall message, especially the prophetic system. Instead of reading the Bible in order to gain an overall impression and understanding of its message, men plunge into the deepest subjects. Instead of reading the Bible to learn its vast and illuminating content, they often begin to read books about the Bible which shape them and could even prejudice them towards the true message of the Bible.

A good rule for the new Christian to follow is this: the first few years of my Christian experience I will make the Bible my primary object of reading and study. And that should be true throughout our whole Christian experience. Human writing should never take the place of Scripture in our lives as our authority, or as our focus of study, but especially in the early stages of our walk with Christ. We need continual input of the Word of God apart from human writings.

So, learn the content of each book of the Bible. Learn the great stories of the Bible. That is why we went through Mears's book, *What the Bible is All About*. Not that you are new Christians, but it is like, most people never get through and they never read the whole Bible from Genesis to Revelation. That is why we go through Chuck's series there and

listen to everything. It is important to just get through the Bible and learn the great things of the Bible.

Get acquainted with the great characters of the Bible. Come to know the content location and sections of the Bible. Learn the verses of the Bible, the great ones. Use a Bible with a minimum of notes. It is just the smart thing to do before you begin to try to develop a system of theology. Read key books that deal with the systems of Christian theology. The mistakes so often made by Christians are those who read books covering just one side of an issue. That is the problem. And that is true concerning the major and minor doctrines of Christianity, as well as the systems of Christianity. Obviously, if we read only one side of an issue, we will probably emerge with that viewpoint as our conviction. Read books from both viewpoints. You know, read a covenant theology and read a dispensational theology. Get both viewpoints. Don't just take one side. Look at both.

Then check carefully the definitions of each system. Are they consistent? When they use a term, is it a biblical term and do they use it consistently? And then check the hermeneutics of each system because that is really the issue. It is the hermeneutics because it is your view. The question is not approached by the simplistic notion that one system basically is literal while the other one is figurative. In reality both systems handle some sections figuratively and some sections literally. They both do that. So, you have got to take that into consideration. Check their hermeneutics. And we do not have time to go into all of that.

But I do want to ask you this since there are basically three ways to look at it. That is the one-program view, which is covenant, or the two-program view which is dispensational. But isn't there a possibility for a third view, which is a combination of the two? I think so. And I tend to lean that direction. I look at the covenant view and I look at the dispensational view, and I realize there is a lot of truth in both views. But there are some problems in both views. And I am not smart enough to reconcile all of those problems. What I want to do is just look at it and appreciate the two views and realize that I don't know everything. But I want to understand this guy is a covenant theologian. I want to

understand where he is coming from. And this guy is a dispensationalist. Where is he coming from?

And after I see where they are coming from, then what do I want to do? I just want to get back to the Bible and go, “Lord, I don’t know all of this. So, help me. Smarter men than me, greater men than me, and more spiritual men than me have disagreed on these issues for years. But I do not want to despair because of that. Because I know You have called me and You are walking in me and using me. And I am developing my relationship with You. And I want to have a large view of the Bible so that I do not find myself polarizing to one extreme or the other.” And so I want to read both sides. I do not want to just read covenant theology. And I do not want to just read dispensational theology. I want to read both of them so that I can step back and kind of understand where it is coming from so that I won’t polarize and go to one extreme or the other. But people like to polarize because they like to have all of the answers for everything. And that is a form of pride.

And remember the last thing that I would ever say would be this: “Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies” (1 Corinthians 8:1). And so when you find yourself in a place where you are going to be discussing some of these issues of theology, always go back to remember that knowledge will just puff up and produce pride. But if you can bring it back to Jesus Christ—that is why we wanted to read from Genesis to Revelation and realize that it is Christocentric—from that standpoint, I go: “Yeah, I love the covenant view.” Because the covenant people keep bringing it back to the fact that it is all Christ. And that whole new covenant thing, that part of it I love. But then the dispensationalists do that too. They will say that it was Christ during this period and it was Christ during that period. You know, it somehow relates to Him.

And that is the point. Whether you are dispensational or a covenant, we still always need to be going back to Christ because it is all about Him. And if we get back to Christ in a true picture, we will be humble and we won’t be prideful. And we won’t have to draw swords and kill each other from one camp to the next. That’s just the way it is.

For example, I was—I won't mention the name but someone came to me this week and he showed me an article by a renowned Christian. And he said, "What do you think about this?" And I read the article because in the article this guy was saying—for example in Ephesians 2:8-9—this guy was saying it, "For by grace are you saved through faith, and that not of yourselves. It is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast." And this great Christian, who is well known today, wrote that the thing that we were given as a gift, he said was faith. Faith was the gift. So we were looking at it and Joe said, "What do you think about that in terms of the grammar?"

So I looked at it and I went, "Well, grace is feminine and faith is feminine." But the article used here says that we receive this *gift*—which is neuter. So, you can't take a neuter article and refer it back to a feminine word, as a rule. That would be a really extreme exception to the rule. And here is Paul writing and we know Paul was a super educated guy and his writings are so consistent in terms of their form in grammar and syntax. And so, since Paul is writing it, I can't say that faith is the gift. I do not think it is. And I do not think grace is the gift either. Because that is feminine and it does not go back to either one of those. So if it is neuter, what does it refer back to? It refers back to the whole view of salvation. It refers to the whole statement of it.

"For by grace are you saved through faith, and that not of yourselves" (Ephesians 2:8). What does the *toûto*, the neuter, refer back to? It refers back to the salvation, the process of being saved. It is by grace through faith. So it includes both of them. But what he referring back to is the whole concept of the whole phrase which can be neuter. But when you break it down and grace is feminine and faith is feminine, it cannot refer back to either one of those. It refers to the whole concept, the big thing. But men, in their theologies want to break it down because they are trying to prove their point. You know, they want to prove their little theology.

So, this happens all the time in Christianity. So I just warn you to step back and try to get the big view. But at the same time, don't get so prideful that you can't talk to people. Humble yourself and don't draw swords and kill each other.

All right, questions?

Student question: Which view is older, covenant or dispensational theology?

Well, there's always—which is the older view? I think there have always been the two views. Some people say, well, which was the older view, like in terms of eschatology? Did the early church believe in the Rapture? Did they believe it was pre-Trib or did they believe it was post-Trib? I think they had both views at the same time. I think there have always been the two views. And I hate to relate it to this, so take this with a grain of salt because to turn it over to, in any country, in any place where you have people that get to express their opinions. In America, we have Democrats and Republicans are our two big groups, right? And you see it all the time on television. The Republicans are sitting there going, “Why in the world does this crazy Democrat think like that?” And then it goes counterpoint and the Democrats are sitting there going, “How in the world can this Republican think like that?” And they are both looking at each other going, “What is wrong with you? How could you think this way?”

And that is the whole issue, isn't it? Is the fact that they have two different ways of looking at things. And that is just part of the way human nature is. You know, we just look at things differently. And I think that is what you see here. It has always been there, two views. And it is just the way people look at history. It has always been there, always will be.

And that is why I wanted to bring it up, because though for some of you, you don't really care, but some of you do. You are still going to be faced with these two basic views of Christianity and views of Scripture. They have always been here.

“Questions?”

Student question: “Why do you think God did it this way? There are several ways to look at this and why didn’t He just make it clear? Any idea?”

He hasn’t told me. I am shocked! He should tell me. I don’t know. You know, it is sort of like—somebody was asking a question yesterday about Hebrews 6, and if they have tasted of the heavenly gift and da, da, da, da. And they fall away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance. And you know, on and on and on. I do not understand why the Holy Spirit, when He wrote the first five chapters of Hebrews, why He wrote those in the indicative mode. And then when He gets to chapter 6, He just jumps over into the subjunctive mode of hesitating affirmation and the mode of hypothetical statements and gives us this. And then as soon as He finishes, He jumps right back into the indicative mode again. And I go, “what is up with that?” I mean, because the subjunctive mode would be the mode that if you want to be ambiguous about something and not be clear, that is the mode you would jump into. And I go, “well, how come the Holy Spirit jumps into that mode? Right where we want Him to be clear, He jumps into a mode of more ambiguity. And you go, “why did You do that? Now we are going to sit around and argue over this forever!” And it is almost like He goes, “Yeah, I know. That’s good.” But you know what I mean? You go, “what is up with this? You are speaking in the indicative mode. Why didn’t You continue in the indicative mode and make it more clear to us? Why did You have to make it just a little more darkly—that see through a glass darkly thing—couldn’t You have just brought a little more light to it so that we wouldn’t be arguing over whether they were saved and then lost it, or whether they never were saved to begin with? How come You left it so ambiguous on that point?”

And I do not know the answer to that either. I just know that that is what He did. And when I step back and look at it, I know that when something goes into the subjunctive mode, like Hebrews 6, I need to be real careful about what I do with that. If it had been in the indicative mode I would have been more likely to be dogmatic. But since it is subjunctive, I have to go, “Hmm. He purposely wanted to be a bit ambiguous here. I need to chill.” That is what it tells me. And that is what I do. Okay.

Student question: “When you gave the meaning of the dispensational view, you said that it was against God’s nature to judge, and I was just wondering, isn’t He just? Wouldn’t that be according to His nature to judge, in order to be just?”

Yes, but I think you have to read it in the context. What they were explaining was that it is not normal. It is God’s strange work. Yes, He is just and He does judge, but it is not His normal nature to do that. You know what I mean? He has been very gracious and He does not want to judge. But He does because it is His strange work. But it is not what He wants to do.

And even through the Old Testament, you notice how God dealt with His children. I am not saying this is the way you should deal with your children. Because some people that read books like *Raising Kids God’s Way* would not agree with it at all. But when you look at the history of the Old Testament, how did God deal with His children? We saw it when we went through, didn’t we? He went to His kids and He said, “Don’t do that.” Right? Remember? And then what did the kids do? They did it. And then what did God do? He sent a prophet or somebody and said, “I thought I said don’t do that. Isn’t that what I said?” And what did they do? They kept doing it. And then what did God do? God sent another prophet and said, “Didn’t I tell you not to do that? If you keep doing that, do you know what is going to happen if you keep doing this? You are going to get judged.” And then what did they do? They kept doing it. And then God sent another prophet and said, “I thought I said I was—you guys are getting close!” You know what I mean? And then finally what did God do? Bam! Finally He judged. And what I see all through the Old Testament, God is dealing with His own kids. God was patient and He warned them and He warned them and He warned them. But boy, when the day came, He beat the mess out of them. I mean, He just—He didn’t just go, “Sorry, I told you...[slap, slap].” I mean, He beat them. He judged them. It hurt! You know what I mean? And they remembered it for a long time. But then, after a while, you forget. And you go back to it again.

That is the way I see God dealing all through. As I step back and I look at it, I see God dealing that way. And I know there are some things they say today, you tell a child once. You say, “no,” and that is it. If he does not obey you—Bam! You know, and then he learns quicker. And I am not saying you shouldn’t do that, necessarily. I am just saying that when I look at the way God did it, He was pretty patient. And He reminded people over and over and over again before He finally judged. But then He did deal with it and it was for rebellion because normally when God judged, it was always for rebellion. I mean, when somebody spills their milk, God doesn’t care. Okay, you spilled your milk. So what? Big deal! But it is rebellion if God kept telling them, “Don’t push the glass over” and you push it over. Because He said: “don’t push it over” and you push it over anyway that is rebellion. That is the spirit of rebellion. And He kept dealing with that. And when they finally got to the point where He said, “These guys are just rebellious.” Then He said, “I am going to whip them so that they can remember it.” And He did.

Some of you have experienced that, I can tell. Some of you never have been spanked.

All right, any other questions about it?

Student question: “Do you think it is good to study both views?”

I look at both and try to appreciate both.

Student question: “And can you give us some authors or titles to read?”

Well, I certainly lean—I have to admit—I lean more towards dispensational theology. And I am not sure if that is because that is the way I was raised. You know what I mean? That is what I have heard most of my life. But when I went off to Bible college, the original founder of the Bible college that I went to was Presbyterian. The original founder and he was a covenant theologian. But it is mainly a missionary school. And that is what always cracked me up. It is the whole thing about the Calvinism, Arminianism thing. You know, people say, Calvinists aren’t missionary. You know, that is not true. They are

some of the most missionary people that have ever existed, Calvinists. You can't say that and it is the same way with covenant. You can't say that because some of the covenant theologians I have met are some of the most missionary minded people in the world.

But when I went to Columbia Bible College at that time, what I appreciated about them was that they taught both. They taught the dispensational view and the covenant view side by side. They wanted us to understand both views. And I was raised in churches that were mostly dispensational. So, I was influenced by that. But what I have tried to do is I have tried to read Hodge, you know, and get a whole covenant view of theology. At the same time, I want to read Lewis Sperry Shaffer and find out the other side. I want to be able to know what these guys are thinking and believing because I am still working on my understanding of the whole view of Scripture and how the two fit together.

I just know where it breaks down is over here, you know. And this is where, I tend to, when I get to this point, I tend to go, well, I lean more this way. But there really is this Romans 9–11 thing going on, that there will be a kingdom. It is promised to Israel. Do I understand all of it? No. I don't understand it. I just step back and I see it and I go, "you know what, I think there is going to be one." Can I answer all the questions about how it is going to happen? No! I don't know how to answer those questions. Does that bother me? No. It doesn't bother me. It bothers some people. And it probably bothers some people that it does not bother me. And I hope that bothers them.

So don't feel pressured. But just keep looking at it and appreciating it for what it is. And always bring Christ into the middle of it because both of them see Christ. It is just that their view is just a little different. But yeah, I tend to lean a little bit to the dispensational side. But I am certainly not like extreme. I'm more in the middle and so I can have fellowship. I have got good friends that are covenant theologians.

Student question: "If the covenant theology says historically that there is no Millennium and the Bible clearly talks about a thousand year reign, how can they support that view?"

Well, because their view is that this is spiritual. That is their hermeneutic system. Their hermeneutic says, “we read that passage that you read, but our hermeneutics tells us that is spiritual and figurative.” You read it and you go, “oh, my hermeneutics tells me that is literal.” That is the difference. You see it as a literal thousand year reign and they see it as, “no—that is not literal.”

Student question: “Does Calvary Chapel interpret it literally?”

Calvary Chapel teaches a literal thousand year reign. Yeah, absolutely! In that point, Calvary Chapel is definitely dispensational. Exactly! Sure you are. Yeah. And almost every—I don’t know any Calvary Chapel teachers that hold the covenant viewpoint when it comes down to this point at all. They know it and they appreciate it. And so that is why I say you have got to appreciate the two systems that are out there. You know what I mean? And if you understand where people are coming from then it is easier for you to have a relationship with them and even to talk to them.

And you get to a certain point, where you realize what? You have to get to certain points where you agree to disagree, don’t you? And so if I understand their system—when I am talking to somebody that is a covenant theologian and I get down to these two last points—I know when I get to that point I have to do what? I just kind of go, “I can stand here and I can beat my head against a wall and try to beat their head against a wall and we can argue about this forever or we can quickly go: “Okay, we already know we are going to disagree on this interpretation. So let’s just agree to disagree and let’s move on.” Instead of standing around fighting with each other and the world is looking on going: “What are they fighting about now?” I would rather not do that.

That is why I say, I lean definitely toward the dispensational viewpoint, just not extreme. I am not like Dallas. Some people are. That is okay for them.

All right. One more and then we have got to pray.

Student question: For an objective approach to Scripture in terms of hermeneutics, what would you recommend?

Do you mean in terms of a book maybe to read or something? Well, hermeneutics is simply your system, your understanding of how the Bible interprets itself. That is what hermeneutics is. It is you finding within the Bible principles that are found within the Bible about how the Bible interprets itself. But the problem is, I go to the Bible, you go to the Bible. We are looking at the Bible, reading the Bible. And I have some preconceived ideas and you have some preconceived ideas, and those are going to affect what we find in the Bible. You know what I mean, in terms of the way that you come to your conclusion? You know what I mean?

So, you know, like sometime it would be good for you to read something like Milton Terry's book on hermeneutics. That is a good classic book on hermeneutics. And it deals with these systems, because that is all hermeneutics is the track by which you come to meaning. You know, it is just like a railroad track. And you have got this railroad track and you have got this place you are going. Let's say this is meaning. That is where you are headed and you are on this train. And that is interpretation, but meaning is what you want. You don't want interpretation, do you? You want meaning. Where is meaning? Where do you find meaning? Meaning is in the mind of the speaker. Meaning is in the mind of the communicator. Who was the communicator? God. But the way you interpret things, the track you get on to find meaning, is your system of interpretation. And so this track would be called hermeneutics. That is hermeneutics. It is the track that you are on. It is not interpretation. It affects your interpretation because you are following certain laws to come to that. That is why I said there are laws of the Spirit and there are laws of human language. If you stay on the track of the laws of the Spirit and the laws of human language, while you are interpreting and keep adjusting, you will finally get to meaning. If you follow the laws of the Spirit and the laws of human language because the Bible is a linguistic incarnate. It is a God-man thing. Then you will find it eventually because the Lord will lead you into all truth.

It is like what you are saying, what is hard to get, is how can I be a born again Christian and I got my brother and sister over here and they are born again Christians; and when we read the Bible we come up with these two different views. But there is evidence that we both have a relationship with Jesus Christ and our lives have changed and we are not what we used to be. Well, I will tell you how, it is because that is what is going on. Our view and the way we are approaching it is different.

So, what do you do? “Knowledge puffs up; love edifies.” Love them. That is what you do. You might disagree but you have got to love them.

Student question: “When there are different views or interpretations of Scripture, doesn’t that open the door for the cults to come in and give their point of view too? And then cults start by taking partial truths and it just gets so far out there.

Yes. Obviously, that is the whole point. In other words you have got covenant theology and you’ve got dispensational theology. And they are different. It seems like these people that are in here, they can seem to get along and love each other and have relationship. The people out here, you know what I mean, never shall these two meet. They will kill each other. And the cults are out here too. You see what I am saying? They are out here too. But what we are saying is there is something in here; although, I tend to lean on this side.

Well, let’s pray.

Lord, we thank You for this time. We pray that again—because I know I am still learning—we pray that You would lead us into all truth by Your Spirit. We know You will. I do not have any doubt on that. But we’re are going to have this kind of thing going on all the time in the body of Christ. So Lord, help us in our relationships as well.

And thank You for Calvary Chapel that has been kind of—I mean, I know we have got our distinct position on the rapture of the church and it clearly defines us as dispensational there. But also there has been an openness; there has been just an acceptance of fellowship with other members of the body of Christ. At least historically, that has been the case. Let us be fully convinced in our own mind. We have got to be. At the same time, Lord, give us Your love and Your grace. We have just got principles to follow in our relationships in the body of Christ. So help us to keep those principles before us while we are being more of a Berean and more fully searching Your Scripture and being convinced about things. Lord, let us still never forget love and edification of the body as a whole, while we stand for what we believe is the truth. For Your glory, we pray in Jesus name, amen.

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