
a *Grace Notes* course

Foundations I

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Foundations 106

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Lesson 15 – Interpret Recognizing Human Volition

This principle considers the freedom that God gave mankind to make decisions, and the responsibility that goes along with such freedom (John 3:18; Gal 6:7). The principle of human choice is clearly portrayed in the test established for Adam and Eve in Genesis 2-3. God's Omniscience knew that they would eat the fruit of the "tree of knowledge of good and evil," but God was not the cause of that forbidden dinner. Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit because they chose to eat. They were then held responsible for their actions and thus driven from the Garden.

The Bible records both the good and the bad decisions made by mankind. This serves as a testimony to its internal honesty.

There are many terms and words that point clearly to mankind's ability to choose - most notably the words "believe" and "faith" which have the same roots in the Greek language. Because of God's Omniscience (see Principle#1), He has always known who would believe in His Son Jesus Christ, and thus be saved (Rom 8:29; I Pet 1:1-2). His foreknowledge, however, did not remove the requirement to believe.

This principle also recognizes that the Word of God records some of the bad decisions of man. These were volitional acts by man that were allowed by God for the purpose of His plan, but were never commanded by Him. Two examples:

1. The Bible records (but does not condone) the decision by Adam and Eve to eat the fruit (Gen 2 and 3).
2. Jesus Christ knew that Judas would betray Him, and in fact warned Judas that he should not go through with the betrayal (Luke 22:21-23).

Lesson 16 – Interpret Progressively

This principle teaches us that God reveals information over a period of time. For example, the first prophecy of the Messiah, found in Genesis 3:15, is the promised seed of the woman. The Old Testament continues throughout its

entirety to give more information about this "seed."

We are told that the Messiah would be of the seed of Abraham (Gen 12:3), of the seed of Isaac (Gen 21:12), of the seed of Jacob (Gen 35:10-12), of the tribe of Judah (Gen 49:8-11), of the line of Jesse (Isa 11:1), and of the house of David (2 Sam 7:12-16). He would be born at Bethlehem (Mic 5:2). He would be both God and man (Ps 110:1). He would be called Immanuel (Isa 7:14). He would be a prophet (Deut 18:18), a priest (Ps 110:4), a judge (Isa 33:22), and a king (Jer 23:5). He would have a special anointing of the Holy Spirit (Isa 11:2), and a zeal for the house of God (Ps 69:9).

Revelations that are expanded over a period of time (like the one above) form what is called "Progressive Revelation." The general prophecy is made, then significant details concerning that prophecy are revealed over time.

Therefore, it makes sense to look at the first mention made of a given subject, letting it guide our understanding of subsequent occurrences of that same subject. For example, the business and subtlety of Satan are first seen in Genesis 3:1. As we learn more about this "serpent," we are guided by the fact that he is a deceiver who is the direct adversary of God. Satan does not change for the better throughout all of human history (Rev 12:9; 20:2-3,10). However, he has changed his methods over the course of time, but has never changed his attitude (Isa 14:12-14; Rev 12:9; 20:7-8), or his approach - arguing perpetually that becoming a god is within reach. This is made clear again when the "man of lawlessness" takes his seat in the Temple during the Tribulation and proclaims himself to be a god (2 Thes 2:4).

Many times we find that the universal truth about a given subject is taught in conjunction with its first mention. Moreover, several topics found throughout the Bible are first found in the Book of Genesis. Accordingly, a serious and detailed study of the Book of Genesis is important for the one who wants to interpret God's Word.

Lesson 17 – Interpret Dispensationally

Dispensations are periods of history in which God establishes different responsibilities for His people. They are divisions of history which are categorized by these responsibilities. We are told in Hebrews 7:12, “For when the priesthood changes, of necessity there takes place a change of law also.” This verse teaches us that God establishes different responsibilities at different periods of history.

There are four clear Dispensations since the fall of Adam:

1. The Age of the Gentiles from the fall of Adam to the Exodus from Egypt

This age is covered in Genesis and Job. It extends from approximately 3900 B.C. to 1445 B.C.

2. The Age of Israel from the Exodus to the Day of Pentecost;

The Age of Israel is found in all Old Testament books except for Genesis and Job. It also extends to all of the four Gospels and Acts 1. There exists in the Old Testament some passages that refer to the Millennial Age. Two examples are Isaiah 61-66 and Ezekiel 40-48.

The approximate dates of this age are from 1445 B.C. until 33 A.D. This Age will also include the time period from the Rapture of the Church until the Second Advent of Jesus Christ, period known as the "Tribulation" or "Daniel's 70th Week" (Dan 9:24-27).

3. The Age of the Church from the Day of Pentecost until the Rapture; (The Tribulation Period, which is the final seven years of the Age of Israel lasts from the Rapture to the Second Advent of Jesus Christ.)

The Church Age is covered in Acts 2-28, the Epistles and Revelation 2-3. The Tribulation period which completes the Age of Israel is found in Revelation 4-19.

This age began in 33 A.D. and is not completed until the Rapture of the Church.

4. The Millennial Age from the Second Advent to the Great White Throne Judgment.

This age is covered in Revelation 20 and certain passages in the Old and New Testaments.

Dispensations are most clearly understood when we consider the different priesthoods that God has assigned to man. For example, before Israel became a nation right after the Exodus, mankind was in the “Age (or Dispensation) of the Gentiles.” The priesthood of this Dispensation was conducted by the elders within one’s own family and is called the “Family Priesthood.” It was practiced by Noah (Gen 8:20), Abraham (Gen 22:2) and Job (Job 1:5). The laws they were to follow were those “written in their hearts” (Rom 2:15) by God.

Shortly after the Exodus of the Jews from Egypt, the Age (or Dispensation) of Israel began and the tribe of Levi was called by God as a new and different priesthood which became known as the “Levitical Priesthood.” This priesthood was based on genealogy and descended through the Aaronic line of the Tribe of Levi. The Levitical priesthood carried out its functions in the Tabernacle, and later in the Temple. Priests of that age were to offer animal sacrifices, to lead in worship, and to communicate God’s Word, but by very specific methods given to Moses by God. As an additional note, it is both interesting and sad that these methods became so distorted by the time Jesus Christ was born that the ritual action itself had become more important than the reality of what it represented (Heb 10:8). The laws they were to follow were recorded in the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.

After the Cross and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, on the Day of Pentecost, God began a new age or “dispensation.” This is called the “Church Age” or “Dispensation of the Church.” In this new Dispensation all those who believe in Jesus Christ become priests to God (1 Pet 2:5,9). These new “Believer-Priests” are not to offer animal sacrifices but are instead to “present their own bodies as living and holy sacrifices, acceptable to God, which is their spiritual service of worship” (Rom 12:1). During this Dispensation, the form of expression of the priesthood changed. However, the spiritual functions of the various priesthoods did not change. All offered sacrifices, led in praise and communicated God’s Word.

Dispensations are represented by the different forms or methods God prescribed to carry out His principles. The Dispensation of the Church is to follow the “Law of Liberty” (James 1:25; 2:12) ”in the sphere of love” (Rom 13:8-10; Gal 5:14; Jas 2:8).

The Millennial Age or Dispensation will have a new priesthood that is led by the Zadokite line of the Tribe of Levi (Eze 40:46; 43:19; 44:15; 48:11). The laws will be based on the “New Covenant to Israel” (Jer 31:31-33; Heb 8:8-10) and established by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself as He “rules all the nations with a rod of iron” (Rev 12:5).

The Dispensational Interpretation, therefore, recognizes changes in the forms or methods, but has its basis in principles that are spiritual in nature more than physical. For example, in our current Dispensation we do not need to offer animal sacrifices to our God as a memorial to the ultimate sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ (Heb 10:10). Instead of offering animal sacrifices, the Church partakes of the Lord’s Table as a memorial, a sacrifice of praise (1 Cor 11:23-34). During the Millennial Age animal sacrifices will be reinstated as another type of memorial to commemorate the finished work of Christ on the cross (Eze 43:18-27).

The divisions of history are derived from an interpretative study of Scripture and are not rigidly set. There are several viewpoints as to the exact timing of the change from Dispensation to Dispensation. This does not negate the

Dispensational Principle that God has different responsibilities for people at different points of history.

There is a modern-day trend toward “hyper-Dispensationalism,” which seeks to put several small Dispensations within the larger framework. We must note that this trend lacks serious Scriptural backing. It can be easily used to promote personal bias and distort accurate interpretation.

Extreme rigidity in this principle can lead to legalism, and even failure at recognizing opportunities to serve in the Christian life. For example, finding no value for the Church in the Sermon on the Mount, because Jesus spoke the principles during the Age of Israel, misses completely what we are told by Paul in 1 Timothy 6:3, that “sound doctrine” and “sound words” are those of our Lord Jesus Christ.

What we should really seek and cling to are the principles that extend from a study of Dispensations. The forms and methods of the priesthood changed through the course of the Bible, but the principles upon which they functioned remain the same. All priests of any Dispensation have been commanded both to bring sacrifices to the Lord, and to teach God’s Word.