

Dispensation of Grace - *a study for the Bible Institute*
at Gulf Coast Baptist Church Spring 2021 by Steve Thomas

Master/Godhead - the Father is the master of each dispensation, giving the rule of life whereby the household should approach in order to receive the dispensation of the Father's property. Each member of the Godhead has a special relationship with the believer in this time. Each member of the Trinity is indwelling the believer, and the believer is in each member of the Godhead. God's quality of life is in the believer and in order to live out this life, one must live by the present rule of life, which is grace.

The Father (Eph 4:6, 1 John 3:9, 2 Peter 4:1), the Son (Rom 8:10, 1 John 5:11-12, 1 Cor 2:16;6:17) and the Spirit (Rom 8:9, Eph 1:13-14, Rom 8:23) all indwell the believer. This indwelling makes it possible for the believer to be a born one of God sharing in God's nature. The believer has the life of the Son, and the mind of the Son, making it possible for the believer to think some of God's thoughts. The indwelling of the Spirit provides Fruit, the anointing - or illumination, the ability to know God's truth, and the down payment - which is a sample of our Future tense salvation.

The believer has a position in each member of the Godhead, which is an imputed or God-credited standing. It is real, it exists in the mind of God. Whereas the Godhead is omnipresent, being in all places at once, the believer can only be in one place at a time. God blesses (or speaks good things about) the believer as he credits him with being in Christ (Eph 1:3,6). Being in Christ, we have been credited with all His righteous acts. This position is the basis of the dispensation of Grace. (1 Cor 1:30). The believer is in the Father, we have the unity that Christ spoke of in his High Priestly prayer John 17:21. The Grace believer is also counted to be In the Spirit, which is a way of thinking, a frame of the mind. (Rom 8:9)

Steward - Paul in Ephesians 3:2 was noted to be the "manager" of this dispensation of the grace of God. Peter, James, Jude, and John also wrote letters to Grace believers explaining the true grace of God, but this added depth to what God revealed through Paul.

Household - The body of Christ is every believer from the day of Pentecost until Christ returns to retrieve them. Believers are baptised into this body by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:13). This was not happening in Christ's day or before (Acts 1:5). Eph 1:22-23 delineates that the body is the Church. Jews and Gentiles are being placed into a new creation Eph 2:15. The distinction between Jew and Gentile that existed in the gospels, will exist again during the Tribulation. There are those who believe that the Body started with the Apostle Paul, but this is not correct. At Paul's arrest on the road to Damascus, Christ asked him, "why are you persecuting me?".

Rule of Life/Test - The Body of Christ is given many responsibilities. He is to mature, to live righteously and godly, to do priestly service, offering spiritual sacrifices. Connecting many of these responsibilities is the New Commandment in John 13:34-35. The distinction between the new commandment (to love as Christ loved) and the great commandment (to love God with all of our heart and our neighbor as ourself) is significant. Because of the indwelling of the Godhead in the believer, we have the ability to live out God's quality of life, directing it towards others. (Gal 5:22, 1 John 3:14) Paul calls this the law of Christ Gal 6:2. It was Paul's desire that believers experientially know this love (Eph3:19, Gal 5:13). We have been graced with God's quality of life, and we are to use this grace, not to serve our selfish desires, but to

Dispensation of Grace

relate to God's grace given to him in such a way that we are at ease in this life, and to love our brother in a way similar to His Saviour's love for him.

As we have already read, Grace is the rule of life for the body of Christ (Eph 3:2). God has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in Christ Eph 1:3-4. To bless is to say good things about. The Father says good things about us, not based upon how we act here on earth, but based on what Christ has done on our behalf. Because of the character of Christ, God the Father blesses us and reckons us to have done great things. This is similar to our salvation by Grace. The things that God says about us (we died with Christ, were buried, and rose again, and are seated in the heavenlies, that we are righteous, and have no condemnation) are provisions of grace, we must understand these things in order to live by grace. We are not motivated by fear or reward, but out of a motivation of the provisions.

Grace encourages us to live worthy of our calling in Christ (Eph 4:1). There is a way of life that is balanced (like a scale would determine worth), or consistent with the gracious provisions of God. Paul allowed the grace of God to labor in him, so that his life was consistent with (or worthy of) God's provisions. (1 Cor 15:9-10). Many believers do not avail themselves of this grace, seeking instead to earn favor with their behavior. The grace belongs to us whether we use it or not. We are ensphered by this grace, and are to use it, be strengthened by it, and grow by it (2 Peter 3:18). The believer must mentally relate to his standing in this grace in order to live by grace. Titus tells us that Grace actually child-trains us (Titus 2:11-13). We can see what is worthy of the grace we have been given and what is not. The spiritual believer will discern between that which is lacking character and that which is good.

The ability to direct the character of Christ towards one another comes from setting our minds on things above (Col 3:1-4). This mindset is also set forth by Christ in the upper room. "Abide in me", He told his disciples. We are to be at ease in our position, gaining access to power, training, joy, peace, longsuffering, and the other fruits produced by the Spirit. When we seek to live by means of our flesh, or approach the Father using one of the previous rules of life we have studied, the Spirit is quenched, and we hinder His work of conforming us to the image of the Son. Part of the test is for the believer to offer sacrifices as a believer-priest.

Sacrifices of the Believer-Priest

- Rom 12:1-2 Presenting our body to Him as a **living sacrifice**
- Heb 13:15 **Praise**
- Phil 4:18 **Giving** *Remember God's word says giving is not an obligation, but from the heart 2 Cor 9:7-8 and with a willing mind 2 Cor 8:12
- Phil 4:6, Col 2:7, Col 4:2, 2 Cor 4:15 **Thanksgiving**
- 1 John 1:7, Heb 10:25 **Fellowship** *Walking in the light means to manifest, make seen, the life of Christ
- Phil 2:17 **Faith**
- Eph 2:10, 1 Peter 2:12, Heb 10:24 **Good works**

Judging by the state of the professing church, and what we see in the letters to the Churches in the early chapters of Revelation, the Body of Christ is not passing our test. But the judgement of God is gracious in nature. Consider the Rapture and the Bema Seat. in 1 Peter 1:13 we see the coming of Christ as

Dispensation of Grace

something to anticipate, not to dread. Christ is coming back to deliver us from the wrath that is to come. (Eph 5:25-27;31,32, 1 Thess 3:13). The Body of Christ is being retrieved so it can be presented as a blameless and holy bride. The Bema seat is the place where God tests the quality of the works that we have done for Christ. Each believer has been given a set of works to do (Eph 2:8-10). God has also made provision for us to do them, as He has done for everyone in each dispensation. But not all believers will accomplish those works. The Corinthians attempted to accomplish God's purpose by relying on earthly power, wisdom and scholarship (1 Cor 1:17-21). Paul describes the Bema seat in 2 Cor 5. It was stated in the previous chapter that every believer will have the praise of God (4:1-5). This is amazing. We are brought before the Father blameless (1 Thess 3:13). The end of the dispensation will be in the same character of its beginning... gracious.

Law vs Grace. Some will tell us that when Paul tells us that we are not under law but under grace that he was referring to a means of salvation. This cannot be accurate, because as we have learned, law was never a means for salvation. Dispensations are God's means of "dispensing" his property to a group, not a way of saving them differently. The simple difference between law and grace is one of motivation. Law motivated by promising blessings and cursings for those who kept or violated the law. Grace does not require a penalty. We may see the longsuffering of God or the chastening of God, not the reward or punishment system. Our motivation is to live righteously, seeking the desirous will of God based upon what God has already done for us. The Great salvation is certain and cannot be altered. The believer does not need a system of rules, a set of do's and don'ts to guide him. The Spirit is a far better guide than the commandments. When the believer relates to God by grace, he will see clearly the desirous will of God. When he does not, refusing to relate to God by the provisions of grace, he is robbed of joy and brings himself under a form of law. Living by grace is far superior and brings far greater joy. It draws attention to God's character, and is God's purpose in the dispensation of Grace.