

Before we take up each dispensation individually and deal with crucial truths, I would like to share seven guiding principles for Bible study, which briefly are:

1. God, is the Great Creative Sovereignty

The Scripture makes no special effort to prove the existence of God. It simply takes this for granted. God is supreme in the universe. He brought this wonderful system of worlds and all they contain into being. He maintains them in perpetual orderly relation and harmony, and rules over all the created intelligences, angelic or human, which inhabit them. He is the active governor, not an absentee landlord who created the universe and then left it to work out its own destiny. God is *omnipotent*, (infinite in power) *omniscient* (complete infinite knowledge) and *omnipresent* (present everywhere at the same time). He is concerned about the interests of even the smallest of His creatures. He observes the sparrow's fall and has numbered even the hairs of our heads (Matthew 10:29-30).

2. The Devil is a Person Power of Evil

Many ask, "*If there is a God how could He permit such terrible tragedies to happen in the world?*" The answer is simple. God is not responsible for the tragedies that prevail in the world. There has come rebellion into God's universe. Another being, Satan, the archenemy of God and man, is responsible. He is the 'murderer from the beginning,' the destroyer of men, the opposer of all God's beneficent purposes for the world.

3. The Need of Redemption for Mankind.

God is a Being of absolute holiness. His holiness must react in banishing from His presence that which is out of harmony with himself, a perfect Being. When man fell, as a consequence of his sin, he was bared from the Garden of Eden and from the place of fellowship with a holy God. This lesson is set forth in objective reality throughout the Old Testament in the sacrificial economy of the Tabernacle and the Temple. Man was excluded from the Holy of Holies, the place of God's divine presence, and could come only through a representative, the High Priest, and even then only once a year, with sacrificial blood.

God's love flowed out to the being whom He had created in His own image and likeness and even before the fall, in anticipation of this calamity, prepared a "*Lamb slain from before the foundation of the world,*" who would give His spotless life for man's redemption.

4. A God of Retribution

God is a God not only of love, but also of the most absolute and rigid justice. God is a being of perfect evenness and proportion of character. His justice requires that the fullest satisfaction must be given for the outraging of His holy Law, and penalty must be visited upon the head of the transgressor. In spite of the fact that He has prepared a way back to His fellowship and favor, all men do not and will not accept this provision of His love. Man is a free moral agent and can lift his puny will in defiance even against the God who created him. Rejection of God's love is an eternal sin and must be visited with its awful consequences, banishment from the presence of a holy god. "*The soul that sins shall die.*"

5. God Has a Chosen People

In His divine sovereignty and wisdom God has chosen a people, the children of Israel, as a medium for the giving of the revelation of Himself and of His Law in dealing with the world; as a witness of His existence as the true and living God; and as a channel for the display of His matchless grace to an unworthy nation.

6. God's Word has a Principle of Structure

The structural plan of Scripture is clearly seen in the seven dispensational periods of God's Word. As we have studied before, – "*A dispensation is a period of time during which man is tested as to his obedience to some specific revelation of the will of God.*" God has endowed Man with a free will and consequently that will must be tested as to whether it will side with God or disobey Him. We see God's ultimate purpose in Revelation 21:27 – to have a universe or kingdom over which He will preside and from which there will forever be excluded everything that is out of harmony with Himself.

In order for this to be realized, the free will of Man must be tested and confirmed in obedience to God, else there would continually arise the possibility of marring God's plan through recurring disobedience. God did not make man like a mechanical toy, to be wound up and set in motion, but He made man with capacity and power to love Him, glorify Him, and have fellowship with Him. This demanded a free choice on Man's part.

The record of the test and fall of man in the Garden of Eden is logical and reasonable. The dispensations, then, show us the various methods by which God has tested, and will test, man.

These dispensations do not mean that Scripture is to be put into separate water-tight compartments, completely isolated from each other. These dispensations often overlap, and some of them clearly belong to the past, however, as far as God's dealing with mankind, their teaching is still in effect – for instance: the dispensation of Human Government – or the dispensation of Law.

There is an ultra-dispensational teaching which takes away from us as Christians, not only the whole Old Testament, but large portions of the New and which classifies and applies Scripture in such an iron-clad way that we dare not claim the blessing of any part not strictly allocated to us. This is wrong – See, for instance, Romans 15:4 and 2 Timothy 3:16.

7. God's Word Teaches The Principle of Consummation

God has planned and God is moving toward a definite goal in the working out of His redemptive purpose. He has ordained a glorious destiny for His redeemed people, both earthly and heavenly. This purpose is to be consummated in the second advent of the Redeemer, who will rule the world in Righteousness and when He has administered the earthly kingdom during the Millennium He will deliver it over to the Father. Then will be established a New Heaven and a New Earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness forever. God will be supreme and will be obeyed implicitly in His entire universe.