

SALVATION IN DIFFERENT DISPENSATIONS

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Soli Deo Gloria!

Dispensationalists have always taught that God deals with mankind differently in different dispensations. This conclusion is obvious from even a cursory analysis of Scripture. Adam in the Garden was allowed to eat only plants (Genesis 1:29); the nation of Israel under the Mosaic covenant was prescribed a complicated and restrictive diet limited to a certain few animals (Leviticus 11:1-47); whereas all people today can eat all meat (1 Timothy 4:4). Classical dispensationalists of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, such as Scofield, Larkin, and Gaebelien, recognized that dispensational differences extended into the domain of soteriology, such that God's requirements of men for justification have not always been the same. In contrast, more modern dispensationalists such as Walvoord, Ryrie, and Pentecost, in response to unrelenting criticism from Covenant theologians, have largely abandoned the teaching that dispensational distinctions include salvation. Ryrie's teaching that salvation has always been by faith alone (conceding that the content of faith has changed with progressive revelation) has become the mainstream dispensational view. However, such a view does not comport with a literal interpretation of Scripture, which Ryrie himself asserted to be a *sine qua non* of dispensationalism.

The requirement to enter the Kingdom under the Dispensation of Law was human righteousness (Matthew 5:19-20). This righteousness was attained by personal faith (Hebrews 11:6) and the keeping of commandments¹ (cf. Matthew 19:16-17; Romans 2:13; James 2:24). According to the Bible, such human righteousness was attainable, as demonstrated by Job (Job 1:8), Zacharias and Elizabeth (Luke 1:5-6), and Paul (Philippians 3:4-6). Furthermore, after the Dispensation of Grace concludes with the rapture of the Church, faith in Jesus Christ and the keeping of commandments will again be necessary during the Tribulation² in order to enter the Kingdom that will begin at the second advent of Christ (cf. Rev 12:17; 14:12). Note that verses like Romans 3:20, Galatians 2:16, and Ephesians 2:8-9 in which the Apostle Paul asserts that justification is by faith, and not by works, pertain to justification under the Dispensation of Grace; observe that these verses do not say that justification was never by works, but that it is not by works today³ (Cp., Romans 11:6).

¹ Perhaps a better understanding is the keeping of the stipulations under the Mosaic covenant (i.e., the Law of Moses; Deuteronomy 28:1). This does not equate to perfection in the keeping of commandments, since the Law provided mechanisms for atonement for sin (i.e., the breaking of commandments). Thus, one could be "blameless" under the Law (cf. Luke 1:6; Philippians 3:6) without being sinless.

² While the requirement to keep "commandments" directly applies to Jews, once again under the obligations of the Mosaic covenant, the criteria for entrance into the Kingdom observed in the Sheep and Goat Judgment indicates that certain works will also be required of Gentiles (Matthew 25:31-46).

³ Dr. Peter Ruckman asserted that, "Every heresy in this age is the truth misplaced"; E.W. Bullinger exhorted, "Not only, therefore, must we rightly divide the Word of truth as to its Times and Dispensations, but as to its Truth and Teaching also: we must learn to appropriate each truth to the particular Dispensation to which it belongs".

Today, the requirement to be saved (and enter Heaven at death or the rapture) under the Dispensation of Grace is faith alone in the gospel of Jesus Christ (Romans 1:16-17; Ephesians 2:8-9; 1 Corinthians 15:1-4), which God “counts” for righteousness (Romans 4:3,5).

Note that it was the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ that made this dispensational change possible. Before the work of Christ, God could not justify even the believing sinner, which His divine attributes of love and mercy desired to do, because doing so would have violated His divine attributes of righteousness and justice⁴. But after the propitiatory work of Christ made for the whole world (1 John 2:2), God can justify the believer without doing violence to His attribute of justice. This is made clear in Romans 3:23-26:

For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood ... To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: **that he might be just, and** the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.

There is a sense in which it is not correct to talk about individual salvation before the coming of Christ. Old Testament saints died “in faith” (Hebrews 11:13) and went to Abraham’s bosom (Luke 16:23) to await their redemption (Galatians 4:5). The finished work of Jesus Christ at a specific point in time (Galatians 4:4; Hebrews 9:26) accomplished something profound, not for men only, but especially for God. Before the completed cross-work of the Lord Jesus Christ, God could not justify the believing sinner without human works of righteousness; after that watershed event in the history of the world, God can, and during the Dispensation of Grace He does, justify the believer on the basis of personal faith and the imputed righteousness of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:21).

⁴ The divine attributes of God are always in perfect harmony; one never takes precedent over another.