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The Dispensation of the Grace of God

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When the Lord Jesus Christ wept over Jerusalem, He expressed the distress of His heart by saying, "**If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes.**"

Those who have the spirit of Christ cannot help but experience like feeling toward the great bulk of professing Christians today. Many who profess to be followers of Jesus Christ do not know they appear to be blinded to the things that pertain to their peace. They are involved in a multitude of things that cannot possibly have any connection with their present relationship to God or to their future destiny. They seek for peace and assurance in vain, for they do not know what it is in this day that makes possible the possession of that peace that passes all understanding.

Christendom as a whole is ignorant of that greatest of all revelations' of "present truth" that tells the relationship of God, the attitude of God, and the character of His administration toward the world and His household in the world at the present time. The standard theology of Christendom will be searched in vain for that truth that God's present dispensation is the dispensation of the grace of God. That God is now dealing with men solely and only by grace is the most distinctive truth of New Testament revelation. This is the subject of this study.

What Is A Dispensation

The reader of the Word of God will most certainly come upon the word dispensation. When he does, he can pass it by regarding it as one that contains no message or holds no truth for him, or he can feel that it does speak the truth of God even if that truth is not immediately seen.

It is a positive fact that in the study of the Bible the student can discover its truths by tracing out the intimations and suggestions that are scattered everywhere throughout its pages.

There is a definite intimation of truth in the word dispensation. The honest searcher, desiring to add to His knowledge of the truths of God, the truth contained in the word dispensation, will do all the work that is necessary so that this word will speak its message to his heart.

The word dispensation is the translation of the Greek word **oikonomia** (pronounced oy-kon-om-ee-ah). This word occurs in two forms in Luke 16 :1-4 where it is translated "steward" and "stewardship", and this passage provides the proof that it really means administration.

There was a certain rich man, which had a steward (administrator); and the same was accused unto him that he had wasted his goods. And he called him, and said unto him, How is it that I hear this of thee? give an account of thy stewardship (administration); for thou mayest no longer be steward (administrator). Then the steward (administrator) said within himself. What shall I do? for my Lord taketh away from me the stewardship (administration): I cannot dig; to beg I am ashamed. I am resolved what to do, that, when I am put out of the stewardship (administration), they may receive me into their houses.

From this we learn that oikonomia means administration. Since this same word is translated "dispensation", a dispensation is an administration. Throughout these studies these two words will be used interchangeably.

In the political life of our country, the administration may be Republican or Democrat; it may be extravagant or economical; it may be a war time administration or a peace time administration. In relationship to God the word administration has to do with the character of His dealings with the world or His household in the world. Therefore, it is evident that once we know God's present method of dealing with the earth and with His saints upon the earth, we will be better able to live and work in harmony with His will for us.

A dispensation or administration is not, strictly speaking, a period of time. The idea of time is not prominent in an administration. The character of a dispensation is always the most important feature. Nevertheless, there is a time element in every dispensation that should not be ignored. To say, "His administration was an efficient one," is to speak of its character. To say, "His administration continued four years," is to speak of the time element.

It is declared in the Scriptures that the time in which we live is the dispensation (or, administration) of the grace of God. This revelation is of utmost importance to all who earnestly desire to glorify God in the present administration. It cannot be ignored by any who would prove to themselves what is the "good and acceptable and perfect will

of God". This dispensation has a peculiar relationship to the Gentiles; therefore, it was to them that Paul announced:

If you have heard of the dispensation (administration) of the grace of God which is given to me toward you. Ephesians 3 :2.

In God's dealings with the earth, a dispensation or administration is based upon a revelation of truth. The dispensation of the grace of God is based upon a great revelation of truth that was given to the Apostle Paul while he was in Rome. The greatest declaration of this revelation was the first one made in connection with it. **Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it.** Acts 28:28. [note: see separate study on this topic]

This is the greatest of all truths made in connection with the present dispensation. It is the great general truth to which every particular truth is related. It is the framework and the epitome of that body of truth Paul calls "the secret". All other truths having to do with the present dispensation, revealed after this declaration, are encompassed by it. Before it was spoken, "the salvation of God" was with and among Israel. After it was spoken, "the salvation of God" is with and among the Gentiles. During the period of time that the salvation of God is with and among the Gentiles, the dispensation or administration is that of the grace of God. Grace is the supreme, the absolute, the dominating principle that characterizes all of God's dealings with the world today. As stated before, the dispensation of the grace of God is founded upon a revelation that was made known to Paul in order that he might transmit it to the Gentiles. This truth had been a secret, but it was made known to Paul by revelation (Eph. 3 :3). Later it was revealed to other apostles and prophets by the Spirit (Eph. 3 :5), but in the beginning it was made known only to Paul. Even after it was revealed to others, Paul was still the only one who could authoritatively pass it on to the recipients for whom it was intended, the Gentiles. Eph. 3 :8. The truth that is the foundation of the present dispensation will be found only in the writings of Paul. Its greatest truth (Acts 28 :28) is not even suggested by any other writer. The letters of Peter, James and John will be searched in vain for even the least hint that the salvation of God had been sent, or was to be sent, to the Gentiles. There is no doubt but that these writers knew from Paul of this awful judgment that had befallen Israel, and they also knew the great boon it was to the Gentiles; but the task of originally transmitting the message either by word or letter was the sole duty of Paul.

That there would be such a dispensation or administration as the world now enjoys was never predicted, typified or suggested until that time when Paul announced the great truth that the salvation of God is sent to the Gentiles. He emphatically declares that in other ages it was not made known unto the sons of men (Eph. 3 :5), states that from the beginning of the world it had been hid in God (Eph. 3 :9), and clinches this

by saying that it had been hid from ages and from generations (Cot. 1 :26). In view of these explicit statements, men of faith will take God at His word and think accordingly, but men of little faith will deny them by trying to read the truths of the dispensation of grace into earlier revelations.

In fact, if we accept the plain statements of Paul that this truth was a secret, that it was hid from ages and from generations, that it was not made known unto the sons of men, that from the beginning of the world it had been hid in God, then these great truths cannot possibly be found in the epistles Paul wrote before the salvation of God was sent to the Gentiles. These epistles are 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians and Romans. It is readily admitted that these epistles contain some of the most important, precious and blessed truths in the Word of God; nevertheless, they do not contain the transcendent truth which gives the present time its peculiar dispensational character. Everyone of these epistles bear the stamp of the salvation of God being with and among Israel.

That the Thessalonian, Corinthian, Galatian and Roman letters do not contain any of the truth that was a secret hid in God is seen in Paul's great message recorded in Acts 26 :22-23. Every Epistle listed above was written and circulated before he spoke these words.

Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, SAYING NONE OTHER THINGS THAN THOSE WHICH THE PROPHETS AND MOSES DID SAY SHOULD COME: that Christ should suffer, and that He should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should show light unto the people and to the Gentiles.

If this straightforward declaration of Paul were accepted, it would settle once and for all the question as to whether the peculiar truths that belong to this dispensation alone can be found in the first six epistles of Paul. If these truths were a secret hid in God, they are not to be found in Moses and the prophets; therefore, are not in the early epistles of Paul which contain nothing beyond that which Moses and the prophets did say should come.

It would seem that this plain statement of Paul could not be misunderstood; however, plain as it is, it is rejected by some men who are prone to boast of their faithfulness to the word of God. These men point to certain transcendent truths that were set forth in these early epistles, declare that these truths are peculiar to the dispensation of grace, and then insist that the truths that belong to this dispensation alone are to be found in the six epistles first written by Paul. They erroneously assume that all truths that are applicable at the present time were never applicable to any other time. This is false reasoning, since many truths from the Old Testament, the gospels and the early epistles are applicable in the present dispensation.

Some men eliminate this witness of Paul concerning the extent of his ministry before Acts 28 :28 by teaching that Paul declared here that he had "said" nothing save what Moses and the prophets did say should come, but that in his written messages he set forth things about which Moses and the prophets knew nothing.

After careful consideration it is my judgment that such teaching is a dishonest and deliberate wresting of the Word of God in order to nullify the witness of a passage that they do not accept and for which they have no answer. It is a positive fact, in Scripture as well as among men, that whatever a man writes he says, since writing is simply a means of saying a thing.

In the passage under consideration (Acts 26 :22) "saying" has no reference to the spoken word. If that is what Paul means, then he must be honest and carry this same meaning throughout the balance of this sentence wherein he speaks of the things which "the prophets and Moses did SAY should come." Here the word "say" refers to written messages and not to spoken messages.

Positive proof from the Scripture that what men write they also say is seen in Luke 1 :63 **:And he asked for a writing table and wrote, saying, His name is John.**

Further proof is seen in Peter's words concerning the writings of Paul:

Even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; as also in all his epistles, SPEAKING in them of these things. 2 Peter 3:15-16.

If the reader should wonder why so much space is given to demonstrating something that is evident, it is because some men are insisting that a distinction can be made between what Paul wrote and what he spoke, and that his testimony in Acts 26 :22 concerns only what he said and not what he wrote. No doubt there are writers who can write much and still say nothing, but Paul was not one of these. When he wrote, he said something.

Paul's great declaration in Acts 26 :22 is simple and straightforward. If the Bible is known, it will also be known that he spoke the truth in his testimony before Agrippa. In the Old Testament there is a divine framework or outline of truth, and everything that Paul wrote in his first six epistles or set forth in his spoken messages came within the limits of this outline or framework of truth. Concisely stated, this outline is, (1) that Christ should suffer, (2) that He should be the first that should rise from the dead, (3) that He should show light unto the people, (4) that He should show light unto the Gentiles. Every detail of truth set forth in Paul's written or spoken ministry before Acts 28 :28 comes within the scope of these four great general truths.

It is utterly childish for one who claims to be a teacher of the Word to select some specific truth in Paul's early epistle, then shout with glee, demanding to know where it can be found in the Old Testament. A minister in Chicago pointed to Romans 8:29, "conformed to the image of His Son", and demanded to know where anything like this could be found in the Old Testament. His listeners probably thought he had produced an unanswerable argument for his view that truth can be found in Paul's early epistles that cannot be found in Moses and the prophets. If any of his hearers had been familiar with the Old Testament they could have pointed to David's words in Psalm 17 :15, "I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness". This truth is identical with Romans 8 :29.

Dispensation of Grace

The far-reaching effect of Christ's work on the Cross was such that after it was complete, grace reigned through righteousness in relationship to the gift of eternal life through Jesus Christ. Romans 5 :21. This was true in the Acts period. Grace abounded, but it was not then the dispensation of the grace of God. The phrase "the dispensation of the grace of God" is absolute, admitting no qualifications. The word grace sets forth the character of God's dealings with the world at the present time. It reveals His attitude toward the world and tells the world what it can now expect from Him.

There is no word in Scripture that is as blessed to man as the word grace.. Its exact meaning should be crystal clear to every child of God. Let it be remembered that God has a burning desire to bless, and this desire is His grace. Grace is the passion of God to bless, causing Him to seize every opportunity to deliver the sinful and give grace to the graceless. Grace is the unlimited love of God in expression. The one who is a recipient of the love of God is a partaker of His grace. In the New Testament, God's love toward sinners is always called grace. Grace is God's love and favor to the undeserving. Grace is pure unrecompensed kindness and favor. It is God's love to His creatures who do not deserve His love.

As a help in understanding and appreciating grace, it will be helpful if we consider certain great fundamental facts about grace that are ably set forth in the writings of Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer. The following is quoted from his book "Grace".

1. Grace is not withheld because of demerit.

This fact about grace is more evident, perhaps, than any other. It is the sense of demerit more than anything else which impels a soul to cry out for the kindness and benefits of grace. So, also, grace finds its greatest triumph and glory in the sphere of human helplessness. Grace ceases to be grace if God is impelled to withdraw it in the

presence of human failure and sin. In fact, grace cannot be exercised where there is the slightest degree of human merit to be recognized.

2. Grace cannot be lessened because of demerit.

God cannot propose to do less in grace for one who is sinful than He would have done had that one been less sinful.

3. Grace cannot incur a debt.

An act is in no sense gracious if under any conditions a debt is incurred. Grace, being unrecompensed favor, is necessarily unrecompensed as to obligations which are past, unrecompensed as to obligations which are present, and unrecompensed as to obligations which are future. Grace must always remain unadulterated in its generosity and benefit.

4. Grace is not exercised in the just payment of a debt. The fact is self-evident that the payment of an honest debt could never be an act of grace. In no circumstances, however, is the recognition of this truth more important than when grace is declared to be the present divine plan for the salvation of sinners. If God should discover the least degree of merit in the sinner, this, in strict righteousness, He must recognize and duly acknowledge. By such a recognition of human merit, He would be discharging an obligation toward the sinner and the discharge of that obligation toward the sinner would be the payment, or recognition, of a debt. "Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt" (Rom. 4:4).

5. Grace is never the over-payment of a debt.

Grace is no longer grace if it is complicated in the slightest degree with the payment of a just debt. It can never be that which is added to, or a part of, a righteous transaction. A bounty may be added to the payment of a debt -- an extra amount above the full measure due; but in no case should this extra amount be considered a matter of pure grace. The character of the bounty thus added would, of necessity, be qualified to some extent by the relation of the bounty to the debt. The bounty will be either more, or less, than it would have been had it stood alone. Inevitably it will be affected to some degree by the righteous transaction with which it is combined. In the Word of God, as in common usage, the word grace, in its exact meaning, precludes any complications with other acts or issues however righteous and just. Grace speaks of a gift, not of barter or trade however unequal. It is pure kindness, not the fulfilling of an obligation. An act in order to be gracious must stand disassociated and alone. Divine salvation is, therefore, the kindness of God toward sinners. It is not less than it would be had they sinned less. It is not more than it would be had they sinned more. It is wholly unrelated to every question of human merit. Grace is neither treating a person as he deserves, nor treating a person better than he deserves. It is treating a person

graciously without the slightest reference to his desserts. Grace is infinite love expressing itself in infinite goodness.

I would suggest that the reader give the most careful consideration of the five fundamental facts about grace set forth above. We will profit greatly if we digest them, assimilate them and incorporate them into our thinking about grace. I consider them to be some of the greatest words ever spoken about grace outside the Word of God. In them, Dr. Chafer writes as one illuminated by the Holy Spirit. When his book on grace came into my hands eighteen years ago, I accepted the above statements as being in harmony with the truth of God, and these five fundamental facts have helped immeasurably in my understanding and appreciation of the dispensation of the grace of God. Dr. Chafer in his book applies these facts only to salvation by grace. If he followed them out to all their conclusions, applying them to the dispensation of the grace of God, he would soon see that this dispensation could not have begun at the Cross, and that the Acts period is no part of the dispensation of grace. This will be pointed out later in these studies.

Once the exact and full meaning of the word grace is understood by the child of God, he is ready to enter into an understanding and appreciation of the dispensation or administration of the grace of God. If we accept the divine declaration that God's present administration is one of grace, then we should not back down one inch from this position. If this is the truth, then it must remain true in every circumstance; therefore, we should cease to hold a single attitude or think a single thought that would alter this truth in the least. Accepting as we do the revelation that this is a dispensation of grace we can expect that God's relationships, God's administrations, God's dealings, and God's blessings will all be in absolute grace. God's present administration is not one of justice or judgment. It is one of grace.

Grace and Justice

If God's present administration were one of justice, He would be rendering to every man his due or right. Those who merited reward would get it; those who deserved punishment would receive it. The Scriptures speak of a time when God will render (pay) to every man according to his deeds, but it is evident that He is not doing this today. All acts of God that deal with human sin and failure are acts of justice. Many of these acts of justice can be found throughout the Word of God. However, this being the dispensation of grace we are safe in believing that every act of God since Acts 28 :28 has been an act of grace. When God could not act in grace, He has not acted at all. The Pentecostal dispensation closed with an act of judgment. God's final act toward Israel was to pronounce upon them a sentence of judicial blindness, deafness, and hardness of heart. See Acts 28 :26-27. His first act in the new dispensation was one of the greatest acts of grace recorded in the Word of God. To a people who were

unthankful, proud, and idolatrous; to a people who had changed the truth of God into a lie; to a people who had not cared to retain God in their knowledge; to a people who were filled with unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, murder, and hate; to these people, the Gentiles, God performed His greatest act of grace in sending His salvation to them. This dispensation began in an act of grace, and every act of God toward men since that time has been one of grace. The wicked have gone unpunished and the good have not always been blessed, but every man without exception has been under the grace of God. The very fact that God permits the sinner to live, to breathe His air and enjoy His sunshine is proof that all men are enjoying the undeserved favor of God.

These great truths are little understood or appreciated today. On every hand we find beliefs, opinions, and attitudes that deny this. Most professing Christians believe that God's present administration is a mixture of grace and judgment. They believe that in this day God blesses the good and punishes the wicked, and that men get from God about what they deserve. A tragic event happens to someone, and many will declare that it is God's punishment upon him because of his sins. By such statements they deny that this is a dispensation of grace, insisting that it is one of justice and judgment. They believe that while God acts toward some in grace, He acts toward others in judgment, thus making this dispensation to be a mixture of grace, mercy, justice, and judgment.

The honest observer knows very well that frightful tragedies take place in the lives of the good as well as the bad. The dissolute young man returning from a night spent in drunkenness and immorality becomes involved in a terrible accident and is burned to death in his flaming car. When such things happen many will rise up to declare that this is the judgment of God upon him because of his sins, and his tragic end is set forth as a warning that the same thing may come upon others if they do not alter their lives. However, the same tragic accidents have happened to ministers of God while upon some mission of mercy. Therefore, human experience cannot be used to prove that God is today judging sin or sinners. God's grace cannot be lessened because of demerit, and in this dispensation of grace every act of God must be an act of grace. If He cannot act in grace, He will not act at all.

In the next dispensation God will judge sin and those who commit sin. Then He will rule with a rod of iron, and strict justice will prevail in all His dealings with men. But the present time being an administration of grace even the men of the world are enjoying a favor which they do not deserve. This is surely not the time when every transgression and disobedience receives its just recompense of reward. Nothing that comes upon men can be regarded as punishment for their sins. No demerit or sin of man can alter God's present administration. It will continue to be one of absolute grace as long the salvation of God is with and among the Gentiles.

In the Acts period this was not so. That thirty-three years was no part of the dispensation of the grace of God. In spite of the marvelous grace that was shown to men, there were acts of justice and judgment that show it was not an administration of grace.

Ananias and Sapphira died because of their sin of misrepresenting their gifts. They said they had given all when it was only a part. Acts 5. Their deaths were certainly the result of an act of judgment upon the part of God. Simon the sorcerer was threatened with death unless he repented of his wickedness. Acts 8. The merit of Cornelius was recognized by God, and the blessing that came to him was not one of unmerited favor. Acts 10 :2-4. Herod died because he failed to give the glory to God. Acts 12. Bar-jesus was stricken with blindness because he withstood the gospel. Acts 13. Many of the Corinthians were sick and some were dead because of eating the passover bread and drinking the passover cup in an unworthy manner. 1 Corinthians J 1. If these Scriptural facts are faced, it is impossible for us to believe that the Acts period was any part of the dispensation of the grace of God. While great grace was shown, favors were given because of merit and favors were withheld because of demerit. The cases of Cornelius and Ananias are proof of this. Such things cannot be when the dispensation or administration is one of grace.

Grace and the Dispensation of Grace

In comprehending and appreciating the dispensation of the grace of God, and in realizing that it began at Acts 28 :28, we must never become confused by thinking that grace began at that point, or that there was no grace shown before that time, or that the gospel of grace was not proclaimed until after Paul's announcement that "the salvation of God is sent to the Gentiles." Certain detractors seeking to create confusion declare that this is what we teach when we say that the dispensation of the grace of God began at Acts 28 :28, thirty-three years after the Cross. There are no facts more clearly set forth in Scripture than these: Grace is first seen in God's dealings with Adam; grace is seen being shown to many throughout the Old Testament; the gospel of grace was proclaimed throughout the Acts period; and the gospel of the grace of God was preached to the Gentiles before Acts 28 :28.

Adam and Eve were the recipients of God's grace when He made coats of skins and clothed them. However, after being the beneficiaries of this act of grace, they experienced judgment in being expelled from the garden. It was not at that time a dispensation of grace, so some of God's acts were gracious while others were acts of justice and judgment.

We are told that Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord; nevertheless, the time in which he lived was no dispensation of grace, for in that day God brought in the flood upon the world of the ungodly.

The gospel of the grace of God was proclaimed throughout the greater part of the Acts period, but that period was no dispensation of grace. During that period grace was the sole means of forgiveness, redemption, and justification, but it was not an administration of grace. Pure grace can make no such distinctions as is set forth in Romans 1 :16. **For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; TO THE JEW FIRST, and also to the Greek.**

In a dispensation of grace no such superiority can be admitted such as is positively set forth in Romans 3 :1-2.

What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision? Much every way: chiefly because unto them were committed the oracles of God. Under an administration of absolute grace no warning of judgment such as is found in Romans 11 :21-22 will ever be heard: **For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee. Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also will be cut off.**

When goodness and severity walk side by side, we know that the dispensation or administration is not of grace. When infinite love expressing itself in infinite goodness walks alone, then and only then is the dispensation one of pure grace. There is no sword of Damocles suspended by a single hair hanging over our heads. We can rest assured that in this dispensation every act of God toward us will be an act of grace.

The One to whom the prerogative of judgment has been committed is now sitting upon the throne of God in grace. All judicial and punitive action against human sin is in abeyance deferred until the dispensation of grace is over and the dispensation of judgment begins.

Since grace cannot incur a debt, any declaration such as we find in Romans 15 :27 is out of harmony with an administration of grace.

It has pleased them verily; and their debtors they are. For if the Gentiles have been made partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister unto them in carnal things.

These four truths, all of them from the book of Romans, the last epistle written before Acts 28 :28, are sufficient in themselves to show that the dispensation of grace had not yet begun when Paul penned that epistle.

Grace and Covenants

The student of the Bible will discover the fact that it has pleased God to enter into covenants with men. A covenant is an agreement. Some of God's covenants are conditional, and others are unconditional. A conditional covenant is one in which God's part is made to be dependent upon some action upon the part of those with whom the covenant is made. A conditional covenant binds God to do His part when the human requirements are met. An unconditional covenant is simply a declaration upon the part of God as to what He is going to do without any reference to human action. An unconditional covenant is more binding upon God than a conditional one. The making of a covenant or the declaring of a covenant could be an act of pure grace upon the part of God, a favor bestowed upon men without regard to merit or demerit. However, once the covenant has been declared and ratified, the keeping of it can not in any way be considered an act of grace. To keep a covenant or agreement is an act of righteousness and not an act of grace. God is bound to keep His agreements, but He is not bound to act in grace. If so, then the act of grace would be the fulfilling of an obligation or the payment of a debt, and grace would no longer be grace. No grace is ever shown in the just payment of a debt. The payment of an honest debt can never be an act of grace. Therefore, in this dispensation of grace, no covenant of God that promises personal blessings to men can be operative.

As stated before, a covenant is an agreement, and no act of God toward men or any of God's dealings with men in this day are based upon any agreement. They are based solely upon grace. There are those who speak of a "covenant of grace," but this is an unscriptural idea, for the words covenant and grace do not any more accord with each other than do the words grace and works. Those who put these two words together show a lack of appreciation of what either one of them means. Under all covenants God binds himself to do something. And while grace might be the basis for making an agreement, once the agreement is confirmed grace cannot enter into the keeping of it. The keeping of agreements with God as well as among men will always be matters of righteousness and justice. No man can be called gracious because he keeps his word, pays his debts or fulfills his agreements. Grace does not enter into such matters, even as the grace of God has no relationship to the keeping of covenants.

Many there are who insist that we are living under "the new covenant," then go on to say the "the new covenant is one of grace." They blindly ignore the fact that one of the prominent statements in connection with the promise of the new covenant is:

But every one shall die for his own iniquity: every man that eateth the sour grape, his teeth shall be set on edge. Jeremiah 31 :30.

There is not one drop of grace in that statement. In it we see men receiving what they deserve. It reveals God acting in justice and not in grace. "Count your many blessings, name them one by one," is good advice. If we attempt this, then out of every blessing we can name, not one of them has come to us because of any agreement or covenant God made with us, with Abraham, or any agreement He has promised to make with Israel. To consider even the least of our blessings as having come to us because God fulfilled an agreement is to trample under foot the grace of God. Every blessing we have in Christ is based upon infinite love manifesting itself in infinite goodness. None of them are based upon any covenant. The very fact that this is the dispensation of the grace of God automatically excludes and makes inoperative all covenants that promise personal blessings to men.

Grace and the Promises

The Bible discloses the fact that at various times it has pleased God to make promises to men wherein men were to receive a reward if they performed certain works. Such a promise is found in Genesis 12:3 where we read concerning Abraham and his descendants: **And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee.**

Here we have a definite promise in which God has promised a blessing to all who bless Abraham and his seed. If a man fulfills the conditions stipulated in this promise, God will owe him the blessing. However, such a blessing will be the reward of works and will not be one of grace. Since God's administration today is one of grace, no blessing can possibly come to men because of works; therefore, all such promises are inoperative today. This promise was operative from the call of Abraham to the close of the Acts period. It will operate again in a future day after the salvation of God returns to and is again with the people of Israel. There are many who believe that any special favor we show to Israel today will result in some definite blessing coming to us; This is not true, and the very idea is a denial of the great truth that God is dealing with us in grace. Every blessing we have comes to us because of undeserved favor. If today there is in operation a promise of blessing to all who bless Israel, then those who fulfill the conditions have every right to demand that God will reward them for their works. Thus a blessing can be claimed on the basis of merit.

Because of our relationship to God we have every reason to treat the Jewish people with the utmost love and grace, but all who do this in the hope of getting a blessing as a result fail to realize that in this dispensation God does not dispense a single blessing on the basis of faithfulness, service, or merit. Our sole ground of expecting anything from God is His grace - that love and favor He shows to the most undeserving. If we remove ourselves from the ground of grace, no blessings can be expected. We are shut up to grace.

The character of the dispensation of the grace of God is such that every promise is suspended or made inoperative wherein men are promised blessings upon the basis of their works. We have no claims upon God, and we can never make any claims upon Him. Any blessing of God today is spoiled the moment we connect it with any merit or work. All His blessings at the present time are for the purpose of manifesting His grace and proclaiming His gracious character. We deny His grace when we think that the least of our blessings comes to us because of our merit or work.

Grace and Faith

In Romans 4 :16 a great principle is set forth that has a very positive bearing upon the character of the present dispensation. The subject under consideration is the justification of the ungodly. This is declared to be an act of grace upon the part of God. However, this grace operated through faith; therefore, it is declared: **Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace.**

It must be carefully noted that this statement deals with one matter only - the justification of the ungodly. This was made possible by the Cross, but it came to man solely as an act of grace. It could not be on any other ground for none could possibly deserve it or merit it in the least. Being solely of and by grace it had to also be solely of and by faith, or else grace would no longer be grace.

From this we can learn that whatever is of grace must also be by faith. There can be faith in matters where grace is not in view, but wherever there is grace it must operate through faith. Faith is in accord with grace, but nothing else in man can be in accord with grace no matter how good or desirable the thing may be. Therefore, this being a dispensation of pure grace, it must also be a dispensation of pure faith. In other words, all that man can expect of God is grace, and all that God desires of men is faith. He will not be moved off the ground of grace in any of His dealings with us, and He will not permit us to move off the ground of faith in any of our dealings with Him. If God permits us to deal with Him upon any other basis than that of faith, He will change the character of grace so that it will no longer be grace.

Faith accords with grace because it does not have the least merit. We do not consider it a meritorious work when we believe a truthful and honest man. Such belief or faith requires no effort; it is no work. Therefore, it is no meritorious work when we believe God, who is more worthy of faith than any man whom we have ever trusted.

We can confidently expect that in this dispensation of the grace of God that we will be kept by Him upon the ground of faith. Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God; therefore, all we are, all we possess, all we know, all we have

experienced in relationship to God will be as the result of hearing the Word of God. Nothing comes to us by seeing, feeling, or human experiences. We are shut up to faith alone. During this dispensation we have nothing to lean upon, nothing to teach us, nothing to help us except the written Word of God. We cannot expect any signs, demonstrations, or miracles, to confirm the sacred Scriptures. This is the time of pure faith during the absolute silence of God. God has spoken. He has said all He desires to say. Now the heavens are silent and they will remain silent until the dispensation of grace is at an end.

Lack of appreciation of the dispensation of grace, and lack of understanding that since it is of grace it must also be by faith, brings about the desire among many professing Christians for something more tangible than the Word of God. They desire to see something, to hear something, to feel something. Thousands of prayers are offered every day which implore God to manifest Himself, to give evidence of His power, to rebuke the wicked, and to bless the righteous. All such prayers are simply requests for God to bring an end to the dispensation of grace and to begin to deal with men in justice and judgment. Good indeed that such prayers will never be answered. They are not in the will of God. Strange indeed that some who have tasted of the grace of God in this dispensation of grace should make requests of God which virtually ask Him to bring it to an end. Some day it will end, but all the prayers men can offer will not change the dispensation of grace or speed up its ending by a single day.

Since the Acts period was not a dispensation of grace, God's people in that time were not held strictly upon the ground of faith. They had confidence, assurance and knowledge which were not based solely upon believing the Word of God. The words of the Lord to His disciples promised them that the works He had done, they would do also, and even greater works would be performed by them. John 14:12. When they went forth to proclaim the gospel, the Lord worked with them and confirmed the word with signs following. Mark 16:20. Therefore, these men had more than the Word to sustain them, and those who heard them were not shut up to believing the Word alone. They also saw the signs that confirmed the Word. When the disciples were threatened with penalties if they continued to speak in the Name of Jesus, they appealed from men to God, asked Him to stretch forth His hand to heal and to work signs and wonders. In answer God gave public proof that He heard their prayers for **"the place was shaken where they were assembled."** Acts 4:23-31. And when their enemies seized them and cast them into the common prison **"the angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them forth."** Later when Paul found himself in prison at Philippi, his prayer was answered by an earthquake which shook the foundations of the prison, broke the chains that bound him, freed his feet from the stocks and opened wide every door in the prison. Everyone who was in any manner related to these experiences had something more to depend upon, something more to strengthen his trust than the Word of God.

Such things, could properly be in the Acts period, but all such things would be out of place in a dispensation of grace. Grace can operate in the individual only through faith. Faith does not come from seeing miracles or experiencing wonders. Faith comes only by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God. This is why we are shut up to the Word of God alone.

In the Acts period when men received the Holy Spirit, they were granted some evidential sign which was positive proof that they possessed the Spirit. They spoke in languages which they had never before heard; they possessed the power to heal or to work miracles. Today we have nothing to tell us that we have the Spirit of God except the Word of God. It is the testimony of the Scriptures that we possess the Spirit of God. We have no other evidence. We are shut up to the Word of God alone.

One could almost wish it were otherwise. In view of the constant and bold rejection by men of the Word of God, it is certainly natural to desire that the proclamation of it could be confirmed with signs following. Hundreds have said in sincerity that if they could see a miracle such as was repeatedly performed in the Acts period, they would be able to trust God. Since we desire that men shall trust Him, we would like to be able to supply the miracle. But, as the familiar saying so aptly puts it, "One cannot have his cake and eat it, too." We cannot enjoy the privilege of living in a dispensation of pure grace unless we are willing to take our stand upon the Word of God and never ask or seek one thing in addition to it.

In this day we have nothing except that which comes to us as a result of believing the Word of God. As Sir Robert Anderson has well said:

The divine history of the favored race for thousands of years teems with miracles by which God gave proof of His power with men, and yet we are confronted with the astounding fact that from the days of the apostles to the present hour the history of Christendom will be searched in vain for the record of a single public event to compel belief that there is a God at all.

Prayer in the Dispensation of Grace

The fact that God's present dispensation or administration is one of absolute grace demands that there shall be a new revelation or basis upon which men may approach God in prayer and also a different divine method used by God in granting answers to prayer. These must be in complete harmony with pure grace and pure faith.

It is no secret that many of God's people are sorely distressed at the seeming failure of the prayer promises recorded in the four Gospels. Words could not be plainer than those used by our Lord in setting forth to His disciples the sure basis upon which God would answer prayer for them. Here are some of His words:

Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh. findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. Matthew 7:7-8.

If ye abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. John 15:7.

And whatsoever ye shall ask in My name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. John 14:13.

If ye shall ask anything in My name, I will do it. John 14:14.

These promises are constantly set forth in this day as a basis of prayer and are quoted as encouragements to pray. Thousands of ministers have led people to believe that if these promises are claimed by them they will experience the fulfillment of them in their lives. As a result many in hours of desperate need have earnestly claimed these promises only to be disappointed. When they have sought for some explanation from those who urged them to claim these promises, their failure to realize upon them has been explained by reading into these promises certain conditions of one kind or another. Our Lord made no conditions whatsoever except that the petitioners shall abide in Him, His words abide in them, and the prayer be offered in His name. It will not satisfy for any to point out that these promises have worked for some in some cases at sometime or another. Everyone of these promises are agreements - agreements for which men did not ask, but which were freely entered into by our Lord. In view of our experiences in prayer, must we conclude that the Lord does not always keep His agreements, or that he keeps them only at certain times when some undeclared conditions are kept - conditions which were no part of the original agreement?

It is simple to show that these agreements or promises were kept to the very letter upon every occasion in the Acts period, that this basis of prayer operated exactly as the Lord said it would.

The disciples asked the Lord to show which man He had chosen to take the place of Judas. He could not fail to do this since He said He would do anything they asked in His Name. And he did answer at once by causing the lot to fall upon Matthias. See Acts 1 :24-26.

In order that the rulers might be rebuked, the disciples prayed that God would stretch forth His hand to heal and that signs and wonders might be done. In answer, the place where they were assembled was shaken and some of the greatest wonders in the Word of God took place. The shadow of Peter falling upon the sick healed every one of them. See Acts 4 :29-31; 5.15-16.

When Peter prayed that the Samaritans might receive the Holy Spirit, he laid his hands on them and the desired result was accomplished. See Acts 8 :15-16.

Saul of Tarsus in great distress about the loss of his sight prayed about his blindness. In answer God gave him a vision of one named Ananias coming to him, laying his hand upon him and his sight being restored. Acts 9 :11-12.

In the house of Dorcas, Peter prayed and Dorcas arose from the dead. Acts 9 :40. The church in Jerusalem offered prayer to God without ceasing for Peter who was in prison. In answer God sent an angel to Peter, caused the shackles to fall from his hands, brought him out through the first and second ward, even causing the iron gate of the prison to swing open of its own accord. Acts 12 :5-10.

When Paul and Silas prayed in the jail at Philippi, an earthquake shook the prison; all doors were miraculously opened, and everyone's bonds were loosed. Acts 16 :25-26. Even in the final chapter of Acts when Paul prayed for the father of Publius, the prayer was answered by immediate and complete healing. In fact, every recorded instance of prayer in the Acts period wherein a definite request was made, the answer was immediate and in such manner that there could be no possible doubt that it was an act of God.

Prayer as set forth in the Gospels and as seen in operation in the book of Acts was somewhat like cashing checks at a bank. God never defaulted. He saw that each check presented was paid in full, for every prayer in the name of Christ was a valid claim upon Him. When men prayed, He answered, and, as said before, the answer was of such miraculous nature, that men had positive proof that He kept His word.

The character of this present dispensation is such that it demands a new basis of prayer which will be in harmony with it. It is still true that men should pray without ceasing, and that men ought to pray and not to faint. However, no prayer today can be like the presentation of a check at a bank as it was in the Acts period. The believers of the Acts period had a claim upon God because of promises He had made to them. An answer to a prayer was God making good one of His promises or fulfilling one of His agreements. Under an administration of the grace of God no man can ever have a claim upon Him. Every answer to prayer must be an act of grace, and must not in any manner be the payment of a debt, the keeping of a covenant or the full-- filling of an agreement.

It is in Philippians 4:6-7 that we find the new basis of prayer which is in harmony with the dispensation of the grace of God.

Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God, and the peace of God which passeth understanding shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Here we have a basis for prayer which will work every time it is put into operation. It has never failed and it never will fail. The truth it expresses will be found to be in harmony with the actual experience of spiritual believers.

The basis of prayer set forth in Philippians 4:6 makes everything about which there might be the least anxiety a legitimate subject for prayer. Our requests may concern physical needs, such as bodily healing; they may concern material needs, such as food and clothing; or they may concern spiritual needs, such as guidance, wisdom, or the salvation of others. By means of prayer and supplication we are to make our requests known to God. If we do this, then the basis of prayer will not be as if we were presenting a check at the bank; neither will it be as if we were in possession of a pass that opened the storehouse so that we could take what we pleased. In the dispensation of grace prayer must be as if we were going to the storehouse with a requisition for supplies. We cannot make demands upon God; we cannot command Him; we cannot call upon Him to fulfill His promises; but we can in prayer make our requests known unto Him. Of course we must not make any request of God that is out of harmony with the administration of grace. We must not ask Him to perform any judicial or punitive act against any sinner. All such acts have been deferred until the dispensation of grace is over and a dispensation of judgment begins.

Those who consider carefully the truth set forth in Philippians 4 :6-7 will see at once that there is no promise that our requests will be granted. Neither does it say that if two or three agree upon any request it shall be given to them. It teaches us to leave it all in His hands, confident that He will do that which is for our highest good. If we do this we will enter into His peace. As Sir Robert Anderson has so clearly stated it:

The prayer of the Pentecostal age was like drawing checks to be paid in coin over the counter. The prayer of the Christian dispensation; that is, of the life of faith, is to make known our requests to God, and to be at peace. If the matter were one within the power of a friend to deal with - a friend whose wisdom we could trust and of whose love we were assured - should we not be content to say, after telling him all, "now you know my feelings and my wishes, and I leave the case entirely in your hands." And this is just what God invites. In the dispensation of grace we must expect a different manner of answering prayer. God will not in this dispensation give us one thing outside of His Word to cause us to believe in Him or trust Him. All answers to prayer will be of such nature that only the man of faith, that is, the man who has believed the Word of God about prayer, will be able to discern His hand in them. There will be no answers of such nature as will impel man to believe in prayer.

At the present time God is still answering prayer as fully as He has ever done. Men are making their requests unto God; every request is being considered; and many requests are being granted. Nevertheless, all answers are of such nature that in the end the only positive proof we will have for believing that God answers prayer will be that testimony in the Word of God which we have read and believed. In the Acts period, part of the proof that God heard and answered prayer could be found in the answer itself. Today, God's manner of granting our request is of such nature that no proof that God answers prayer can be found in the answer; therefore, faith in prayer can have no source but the Word of God.

In Conclusion

The time in which we live, the administration of God under which we live, is the administration or dispensation of the grace of God. In the sacred Scriptures we read of such things as works, law, promises, covenants and grace. The blessings that we enjoy at the present time have not come to us as a result of any work we have done, any laws we have kept, any promises God has made, or any covenants into which He has entered. Our blessings, all of them, are of grace. If traced back they will be found to be acts of unmerited favor. If they are of works, they are not of grace. If they are of law, they are not of grace. If they are the fulfillments of promises, they are not of grace. If they are the keeping of covenants, they are not of grace. This being a dispensation of grace, every blessing that is ours must find its source in the grace of God.

In an administration of grace, every act of God must be an act of grace. If He cannot act in grace, he will not act at all. The time will yet come when all men will know that for at least 1900 years God has acted only in dispensing grace. Nothing that man has done in those years has caused Him to change in the least His present administration. The ungodly with their ungodly deeds, all the hard things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him, the blasphemy of men's lips, the murmurings of their hearts - none of these has caused Him to cease to act graciously and to deal with men in judgment. Men have actually challenged God to deal with them in judgment. The well-known infidel, Robert Ingersoll, in the course of his lectures used to shake his fist toward heaven and cry, "If there be a god, let him strike me dead." When nothing happened, he declared it was proof that God did not exist. If his antic proved anything at all, it demonstrated that this is a dispensation of grace, and that God is not acting in justice or judgment.

A dispensation of grace must also be a dispensation of pure faith. Everything must be of faith so that it might be by grace, for only faith can harmonize with grace. Law, works, covenants, and promises do not harmonize with grace.

Many will rebel against the divine revelation that this is an administration or dispensation of grace. Having made a habit of attributing every strange occurrence to God, they will insist that some of His acts are acts of justice, of judgment, of merited favor, rewards for service, or the keeping of covenants.

Others may rebel against the teaching that the dispensation of grace must also be a dispensation of faith in which all men are shut up to the Word of God alone. Some will argue against this, claiming that they have heard voices, dreamed dreams, or seen visions. They will insist that by means of these experiences they have something more than the Word of God as a buttress for their faith.

Some will be frankly disappointed. They have hoped and prayed that God would break His silence and manifest Himself in such a way that they might have some better reason for believing in Him than the statements of Scripture. They want to see, to hear, to feel, to know by experience - not just to read and believe. They think that God should conduct Himself like God, manifesting all His attributes, not just His grace. They would pray, "Let God arise, let His enemies be scattered: let them also that hate Him flee before Him."

The man of faith will make no such demand upon God or any such request of Him. He realizes the great privilege we have in this dispensation of grace. He can say of all things what God led Paul to say concerning one thing, "His grace is sufficient for me." He knows it is far better to believe without having seen than to have seen first, then believed. Even as the Lord said to Thomas:

Because thou hast seen Me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed. John 20 :29.

May God grant that the writer and reader will seek no higher place than to be among those blessed ones who are satisfied with believing the Word of God.

How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,
Is laid for your faith in His excellent Word !
What more can He say than to you He hath said,
To you who for refuge to Jesus have fled?

The End #SS08