

**Doctrinal Statements,
Perspective, and Meditations**

of
Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.

1991

These lessons were given at Mullen Hill Church in Lakeville, Mass.

in the Spring and Summer of 1991, and reflect my theology

Mullein Hill Baptist Church
Lakeville, MA

Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.
Great Doctrines (#1)
January 6th, 1990

(Hymn #'s 409 & 395)

IF GOD CAN BE KNOWN, HOW CAN I KNOW HIM?

Systematic theology, the greatest of the sciences, has fallen upon evil days. Between the rejection and ridicule of it by the so-called progressives and the neglect and abridgement of it by the orthodox, it, as a potent influence, is approaching the point of extinction.

- Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer

Every man may be a theologian without being saved, but every man cannot be saved without being a theologian.

- Dr. John Gerstner

Doctrine is the straightforward summary of biblical teaching on any subject. Theology is secondary reflection on the content of doctrine. - Dr. John Jefferson Davis

Introduction It is the Christian's claim not only that he is assuredly going to go to heaven when he dies, BUT ALSO that he possesses a unique relationship to God. The Christian even says that this relationship entails a family closeness with God. These two claims strike those outside the evangelical Christian church as preposterous--not to mention impossibly arrogant.

But the matter of SALVATION (what theologians call *soteriology*) is the very thing which does make us different from all others around us. It is not that we view ourselves as different--at least we *shouldn't*--it is that in salvation GOD VIEWS US DIFFERENT. Through the substitutionary atonement of Jesus Christ, applied to us by faith alone, we are completely justified before a holy God. That is our claim; it is our creed. So thoroughly has the death of Christ redeemed us (we are persuaded), that we boldly repeat the simple claims of Peter, Paul, John etc. So convinced are we that their teachings are correct and reliable, that we give no second thought to passing them on to as many other people as will listen to us. While it may utterly baffle some of our hearers that we make such fantastic claims, still we continue to do it--and we like to do it, because in the *sharing* of the good news we find great joy!

So if-

- 1) our claims are lofty (and they are), and if
- 2) the stakes as to what we offer are high (and they are), then

it is both profitable and "spiritual" to each become skilled at thinking through

- 1) EXACTLY WHAT we think the Bible teaches,

and

- 2) WHY we think it teaches those things...

↳ on any number of topics

- * Angelology (angelic beings, Satan)
- * Anthropology (the nature of man)
- * Christology (the nature of Christ)
- * Pneumatology (the nature of the Holy Spirit)
- * Soteriology (salvation)
- * Ecclesiology (the nature of the Church)
- * Eschatology (last things)

NOTE: The whole Book of Romans is essentially the first "systematic theology" book ever written by a Christian. It deals extensively with theology-proper, anthropology, and soteriology. It also deals in a secondary way with ecclesiology and eschatology.

C. "Historical" Theology

- this is the study of how THE CHURCH has developed its views of doctrine over twenty centuries of pondering (and fighting).
Examples: the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, Martin Luther's 95 Theses, the Westminster Confession of Faith, etc.
- The Christians of different centuries and eras seem charged with wrestling with different aspects of systematics:

* Bibliology	65- 150 A.D.
* Christology	65- 400 A.D.
* Pneumatology	150- 400 A.D.
* The Will of Man	250- 500 A.D.
* Soteriology	1400-1600 A.D.
* Ecclesiology	1600-1800 A.D.
* Christology	1830-1930 A.D.
* Eschatology	1900- A.D.
* Pneumatology	1920- A.D.

D. "Practical" Theology

- this includes things like counseling, approaches to discipleship, philosophies of Christian Education, missiology, etc.

SUMMARY of Introductory Comments

- I We claim big things! (There is one God, that He is "knowable", and that we (Christians) "know Him.")
- II God wants us to think *clearly* and *correctly* about the things on which He has spoken.
- III Our world demands that we defend our faith.
- IV Doctrine can be viewed from different "perspectives": by its progressive unfolding, by theme, by its development in church history, by its practical application in ministry.

DOCTRINE # 1

"The Revelation of & by God"

Intro. The doctrine of REVELATION asks, "What?"
 The doctrine of INSPIRATION asks, "How?"
 The doctrine of ILLUMINATION asks, "What does it mean?"

Before we can say anything about anything, we have to start with the assumption, that:

There is one God, and that He has made Himself knowable.

Without this assumption, doing theology is a complete waste of time. Evangelical Christians share this assumption with a great many other people in the world--Jews, Moslems, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, Roman Catholics, etc. all accept this first assumption. There are also a great many other people in the world who would reject that assumption--Buddhists, Hindus, Shintoists, deists, many liberal Protestants, etc.

We are persuaded that God has revealed Himself in His creation. This not only just makes sense, it is the teaching of Scripture in places like Psalms 8, 19 and Romans 1. This is called "Natural Revelation," (see Acts 17:22-31) and its *handmaiden* is the doctrine of "common grace," wherein we say that God has been gracious to the whole planet in many ways (Matthew 5:44-46).

But many people content themselves with no further word from God than the knowledge that He simply IS. That knowledge alone, of course, offers no answer or solution to the problem of evil--which, you don't have to walk on the planet too long before you bump into it--both around you and IN you...

The fact is that God has said more than just "I am here, Period." This is where we cling to the doctrine of "Special Revelation." It is our belief (and that of Jews and Catholics and Orthodox and some liberal Protestants) that GOD HAS SPOKEN. In His providence, He has caused a collection of "recordings" to be handed down to us which accurately reflect:

- * His exact ATTRIBUTES
 - * His WILL
 - * His LOVE
 - * His PLAN

(Parenthesis: A quote on the problem of DOUBT...When the religious believer finds himself preoccupied by doubt, he or she would do well to specify as carefully as possible the exact nature of the worrisome...objections. Often what mistakenly passes for philosophical doubt is really

- * lack of sleep, * lack of social support for one's belief system
- * uncritically identifying with a character in a work of fiction...

or some other condition not strictly relevant to issues of TRUTH or FALSITY. Works of fiction often reflect a definite interpretation of the world, and the reader is led to "experience" the fictional world in terms of that interpretation...Such dislocations may induce a feeling of alienation from your previous commitments and may be mistaken for genuinely philosophical doubt.

from David Wolfe, *Epistemology*, p.75)

(Another Parenthesis: It is great significance that a good many of our Pentecostal and charismatic (the new term is "third wave") brethren depend upon the assumption that the Lord continues to reveal Himself just as He did to the prophets and apostles. The current trend is to seek such "revelations" almost as much as to study the written word.)

Bibliology

Central Passages Supporting the Evangelical Viewpoint:

2 Timothy 3:16,17; 2 Peter 1:20,21; 2 Peter 3:16; I Corinthians 2:13; John 10:35; Deuteronomy 9:10; Luke 1:1-4; Acts 28:25; Hebrews 3:7; 2 Samuel 23:2; I Thess.5:27; 2 Thess.3:14; John 10:22-39;14:26; Matthew 5:17,18; 19:4,5,18,19; Matthew 22; I Tim.5:18.

Evangelical Christians presuppose that God has spoken to man through the Hebrew prophets, kings, etc. and through His Son, and through the writers of those books collected in the New Testament. We believe that these "special revelations" have been reliably preserved between the pages of the Holy Bible. In this belief, we acknowledge several things:

1. That each writer of what would later be called Holy Scripture wrote freely from within his own personality and culture, and that these conditions did not hinder the Holy Spirit from inspiring him to write what God wanted.
2. That the Holy Spirit *superintended* the writing of certain books in such a way that every word written would be without error.
3. That some of the writers wrote (or used: Jude 14) other books which were not uniquely inspired by the Holy Spirit, nor preserved for us by Him (for Paul's initial correspondence with the church at Corinth).
4. That the Church continued to be providentially led by the Holy Spirit to collect the CANON of Scripture and to preserve it for future generations.
5. That certain aspects of the written revelation of Scripture are *descriptive* and certain aspects are *prescriptive*, and that the distinguishing of which is which is not obscure but plain upon the responsible practice of hermeneutics (interpretation).
6. There are really only a dozen or so passages in the whole Bible which honestly even look like they contain error, and for every one of those, there is a plausible explanation.

Conclusion Since we have reliable and understandable revelation from the true God, we can know Him. We can learn ABOUT Him from Scripture with an assurance that He has not changed. And through using Scripture as our "milk, bread and meat" we can foster that amazing walk with the Savior that He has made possible by His death on the cross.

Great Doctrines of the Faith

The Doctrine of Bibliology

or

"How We Got Our Bible"

Hymn 271 and "Oh, Lord, You're Beautiful"

Introduction Fundamentalists and evangelicals are often accused of taking an unintelligent view of the Bible. We treat the Bible (it is thought) as a magical book that somehow floated down from heaven. Attitudes like, "if the King James version was good enough for Paul, then its good enough for me" are considered laughable...and if there is some justification for this view of us, then that is unfortunate. Our view tonight though, is that it is profitable for us to know something of how the "Scriptures" have come down to us, and what is the NATURE of those Scriptures. Let me begin with a few assumptions:

- * We believe that there are 66 "writings" of unique character which comprise the 66 books of the Holy Bible.
- * We believe that these 66 writings were "inspired" by God in such a way as to render them "sacred," and that while other religious writings may be of high value, none other than the 66 have been inspired to their degree.
- * We believe that the Holy Spirit engineered the 66 writings by means of human authors but without circumventing or diminishing those authors' personalities or their cultural circumstances.
- * We believe that in "the original autographs" (the first edition) those 66 writings were written without error of any kind.
- * We believe it is both profitable and important that believers have translations available of those 66 writings which most closely duplicate the original text.

The Doctrine of Scripture is called "Bibliology." Bibliology has a long and fascinating development in history and holding to a conservative/evangelical view of bibliology is not tantamount to committing intellectual suicide... Rather, a well-thought out and considered view of "Scripture" is one of the most rational studies a person can undertake!

The NATURE of Scripture What makes the "Holy Bible" different from the Book of Mormon, the Hindu *Upanishads*, the Koran, or even First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians (c. 100 AD)? The Church has recognized over the centuries that the 66 sacred writings collected in the Bible are invested with unique character and quality. Therefore, we can summarize the NATURE of our Bible under the following headings:

Plenary - that the Bible is WHOLLY inspired; it is fully of God.
Use of men - that the Bible is fully of man, too. God used all of the men who wrote it--their intellect, their emotions, their cultural circumstances, etc.

Given by the Holy Spirit - God, the Spirit is the prime divine agent in the transmission of God's Word.

Use of a variety of materials - as below.

Use of written words - God's *superintendence* of specific ideas through the written communication of humans.

Reliability - what Scripture says, is true. It is reliable in all that it affirms (though this does not imply that it is unreliable in what it does not affirm).

Balance between the divine and the human elements - again, fully of God and using man fully.

Types of Literature in Scripture

	<u>Examples</u>
History	Genesis, I Kings, Matthew, Acts)
Poetry	Psalms, Song of Solomon
Prophectic	Isaiah, Micah
Wisdom	Proverbs
Apocalyptic	Daniel, Revelation
Epistolary	Romans, I John

How Did God Bear These Words Along?

Dictation (Deut.9:10)

Eyewitness accounts/research (Luke 1:1-4)

Emotional/personal reflection (Romans 9:1-3)

Falsehood (Gen.3:4,5)

Non-canonical material (Jude 14) [NOTE: though never *apocryphal* mat'l]

Visions/dreams (Acts 18:9.10)

Use of angels (Revelation 4:1)

What We Mean By INERRANCY - the *errorlessness* of the text of Scripture.

"The Bible tells the truth, and it does so without error" -- Charles Ryrie

A Few Points:

- * Keep in mind the question, "What was the author's intent?"
 - was it his purpose to record exact facts, or sometimes to offer an approximation?
- * To say that the purpose of the Bible is *soteriological* (teaching about salvation), and therefore it is only inerrant in respect to what it teaches about salvation is a **WRONG** concept of "inerrancy."
- * other notes...

Great Doctrines of the Faith
The Doctrine of Christology
or
"Knowing Jesus Christ"

Hymn #'s 220, 206

Scripture reading: Matthew 16:13-17

Introduction Our purpose this evening is to give a broad overview of the study of the Person of Jesus Christ, known by theologians as the Doctrine of "Christology." In October, 451 the Council at Chalcedon (modern Istanbul) was convened to address the matter of "who was Jesus Christ?" They issued their famous "formula" on the Person of Christ, which reads as follows:

We then, following the holy fathers, all with one consent, teach men to confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood; truly God and also truly man, of a reasonable soul and body; consubstantial with the Father according to the Godhead, and consubstantial with us according to the manhood; in all things like unto us, without sin; begotten before all ages of the Father according to the Godhead, and in these latter days, for us and for our salvation, born of the virgin Mary, the Mother of God, according to the manhood; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, to be acknowledged in two natures, inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably, the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one Person and one subsistence, not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son, the Only-begotten, God the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ; as the prophets from the beginning have declared concerning Him, and the Lord Jesus Christ Himself has taught us, and the Creed of the holy fathers has handed down to us.

Although this creedal formula is lengthy, it shows the kind of precise thinking that came out of that Council. It does not bear the divine authority as Scripture does of course, but it rings true to the heart of what Scripture teaches about the nature of Jesus Christ. This formula represents one way in which people can KNOW Jesus Christ. There are variety of ways to address the task of knowing Jesus Christ--which is the focus of the discipline of Christology.

Doctrinally

Historically

Salvifically

"Existentially"

Eschatologically

WAYS TO "KNOW" JESUS CHRIST

Knowing Jesus Doctrinally

Becoming familiar with the Biblical material on the nature of Jesus is the first way to know Him. The Old Testament abounds with *prophetic* information about Israel's Messiah, and the New Testament is full of *doctrinal* information about Jesus' claims and proofs to BE that Messiah, as well as His closest followers' defense of that same claim.

A. *Central Christological NT Passages*

John 1 Colossians 1 Philippians 2 Hebrews 1,2,3,5

B. *Divisions of Christology*

Christ Pre-incarnate (before His birth) - in eternity, the OT
 Christ Incarnate (His virgin birth, deity, humanity, offices
 Christ's Suffering and Death
 Christ's Resurrection
 Christ's Ascension & present position
 Christ's Second Coming

Knowing Jesus Historically

Until Chalcedon the church had wrestled with a unified and precise understanding of exactly what His nature was. That was over 4 centuries after His ascension! Today, we take for granted this issue (unless we find ourselves confronted by cultists who deny various orthodox tenets). The Christological heresies of those first 4 centuries are still around today, in dressed up and modernized fashion. But they are still the same old heresies... If it is taking the church some decades to hammer out a universally accepted "formula" on eschatology (end times) or pneumatology (the Holy Spirit), it should not surprise us--it took the church twice as long as the history of the United States to hammer out her Christology!

BRIEF Summary of the Christological Heresies

- A. Ebionism - Jesus was not fully God, although of excellent character.
- B. Adoptionism - Jesus was only human until His baptism, and then He was mystically absorbed ("adopted") into the Godhead at that time.
- C. Dynamic Monarchianism - Non-trinitarian monotheism; Jesus only a man, and the Holy Spirit only an influence.
- D. Modalistic Monarchianism - Non-trinitarian monotheism which saw ONE God, expressing Himself in 3 modes: F, S, or H.S.
- E. Arianism - the controversy which culminated in the Nicean Council in 325 AD. Arius (an Alexandrian presbyter) said Jesus was "*homoiousias*" - of LIKE substance with God. Athanasius said Jesus was "*homoousias*" - of the SAME nature as God). The Nicene Creed states: **We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of things visible and invisible; and in one Lord Jesus Christ, begotten, not made, being of one substance [*homoousias*] with the Father...**
- F. Apollinarianism - a denial that Christ had a human soul.

- G. Nestorianism - Christ possessed TWO distinct personalities.
 H. Eutichianism - Christ's two natures were indistinguishable.

NOTE: the Council of Chalcedon also pronounced Mary as the "mother of God." She is not the mother of God, she is the mother of Jesus' *humanity*.

Knowing Jesus Salvifically

Most of us do not introduce people to Christ through either of the above WAYS to know Christ. We jump right to this "way," and that is appropriate perhaps most of the time. We tell people, "Trust Jesus to be your Savior just on the evidence of His resurrection." With many that is all they need to know, at least at first.

How much "Christology" does a person need to understand, accept, love to be saved? There are a great many theological questions about Jesus that can be asked, and some are hard to answer... Perhaps the following is the "bottom-line" of what a person needs to know and believe in order to be truly saved--what we might call a *minimal Christology*:

- * Jesus was who He said He was: 100% God/100% Man.
- * Jesus died for all who would ever trust in that atoning death
- * Jesus' death is completely sufficient for my redemption
- * Jesus didn't stay dead

Knowing Jesus "salvifically" is the *first* goal of evangelism but it is not its only goal. Once a person is saved, he then needs to be "followed up" or, what we call "discipled."

Knowing Jesus "Existentially"

Being careful with this word, we mean simply that a person needs more than an *introduction* to Jesus--he needs an ongoing "existence" WITH Him. Every Christian needs to sense the presence of the Lord Jesus in his life in His:

moving,
 providing,
 guiding,
 loving,
 protecting,
 teaching,
 preserving,
 readying,
 equipping,
 sanctifying,
 disciplining,
 communicating...

In this sense "Quiet Time" is actually a division of Christology. Preaching in the church is part of Christology. Our relationships in the Body are part of Christology.

Observation: That some Christians can go for weeks, months, (years?) and NOT experience ANY of the above--or at least not testify to them, is amazing, and (according to Scripture) cause to question whether that person was ever genuinely introduced to Jesus.

Knowing Jesus Eschatologically

For the true Christian death is not the end, although it is a change. *Our Daily Bread* had a recent devotional about the way Christians die. The little devotional suggested that "Christians die well."

Jesus said He would never forsake us. No "experience" is more challenging to even the Christian than the experience of death. Few people look forward to it. But an important part of Christology is the FAITH that the Christian exercises in this area. Biblical Christology states that in wonderful sense, Christ has gone to prepare a place for us that where He is, there we may be also. The Apostle Paul affirmed this when he wrote, "we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord" (2 Cor. 5:8).

"Personal Eschatology" is the most intimate and precious part of our Christology. We cherish the promises Jesus gave us in Scripture, and we brag on HIS assurances (though with no confidence in the flesh...)

Finally, we SHALL know Jesus eschatologically when He comes again. Consider I Cor. 13:9-13. Without fully understanding all the wonders of Paul's statement, we look forward to Christ's return to this planet. Perhaps that will be sooner than we realize. But to see Him on that day--indeed to be WITH Him as He returns--that is a "reality" which will occur which overwhelms us tonight! It compels us to praise Him, to look up with the eyes of faith, towards a horizon not yet visible but far more exciting than all the pleasures the world has to offer.

THE HOLY SPIRIT, and HOW HE WORKS

Introduction Before 1960 you would have been hard pressed to find a book in a religious book store on the subject of the Holy Spirit. But since that time countless books have been written on the third person of the Trinity. Perhaps this is partly because it is the task of this generation to wrestle with the doctrine of "pneumatology" just as it seems to have been the task of other generations to hammer out other major areas of Christian doctrine.

No doctrine is more relevant to us. No doctrine has more importance to the Christian. And no doctrine is more controversial today among Christians. Today, there seem to be two extremes that Christians flock towards: 1) ignoring God, the Spirit, or 2) elevating God, the Spirit to the place of preeminence. Obviously, both of these extremes represents error.

As with all "Great Doctrines", our assumed starting place is the revelation of Scripture. God's Spirit is mentioned about 400 times in the OT and about 254 times in the New Testament--He is no minor Biblical theme! Dr. J. I. Packer's article on the Holy Spirit (from the *New Dictionary of Theology*, InterVarsity Press) is an excellent summary of both OT and NT teaching...

THE BASICS OF BIBLICAL PNEUMATOLOGY

General Hebrew (OT) word used for the "Spirit" is *ruach* (atmosphere, the wind, which is an invisible, irresistible power, sometimes benign and beneficial, sometimes raging and destructive--See Gen. 8:1; Ex. 10:13, 19: 14:21; Num.11:31)

General Greek (NT) word for "Spirit" is *pneuma*, whose root meaning is "to breathe" or "to blow." NOTE: while the full name, "Holy Spirit" occurs in the Greek OT (the Septuagint) only twice, Ps. 51; Is. 63; it occurs in the NT 80-90 times.

ATTRIBUTES OF THE HOLY SPIRIT:

1. He is GOD, coequal & coeternal with the Father and the Son, and possessing all the attributes of deity (omniscience, omnipresence, omnipotence, absolute purity, etc., etc.)
2. He eternally "PROCEEDS" from both the Father and the Son (even as the Son is eternally "begotten" by the Father). See Psalm 104:30; John 15:26; 16:7; Romans 8:9; Gal. 4:6.
3. He is "CHRISTOCENTRIC"--that is, He always directs the believer towards Christ and magnifies Him.
4. He is a PERSON, not a thing, influence, "force" or "E.T."
5. He is SOVEREIGN (See John 3:8), and calls the elect unto a saving relationship with the Son.
6. He INDWELLS every regenerate believer (John 14:16). *Rom. 8.*
7. He is DISCERNIBLE to the believer, and sensing His leading and guidance is a part of the normal Christian life.
8. His true works are never hollow, cheap or fleshly. They are characterized by godly power and holiness and wonder.

TENSIONS IN PNEUMATOLOGY

1. Asking Him to move in my life, is to invite CHANGE.
2. The purpose of the gifts is SERVICE which builds up. Period.
3. He is never the source of confusion or disharmony.
4. Spirit baptism occurs at conversion.
5. Filling occurs repeatedly.
6. His goal is to produce fruit in the life of the believer (Gal. 5) which reflects Jesus Christ and duplicates His nature, i.e.
 - * love
 - * joy
 - * peace
 - * longsuffering
 - * gentleness
 - * goodness
 - * faith
 - * meekness
 - * temperance
7. Misconceptions or error about pneumatology can be very "toxic".
8. He is not necessarily discerned through our senses--that is, He should not be confused as automatically "present" in Sound: pleasing music, good Bible preaching or teaching
Sight: church buildings, religious art, big numbers at church services or functions...
9. His presence in corporate worship should be viewed as *incidental*, not as the primary focus. The primary focus should always be JESUS CHRIST--honoring Him privately and as an assembly.
10. There IS a properly mystical side to discerning Him--indeed He IS the source of all true and holy "mysticism" and His ways and movements can never be fully categorized or enumerated by man. Romans 8 is an excellent text on this...
11. He might be discerned in a plethora of means and ways, i.e.:
 - * In the beauty/order/power of creation (despite its fallen character).
 - * In and through the written Word of God;
 - * In the fellowship of the saints (when it is good);
 - * In the privacy of the believer's own walk with Christ and in any of the experiences therein--
(conversion, baptism, the Lord's Table, "secret acts of love and service", in grief & loss, successful evangelism, consoling another, "unction" in preaching or teaching, conviction of sin and godly sorrow for sin, in seeing His fruits produced in my life, in the conviction and "feeling" that his/her worship has been acceptable and pleasing to God; in sensing His will in specific decisions and on specific occasions, at death, etc., etc.);
 - * In the rise and fall of nations, good or evil;
 - * In local, regional or national revival.

WHAT A CHRISTIAN SHOULD EXPECT...

We could spend a lot of time correcting errors in modern thinking about what the believer should expect to experience from God's Spirit. But it is more profitable (and less time consuming) to lay out those things we CAN and SHOULD expect. Here is my list, as I understand it from Scripture:

1. Assurance that "I am His and He is mine"--that my conversion and redemption are, in fact, real and genuine, and that they cannot be undone by any force on earth, including my own "proneness to wander."
2. The guidance and leading of the Spirit (not to be confused with my own inclinations, prejudices, likes/dislikes) is to be my frequent experience--in times of the mundane just as at times of crisis.
3. The fruits of the Spirit in my character, progressively developed in accordance with the degree of seriousness with which I seek Christ.
4. There is at least one (maybe more) "ministry tool" (gift) for me to use within the body of Christ, which will manifest itself in time as I serve Him. That tool may or may not entail "high visibility," but its use will bring glory to Jesus, and to Him alone.
5. That I will become a cleaner vessel (over time), more obedient and more open to the sanctifying work of the Spirit with each passing year, in whatever areas of my life He chooses to convince and convict.
5. That I will become bolder (over time) and more burdened about witnessing for Christ.
7. That I will grow less attached and concerned about the attractions and vanities of this world.
8. That I will become increasingly impressed with MISSION (Matt.28:19,20) as I tend to remember "the Kingdom" more frequently.
9. That I will become more a person of faith, willing a little more with each passing year to ENTRUST myself, my family, my life and its changing circumstances, unto a wise and loving God.
10. That I will become more a person of prayer, given to a progressively
 - * greater burden for prayer
 - * greater duration of prayer
 - * greater confidence in prayer
 - * greater love and fondness for prayer
11. I will be less prone to discouragement as I become more sensitive to God's Spirit.
12. I will grow less cynical and will resist the influences toward that fallen tendency.
13. My life should become a laboratory and a showcase for the greatest two commandments: loving God with all my being, and loving my

14. My spiritual growth will be progressive, varied in intensity with different "seasons of life", but I will not reach a complete harmony with God's Spirit until I am with Jesus--contra John Wesley, who claimed it is possible to become "entirely sanctified" before being with Him, although one could slip back away from entire sanctification.
15. My emotional health will be aided by my spiritual growth, but it will not automatically or magically be *immunized* or *healed* just because I attend a special church service or assembly of Christians. God is the sovereign healer, and His method and timing for healing are His prerogative. My sense of happiness and security are *enhanced* by God's Spirit, but they come progressively more often than all at once.
16. In summary, I can expect my life to become "fruitocentric" rather than "giftocentric", privately moved rather than publicly dramatic, and increasingly willing to serve rather than waiting and expecting to BE served.

How People Are Saved

(The Doctrine of Soteriology)

Introduction The proper place to start with this study is the question,
Is mankind "lost", and if so, HOW "lost?"

Our doctrine of salvation (soteriology) must begin with the problem of man's nature. A "sub-doctrine" of soteriology, therefore, is the doctrine of sin (harmartiology). Once we establish what we believe about man's sin problem, we can see what God had to do to solve it, and therefore, how people are saved.

In the details of soteriology, Christians hold many varying views. But ALL Christians agree on certain basic "fundamental" truths about salvation. This group of truths ("dogmas") is what really distinguishes us from "Christians" of other traditions. (Discussion, argumentation and even conflict about these truths is what lay at the base of the Protestant Reformation of the 1500's.)

Let's summarize these truths, about which all evangelicals agree:

1. Interpreted responsibly, what the Bible proclaims about man's destiny is true.
2. The Bible reveals that mankind is lost from God's kingdom, by virtue of *two* aspects of personal evil:
 - a. All people are still-born, spiritually, by reason of their inheritance from Adam and Eve of the principle of sin. Only one individual in all time was born free of sin, the Lord Jesus Christ.
 - b. All people begin to refine the principle of sin from a very early age, and, invariably continue in the practice of sin without excuse before a holy God.
3. The entire human race is worthy to pay for their own sins in the lake of fire, eternally damned there, and yet having been condemned to that place justly and fairly by their Judge, the Lord Jesus Christ.
4. A great proportion of the race will ultimately end up in eternal judgement.
5. God loves His creation, and in eternity past, the Father "covenanted" with the Son to redeem out from the lost masses of humans, all those who would place their personal faith in the atonement for sin which the Son would make.

6. That atonement would prove completely sufficient for the whole human race, if indeed the whole human race were to appropriate it by faith.
7. Faith alone is the response which appropriates this redemption.
8. This decided Plan of Redemption is *indeed* GOOD NEWS for man, and therefore this plan is called "the Gospel" (which means, "good news.")
9. All Christians have been commissioned by Jesus Christ to engage themselves in the sharing of this good news, and its proclamation wherever and whenever possible.

The Starting Place: "How sinful is Man?"

The viewpoint that we are teaching tonight embraces what is called the doctrine of "total depravity."

TOTAL DEPRAVITY means that *inherent corruption* extends to every part of man's nature: his will, his intellect, his emotions, and his body. It means that no part of a person can exercise merit towards God. It suggests that man's condition is inherently hopeless, insofar as performing spiritual good towards God is concerned.

TOTAL DEPRAVITY does not suggest that all people express their sinfulness equally, nor that unsaved people cannot perform deeds which are "good" relative to each other, nor that there is nothing in man which drives him to seek someOne higher than himself.

TOTAL DEPRAVITY *does* mean that every part of man has been ruined by sin; that man has no natural ability to respond positively towards God; that man is spiritually dead and must experience a supernatural ACT to live spiritually.

Good quote: *Man is free to do as he pleases, but he will always "please" to do what he ought not to do.*

Scriptures: Isaiah 64:6; Psalm 14:2-4; Romans 3:10-20; John 5:42; Psalm 10:4; Luke 19:10; I Cor. 2:14; Gen. 2:17; Rom. 5:12; Eph.2:1-3; Eph.2:12; Jer. 13:23; Psalm 51:5; John 3:3; Job 14:4; I Cor. 1:18; Acts 13:41; Prov. 30:12; John 5:21; 6:53; 8:19; Matt. 11:25; I Kings 8:46; Psalm 130:3; Eccl. 7:20; Jer. 17:9; etc.

HOW SINFUL IS MAN? He is totally depraved, though not *absolutely* depraved, as is Satan. Man's whole being, in every part has been polluted, ruined and "bent" by sin.

HOW, THEN, CAN THERE BE ANY HOPE?

If man is fully lost, and *born* in that condition, how then can there be any hope for anyone at all? The answer is plainly found in the Bible where the good news is revealed that God could not allow man's destiny to be determined by one factor only: his sinfulness. Yes, God is an absolutely holy and righteous God and cannot allow sin in His presence. But at the same time He is a loving and compassionate God.

POSSIBILITIES

1. God chooses none - *nihilism*
2. God chooses all - *universalism*
3. God chooses some — by their works
 |
 | or
 |
 | by *grace* (unmerited)

And God declared His plan to REDEEM some people--many, many people-- from their hell-bent lostness. In fact, so wide and deep is God's love for His creation that an OPEN INVITATION is made through the pages of Scripture that **ANY** many come; any who will trust in God's remedy for sin.

Importantly, it is the clear teaching of the Bible that who WILL be saved has not been left up to random chance. In fact, God has been intimately involved in that question, since before the world was even created! Scripture teaches us that God determined that He would unconditionally elect for Himself a great portion of mankind to become saved. God's election is a free, sovereign, unconditional choice of sinners as sinners, to be redeemed by Christ, given faith and brought to glory. This is the biblical doctrine called UNCONDITIONAL ELECTION.

Scriptures: John 1:12,13; 6:37,39,40; 10:27; Eph. 1:4; 2 Thess.2:13; 2 Tim. 1:9; Romans 8:29,30; 9:23; etc.

How Does God Do This?

If God has chosen certain individual people that *they will* at some point in their days *chose* to trust Christ--

(because although man's will is "bent", it is not ignored)

--how does He perform it? If He holds mankind responsible to believe (as the Bible clearly teaches that He does), then HOW does He at the same time DO the saving?

TWO THINGS THE BIBLE TEACHES...

WHICH SEEM TO CONTRADICT EACH OTHER:

(what J.I. Packer calls an "antinomy")

1. God is absolutely, unconditionally sovereign
2. Man is held responsible to *chose* to believe

ANSWER: God accomplishes the salvation of "the elect", motivated by His love, by means of His grace, sovereignly given to whom He will.

"The work of the Holy Spirit in bringing men to faith and salvation never fails to achieve its object." --Dr. Jack Arnold

Scriptures: Romans 8:29,30; Ephesians 2:8,9; 4:4; 2 Tim. 1:9; etc.

What Did the Cross Accomplish?

We must ask ourselves at this point, "what did Jesus' death on Calvary actually accomplish, or perform? Did it merely make salvation potential for whomever would, of their own doing, appropriate its benefits? Or, did the cross actually accomplish redemption for somebody?

The perspective of this study is that the redeeming work of Christ has as its end and goal the actual salvation of the elect. And therefore the cross actually effected the redemption of particular people. It makes no sense at all to say that Jesus "PAID FOR" the sins of the whole world, and then was frustrated in His designs by the overriding will of man. That would make man sovereign, not God. Therefore, we view that the cross was the means by which the salvation of the elect of God was and is accomplished. This teaching has been called by some the doctrine of "limited atonement", an unfortunate term which confuses the meaning of the teaching. A better term is *particular redemption*.

Scriptures: Matthew 1:21; John 10:11,14; Acts 20:28; Eph. 5:25; Romans 5:8,9; 2 Cor. 5:21; Titus 3:5,6; Isaiah 53:5,6; I Peter 1:18,19; Matthew 26:28; etc.

If I Trust Christ, How Secure is My Salvation?

A question of great concern is, "is it not possible for a person to undo what Christ accomplished?" Can we not, by our own unbelief and apostasy *disqualify* myself from the covenant of promise? Some Christians live in fear of their own potential for sin so much--and some churches contribute to this fear--that they question whether the cross has really accomplished anything irreversible...

But we believe that believers are KEPT in faith and grace by the unconquerable power of God until they come to glory. In other words, the elect will persevere in faith--though it may be "through many dangers, toils and snares." God has secured the continuous and final salvation of all true believers in Christ.

Scriptures: Romans 8:28-30, 34; I Peter 1:5; Romans 5:7-10; John 10:29; Jude 1; John 17:11,15; John 11:42; Matthew 28:20; I John 2:1,2; Hebrews 4:14-16; 7:25; I Cor. 6:19; Ephesians 4:30; Galatians 3:26; John 1:12; Eph. 1:4; 2 Thess. 2:13; etc., etc.

Note: Problems with this doctrine generally arise as we try to explain the apostasy of people we have known. Three things need to be observed: 1. The "profession" of faith is not infallible proof that a work of grace has occurred. 2. Doubting does not call a person's redemption into question. It is what they do with the doubts they have... 3. The "proof" of genuine conversion may be very simple: "I am trusting in Jesus' death and resurrection." That simple faith may be accompanied by little else...

Unitarianism Pelagianism Liberalism	Arminianism Semi-Pelagianism Free Will	Modified Arminianism Modified Free Will	Modified Calvinism Modified Electionists	Calvinism Electionists	Hyper-Calvinism Hyper-Electionists	Fatalism Non-Christian
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. No Depravity 2. Man basically good. 3. Christ died for everyone and all will be saved. 4. God loves everybody 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Partial Depravity 2. Conditional Election 3. Unlimited Atonement 4. Resistible Grace 5. Loss of Salvation 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Partial Depravity 2. Conditional Election 3. Unlimited Atonement 4. Resistible Grace 5. Eternal Security 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Total Depravity 2. Unconditional Election 3. Unlimited Atonement 4. Irresistible Grace 5. Perseverance of the Saints (Eternal Security) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Total Depravity 2. Unconditional Election 3. Limited Atonement 4. Irresistible Grace 5. Perseverance of the Saints 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Total Depravity 2. Unconditional Election 3. Limited Atonement 4. Irresistible Grace 5. Perseverance of the Saints 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Determinism 2. Closed System 3. Men are puppets 4. "Men are machines" 5. "What will be will be and there is nothing we can do about it"
	<p>*Accepts free will and modifies the concept of a sovereign God.</p> <p>*Accepts the mystery of Christ dying for all, the H.S. drawing all, the Father loving all and man's innate ability to believe.</p> <p>*Accepts Christ died for all, and all men are lost, except the heathen who have never heard the gospel.</p> <p>*Accepts the fact that a man once saved can fall out of salvation and be lost.</p> <p>*Accepts the Great Commission and seeks to fulfill it.</p>	<p>*Accepts free will, and modifies the concept of a sovereign God.</p> <p>*Accepts the mystery of Christ dying for all, the H.S. drawing all, the Father loving all and man's innate ability to believe.</p> <p>*Accepts the idea that even though Christ died for all, all men are still lost and in need of Christ.</p> <p>*Accepts the Great Commission and seeks to fulfill it.</p> <p>*Accepts the fact that the heathen are lost even though they have never heard the gospel.</p>	<p>*Accepts human responsibility (may speak of free-will).</p> <p>*Accepts a supralapsarian position (God planned to provide salvation for all men after He planned to elect some) between sovereignty and human responsibility, and also between Christ dying for all men and God electing some to salvation.</p> <p>*Accepts no form of double predestination but says only that Christ elected some to salvation.</p> <p>*Accepts the Great Commission and seeks to fulfill it.</p>	<p>*Accepts human responsibility.</p> <p>*Accepts an infralapsarian position (God chose to plan the Fall before He chose to elect men to salvation).</p> <p>*Accepts a mystery between divine sovereignty and human responsibility.</p> <p>*Accepts a mild form of double predestination (God actively chooses the elect and passively passes by the non-elect)</p> <p>*Accepts the Great Commission and seeks to fulfill it.</p>	<p>*Plays down human responsibility.</p> <p>*Accepts a supralapsarian position (God elected men to salvation before He chose to permit the Fall).</p> <p>*Accepts no mystery between divine sovereignty and human responsibility. Stresses only divine sovereignty.</p> <p>*Accepts a strict form of double predestination (God actively chooses men to be saved and to be damned)</p> <p>*Accepts no responsibility to fulfill the Great Commission. Non-evangelistic.</p>	<p>Gill</p> <p>Primitive Baptists</p>
Roman Catholics	<p>Wesley, Marshall, Pennick, Hubbard</p> <p>Methodists, Wesleyans, Some Episcopalians, Pentecostals, most Charismatics, Holiness, Some Baptists</p>	<p>Rice, Jones, Falwell, Tolsens, Hyles, Swindell, Lindsey, Graham</p> <p>Most Baptists, Some Evangelical Free, Most Independents, Covenant Church</p>	<p>Baxter, Kyle, Moody, Mueller, Chafer, Ryrie, Pentecost, Walwood, DeBass, McGee, Bright</p> <p>Some Baptists, Some Presbyterians, Some Independents, Some Evangelical Free, Some Episcopalians</p>	<p>Augustine, Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, Whitefield, Edwards, Spurgeon, Barhouse, Lloyd-Jones, Packer, Martin, Johnson, Vanfil, Murray</p> <p>Most Presbyterians, Dutch Reformed, Christian Reformed, few Independents, Some Baptists</p>		

Roman Catholics

Lutherans

What IS the Church?

(The Doctrine of Ecclesiology)

2 QUESTIONS:

Why does Mullein Hill Baptist Church exist?

How are we fulfilling the reason(s) we exist?

7 DOCTRINAL "CHECKPOINTS"

- ❑ ORGANISM
 - ❑ ORGANIZATION
 - ❑ CELEBRATION
 - ❑ INSTRUCTION
 - ❑ WITNESS/PERPETUATION
 - ❑ BLESSING
 - ❑ PRESERVATION
-

Intro.

The seven "checkpoints" give us the basic elements of the New Testament model for what the church is to be. Before we look at each, we need to recognize another NT truth: the "church" exists on four levels:

LOCAL ASSEMBLY	(Rom.16:5)
CITY	(Romans; Rev. 2,3)
REGIONAL	(Galatians)
UNIVERSAL	(I Peter; I John, etc.)

Local churches are connected, whether they practice "connection" or not. We are bound by one Lord, one Spirit and one baptism. Whether we are *interdependent*, is another question. But Christians all over the planet are connected in Christ by means of the work of God's Spirit. This is what is meant by the term, "the universal church."

The Seven "Checkpoints" of NT Ecclesiology

1. ORGANISM

Any evangelical church should regularly ASK ITSELF, "Are we alive?" The Lord Jesus intends for His Body, the Church, to function in many ways similar to how the human body works (I Cor.12):

- a. Christ is the Head
- b. Christ has placed the "parts"
- c. The "parts" each have a distinct and valuable function
- d. The "parts" are interdependent

As the NT teaches it, one of the church's highest priorities is the practice of "body-life." God intends for His people to give serious attention to the needs which each member has. This is the primary reason why He has given to each member of the body at least one spiritual gift--to use it in ministry within the body.

The church is to be a living "organism," full of life and growing in the fruits of the Spirit. We should never get bogged down in the details of "running the church." And we should be careful to avoid thinking of the church as a building, or the time when we go to sing hymns and listen to sermons. But all too often church-life degenerates into little more than this. See Ephesians 2:4.

2. ORGANIZATION

It is interesting to me that the "hippest" of Christian fellowships eventually discover the need for some sort of organization. And they are surprised to find in the NT a definite organizing pattern for the churches, given by the apostles. They knew that in order to survive and avoid chaos, a workable and Spirit-led organization is needed.

Before we ask the question, "What kind of church-organization does the NT prescribe?" remember this principle: There are some real differences between the days of the apostles and the rest

of the church age. We do not have apostles today; but we have their writings. Therefore it is sometimes necessary to distinguish their *prescription* from their *experience*.

Elements of NT Organization

a. **Government**

The NT evidences three types of government:

Episcopal-----deciding-authority in one person
Presbyterial-----deciding-authority in the "elders"
Congregational---deciding-authority in the congregation

Opinion: the most effective churches do not place all authority with any one of these methods, but use all three. For example, the pastor(s) of the church have authority in certain situations, the elders in others and the congregation in others. Each must remember Paul's words in Eph. 5:21.

b. **Membership**

While we cannot turn to chapter & verse to demonstrate a list of church "members" as we practice it, it is evident that the NT church *did* have "lists". See I Tim. 5:9. Membership is the commitment that a person makes to a local assembly to support, minister within and submit to that assembly. It should never be a thing of obligation. It should always be a thing of joy and encouragement. That the NT Christians practiced a visible and recognizable commitment "to one another", is obvious!

c. **Structure/Communication/Accountability**

These are not curse-words, although they are perceived as such by many new Christians. They are *servant-words* for us, and need to be practiced only with a view to enhancing the ministry and utilizing good stewardship. In no area is this more true than in the area of church finances. Without structure/communication/accountability, the devil is given prime opportunity to inflame suspicion and greed within a church.

d. **Officers**

The NT speaks of several types of officers that were functioning at that time. It is important to realize that during the first century, the concept of church officers was evolving. The NT church inherited certain Jewish concepts and certain Greek ones too. As the Spirit led them, they installed officers that were Spirit-filled, grounded in the Word, and fitted for their function according to their gifts. These officers included:

Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Pastor-teachers, Teachers, Elders, Deacons, and possibly Deaconesses (depending on how you interpret Rom. 16:1 and I Tim.3:11.)

e. Goals and Strategy

Another aspect of ORGANIZATION is for the church to *intentionally* set goals which are reasonable and measurable. And in order to move towards those goals, the church can develop certain specific strategies which the people can work on.

Example:

GOAL: "every member a minister"

STRATEGIES: * Sunday School class on spiritual gifts
* invite specific members to serve on certain teams
* regularly affirm the good things people are doing in their ministries
* periodically evaluate the proportion of ministering-members and their effectiveness

Point: the church is *both* organism **and** organization. It is not one or the other--although most churches tend to lean towards one emphasis OR the other. Our task is to have a balance of both.

Observation: Some people are more interested in organism than in organization. Others are more interested in organization than they are in body-life. This is fine--God has gifted people to serve in different ways. What we need to see is that *both* kinds of people are needed in the body.

3. CELEBRATION

This ought to be the main thrust of worshipping together. "Celebration" does not imply frivolity; but it does place an emphasis on JOY and the proper PERSPECTIVE we need with which to live the Christian life the rest of the week past Sunday.

Celebration was a feature of OT worship. The Festivals in Israel's worship were the times of exultation that elevated life above its routine, earthbound experience to its more glorious nature, as the Creator had intended it. Israel's festivals were celebrations of harvests and historical events in which Jehovah had sovereignly provided for His people. These special times of worship included Passover, Weeks, Trumpets, Day of Atonement, Booths, Purim.

In the NT, we have been given two *ordinances* (commands) which serve as tools for worship-celebration. They are 1) the Lord's Table, wherein we remember the sacrifice Christ has made for believers, and which we symbolically "model" in the bread and wine; and 2) baptism, by which a new believer makes a public statement and "demonstration" that he/she is personally identifying with the death, burial and resurrection of Christ.

Celebration WITH the brethren is a necessary part of the theology of the Church. God intends for His people to assemble, to "speak to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord" (Eph.5:19). Even though they placed themselves at risk of arrest or worse, the Jerusalem Christians seemed to love to gather together for breaking of bread, prayer, sharing, and listening to the apostles' teaching (Acts 2:42).

4. INSTRUCTION

People do not automatically learn good doctrine. They need an intentional plan of instruction. This is true for our children, for seekers who are not yet saved, for new adult converts, and for mature believers as well. Everyone needs to be fed on the meat of Scripture.

Christians need two basic kinds of teaching:

- a. truth -----by which I mean solid Bible doctrine, derived from Scripture in a responsible way.
- b. How the truth *transforms*

Opinion: Most Christians do not think theologically. They think traditionally, emotionally ("how I was raised"), denominationally; but they do not naturally think in terms of the themes and emphases of Scripture. This needs to be taught and modeled by the church's leaders.

5. WITNESS/PERPETUATION

It is the Lord's intent that His people should share the good news that heaven is a free gift, and that Jesus has come that people might have an abundant life here. It is our responsibility--and therefore ought to be a major part of the church's basic program--to testify to the declarations of Scripture.

It doesn't mean that we shouldn't be *persuasive* or *bold* for the apostles were both. But ultimately, Jesus is Lord of the harvest and the "numbers" in any effort are His realm. What the Church needs to do, is to do everything within our resources to get the news to as many people as possible. No one church (or denomination) can do it all, and some churches are stronger at one kind of outreach than another. That is why we NEED each other!

But evangelism takes several forms, and each should be on-going in the local church (although one or two forms may be stronger):

- a. Personal
- b. Church-wide programs (campaigns, films, etc.)
- c. Family
- d. Visitation (in "seekers" homes)
- e. Friendship/relationship
- f. Site-oriented (i.e. nursing homes, etc.)
- g. Foreign

Observation: Probably none of the "ecclesiological checkpoints" is more dependent on prayer than this one. Satan does not want any more "seekers" to be reached with the Gospel.

By "perpetuation" I mean "Christian education." This is the place in our theology where our Sunday School and Children's Church fit. It is part of how God has engineered the church, that the church perpetuates itself not only through external evangelism but also through raising up Christian families.

Observation: Presbyterians, Episcopaleans, Lutherans have a place in their theology for their children. Baptists, Pentecostals and other "independents" do not, but they need to develop one.

6. BLESSING

It is no small theological and foundational point to make, that part of God's basic *design* of the Church, is that it should be a blessing in the world. The non-Christian community should feel that it is good to have Mullein Hill here on Highland Road and it is useful to have Dartmouth Bible down there on Morton Avenue. It is true that there are times when the church's presence is an irritant in the community simply because of righteousness' sake. But if we are perceived by the town as being "salt and light", then we are more completely fulfilling God's plan for us. The Church's presence should be marked by its witness of the Gospel. But it should also be known for its kindness, friendliness and openness.

Point: Who wants to go where one is made to feel like they are unwanted or unneeded? Who goes out of their way to go someplace on a Sunday morning where they hear nothing but negative or critical speeches? What thinking non-Christian wants to be part of an organization which they perceive to be completely irrelevant and out of touch with modern life? Not many.

7. PRESERVATION

Part of the ancient usefulness of *salt* was in its preserving feature. Jesus portrayed His people as having a preserving influence on the world. This suggests that part of His plan and design for churches, is that they help inhibit DECAY.

Twenty years ago it was trendy for young evangelical Christians to get involved with the political process and with social issues. Today it is trendy to *detach* from any social involvement with society, in an effort to protect myself from pollution. Again, a balance is needed. A church should not so completely immerse itself in one or two "issues" and forget to share the Gospel, or forget to build up and spiritually equip its own members. On the other hand, Jesus wants His churches to exert their influence on the world and to stem the tide of evil where we can. If the evangelical church in America would "mobilize" on just one issue (abortion, the homeless, education, pollution, drugs, etc.) think of how evil would retreat.

"At the sign of triumph, Satan's host doth flee;
On then, Christian soldiers, on to victory!
Hell's foundations quiver, at the shout of praise;
Brothers, lift your voices, loud your anthems raise!
Onward, Christian soldiers, marching as to war,
With the cross of Jesus, going on before."

**The Universal
Church**

**The Regional
Church**

**The City
Church**

**The Local
Church**

WHAT IS DISPENSATIONALISM...
(...other than a 6-syllable word?)

Our Motivation 2 Timothy 2:15

Introduction A vital part of the believer's discipleship is to become a faithful interpreter of Scripture. And, interpretation of God's Word is one of the most fascinating undertakings possible for the human mind! It is also a real adventure, because there are so MANY which Christians have developed over the centuries by which they understand God's revelation. Within "evangelicalism" (our camp), there are Pentecostals, Baptists, paedo-baptists, Calvinists, Arminians, One-steppers, Two-steppers, Amillennialists, Postmillennialists, Premillennialists, etc., etc. --not to mention all the different shades of Catholics, Lutherans, Episcopaleans....

So what's a poor believer to do? With so many different *systems* of INTERPRETATION available--how do we know which one is right? We acknowledge that while there are many, many different applications of God's truth, there can only be one true *interpretation* of it. We also know that God is not a god of confusion. He is far more interested that we understand His Word than WE are! Therefore we choose to adopt the plainest and simplest METHOD OF INTERPRETATION available.

If we take God's Word at face value, understanding Scripture in a normal and exact fashion, while keeping the historical context and occasional *intentional* symbolisms in view, we will inevitably end up interpreting it *dispensationally*.

DISPENSATIONALISM then, is a system of Bible interpretation, built upon a literal-historical approach to the *whole Bible*. When you read the entire Scripture, you see that its *THEME* is God's great plan of redemption, unfolded and activated BY HIM over centuries.

Point: While far from being the only acceptable system for understanding God's plan of redemption (or even the most popular), dispensationalism is the plainest and most readily *observable* "theology" from the pages of Scripture.

Note: Probably the most prominent system of interpretation for evangelicals has been the COVENANT-system, which sees God's covenants as the central events of His plan.

What's A "Dispensation"? Charles Ryrie's definition is a good one:

A dispensation is:

- (from God's view) A DISTINGUISHABLE *ECONOMY* IN THE OUTWORKING OF GOD'S PURPOSE...
- (from man's view) A *RESPONSIBILITY* and in relation to progressive revelation, a *STAGE* in it.

Over the whole of Scripture, from Genesis through Revelation, God has revealed more and more ABOUT His redemptive plan. Dispensationalists recognize that there are stages, or phases, to how God has been dealing with man. Scripture speaks of this clearly in places like:

Acts 17:30 Ephesians 1:9,10 Colossians 1:25,26 Hebrews 1:1,2

FUTURE

Eph. 3:2

Acts 17³⁰

Who "Started" Dispensationalism?

Elements of dispensational theology in Christian writers can be found all the way back to the time of the apostles. But in the modern era, it really begins with a French philosopher named Pierre Poiret (1646-1719). In his 1687 work *L'OEconomie Divine* Poiret identified seven "economies" as follows:

1. "Infancy" - Creation to the Flood
2. "Childhood" - Flood to Moses
3. "Adolescence" - Moses to the Prophets
4. "Youth" - Prophets to Christ
5. "Manhood" - Christ to now...
6. "Old Age" - Now to the Millenium
7. "Renovation" - the Millenial (1,000 year) Reign of Christ

The first advocates of this way of looking at Scripture in this century were C.I. Scofield (*the Scofield Bible*) who died in 1921, and Lewis Sperry Chafer (who died in 1954), founder of Dallas Theological Seminary. Other adherents to dispensational theology include the Moody Bible Institute, Word of Life, AWANA, most Baptist churches and ministries, most Pentecostal and charismatic ministries.

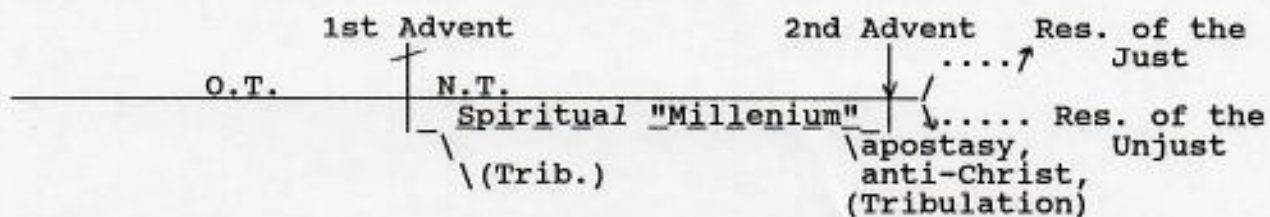
Note: Most Congregationalists and Presbyterians, and others from a Reformed tradition (including many from Gordon-Conwell) hold dispensationalism in great suspect--even to the point of calling it false teaching. Much of this is due to the claim that dispensationalists essentially teach two or more WAYS of salvation--depending on which "economy" is in view. Dispensationalists counter this by saying that salvation is ALWAYS through God's grace; the basis is always the death of Christ; the requirement is always faith; the object is always the true God; but the CONTENT of faith (how much a person knows) changes through the ages, as more and more revelation is given.

So How Many Dispensations ARE There? Dispensationalists go 'round and 'round about whether Scripture displays 3, 5 or 7 separate stages in God's plan of redemption. The views compare as follows:

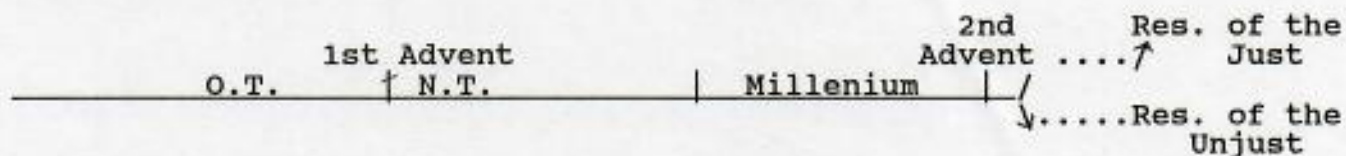
THREE	FIVE	SEVEN
1. The Past (Col.1:25-27).....	Pre-fall.....	Innocence (Gen.1:28)
	Post-fall	Conscience (Gen.3:7)
		Human Government (8:15)
		Promise (12:1)
	The Law.....	The Law (Ex.19:1)
2. The Present (Eph.3:2).....	Grace.....	Grace (Acts 2:1)
3. The Future (Eph.1:10).....	Millenial.....	Millenial (Rev. 20:4)

Dispensational Eschatology Dispensationalism becomes most relevant to us in two areas of Christian thinking. How we see the role and activity of the Holy Spirit is affected by a dispensational theology (we'll look at this in the next lesson). Probably the best-known feature of dispensationalism is how it sets up **ESCHATOLOGY** (the doctrine of final things). In this regard, dispensationalism is a branch of **PREMILLENNIALISM**. Before we consider the "pre" position though, let's look briefly at the other two main schools of eschatology that evangelical Christians often adopt.

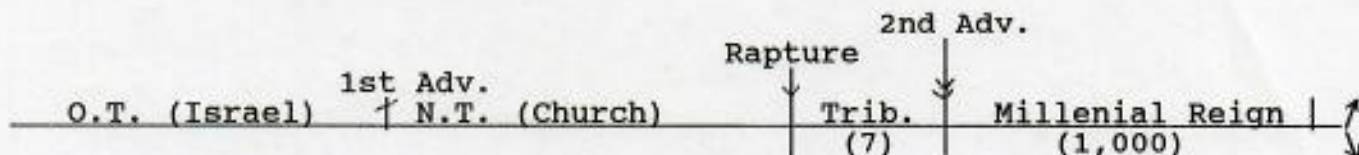
AMILLENIALISM - which says there will be no *literal* reign of Christ, although He will literally return to earth.



POSTMILLENIALISM - which says the last 1,000 years *before* the Second Coming will be a "golden age" of triumph of the Gospel. Christ's return will be *after* the reign of the Gospel, hence "post" millennial



PREMILLENIALISM - which has two kinds: "historic" premillennialism, saying that Christians must go through the Tribulation--making Christ's return *non-imminent* (Fuller Seminary, the "Vineyard" movement); And, "dispensational" premillennialism, which states that His return will be *BEFORE* the Tribulation, thus, a *pre-tribulational* "rapture."



Concluding Notes:

1. Dispensationalists usually see a distinction between Jewish believers and Gentile believers - Ryrie views it as an *eternal* distinction, and includes a third distinct "branch" of the Church - Tribulation saints.
2. A consistent *literalism* is at the heart of dispensationalism. Whether one is talking about the Kingdom of Christ, Israel's role or the Great Tribulation, dispensational theology seeks as literal a view of Scripture as possible, while not ruling out symbols, figures of speech or "typology" where appropriate.

APPLICATIONS OF DISPENSATIONALISM

Introduction Dispensationalism affects the way we interpret the Bible in a number of ways. It is therefore relevant to the Christian life, because our APPROACH TO SCRIPTURE governs our attitudes about many issues. We want to look at some of those "issues" tonight. But first, let's look briefly at the distinct "administrative stages" suggested by dispensationalists:

I. A Review of the Dispensations

Those who see in Scripture seven economies of God's unfolding plan, see them as follows:

Name	Innocence	Conscience	Gov't.	Promise	Law	Grace	Kingdom
Script.	Gen.1-3	Gen.3-8	Fl.-Abr.	G.12-E.19	Ex.20- Jn.19: 30	Acts 2- R.19	Rev.20
Respon.	obedience	conscious obedience	fill the earth/ capital punishm't	stay in the land	keep it & walk w/ God	accept Christ & keep HIS law	believe & obey
Stewards	Adam/Eve	the whole race	Noah+ fam.	Patr'chs.	Moses & proph's + Isr'l	Church	the 12 apos's, + gov't.
Jdgmnt.	the Fall	the Flood	Babel (confus'n)	Exile	capti- vities	Trib.	death or Gog/Magog

II. Dispensational Pneumatology - This is the point which gets us "in trouble" with our Pentecostal/charismatic brethren. Their contention is that the Holy Spirit is doing exactly (or nearly so) the same things TODAY as He was doing in the weeks and months after Pentecost.

Dispensationalists see an UNFOLDING program for the Church, punctuated with different applications of the Spirit's power:

- a. Corporate Spirit-baptism/sounded LIKE wind/tongues of fire/TONGUES
- b. Spiritual EVENTS
 - Signs and wonders
 - dramatic healings
 - releases from prison
 - visions/prophecies (Saul, Peter, Cornelius)
 - punishments (as divine discipline; Acts 5,13)
 - communistic lifestyle
 - "translation" for evangelism (Philip)
 - resurrection (Acts 14:19?)
- c. Spiritual GIFTS
 - sign gifts
 - service gifts
- d. Spiritual FRUIT
- e. The sovereign grace of God whereby HE adds to the church.

2 What IS God's Spirit doing today, and how DO WE KNOW what is real and what is not? Dispensationalism provides the understanding of different programs the Sovereign Spirit is enacting, for the purpose of bringing God's overall plan to maturity.

III. Dispensational "Rapturology"

Main Focus: I Thessalonians 4:18

One of the most famous features of dispensationalism (a "branch" of Premillennialism) is its view of the RAPTURE. For non-dispensationalists the term "rapture" is usually synonymous with "Second Advent." But for disp's. Christ's coming is really in two distinct phases: a coming FOR the Church, and a coming WITH the Church, seven years later. Here is a summary of the reasoning for a pretribulational rapture--that is, His coming for the Church before ("pre-") the Great Tribulation...

ASSUMPTIONS:

- > Unless strongly *compelled* to do otherwise, we take Scripture to mean what it simply says.
- > Christ's coming is imminent.
- > The Book of Revelation is to be understood as future from John's day.
- > Insofar as the Tribulation is concerned, Israel and the Church are distinct "characters" in the great drama.
- > God can do whatever He decrees to do. Period.

1. A "Pretrib" view allows for a literal interpretation of all OT & NT passages on the great tribulation.
2. During the trib., Israel is prepared for restoration.
3. No OT passages (Deut.4:29,30; Jer.30:4-11; Dan.9:24-27; 12:1,2) mention the Church.
4. No NT passages (Matt.24:15-31; I Thess.1:9,10; 5:4-9; Rev.4-19) mention the Church.
5. Nowhere does Scripture *demand* that the "trumpet calls" are all the same event. There is no reason to assume that they cannot be three distinct events.
6. The rapture of the Church is never mentioned in connection with Christ's coming *after* the tribulation.
7. The church is not appointed to "wrath" (Romans 5:9; I Thess.1:9-10; 5:9) and therefore shall not enter "the great day of their wrath" (Rev.6:17).
8. Luke 21:36
"But keep on the alert at all times, praying in order that you may have strength to escape all these things that are about to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man."
9. Rev.3:10 (*tereo ek* literally means "I will preserve out from..")
10. God seems to deliver believers *before* a divine judgement is inflicted upon the world (Noah, Lot, Rahab, etc.). (II Peter 2:6-9)
11. I Thess.4:18 means something only if the Church is guaranteed preservation FROM the tribulation.
12. Titus 2:13
13. I John 3:2,3
14. II Thess.2:6-8 indicates that the Holy Spirit will be withdrawn from the planet *before* the "lawless one" is revealed.
15. II Cor.5:10 indicates that all believers of this age must appear before the judgement seat of Christ, an event never mentioned in the detailed accounts connected with Christ's second coming.
16. I Thess. 1:9b,10
17. I Thess. 5:1-11
18. The absence of specific mention of the Church in Rev.4-19 may not require a pretrib. view, but it does favor it.

Conclusion

No system of theology is without its problems. As believers, God has not called us to become prejudiced with one another. He calls us to COMFORT one another with the revelation He has provided about the end times. He calls us to be filled with His Spirit, to bear with one another, to love one another as we love our very selves. Eschatology seems to be one of the theological-tasks of our era even as Christology (the doctrine of Christ) was for the early Church, and as Soteriology (the doctrine of salvation) was for the Reformation-era Church. NOW, the Church is trying to "hash out" biblical prophecy.

May the Lord give us all a love for His Word, a patience and fairness with each other, and a burden for souls! Even so, come quickly, Lord Jesus.

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT of PROPHECY

