

Contradictions

By David Reid



INTRODUCTION

What should the Christian do with those passages in the Bible that seem to contradict? For example, consider the following verses:

And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat. (Genesis 1:29)

Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you; even as the green herb have I given you all things. (Genesis 9:3)

Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, These are the beasts which ye shall eat among all the beasts that are on the earth. (Leviticus 11:2)

These verses teach different doctrine. Genesis 1:29 instructs man to follow a vegetarian diet. Genesis 9:3 allows man to eat anything that moves, in addition to the vegetarian diet. Leviticus 11:2 teaches that only certain animals may be eaten. What instruction should the Christian observe? All three instructions? None of them? Just one of them? If so, which one? Why? These questions and other similar questions will be answered in this booklet.

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1. What is "rightly dividing the word of truth?"

The Bible is the Christian's final authority for all matters of faith and practice. Therefore, if the Bible tells us that we are to study the Bible in a particular way, we should obey those instructions. There is no room for our own preferences and opinions; if God gives us specific instructions on how to study the Bible then that is what we must do.

One of God's instructions on how to study the Bible is the following:

Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. (2Timothy 2:15)

Since God has commanded to divide the word of truth, there must be divisions in the Bible for us to divide. Rightly dividing the word of truth is simply recognizing the divisions that God has placed in the Bible. These divisions are commonly called dispensations or ages.

2. What is a "dispensation?"

Webster's Third New International Dictionary defines dispensation in the following manner:

dispensation (1) ORDERING, ADMINISTRATION, MANAGEMENT; specif : a divine ordering and administration of worldly affairs (2) : a system of principles, promises, and rules divinely ordained and administered (3) a period of history during which a particular divine revelation has predominated in the affairs of mankind

Put succinctly, a dispensation is a God-revealed body of information given for man's obedience during a certain period of time.

3. Is there not an easier word than "dispensation?"

Yes, there are lots of easier words than dispensation, but dispensation is the word that God chose. For example:

For if I do this thing willingly, I have a reward: but if against my will, a dispensation of the gospel is committed unto me. (1Corinthians 9:17)

The word "dispensation" may not be familiar, but it is a word specifically chosen by God with a precise meaning that is important. The above verse refers to God entrusting a particular gospel to the Apostle Paul.

4. What is "dispensationalism?"

Again, we consult Webster's Third New International Dictionary:

dispensationalism : adherence to or advocacy of a system of interpreting history in terms of a series of God's dispensations

Dispensationalism is simply recognizing the different dispensations (i.e. divisions) in the Bible.

5. What is a "dispensationalist?"

A dispensationalist is someone who believes in the concept of dispensationalism: the idea that God deals with man differently at different times.

6. What is "progressive revelation?"

Progressive revelation is the observation that God did not give all revelation at one point in time, but instead, He has gradually revealed information throughout history. Let us examine again the three verses mentioned at the beginning of this booklet, along with another verse regarding what we should eat.

Adam

And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat. (Genesis 1:29)

Noah

Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you; even as the green herb have I given you all things. (Genesis 9:3)

Moses

Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, These are the beasts which ye shall eat among all the beasts that are on the earth. Whatsoever parteth the hoof, and is clovenfooted, and cheweth the cud, among the beasts, that shall ye eat. Nevertheless these shall ye not eat of them that chew the cud, or of them that divide the hoof: as the camel, because he cheweth the cud, but divideth not the hoof; he is unclean unto you. (Leviticus 11:2-4)

Paul

For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving:

For it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer. (1Timothy 4:4,5)

SUMMARY

Man Dietary Instructions

Adam Vegetarian (except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil)

Noah Everything

Moses Vegetables and clean animals

Paul Everything (and receive it with thanksgiving)

These instructions are different. God, in his divine prerogative, gave new revelation to man as time progressed. Thus, Noah knew more than Adam did because Noah knew everything that Adam knew, plus Noah received new information from God. Similarly, Moses knew more than Noah did because Moses knew everything that Noah knew, plus Moses also received new information from God. As time moves forward, God gives new revelation, and it would be a mistake to assume that people in the past knew everything that we now know today. Still curious as to which of these instructions applies today? Keep reading.

7. Why is it important to know the different dispensations?

One might wonder why it is important to know the different dispensations. As we noticed above, even in the relatively simple issue of what we should eat God required different things of man at different times. God will not change his program for today in order to suit us, so it is our responsibility to learn what God

expects of us in the current dispensation. Ponder Mark 16:17,18:

And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues;

They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.

It is dangerous for us to handle snakes today, although it would not have been dangerous for the apostles that Christ spoke to in Mark 16:18. This is because Christ's promise of the ability to take up serpents was given to them and not to us, so we err when we try to claim that promise.

That is why right division is important. To serve God effectively, we need to know what God is doing today and what He requires of us.

8. Why can we not just obey the whole Bible?

Some say that right division cuts up the Bible and fails to believe the whole Bible. Is it possible to obey every part of the Bible?

Note the differing commands given by the Lord Jesus Christ:

Carry neither purse, nor scrip, nor shoes: and salute no man by the way. (Luke 10:4)

Then said he unto them, But now, he that hath a purse, let him take it, and likewise his scrip: and he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one. (Luke 22:36)

How can one both not take a purse and take a purse? It can't be done. Consider also the following two commands given in the same chapter:

Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane, and saith unto the disciples, Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder.

Then cometh he to his disciples, and saith unto them, Sleep on now, and take your rest: behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.

Rise, let us be going: behold, he is at hand that doth betray me. (Matthew 26:36,45,46)

Did the Lord Jesus Christ contradict himself? Of course not. What He did was issue different commands at different times. Consider the example of a father dealing with a small child. At night, he tells the child to go to bed. In the morning, he tells the child to wake up. Is the father contradicting himself? No. Both of the father's commands make sense at the particular time that they are given. There is only a "contradiction" if one attempts to apply a particular command outside of the context in which it was given.

Just as earthly fathers can issue different commands at different times, God has reserved to Himself the leeway to instruct men differently at different times as it pleases Him.

But our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased. (Psalms 115:3)

9. How can these obviously different commands issued by the Lord Jesus Christ be reconciled with the fact that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and to day and for ever?

There are numerous verses in the Bible that indicate the unchanging nature of God's character. For example, For I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed. (Malachi 3:6). Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever. (Hebrews 13:8). From verses such as these many conclude that God cannot deal with man differently at different times. That, however, is not what the verses say. The verses say only that God, in his character and essence, does not change. They do not say that God's method of dealing with man never changes. Consider the garden of Eden. Once Adam and Eve ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, God kicked them out of the garden. God had not changed, but His method of dealing with man changed because of what man had done. When Adam exercised his free will, Adam effected a change in his relationship with God, and God choose to deal with Adam differently due to the altered circumstances. God himself never changes, but God, in his divine power and authority, has the freedom to deal with man differently at different times.

10. Has the Holy Spirit operated in the exact same manner throughout history?

No. The Holy Spirit interacts with men differently at different points of time. Notice the difference between King Saul and the Christian today. And when they came thither to the hill, behold, a company of prophets met him; and the Spirit of God came upon him, and he prophesied among them. But the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD troubled him. (1Samuel 10:10; 16:14) The Holy Spirit came upon Saul, and it later left him. In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption. (Ephesians 1:13; 4:30) Christians today are sealed by the Holy Spirit until the day of redemption. The Holy Spirit will not leave us as it did King Saul. Just as the Lord Jesus Christ has the flexibility to issue different commands at different times, the Holy Spirit has the flexibility to interact with men differently at different times in history.

11. If we are going to make divisions in the Bible, what principle should we use to make divisions?

We should believe every word of the Bible literally.

Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. (2Peter 1:20)

When God wrote the Bible, he said exactly what he meant to say. The prohibition against private interpretation instructs us to believe the Bible literally: to interpret the verses according to the plain, everyday meaning of the words.

The most important principle for studying the Bible is to ask the following question: TO WHOM IS THIS PARTICULAR PASSAGE ADDRESSED? Every word of the Bible is true, but not every word of the Bible is written for us to apply today.

In the Bible, God has recorded information starting before the creation of the earth and continuing onward into the future. During this vast period of time, God does different things according to His eternal divine purposes. While accomplishing His purposes, God says different things to different people at different times.

For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope. (Romans 15:4)

This verse tells us that we can learn something from every verse of the Bible, but that does not mean that every verse of the Bible is an instruction for our lives. This is a principle that we all implicitly recognize.

For example, when we read about Noah we can learn a great deal about patience and faithfulness, and yet, we understand that God has not commanded us today to build very large boats. We gain a spiritual benefit from reading about Noah, but it would be disastrous if we attempted to carry out the instructions that were given to Noah. Instead, we must find our doctrine for living in the part of the Bible that is specifically addressed to us.

12. What exactly is the Old Testament?

The term "Old Testament" is frequently used to refer to the first 39 books of the Bible, i.e. Genesis to Malachi. However, the Bible gives a more exact meaning to the term "Old Testament."

Whereupon neither the first testament was dedicated without blood.

For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and of goats, with water, and scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book, and all the people,

Saying, This is the blood of the testament which God hath enjoined unto you. (Hebrews 9:18-20)

When Moses went to speak with God on Mt. Sinai, God gave Moses certain instructions to give to Israel. If Israel did what God commanded them, they would be blessed, and if Israel disobeyed the Lord, it would be punished. In effect, God made a deal with Israel.

This deal that God made with Israel is referred to as the "first testament" or as is commonly said the "Old Testament."

13. When did the Old Testament start?

The Old Testament did not begin until the middle of the Book of Exodus.

For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator.

For a testament is of force after men are dead: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth.

Whereupon neither the first testament was dedicated without blood. (Hebrews 9:16-18)

Notice that a testament does not take effect until the death of a testator.

It was not until Exodus 19 that the Lord gave the law to Moses, and it was not until Exodus 24 that Moses dedicated the first testament by sacrificing animals. There is no way that Israel could have been operating under the Old Testament before God gave the revelation of the law to Moses.

Thus, while the book of Genesis is in the group of books that we commonly call the "Old Testament," the information contained in Genesis is pre-Old Testament because it deals with the period of time before Moses received the law on Mt. Sinai. The following books are pre-Old Testament: Genesis, Job, and the first part of Exodus.

14. Does the New Testament start at the book of Matthew?

The New Testament did not begin at the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ. According to the Bible, the New Testament cannot begin until some time after the death of the Lord Jesus Christ.

How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance.

For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator.

For a testament is of force after men are dead: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth. (Hebrews 9:14-17)

The New Testament could not begin until the death of the mediator of the New Testament, who is the Lord Jesus Christ. Since Christ does not die until the end of each of the four gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John), these four books contain Old Testament information. While the four gospels are in a group of books that we call the "New Testament," it would be accurate to say that the four gospels are Old Testament doctrinally. To say the same thing in a different way, God was operating the universe according to Old Testament principles during the time period recorded in the gospels.

15. Are we living under the New Testament?

Since we live after the cross, it might seem that we must be living under the New Testament. However, just as the Bible has a precise meaning for Old Testament, it also has a precise meaning for New Testament. The New Testament (also called the new covenant) is defined in Jeremiah 31.

Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: (Jeremiah 31:31)

Notice that the promises of the new covenant belong to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. We, who are not of the house of Israel or Judah, have no right to claim these promises. They do not belong to us.

Although we are living after the cross, we are not living in the New Testament. We live during a different dispensation, the dispensation of grace.

16. If the Old Testament did not end until the cross of Christ, then under what dispensation did Christ live?

But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, (Galatians 4:4)

This conclusion is confirmed by the dialogue that Jesus had with the rich young ruler.

And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?

And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments. (Matthew 19:16,17)

During Christ's earthly ministry, the way to obtain eternal life was through the observance of the Old Testament law, including the offering of animal sacrifices as a temporary covering for sin. God had not yet given the revelation of the gospel of the grace of God. Everything that we find in the Bible confirms that the Lord Jesus Christ lived under the Old Testament dispensation of the Law.

17. Does the Bible always use the word "gospel" to mean the same thing?

No. Paul clearly states that there are other gospels in Galatians 1:8-9. "Gospel" simply means "good news." During different periods of history, the content of the "good news" is different. Here are a few of the different gospels found in the Bible:

the gospel of the kingdom; Matthew 4:23

the gospel of the grace of God; Acts 20:24

the everlasting gospel; Revelation 14:6

Unless God is purposely confusing the reader by inventing many terms that mean the same thing, there must be more than one gospel in the Bible.

18. Is it true that everyone throughout history was saved the same way that we are today?

The Bible clearly teaches that people are saved by different gospels (i.e. different good news) at different times. Despite differences in the gospel at different times, there are some things that are always true.

Everyone who has ever been saved or will be saved is saved by the shed blood of Jesus Christ (John 14:6, Acts 4:12). Everyone who has ever been saved or will be saved is saved by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9). The manner in which the gospel differs at different times is in the content of the faith required and whether works are required as an expression of that faith. Although works are not required as an expression of faith under the present day gospel of grace, works are required under the gospels that apply during other periods of time.

For example, consider Noah. The content of his faith was not the shed blood of Jesus Christ but what God had said to him about the coming Flood. God gave Noah the good news that Noah would be saved from the Flood provided that he obeyed God. Noah demonstrated his faith in what God had said by performing works, i.e. building an ark. Had Noah not built the ark he would have drowned, and thus, it is obvious that works were required as an expression of Noah's faith.

Another gospel that requires works as an expression of faith is found during the future period of the tribulation. During the tribulation, believers will have to refrain from worshipping the beast or taking the mark of the beast to be saved. Since worship of the beast and taking the mark are sins that cannot be forgiven (Revelation 14:11), the work of avoiding those sins will be a required expression of faith. Those believers will obviously not have eternal security while still alive because there is the possibility that they will take the mark of the beast at some time in the future and be damned.

Noah's gospel and the gospel during the tribulation are different from the present day gospel of grace. The content of saving faith today is complete trust in the shed blood of Jesus Christ on the cross for our sins. This faith is manifested today without any required expression of works. Since there is no required expression of works under the gospel of grace, believers today are eternally secure from the moment that they trust in the blood that Christ shed on the cross.

We should not be surprised that the content of saving faith differs at different points in time. At different times in history, God has given different revelations of what he required of man at that time. Therefore, it naturally follows that the content of the required faith at any particular time would depend on God's particular revelation during that time.

While Christ is the Savior for all who are saved, it is not the case that everyone throughout history was saved in the exact same manner.

19. Did saints in the Old Testament know everything that we know today?

No. This may surprise some who have been taught that everyone in the Old Testament was saved by looking forward to the cross just as today we are saved by looking backward to the cross.

Let us consider Peter. (Remember that Peter is living during the Old Testament all the way up to the cross.) In Matthew 16, Jesus gives to Peter the keys to the kingdom of heaven.

And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. (Matthew 16:18,19)

Notice that Peter's authority includes the ability to bind and loose all things on the earth. Surely the Lord Jesus Christ would not give this authority to someone who did not understand God's program at that time. Now, let us read a few verses later.

From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day.

Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee. (Matthew 16:21,22)

When Jesus explains that He must be crucified, Peter rebukes Him and tells Him that such a thing should not happen. Today, we know that Christ's sacrificial death was necessary to redeem sinful mankind. Peter, however, did not yet understand this. Nor did any of the other disciples.

For he taught his disciples, and said unto them, The Son of man is delivered into the hands of men, and they shall kill him; and after that he is killed, he shall rise the third day.

But they understood not that saying, and were afraid to ask him. (Mark 9:31,32)

The disciples obviously did not understand the death, burial, and resurrection. However, Christ had already sent them out preaching.

And he sent them to preach the kingdom of God, and to heal the sick. (Luke 9:2)

How is it that Christ had sent the apostles out to preach when they obviously did not understand the cross? It must be that they were not preaching the cross. The gospel preached by the twelve apostles was something other than the death, burial, and resurrection.

If the apostles, who were taught directly by the Lord Jesus Christ, did not understand the cross, there is no possibility that Noah, Abraham, Isaiah or anyone else who lived before the cross could have understood it as we do today. Those who lived before Christ could not understand what is now made clear through hindsight. It would be a mistake to conclude that those living in earlier times understand everything that was to happen in their future. Different people in time having different amounts of information is a natural consequence of progressive revelation.

20. Did Peter and Paul have different messages?

Yes. Paul had the "gospel of the uncircumcision," and Peter had the "gospel of the circumcision."

But contrariwise, when they saw that the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto me, as the gospel of the circumcision was unto Peter; (Galatians 2:7)

Peter was taught the gospel of the circumcision by the Lord Jesus Christ during His earthly ministry, and Paul was taught the gospel of the uncircumcision by the Lord Jesus Christ after He had ascended to glory.

21. Are there differences between Peter's gospel of the circumcision and Paul's gospel of the uncircumcision?

Yes, there are quite a few differences. To demonstrate the difference, we will consider two subjects: water baptism and the Old Testament commandments (i.e. the Law).

1. Water baptism

Peter's gospel of the circumcision

He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned. (Mark 16:16)

But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him. (Luke 7:30)

Paul's gospel of the uncircumcision

I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius; . . .

For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect. (1Corinthians 1:14,17)

To be saved under the gospel of the circumcision, water baptism was a required expression of faith, but water baptism is not required under the gospel of the uncircumcision. If baptism were necessary for salvation under the gospel of the uncircumcision, Paul would never have said, "I thank God that I baptized none of you." Thus, whether baptism is necessary for salvation differs under these two gospels.

2. The Old Testament commandments

Peter's gospel of the circumcision

And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?

And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments. (Matthew 19:16,17)

Paul's gospel of the uncircumcision

For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us;

Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; (Ephesians 2:14,15)

Peter's gospel requires the keeping of commandments while Paul's gospel does not. It is thus obvious that Peter and Paul had different gospels. We need to understand which gospel applies today so that we can do what the Lord requires today. Note that Paul's gospel of the uncircumcision is also called the "gospel of the grace of God," and Peter's gospel of the circumcision is also called the "gospel of the kingdom." (Acts 20:24, Matthew 4:23).

22. In what sense are we under the law today?

We are not under the law in any sense.

For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace. (Romans 6:14)

Some interpret the Bible to make a distinction between the moral and ceremonial law. They then suggest that while we are not under the ceremonial law, we are still bound by the moral law. The problem with this theory is that the Bible never makes a distinction between moral law and ceremonial law. Those who are under the law are bound by every statute; they cannot choose certain parts of the law to obey.

For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. (James 2:10)

We who live during the dispensation of grace, however, are saved without having to keep any aspect of the law.

Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law. (Romans 3:28)

There is a tremendous difference between law and grace. For example, notice the difference between law and grace with respect to the sabbath.

Ye shall keep the sabbath therefore; for it is holy unto you: every one that defileth it shall surely be put to death: for whosoever doeth any work therein, that soul shall be cut off from among his people. (Exodus 31:14)

Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: (Colossians 2:16)

Under the Old Testament dispensation, men were executed for failure to obey the Sabbath. Today, we are told that no man can judge us if we choose not to observe the sabbath. There is an obvious difference, so we had better make sure that we know which program is operating today.

23. If we do not need to keep the law today to be saved, then what is the use of the law today?

The function of the law today is to act as a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ.

Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.

But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster. (Galatians 3:24,25)

The law declares the individual to be a sinner by showing him that there is no possible way for him to fulfill the law.

Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin. (Romans 3:20)

Once the law demonstrates a sinner's need for redemption through the blood of Christ, the law has fulfilled its purpose.

24. If we are not currently bound by the law today, does that mean that we have a license to sin?

Grace is not a license to sin.

For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace.

What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid. (Romans 6:14,15)

Although we are saved solely by grace without observing the law, we should not sin because of the consequences with respect to our heavenly inheritance. We choose to live righteously not because of the fear of Hell for disobeying the law but because we must appear before the judgment seat of Christ to be rewarded according to how we have lived. (Romans 14:10, 2Corinthians 5:10). The penalty for an unholy life is not the loss of salvation but the loss of rewards. (1Corinthians 3:12-15).

When a saint is under the law, his behavior is constrained by the law. The law tells him what to do and what not to do. It is different for the saint under grace.

25. If we are no longer motivated by the law, then what is our motivation to do right?

Today, our heart motive for serving God should be love and gratitude for all that Christ has done for us.

For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead:

And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again. (2Corinthians 5:14,15).

One difference between living under the law and under grace is the heart motivation. The believer under grace is motivated by the love of Christ not the ordinances of the law. If we go back to the Old Testament to find our rules for living, we have placed ourselves back under the law. Paul would describe this condition as "fallen from grace" (Galatians 5:4).

26. During what dispensation do we live?

We live during the dispensation of grace.

For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles,

If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward:

How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words, (Ephesians 3:1-3)

The dispensation of grace was committed by God to Paul. This answers the question posed at the beginning of the booklet as to which instruction the Christian should follow in choosing his diet. We should follow Paul because we live during the dispensation of grace, and Paul received the revelation of the dispensation of grace.

How do we know that we live during the dispensation of grace as opposed to another dispensation? Under the principle of progressive revelation, we should follow the most recent information that God has given to man on how he should live. We cannot just choose what we like. The program that God is currently operating is the one entrusted to the Apostle Paul.

27. Did Paul receive new revelation from the Lord?

Yes. Paul received new information directly from the Lord Jesus Christ.

But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God. (Acts 20:24)

The fact that Paul received this information directly from the Lord Jesus Christ demands our attention and respect. If the distinct Pauline information was of man's invention, we could safely ignore it, but since it came directly from the Lord Jesus Christ, we had better pay attention.

28. Did anyone know about this information before it was given to Paul?

No. The information given to Paul was a mystery hidden by God until He decided to reveal it through the Apostle Paul. Scripture describes the information that was given to Paul as a "dispensation."

Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God;

Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints: (Colossians 1:25,26)

Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began,

But now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith: (Romans 16:25,26)

Paul describes the information that was given to him as a "secret" because it was hid from the ages until God made it known through Paul. (Evidently, God is better at keeping secrets than we are.)

29. What part of the Bible applies specifically today?

As we discussed earlier, all of the Bible is written for our benefit, and all of the Bible is the word of God. That does not mean that all of the information contained in the Bible is given for our obedience today. We are not in the garden of Eden today, and we need not be concerned about eating off the wrong tree because that information was applicable to Adam and Eve in a particular context that no longer exists. Instead, we need to concern ourselves with the particular information that God has given us to follow during this dispensation.

We have learned that the dispensation of grace was entrusted to the Apostle Paul. We also noticed that Peter and Paul had different messages to proclaim. Since we are living during the dispensation of grace, the information about how God is dealing with man today will be found in the writings of the Apostle to whom God committed the dispensation of grace.

Thus, the books of the Bible that explain God's dealing with man today are the letters written by Paul: Romans, 1&2Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Phillipians, Colossians, 1&2Thessalonians, 1&2Timothy, Titus and Philemon.

30. What indicates that the books after Philemon are not written to us?

The books of the New Testament after Philemon are all intended for a time when there is a distinction between Jew and Gentile. There is no distinction between Jew and Gentile during the dispensation of grace.

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:28)

Under the Old Testament law, there was a clear distinction between Jew and Gentile, and in the future, God will again treat Jews and Gentiles differently. For example, consider the book of James.

James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting. (James 1:1)

This epistle is written to the twelve tribes of Israel. Presently, God deals with the Jew and the Gentile in the same manner, so James cannot apply dispensationally to us today. It will apply in the future when God changes programs and again deals with the Jew in a special way.

All of the books after Philemon (i.e. Hebrews to Revelation) are addressed to a time period in which there is a distinction between Jew and Gentile and in which salvation is not solely by faith.

31. When did the dispensation of grace begin?

The dispensation of grace began in the mid-Acts period (i.e. Acts 9-15). Since the dispensation of grace was given to the Apostle Paul, the dispensation of grace cannot have started before Paul got saved, which occurred in Acts 9.

In Acts 15, the Jerusalem Council is convened to discuss the different gospel that Paul has been proclaiming, so it is apparent that Paul must have received the "mystery" information before Acts 15. Thus, the dispensation of grace must have begun somewhere between Acts 9 and Acts 15.

32. Why do we not know exactly when this dispensation started?

One common objection to dispensationalism is the impossibility of identifying the exact moment when dispensations began. To see if this is a valid objection, let us consider a similar issue: the exact date when the Lord Jesus Christ was crucified.

We know that Christ was crucified in approximately 33 A.D., but we cannot be sure of the exact date or even the exact year. In His infinite wisdom, God chose to omit the necessary information to make this determination possible.

Does the fact that we cannot pinpoint the exact date of the Lord's death pose a theological difficulty? No. As Christians, we need to know that Christ shed His blood for our sins, died, and rose again. It is not critical that we know the exact date of the crucifixion.

Similarly, the exact moment in time when this dispensation began is not an important issue. We need to know what dispensation we are in so that we know what God expects of us. That dispensation is the dispensation of grace as revealed to the Apostle Paul. It does not make a difference if the dispensation of grace began in 34 A.D. or 40 A.D. or 50 A.D. Similarly, it makes little difference exactly where between Acts 9 and Acts 15 this dispensation started. What is important is that Paul revealed new information not previously known and that we are living during the dispensation committed to him.

The issue for the Christian is what doctrine applies today. Determining the exact moment when this dispensation began is like arguing whether Adam had a belly button: it may be an interesting question, but it has no bearing on our lives or our service for the Lord.

33. Does dispensationalism magnify the person of Paul?

No. The writings of Paul state clearly that we are to think nothing of him as a person. He is only a minister and unworthy of glory. The Lord Jesus Christ is whom we should glory in. Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? Therefore let no man glory in men. For all things are yours; (1Corinthians 3:5,21) The dispensationalist is not interested in magnifying the person of Paul but does recognize that Paul was entrusted with a special office by the Lord Jesus Christ. For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office: (Romans 11:13) We should not glory in any man, but we should recognize and respect the divine revelation that comes through a man. Paul is important not because of any intrinsic merit in Paul but because the Lord Jesus Christ chose to entrust him with the revelation of the gospel of the grace of God (Acts 20:24).

34. Does dispensationalism follow Paul instead of the Lord?

During the dispensation of grace, following Paul is following the Lord.

If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord. (1Corinthians 14:37)

Paul did not preach his own opinions or preferences. He preached the new information that he had been given by the Lord Jesus Christ after His Ascension to glory. Since Paul was sent by the Lord Jesus Christ, we are obligated to receive his teaching.

And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost: (1Thessalonians 1:6)

When we recognize Paul's writings and follow them, we are then following the Lord by following Paul. Since the Lord Jesus Christ gave Paul new information previously unknown, the only way to follow the Lord today is according to the new information given to Paul.

35. How can dispensationalism be true since it was not invented until the late 1800's?

One criticism of dispensationalism is the assertion that it is a relatively new way of interpreting the Bible. Some critics suggest that it did not exist until it was "invented" in the late 1800's and early 1900's by Scofield, Larkin, Darby and others.

Dispensational teachers would never claim to have invented something new. Dispensationalism is nothing more than recognizing truths that the Bible has always contained. Dispensationalism was not invented; it was rediscovered by believing exactly what the Bible says in the particular context to which it speaks.

For the moment, let us assume that dispensationalism was not discovered until just recently. What would that mean?

During the Dark Ages, the gospel of salvation by grace through faith alone apart from works was little known. We credit Luther, Tyndale, Zwingli, and other reformers with rediscovering truth that had been lost. The reformers were not inventing something new; they were returning to the original faith that the professing church had abandoned over time. What Luther taught seemed "new" at the time of the reformation, but Paul had taught salvation by grace nearly 1500 years before Martin Luther rediscovered it. So, we see that something can seem to be new even though it is in fact the original teaching.

The real issue is what the Bible teaches. If the Bible does teach dispensationalism, then dispensationalism is true regardless of when it began to be taught and regardless of what anyone believes. If the Bible does not teach dispensationalism, then dispensationalism is a heresy regardless of who believes it.

36. Why should I believe what you are telling me is true?

You should not take my word for anything nor should you take anyone else's word for anything. The Bible is the authority.

Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand.

One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. (Romans 14:4,5)

No man is your judge. It does not matter what we think or what your pastor thinks or what your denomination thinks. You will not be judged by them. You will be judged by God. Therefore, you need to be fully persuaded in your own mind. What I believe or what anyone else believes does not matter.

These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so. (Acts 17:11)

The Christian's responsibility is to search the word of God and see what is true.

37. How can dispensationalism be true since hardly anyone believes it?

Truth is not determined by majority vote. If everyone in the whole world believed that the earth was flat that would not change the fact that it is round. Similarly, even if every Christian in the world were to misinterpret the Bible, it would have no bearing on what is true.

Although Jesus had a large following during certain periods of His earthly ministry, the numbers decreased significantly as many were offended at the Lord's "hard sayings." (John 6:60-64).

From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him.

Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away?

Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. (John 6:66-68)

Those that have followed the words of the Lord have never been a majority, and it is unlikely to change today. The question is not what the majority believes; rather, the question is what the infallible authority says. Like Simon Peter, we are stuck with what the authority says. We may not like it, but if we are going to serve the Lord, we do not have any other choice.