Dispensational and Foundational Truth

pp. 186 - 190

As an introduction to his Alphabetical Analysis of Truth, C. H. Welch divides the subject into three sections, (1) Doctrinal Truth, (2) Dispensational Truth, (3) Practical Truth. He explains each section in this way:

(1) "Doctrinal Truth embraces all that has been revealed concerning the Being and Attributes of God, and all that God has done, commanded, promised or foretold in creation, law and grace." This is truth that time does not alter. It is basic or foundational. "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. iii. 23) is true under whatever dispensation we may be called. "God is just" is as true under grace as it was under law. There is therefore a permanence about *foundational* truth.

(2) "Dispensational Truth takes note of the purpose of the ages, the changes that have been introduced since creation, such as may be denominated the dispensation of Innocence, Law, Earthly Kingdom, Grace, Church, Mystery, etc., and the office of dispensational truth is to decide whether any particular doctrine—be it command, promise, calling or prophecy—does or does not pertain to any particular individual or individuals." Dispensational truth would lead the believer to distinguish between the blessing that says 'the meek shall inherit the earth' (Psa. xxxvii. 11; Matt. v. 5), and those blessings which are described as all 'spiritual' and to be enjoyed 'in heavenly places' where Christ is enthroned (Eph. i. 3, 19-23; ii. 5, 6). To those who discern 'things that differ' (Phil. i. 10 margin), these two statements cannot mean the same thing if words are allowed to have their normal meaning.

Under the law of God given through Moses sin and its forgiveness was linked with animal sacrifice (Lev. iv. and v.) and this could not be ignored. To do so meant discipline and punishment. Today no Christian who sins is involved with animal sacrifice, for the great Antitype, Christ Himself, the Lamb of God, has made the one necessary sacrifice for sin, namely giving Himself, so doing away with the O.T. types and shadows which are no longer necessary, as the epistle to the Hebrews so clearly shows. Because of this, we now have a dispensation of grace resting on the finished work of the Saviour. The O.T. dispensation of animal sacrifice has passed, having achieved its object. This is no problem when the Scriptural setting of each is realized and distinguished.

(3) Practical Truth. This should be obvious, for it is the practical working out in experience, of the doctrine or instruction given to us in the Word of God.

However, problems will arise if (1) and (2) are not understood and acted on, and some dispensationalists seem to be confused here. It has been pointed out that, in reading the Word of God, we should note "the address on the envelope", that is to say to recognize to whom the passage of Scripture is addressed. This is right, but we must not draw wrong conclusions. The name and address of the person on the envelope decides who is the

owner of the letter. But the owner would be foolish, if, before he opened the letter, he decided that every sentence must refer to him and no one else because he is the owner! Statements in the letter might refer to a dozen different people and these would have to be given their place.

We must bear this in mind when we come to the Scriptures. By all means let us note to whom it is addressed. Failure to do this will affect the interpretation. But don't let us assume that every statement in Scripture can only relate to those who are mentioned in the opening verses.

Let us take for instance the prophecy of Isaiah in the O.T. and the epistle of James in the N.T. Isaiah tells us that his prophecy is "concerning Judah and Jerusalem" (i. 1). James addresses his epistle to "the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad" (i. 1). We have heard it said that because these Scriptures are addressed to Israel, they are not "for the Body" and therefore they need not receive careful study by those who belong to the Body of Christ. And this, in spite of the statement by the Apostle Paul, that "*all Scripture* is profitable for doctrine (teaching), ...*that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work*" (II Tim. iii. 16, 17).

Let us turn to Isa. xxvi. 3 where we read:

> "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in Thee",

and then compare this with Phil. iv. 7:

> ". . . . . the peace of God which passeth all understanding keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

These two Scriptures are addressed to two different groups of God's children, the people of Israel, and the Body of Christ, but both deal with the same *basic* truth that peace of mind can be enjoyed to the full through complete trust in the Lord. The previous verse in Philippians mentions prayer and thanksgiving which must include trust in God. This is typical of what we can find right throughout the Word of God and therefore we must be careful to distinguish between what is foundational or basic, with what is dispensational.

The command to "rightly divide" the Word of God (II Tim. ii. 15) goes far beyond making a distinction between Israel and the Church, or recognizing Acts xxviii. as a dispensational division. It means that we must go carefully through every passage of Scripture we are studying and note what is basic and what is the position of the people in the context (dispensational) and their relation to the purpose of God. Foundational truth upon which the purpose of the ages is built is covered by such Bible terms as justification, redemption, atonement, sanctification, propitiation, reconciliation, substitution, identification, forgiveness, pardon, ransom. Dispensational truth on the other hand, notes the differences that God has planned for various sections of His redeemed family. Their placing in glory depends entirely on His elective purpose and in

His wisdom, love and grace. He knows just where is the best place for each in the new heaven and earth He will yet create.

Some He purposes to bless on the new earth (Psa. xxxvii. 11; Matt. v. 5); others look forward by faith, like Abraham, to the heavenly Jerusalem which finally descends to the new earth (Heb. xi. 9, 10, 16; xii. 22; Rev. iii. 12; xxi. 10-27). Others will be enthroned with the ascended Christ, "higher than all the heavens" (Eph. iv. 10; ii. 6). The whole of God's vast creation will be peopled with His children.

The Lord's great redemptive plan is much greater and wider than the average Christian appreciates. Certain it is that the glory of God will completely fill this new creation as will His redeemed family as they contemplate for eternity and praise the One Who has done "immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine" (Eph. iii. 30, N.I.V.). Then "all things in heaven and earth" will stand in the Headship and power of Christ (Eph. i. 10).

The need to distinguish what is basic and what is truly dispensational is essential when we are dealing with such an epistle as that by James. It is easy to call this Scripture "Jewish"; but what is meant by this? Do those who use this term mean the passage is *predominantly* Jewish, or *entirely* Jewish, that is, every verse is not only addressed to Israel, but *concerns* Israel and no one else. Unless this term is used with care it can lead to considerable misunderstanding. This can be seen in the interpretation of the Gospels. When we come to the Gospel of John, some assert that this is Jewish. If they mean that it was primarily addressed to the nation, they are right, for it is a history, as all the Gospels are, of the earthly life and ministry of the Lord Jesus and this is looked at from four different angles. If they mean that every statement of the Lord recorded by John is about Israel alone and has no reference to the Gentile, then their viewpoint is sadly wrong.

One of John's key words is the word "world" which occurs no less than 79 times. It means *mankind in general* and *not one nation in particular*. No one can give a correct interpretation of this Gospel, unless they study every occurrence of this important word. Obviously it must have taken a prominent place in the Lord's ministry, for we should remember we only have a selection under the Spirit's guidance of the Lord's words spoken during His lifetime. As to why He should stress His relationship to the whole of mankind in a ministry which He Himself said was limited to Israel (Matt. xv. 22, 24) and also that of the Twelve (Matt. x. 5, 6), we have dealt with in a previous article on *The Great Commission of Matthew xxviii.* But we should carefully note that while Christ's ministry was primarily to Israel, yet He declared "I am come not to judge the world, *but to save the world*" (John xii. 47), not just to save Israel, and His goal was the *belief of the world* (John xvii. 21, 23), not just the belief of Israel. The comment of the Evangelist is to the point here "for God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world, *but that the world through Him might be saved*" (John iii. 17). And the previous verse, which has been the means for the salvation of thousands, gives the way this salvation with eternal life may be realized, namely by faith, belief or trust in the Saviour. "He that heareth My Word and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation but is passed from death unto life" (John v. 24). These verses give the

simplest expression of salvation, eternal life and freedom from condemnation in the N.T. It mattered not whether a Gentile or a Jew were listening to the Lord's words, if they responded by faith, then this salvation was theirs. *And this is still true today.*

Here is a good example of basic or foundational truth which is truth for all time. Sin and death are not dispensational, nor is God's remedy for them dispensational. God has only one way of removing sin and justifying the sinner, namely by the redemptive work of His beloved Son and this is received on the principle of faith and John's Gospel gives a clear witness to these facts.

This being so, we must carefully distinguish what is dispensational in this Gospel from what is basic and unchanging. If we do not do this our exposition is bound to be unbalanced and lop-sided. On the other hand, if we do it, the purpose of God for the heaven and earth becomes clearer and more wonderful. To have an inheritance in any part of these spheres is a tremendous privilege and reveals how great is the love and grace of God which alone makes it possible. Human goodness and merit cannot intrude here.

We are in the hand of One Who is working "all things after the counsel of His own will" (Eph. i. 11), and the design that He has will surely be fulfilled in His time and His own way. Because of this we can go on in "full assurance of faith" and not be moved by anything around us.

Like the Psalmist, we look forward to resurrection glory and can say with him, "I shall be satisfied when I awake with Thy likeness" (Psa. xvii. 15).