

Dr. Renald Showers

**“There Really Is a Difference:
A Comparison of Covenant
and
Dispensational Theology”**

April 4, 5, and 6, 2003

**Riverwood Bible Church
5228 Old Canton Road
Jackson, MS 39211
(601) 956-5694**

**Session One, “The Biblical Philosophy of History,” April 4, Friday evening,
7:00 p.m.**

**Session Two, “Covenant Theology, Part I,” April 5, Saturday morning,
9:00 a.m.**

**Session Three, “Covenant Theology, Part II,” April 5, Saturday evening,
7:00 p.m.**

**Session Four, “Dispensational Theology, Part I,” April 6, Sunday School
hour, 9:30 a.m.**

**Session Five, “Dispensational Theology, Part II,” April 6, Sunday Morning
worship, 10:30 a.m.**

**Session Six, “Dispensational Theology, Part III,” April 6, Sunday evening,
6:00 p.m.**

About Dr. Showers ...

Dr. Showers has addressed college groups, church congregations and Bible conference audiences coast to coast, and has ministered in Europe, South America and New Zealand, and has written numerous respected books and magazine articles. He is a 1956 Bible major graduate of Philadelphia Biblical University (then the Philadelphia Bible Institute), and earned a B. A. in history from Wheaton College, a Th.M. in Church history from Dallas Theological Seminary and a Th.D. in theology from Grace Theological Seminary. He has served in the pastorate, as a member of the faculties of Lancaster Bible College, Moody Bible Institute and Philadelphia College of Bible and as a visiting lecturer at Word of Life Bible Institute, Calvary Bible College and Baptist Bible Theological Seminary. He is presently on staff at the Church Ministries Division of The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, Inc.

THE BIBLICAL PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY

I. Necessary Elements

In order for an _____ of the Bible's philosophy of history to be _____, it must contain certain necessary elements. They are as follows:

A. An Ultimate Goal for History

There must be an ultimate goal or _____, with all of history moving toward the _____ of that goal or purpose.

B. The Recognition of Distinctions or Things That Differ in History

The biblical record indicates distinctions, some of which seem _____, during the course of history. These distinctions dare not be _____, watered down or explained away.

Examples:

1. Distinctive Commissions Given to the Disciples
Mt. 10:5-6; Mt. 28:1-20; Mark 16:14-15
2. Distinctive Gospels Given to the Disciples to Preach
(Mt. 10:7; I Cor. 15:1-4; Mt. 16:21-23)
3. Distinctive Preparations Commanded for the Ministries of the Disciples
Luke 9:1-3; Luke 22:35-36
4. Distinctive Ways of Dealing with People Guilty of Adultery
Lev. 20:10; John 8:1-11; I Cor. 6:9, 11

5. Distinctive Ways of Dealing with Murderers
Gen. 4:11-15; Gen. 9:5-6

6. Distinctive Eating Regulations
Gen. 1:29; Gen. 9:3; Lev. 11; I Tim. 4:3-4

7. Distinctions in Access to God
Lev. 16:2; Heb. 9:7-8; Mt. 27:51; Heb. 10:19-22

C. A Proper Concept of the Progress of Revelation

The Bible indicates that God's truth has been revealed in _____ at different _____ in history.
John 16:12-13; Eph. 3:2-6; I Cor. 2:6-10

In light of progressive revelation, we dare not read _____ revelation back into the _____ revelation, making the earlier say all that the later says.

D. A Unifying Principle That Ties the Distinctions and Progressive Stages of Revelation Together and That Directs Them Toward the Fulfillment of the Goal of History

E. A Valid Explanation of Why Things Have Happened the Way They Have, Why Things Are the Way They Are Today, and Where Things Are Going in the Future

An exposition of the Bible's philosophy of history must be able to explain such things as: How, when and why such things as murder, _____ religion, capital punishment, human government, different languages, different _____, anti-Semitism, the Church, Roman Catholicism, _____, the Renaissance, the Reformation, the Enlightenment, the Holocaust and the Middle East _____ have taken place.

F. **Appropriate Answers to Man's Three Basic Questions**

Where have we come from? Why are we here (is there purpose for life)? Where are we going?

II. **Two Basic Approaches to the Biblical Philosophy of History**

Within the last three to 400 years, Bible-believing scholars have developed _____ distinct approaches to expositing the Bible's philosophy of history. Each approach has produced a _____ of theology.

A. **Covenant Theology**

B. **Dispensational Theology**

COVENANT THEOLOGY

I. A Description of Covenant Theology

Covenant Theology is a _____ of theology that attempts to develop the Bible's philosophy of history on the basis of two or three _____. It represents the whole of _____ as being covered by two or three covenants.

II. The Covenant of Redemption

A. The Parties of the Covenant

God the _____ and God the Son

B. The Time of the Covenant

_____ past. God, knowing ahead of time that man would _____, determined to provide _____.

C. The Nature of the Covenant

The covenant was an agreement to the effect that God would provide _____ for the elect by the _____ voluntarily becoming human and making amends for the _____ of the elect by taking their judgment for them.

III. The Covenant of Works

A. The Parties of the Covenant

The triune God and _____

B. The Time of the Covenant

During history. Between the creation and _____ of Adam

C. The Nature of the Covenant

God made Adam the representative _____ of the human race. God promised eternal _____ to Adam and his race. God promised eternal _____ to Adam and his descendants in return for Adam's perfect obedience. If Adam disobeyed, he and his descendants would be penalized with _____ -- spiritual, physical and eternal death.

IV. The Covenant of Grace

A. The Necessity of the Covenant

Because Adam broke the Covenant of _____ through disobedience, the Covenant of Grace was necessary.

B. The Parties of the Covenant

The first party is _____. Covenant theologians disagree concerning who the second party is. Some say it is the _____. Others say it is the elect. Some say it is the elect and their _____.

C. The Dual Aspect of the Covenant

According to Covenant Theology, the Covenant of Grace exists both as “a communion of _____” and as “a purely _____ relationship.” Only the regenerate experience the covenant as a communion of life, for only the regenerate enter fully into the _____ life intended by the Covenant of Grace. Both the regenerate and their _____ experience the Covenant of Grace as a _____ relationship (this means that both are required to fulfill the conditions of the covenant). Thus, unregenerate children of the regenerate are in the Covenant of Grace in the aspect of its legal relationship. They enter that aspect of the Covenant of Grace by physical _____ to regenerate parents.

D. The Time of the Covenant

Covenant theologians disagree concerning the time that the Covenant of Grace was established. Some say that God established it immediately _____ Adam’s fall. Others claim that it was not established until God established His covenant with _____. All Covenant theologians agree that, once the Covenant of Grace was established, it continues to the _____ of history.

E. The Nature of the Covenant

According to Covenant Theology, the Covenant of Grace _____ several things of those people who are in it: Faithful love of God, agreement to be _____ people, saving faith in Christ, continual _____ in Christ forever, a life of obedience and consecration to God. In return for this, God promises

to _____ and to be the God of the regenerate and their _____.

F. **The Relationship of the Covenant to the Dispensations and The Progress of Revelation**

Covenant theologians claim that the Covenant of Grace has been in effect throughout _____ and New Testament history. Each dispensation or each _____ named in the Bible (the Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic, New Covenants) is simply another _____ of the progressive revelation of the _____ of the same Covenant of Grace throughout history. Dr. Berkhof wrote, “The covenant of grace, as it is revealed in the New Testament, is essentially the same as that which governed the relation of Old Testament believers to God.”

This means, then, that the Mosaic Covenant (the _____) and the New Covenant are both part of the Covenant of Grace, and therefore, are essentially the _____.

V. **Key Elements of Covenant Theology’s Biblical Philosophy of History**

A. **The Ultimate Goal of History**

According to Covenant Theology, the ultimate goal or purpose of history is the _____ of God through the redemption of the _____.

B. **The Recognition of Distinctions**

According to Covenant Theology, the distinctions in the Bible are _____ administrations of the same Covenant of Grace.

C. **The Progress of Revelation**

According to Covenant Theology, each new body of _____ that was revealed was another stage of the progressive uncovering of the _____ of the Covenant of Grace.

D. **The Unifying Principle That Ties the Distinctions and Progressive Stages of Revelation Together and That Directs Them Toward the Fulfillment of the Goal of History**

Covenant Theology’s unifying principle for history after the _____ of man is the Covenant of Grace.

VI. A Critique of Covenant Theology

A. Commendable Features

1. Its Emphasis Upon the Grace of God, the Redemptive Work of Christ, and Salvation by Grace through Faith
2. Its Recognition of Jesus Christ as the Central Figure of World History
3. Its Honest Attempt to be Faithful to the Scriptures While Expositing the Biblical Philosophy of History

B. Problem Features

1. Covenant Theology's Ultimate Goal of History Is Too Limited

While the redemption of the _____ is a very important aspect of God's purpose for history, it is only _____ aspect of that purpose. God also has specific _____ for the non-elect, nations, angels, rulers and nature. Surely God's goal or purpose for history must include all these programs, not just the one for the elect.

2. Covenant Theology Denies or Weakens the Force of Some of the Biblical Distinctions

- a. It nullifies the distinction between the Abrahamic Covenant and the Mosaic (_____) Covenant.

Dr. Berkhof wrote, "The covenant of Sinai as essentially the same as that established with Abraham, though the form differed somewhat."

But note the contrast that the Apostle Paul drew between those two covenants in Gal. 3:18.

- b. It nullifies the distinction between the Mosaic (Law) Covenant and the _____ Covenant.

But the Bible draws a strong contrast between these two covenants:

(1) Jer. 31:31-34

(2) II Cor. 3:6-10

- c. It denies the existence of distinctive _____ in the Bible.**
- d. It denies the distinction between _____ throne upon which Christ is now seated in heaven and _____ throne upon which Christ will sit on earth in the future.**

But the Bible draws a distinction between those two thrones. Luke 1:31-33; Rev. 3:21; Mt. 19:28; 25:31.

- e. It denies the distinction between the nation of Israel and the Church.**

Covenant Theology teaches that the _____ existed in Old Testament times and that Israel was a major part of the Church in the Old Testament. It defines the Church as “the continuing covenanted community.” In other word, the Church consists of all the _____ throughout history who have had a covenant relationship with _____. Thus, these peoples are essentially the _____.

But the following things should be noted:

- (1) The Bible draws a distinction between the Jews and the Church – I Cor. 10:32**
- (2) The Bible indicates that the Church did not begin until after Christ’s earthly ministry**
 - (a) Christ put the building of the Church in the future – Mt. 16:18**
 - (b) It is Spirit baptism that builds the body of Christ, the Church, and Spirit baptism**

did not begin until the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2.

Col. 1:18, 24 – the body of Christ is the Church

I Cor. 12:13 – Spirit baptism builds the body, the Church

Luke 3:16 – John the Baptist put Spirit baptism in the future

Acts 1:4-5 – Jesus’ statement on the day of His ascension

(c) Peter’s statement in Acts 11:15-16

3. **Covenant Theology Is Mistaken When It Teaches That Each Biblical Covenant Is a Continuation and Newer Phase of the Covenant of Grace**

According to Covenant Theology, as each biblical covenant was instituted, it was a new _____ of the Covenant of Grace, and therefore, _____ new things to the already established Covenant of Grace.

But Gal. 3:15 militates against this. There the Apostle Paul indicated that once a _____ (such as the Covenant of Grace) is established, nothing can be _____ as a part of that covenant.

4. **Covenant Theology’s Unifying Principle Is Too Limited**

Covenant Theology’s Covenant of Grace deals only with _____ redemption of the elect. It does not unify the program of redemption with all of God’s _____ programs.

In addition, since Covenant Theology does not have the Covenant of Grace beginning until _____ the fall of man, that covenant doesn’t _____ pre-fall history with post-fall history.

5. **In Order To Make Its System Work, Covenant Theology Must Employ a Double Method of Interpreting the Bible**

Covenant Theology uses the historical-grammatical method to interpret _____ parts of the Bible. But it

employs the allegorical or spiritualizing method to interpret prophetic passages concerning the _____, particularly the future of the nation of _____ and the future _____ of God.

But thus far the prophetic Scriptures which have been fulfilled have been fulfilled in accordance with the historical-grammatical method of interpretation, not in accordance with the _____ method. This would seem to indicate the manner in which _____ intends prophetic passages to be interpreted.

DISPENSATIONAL THEOLOGY

I. A Description of Dispensational Theology

Dispensational theology is a _____ of theology that attempts to develop the Bible's _____ on the basis of the _____ of God. It represents the whole of Scripture as being covered by several _____ of God's rule.

II. A Definition of the Term "Dispensation"

The biblical word for "dispensational" literally means "_____ management." Thus, a dispensation is a _____ of God administering His _____ - over the world as He progressively works out His _____ for world history.

III. Illustrations of God Administering His Rule in Different Ways

Adultery –

Murder –

Eating regulations –

Note: It is important to note that God has never changed His moral _____, but from time to time He has changed the ways in which He _____ His unchangeable moral absolutes.

IV. Characteristics of Each Dispensation

- A. A particular _____ of God administering His rule.
- B. A particular _____ for man. Man is responsible to obey God in accord with God's way of administering His rule.
- C. Special _____. Each new dispensation involves a new way of God administering His rule. It is essential for man to know what that new way is, so that he will also know what his responsibility is in the new dispensation. The only way that man can know these new things is by God revealing them to him. Thus, each new dispensation of God's rule requires some

new revelation, and it requires it in the beginning part of the dispensation.

- D. A _____ for man. The test in each dispensation is as follows: Will man obey God's rule by fulfilling his God-ordained responsibility?
- E. Man's _____. Man's failure brings God's judgment.

V. Some Important Considerations

- A. The dispensations are different ways of God administering His _____ of the world, not different ways of _____. Salvation has always been by the grace of God through faith in the Word of God.
- B. A dispensation is not the same thing as an _____, even though both may cover the same time period. A dispensation is a particular way of God administering His rule, but an age is a particular time period.
- C. A dispensation may involve an administration of God's rule over _____ of mankind (for example, the dispensation of human government) or over only one _____ of mankind (for example, the dispensation of the Mosaic Law).
- D. A new dispensation may continue some ruling _____ of earlier dispensations (for example, human government has continued as a ruling element through several dispensations), or it may _____ some ruling elements of earlier dispensations (for example, the Mosaic Law was discontinued as a ruling element when the dispensation of grace began). But a new dispensation will always have at least one _____ ruling element not introduced before. Usually each new dispensation is named after the new ruling element.
- E. A new dispensation demands new _____. Thus, Dispensationalism has a strong concept of progressive revelation.

VI. An Examination of the Different Dispensations

- A. The Dispensation of Innocency

1. **Time Period** – From the _____ of man to the _____ of man.
2. **Ruling Element** – An unconfirmed favorable _____ toward God.
3. **Scripture** – Gen. 1:26- 3:24.
4. **Man's Responsibility** – To obey God on the basis of his favorable disposition.
5. **Test** – Would man obey God on the basis of his favorable disposition?
6. **Failure** – Man rebelled against God.
7. **Judgment** –
 - a. Man died _____. He lost his favorable disposition toward God and replaced it with a disposition of enmity against God (the sin nature) (Rom. 8:7)
 - b. Man became subject to disease, deformity, accidents, physical death.
 - c. Man lost his perfect environment.
 - d. Satan usurped the rule of the world system.

B. The Dispensation of Conscience

1. **Time Period** – From the fall of man through the Noahic _____.
2. **Ruling Elements** --
 - a. The human _____ (Rom. 2:14-15)
 - b. The _____ by the Holy Spirit (Gen. 6:3)
3. **Scripture** – Gen. 4:1 – 8:19.
4. **Man's Responsibility** – To obey God on the basis of his conscience and the restraint by the Holy Spirit.

5. **Test** – Would man obey God on the basis of his conscience and the restraint by the Holy Spirit?
6. **Failure** – Cain refused to bring the kind of sacrifice required by God, committed the first murder and built a godless civilization characterized by polygamy and violence; the human race became corrupt (Gen. 6:5).
7. **Judgment** – The Noahic Flood which destroyed all but eight people.

C. The Dispensation of Human Government

1. **Time Period** – From the Noahic Flood to the _____ of Abraham.
2. **Ruling Elements** – Human conscience, the restraint by the Holy Spirit plus human _____ - with its authority to administer _____ punishment (Gen. 9:5-6; Rom. 13:1-7).
3. **Scripture** – Gen. 8:20 – 11:32.
4. **Man's Responsibility** -- To obey God on the basis of human conscience, the restraint by the Holy Spirit and human government.
5. **Test** – would man obey God on the basis of these three ruling elements?
6. **Failure** – Noah got drunk his descendants began to build the city and tower of Babel in rebellion against God's command to populate the whole earth.
7. **Judgment** – God confused the _____ of the people and thereby forced them to separate and spread out over the earth.

D. The Dispensation of Promise

1. **Time Period** – From God's call of Abraham to the giving of the _____ at Mount Sinai.
2. **Ruling Elements** – Human conscience, the restraint by the Holy Spirit, human government **plus** divine

_____ . (Gal. 3:15-22; Heb. 6:13-15).

3. **Scripture** – Gen. 12 – Ex. 18.
4. **Man's Responsibility** – To obey God on the basis of human conscience, the restraint by the Holy Spirit, human government and promise.
5. **Test** – Would man obey God on the basis of these four ruling elements?
6. **Failure** – Through lapses of faith in God's promises, Abraham fathered Ishmael through Hagar and lied twice about his wife; Isaac lied about his wife; Jacob was a deceiver; the Jews did not return from Egypt to Canaan after the famine of Joseph's time ended.
7. **Judgment** – Throughout their history, the Jews have had problems with Ishmael's descendants, and they eventually were subjected to slavery and threatened with extinction in Egypt.

E. **The Dispensation of the Mosaic Law**

1. **Time Period** – From the giving of the Mosaic Law at Mount Sinai to the _____ of Jesus Christ on the cross at Mount Calvary.
2. **Ruling Elements** – Human conscience, the restraint by the Holy Spirit, human government, promise plus the _____.
3. **Scripture** – Ex. 19:1 – Matt. 27:56; Mark 15:41; Luke 23:49 and John 20:30.
4. **Man's Responsibility** -- The people of Israel were to obey God on the basis of human conscience, the restraint by the Holy Spirit, human government, promise and the Mosaic Law.
5. **Test** – Would the people of Israel obey God on the basis of these five ruling elements?

6. **Failure** – The people of Israel broke the Mosaic Law repeatedly, rejected their Messiah and had Him crucified.
7. **Judgment** – Israel suffered many judgments during the fifth dispensation. Among the worst were the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities, Israel's temporary removal from its place of blessing (Rom. 11) and its worldwide dispersion as the result of its rejection of Christ.

F. The Dispensation of Grace

1. **Time Period** – From the death of Jesus Christ to His _____ coming.
2. **Ruling Elements** – During most of its duration, the sixth dispensation has five ruling elements: Human conscience, the restraint by the Holy Spirit, human government, promise **plus** _____ (Titus 2:11-12). The Mosaic Law was abolished as a ruling element when Christ died (Gal. 3:19; Rom. 6:14), thus, it is not a ruling element in the sixth dispensation. In addition, the restraint by the Holy Spirit will be removed as a ruling element when it is time for the Antichrist to be revealed near the end of this dispensation (2 Thess. 2:7-8).
3. **Scripture** – Matt. 27:57; Mark 15:42; Luke 23:50 and John 19:32 through Rev. 19:21.
4. **Man's Responsibility** – To obey God on the basis of human conscience, the restraint by the Holy Spirit, human government, promise and grace.
5. **Test** – Does man obey God on the basis of these five ruling elements?
6. **Failure** – The majority of unsaved Jews and Gentiles do not accept the gift of righteousness. Organized Christendom does not fulfill the Great Commission, maintain a pure membership, discipline unruly members, prevent false teaching from existing within it and contend earnestly for the true faith. Individual believers do not always live sensible, godly lives, associate with a local church, evangelize and make disciples and use spiritual gifts properly. By the end of

this dispensation, the unsaved will stage a major revolt against God's rule (Ps. 2:1-3; Rev. 16:12-16; 19:17-21) and organized Christendom will be very apostate (Rev. 17).

7. **Judgment** – God chastens believers for disobedience (even premature physical death) (Acts 5:1-6; I Cor. 5:1-5; 11:27-32; Heb. 12:5-13; I John 5:16). He puts some local churches out of existence (Rev. 2:5). Toward the end of this dispensation, God will remove the Holy Spirit's restraint of evil (2 Thess. 2:7-8); apostate organized Christendom will be destroyed (Rev. 17:16); God will pour out divine judgments upon the world (the Tribulation period) (Rev. 6-19), and He will crush the revolt of the unsaved (Rev. 19:17-21).

G. **The Dispensation of the Millennium**

1. **Time Period** – After the second coming of Christ and for _____ years.
2. **Ruling Elements** – human conscience, human government **plus** the _____ of Christ. Since the seventh dispensation will be the final one, it will bring the fulfillment of God's promises. Once promises are fulfilled, they cease to be promises. Thus, promise will not be a ruling element in the last dispensation. In addition, although salvation will continue to be by grace through faith, grace will not function as a ruling element. (Isa. 11:3-4; 29:20-21; Zech. 14:16-19).
3. **Scripture** – Rev. 20:1-6.
4. **Man's Responsibility** – To obey God on the basis of human conscience, human government and the theocratic rule of Christ.
5. **Test** – Will man obey God on the basis of these three ruling elements?
6. **Failure** – Some unsaved will rebel outwardly against Christ's rule during His reign (Isa. 11:3-4; 29:20-21; Jer. 31:29-30). Others will despise Christ's absolute righteous rule inwardly, then will follow Satan in his

last revolt against God's rule when he is released from the abyss after the Millennium (Rev. 20:7-10).

7. **Judgment** – Those who will rebel outwardly during Christ's reign will be executed (Isa. 11:3-4; 29:20 – 21; Jer. 31:29-30). God will crush the final revolt after the Millennium by sending fire to destroy the human rebels and by casting Satan into the lake of fire for everlasting torment (Rev. 20:9-10)

VII. Key Elements of Dispensational Theology's Biblical Philosophy of History

A. The Ultimate Goal of History

According to Dispensational Theology, the ultimate goal or purpose of history is for God to _____ Himself by demonstrating the _____ that He alone is the _____ God.

B. The Recognition of Distinctions

According to Dispensational Theology, the distinctions in the Bible are the result of God administering His _____ in different ways in different _____ of history. In other words, the distinctions are the result of the different _____ of God's rule.

C. The Progress of Revelation

According to Dispensational Theology, each _____ dispensation requires new _____ because it involves a new _____ of God administering His rule.

D. The Unifying Principles That Ties the Distinctions and Progressive Stages of Revelation Together and That Directs Them Toward the Fulfillment of the Goal of History

According to Dispensational Theology, the unifying principle for _____ of history is the sovereign _____ of God.