

Dispensations: Each Has Its Own Spiritual Life; Ryrie Defines Dispensational Hermeneutics; the Church Age is Unknown Prior to Pentecost, Eph 3:9

10. Lucifer is the “ruler of this world,” meaning that he controls the lives of unbelievers who are born into this world spiritually dead, totally depraved, and in slavery to their sinful natures.
11. Christ is said to be a “Son over His house – whose house we are” in Hebrews 3:6a.
12. Christ administers His house, the church. Previously, He administered His house, Israel, in a much different way.
13. All are saved by grace but it is obvious, even by a casual look at Scripture, that the way Christ manages believers in history varies over time.
14. These differing administrations are called dispensations, or *oikonomia*, and the recognition of them is a part of the hermeneutics of pastors who subscribe to this theology.
15. It is beneficial at this point to briefly review the doctrine of dispensationalism:
 - 1) Dispensational theology recognizes God’s administration of human history through delegated authority.
 - 2) This delegated authority is a divine appointment requiring certain groups of people to accept the responsibility and accountability for the stewardship, guardianship, and dissemination of Bible doctrine.
 - 3) Each one of these appointments functions under a distinctive economy, each economy not being as much a segment of time as it is a period of the outworking of human faithfulness or faithlessness with regard to its respective appointment.
 - 4) God changes an administrative agency when the current one fails as His representative on the earth with accompanying judgment for that failure.
 - 5) Each succeeding administration retains some of the regulations of the former, others are rescinded, and new ones are received through the process of progressive revelation.
 - 6) There are six administrative agencies that are identified in Scripture, the dispensations of (1) the Gentiles, (2) Israel, (3) the Incarnation, (4) the Church, (5) the Tribulation, and (6) the Millennium.
- 16) The system of biblical interpretation to which dispensationalists subscribe is clearly presented by Dr. Charles C. Ryrie:

The Dispensational position: *Literal hermeneutics*. Dispensationalists claim that their principle of hermeneutics is that of literal interpretation. This means interpretation that gives to every word the same meaning it would have in normal usage. It is sometimes called the principle of *grammatical-historical* interpretation since the meaning of each word is determined by grammatical and historical considerations. The principle might also be called *normal* interpretation since the literal meaning of words is the normal approach to their understanding in all languages. It might also be designated *plain* interpretation so that no one receives the mistaken notion that the literal principle rules out figures of speech. Symbols, figures of speech, and types are all interpreted plainly in this method, and they are in no way contrary to literal interpretation. After all, the very existence of any meaning for a figure of speech depends on the reality of the literal meaning of the terms involved. (pp. 80-81)

Many reasons are given by dispensationalists to support this hermeneutical principle of literal, normal, or plain interpretation.

Philosophically, the purpose of language itself seems to require literal interpretation. Language was given by God for the purpose of being able to communicate with mankind.

If God is the originator of language and if the chief purpose of originating it was to convey His message to humanity, then it must follow that He, being all-wise and all-loving, originated sufficient language to convey all that was in His heart to tell mankind. Furthermore, it must also follow that He would use language and expect people to understand it in its literal, normal, and plain sense. The Scriptures, then, cannot be regarded as an illustration of some special use of language so that in the interpretation of these Scriptures some deeper meaning of the words must be sought.

A second reason why dispensationalists believe in the literal principle is a biblical one: the prophecies in the Old Testament concerning the first coming of Christ—His birth, His rearing, His ministry, His death, His resurrection—were all fulfilled literally. That argues strongly for the literal method. (p. 81)

A third reason is a logical one. If one does not use the plain, normal, or literal method of interpretation, all objectivity is lost. What check would there be on the variety of interpretations that man's imagination could produce if there were not an objective standard, which the literal principle provides? To try to see meaning other than the normal one would result in as many interpretations as there are people interpreting. Literalism is a logical rationale.¹ (p. 82)

17. It is through this system that we are able to understand Paul's subject in:

Ephesians 3:9 - ... to bring to light what is the administration [οἰκονομία, *oikonomia*] of the mystery [μυστήριον, *mustērion*] which for ages has been hidden in God [the divine decree] who created all things. (NASB)

¹ Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 80-82.

18. The word "administration" is better translated "dispensation," and the mystery is that of the church in which both Jew and Gentile are baptized by the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ.
19. The reason the dispensation of the church is called a mystery is because it was not revealed to Old Testament prophets or its believers.
20. The doctrine of the mystery of the church and the relationship of believers to Christ cannot be completely understood unless the idea is placed in a dispensational context.
21. As an example, the Israelites were to keep the Mosaic Law including its rituals, feast days, and Sabbaths and their spiritual life was dependent upon the execution of the faith-rest technique.
22. The Law was given to Israel alone. Its mandates do not apply to the church unless the New Testament Epistles instruct us to retain them. Most of the Mosaic Law is not applicable to the Church Age believer.