

The Dispensation of the Fulness of Times

“Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: that in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him” (Ephesians 1:9, 10).

These verses are vital to an appreciation of what God is doing in this age of grace, and how it relates to His overall program for believers of all ages. That the "dispensation of the fulness of times" does not have this age of grace specifically, or only, in view is evident since it involves not only all things in heaven, but also all things on earth. The very inclusiveness of the terminology -- "fulness of times," "gather together in one all things," "in heaven ... and ... on earth." -- focuses our attention on God's plan of the ages. The "dispensation of the fulness of times" is the grand finale toward which the earlier dispensations have been leading. It is the culmination, the final chapter in which we will see how all of the dispensations through all of history, will find their ultimate fulfillment in Christ. All was wrought by Him at the beginning and all will find its eternal destiny in Him at the conclusion. "All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made" (John 1:3). "All things were created **by him, and for him**" (Colossians 1:16). "That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him" (Ephesians 1:10).

In seeing the distinctives for this age of grace we tend to minimize, or even lose sight of, the unity of God's overall program. We need to see that many things which have great contemporary importance, as the program runs through time, will glow with only historical importance in eternity. For instance, it is vital today that we preach the gospel of the grace of God, and not the gospel of the kingdom. In eternity we will look back on this and appreciate God's gracious purpose for each of these messages in its time, will realize that each has fully accomplished its purpose, and will glorify Him for His wisdom and grace. But no longer will *any* gospel be preached to even one unbeliever, for all unbelievers will already be in the lake of fire -- beyond any hope of salvation. Today the matter of water baptism has its importance, but in eternity all baptisms will belong to the past. Whether the Rapture will be pre or post tribulation is a matter of concern to us now, but in that day we will all look back on it and finally agree on the matter, for it will have already taken place.

While all things will be "summed up" in Christ (NASB) in the dispensation of the fulness of times, the Body saints and the kingdom saints will be "at home" in different places -- heaven and earth. There will still be the distinction between a heavenly people and an earthly people through eternity.

The Body of Christ is so closely linked with Christ Himself as the Head that it has a name -- "The Christ" (1 Cor. 12:12 -- the definite article is present in the Greek). We, collectively, are "one new man." While, in Ephesians five, Paul is speaking of the **Body** of Christ as having relationships similar to those of a wife to her husband, he is not addressing us as the wife of Christ. He never says, "the church which is His bride," but rather, "the church which is His Body."

So we may think of ourselves as identified with the bridegroom at the wedding supper of the Lamb, while the believers in Israel will be the bride. Notice that Christ is spoken of as the bridegroom long before this age was revealed (Matt. 9:15 and nine other passages in the gospels) and that John the Baptist considered himself the "best man" for that bridegroom (John 3:29). Also, the New Jerusalem, which is called "the bride, the Lamb's wife" (Rev. 21:9), has the number of Israel -- twelve -- stamped all over it (Rev. 21:12 - 21).

When a bride and groom become **one**, in marriage, they do not cease to have the distinction between man and woman -- **it is in their oneness that the very purpose of their differences is made clear, and it is when they become one that the differences are magnified and glorified.** So also when we are one with the kingdom saints the distinctions do not disappear -- they are seen to complement each other **in Him**, and **we see fully the glorious reasons for those distinctions.**

So also the church of this age is not the priesthood spoken of in both the Old Testament and the New (Ex. 19:6; Isa. 61:6; 1 Pet. 2:5, 9). Paul never speaks of believers of this age as priests, nor does he refer to the Body church as a priesthood. On the other hand, Paul not only tells us that the individual believer's body is the temple of God (1 Cor. 6:19), but also that the Body of Christ, corporately, is the temple of God. "Know ye not that ye [plural] are the temple [singular] of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple [singular] ye [plural] are" (1 Cor. 3:16, 17)

Israel is not set forth as the temple of God. When Peter says, "Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood --" (1 Pet. 2:5), he does not mean that the believers in Israel are to be a temple. Rather they are to be a "house" in the sense of 1 Sam. 7:11 and Heb. 3:2. There is, and always will be, a great difference between a temple and a priesthood, but neither attain their full function until they are together. Either comes far short of its intended purpose without the other.

So, in eternity, when the great drama of redemption has run its course, all will be gathered together in Him who has made it all possible, our matchless Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. All through eternity we will look back on what God has done as the ages and dispensations ran their course and sing the doxology Paul sets before us in Romans.

“O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counselor? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen” (Romans 11:33 - 36).

-- William P Heath Bible Study # 78: