

Dispensationalism Debunked

Why I rejected Dispensationalism and can never return to it

My Testimony

I was raised in a non-denominational church. As a young child, I was taught by my parents that God is real; that Jesus is the Son of God; that Jesus died for my sins; that Jesus rose from the dead and is alive today; and by the time I was 3 years old, I could sing all the words to *Jesus Loves Me*. The first Bible verses I learned were Proverbs 3:5-6 and John 3:16. At that age, the focus was simply on who Jesus was, what he did for me, and that I should therefore do what is right out of love for him.

Around the age of 10, things started to change. People would come over to our house for Bible studies, and I would listen to what was said. Around this time, I also stopped going to the Sunday School at church, which was for children, and I began to sit in for adult services on Sundays and Bible studies on Thursday nights. The Christianity presented was different from what I learned about Jesus as a child. Jesus was still there, and he still served a purpose: he was the Son of God who died for me so I could go to heaven. But that's all he was. He was a historical figure that did something for me. But the Christianity I learned at this time was not about Jesus, per se. It was about *what the Apostle Paul said*.

Paul was the go-to guy. If Paul said something about Jesus, we listen to Paul. But if Jesus himself said something, I was taught that it *wasn't for us*. "No, Raymond. That's for the Jews." There were exceptions, of course, like John 3:16. But, in general, we did not pay much attention to the four Gospels. In fact, I would say that we practically avoided them. When I opened up the Bible, I would gravitate toward either Genesis or Paul: Genesis, because it had most of the familiar Bible stories that I remembered from childhood; and Paul, because he was *for me*. If I accidentally opened up to one of the Gospels, I was immediately intimidated by all the words in red—all the weird things Jesus said that had nothing to do with me or the church. After I'd been sitting in church services and reading the Bible for nearly 10 years, one day someone asked me about the 'woman at the well'; I had no idea who she was.

I believed in God, and I believed in Jesus (as much as I knew of him from Paul); but I did not know *him*. We did not follow him; we followed Paul, and Paul followed Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1). Paul was not our example; he was our link to Jesus. It was like a choo-choo train. While Peter said that by Christ we believe in God (1 Pet. 1:21), we were basically taught that *by Paul we believe in Christ*. When I met other Christians who were not a part of our church, it was strange to me that they spoke of Jesus instead of Paul. My dad would tell me of Baptists: "They are saved, but they don't have the right doctrine. They are not *dispensational*. They don't know how to *rightly divide*." Ah. That's what we are: *dispensationalists*. We "rightly divide the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15): meaning that we know which parts of the Bible are *for us* (Paul's epistles) and which parts are *not for us* (everything else).

In my late teens, I had many more interactions with Christians who were not of our sect. I had a summer job working at *Odosagih Bible Conference*. But it was frustrating talking to them about the Bible. They did not believe as I did (as I was taught), especially in regard to water baptism. I had always been taught by my church and my dad that water baptism is not for the church today: because Paul said he was not sent to baptize (1 Cor. 1:17); and that there is only one baptism we should have (Eph. 4:5), which is the baptism by the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13). I tried to explain this to my poor, misguided Christian friends, but they never seemed to get it. What a shame... I'm surrounded by all these unintelligent Christians who just don't realize the all-important truth: that Christianity is about following Paul to access that part of Jesus that we are supposed to get.

Around this time I also started to “preach” in church—the church where I grew up. Did I have anything important to say? No. Did I have any conviction? No. Was I there to help the church? No. Okay... so WHY was I in the pulpit preaching??? To impress people. The men of the church wanted to start investing in the next generation of preachers; and since my dad had been ordained as a pastor for several years, and I was now 17, they naturally looked to me as having potential. I went to Bible studies. I asked questions. I claimed to believe whatever they taught me. So I was asked one day if I’d like to start my preaching career at the church with a 30-minute sermon. And I was so puffed up with pride in my purported Bible knowledge that I gleefully accepted. It was my chance to be a big shot—to let the church know that I agreed with their doctrine, and that I was worthy of a good pat on the back. I didn’t preach to benefit the church; I preached to be accepted by them. But I didn’t realize that until much later.

In college, I got away from going to church. The church I grew up in was too far away from my school, and I didn’t drive. I tried fellowshiping with other Christians on campus, but the experience always frustrated me because our “doctrine” did not agree. When I joined Bible studies, my aim was always to either convert them into KJV-only or Paul-only (preferably both). It never worked, not even once. I became frustrated with Christianity, never able to find what I was seeking, and eventually stopped going to church.

Years passed. Occasionally I’d try a neighborhood church; but I would always find “irreconcilable differences”. In 2007, I started attending Grace & Truth Church in Amherst, NY, and was overjoyed to discover that they were KJV-only. The first teaching I heard there was on The Good Samaritan, which I had barely read or understood before. I was really excited about finding this church, and I remember telling my dad: “They are KJV-only! And the word ‘Grace’ is in the name of the church, so it might even be dispensational!” Of course, my dad replied, “Pffft. I doubt it.” By this time my dad was also very frustrated—perhaps even more than I was. He was skeptical that any other church in the region might possess this apparently exclusive (but critical) truth that he had.

Actually, I mentioned this possible dispensationalism of Grace & Truth Church to my dad, not so much because it was still all-important to me, but because I knew it was all-important to him. At this point, I was not close to God, and I knew it; but I wanted to be. And I knew I would have to get closer to other Christians for that to happen. I continued to attend the church, and I also began to visit other Baptist churches in the area. I noticed three main differences between them and the church I was used to growing up.

First was water baptism. It wasn’t brought up every day; just often enough to make me roll my eyes and remember that they were Baptists, and I was not. Second was that, though these churches claimed to “rightly divide” and be “dispensational”, they didn’t focus quite so much on Paul as I was used to. I started to hear much more teaching from the rest of the Bible. Actually, I liked it. But I also started to wonder, if they “rightly divide”... and my old church “rightly divided”... then why do they still teach different things? Why did my old church not have water baptism, but these churches do? In my stubbornness, I just assumed that the Baptists simply didn’t take the idea of dispensationalism far enough. In other words, they were right, *except* when I disagreed with them. Then, of course, I was right.

The third difference was in the fruit of the churches. People talked about Jesus more than they talked about Paul. Evangelism was common and encouraged at all levels. Everybody was reading the Bible, and many were on regular Bible-reading plans. Parents kept their children in subjection with gravity. The church was visibly healthier.

The particular “brand” of dispensationalism employed was explained to me thus: all scripture is *for us* (2 Tim. 3:16), but not all scripture is *to us* (2 Tim. 2:15). So all scripture—Moses, Jesus, Peter, James, John—can be utilized and learned from; but still, the most relevant doctrine for the church, our “marching orders”, are from Paul. This made a lot more sense to me.

When I told others about the doctrine that I had been brought up with, it was referred to, not as dispensationalism, but as *hyper-dispensationalism*. In other words, we had the right idea of “rightly dividing the word of truth”, but it was taken too far. Well... this was interesting. I recalled my old church saying the same thing: we were dispensationalists, but there were others who divided too much, and they were hyper-dispensationalists. Then I understood: everyone who thinks he “rightly divides” calls himself a dispensationalist; and if someone else divides more than he does, he calls them hyper-dispensationalist. Everyone wants to be a dispensationalist; nobody thinks of himself as a hyper-dispensationalist.

I began to realize that I may be wrong about some things. Thank God. One day I was having a discussion with someone, and explaining the view that I and my fellows held about *prophecy vs. mystery*. I had been told my whole life that the message of the apostles in Acts 3, “spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began”, could not possibly be the same as the gospel which Paul preached: the “mystery, which was kept secret since the world began.” (Rom. 16:25) I remember the conversation. I was sure that I had him. Clearly these two were opposites; there was no wiggle room. But then the gentleman posed a question to me which caught me off-guard: “Is it possible that what was spoken by all the prophets since the world began was a mystery to them because God hadn’t revealed it yet?” I couldn’t answer. I thought about it for hours, days, and weeks. I had to admit this possibility. He might be right. We may have been wrong all along, seeing a division which wasn’t really there.

Around this time, my friend Adam and I were teaching weekly Bible studies. After going through different topics, somehow we ended up doing a series on Dispensations. That was a real eye-opener to me. We laid out the 7 dispensations which we had been taught by men. Then, since there were only 4 mentions of the word “dispensation” in the Bible, and they didn’t even seem to match up with 4 of the 7 that we attempted to present, we again had to consult other men to see how we could procure 7 dispensations from the text of the scripture. Somehow, we managed. But something didn’t seem quite right.

At this point, all I knew was that some men taught one thing, some another, and some still another. I was confused, and I didn’t know what to believe. I wondered, “If God is not the author of confusion; and we are all following him; then why is there so much confusion? Why are there so many different and conflicting ideas, and doctrines, and denominations?” I prayed. I humbled myself. I told God that I didn’t know anything, but I wanted the truth from him. I told him that, without reservation, I was ready to give up everything I thought I knew, and have an open mind toward him. I didn’t pray like this once, but many times. I started opening the Bible see what God was trying to tell me, as opposed to just trying to prove what I had already decided to believe.

From that time forward, God began to open my eyes to the truth. He took away the lenses of man-made doctrine, through which I had been accustomed to seeing everything, and rather anointed my eyes with eyesalve that I might see for myself. This experience has been both wonderful and terrifying: wonderful, in that I am now able to walk in the light of the truth; but terrifying, in that I see how far astray our churches have gone. Churches that consider themselves to be the “elite”, the “faithful”.

One of the first things the Lord revealed to me is that dispensationalism is a lie. It is completely untrue. While it is touted as the Holy Grail of Bible understanding (some even claiming that dispensationalism is the only alternative to heresy), God has shown me that it actually destroys correct understanding of the scriptures and of his will. The church is presently in an age of unsurpassed darkness, ungodliness, and ignorance, and the propagation of dispensationalism is partly to blame for it.

What follows is a list of problems that I have found with dispensationalism—things which helped me to understand why it is false, ultimately becoming some of my reasons for rejecting it. I did not set out to deny or disprove it; I only asked God to show me the truth; and he led me to understand these things in the order that I’m about to present them.

What is Dispensationalism?

The main idea of dispensationalism is that the Bible should be “rightly divided”, as per 2 Timothy 2:15. Why then is it called “dispensationalism”? Well, launching from this understanding of 2 Timothy 2:15, with no indication in the context as to *how* the scripture is to be “rightly divided”, one embarks on a scripture-wide quest to discover the meaning of this directive.

An opportunity presents itself in Ephesians 3: in the midst of disclosing a mystery which had not heretofore been made known to the sons of men, Paul uses the word “dispensation”. Since the passage speaks of a new revelation, the dispensation is mistakenly seen to be the thing revealed; and there must be a division between this new dispensation and whatever was before it—presumably another dispensation. Having accepted this division between dispensations, we then suppose that all of God’s dealings with man throughout history may be “rightly divided” into these dispensations, each representing a time period, program, administration, or set of divine rules in effect.

Problem #1: Actual occurrences of “dispensation” in the Bible

Theologians have differing opinions regarding how many dispensations there are. The obvious question is: “Why not look in the Bible and see how many there are?” And that leads us to the first problem with dispensationalism: the word “dispensation” itself is only mentioned 4 times, and most theologians claim that there are at least 7 dispensations. Not only so, but these 4 mentions do not correspond to any 4 of the dispensations proposed! At best, 2 mentions (Eph. 1:10 and 3:2) can be claimed to be 2 different happenings in time, leaving us to guess for ourselves how many other unnamed dispensations there are, and then to define what they are.

When I first tried to teach dispensationalism, this is the problem that I ran into. The actual mentions of “dispensation” do not support this idea of a time period, program, administration, or set of rules. This wrong idea is based on a careless reading, and therefore a flawed understanding of, Ephesians 3:2; not surprisingly, the other 3 mentions do not support it. Let us examine them one at a time to see what these verses are really talking about.

Paul uses the word “dispensation” 4 times:

1. “a dispensation of the gospel” (1 Cor. 9:17)
2. “the dispensation of the fulness of times” (Eph. 1:10)
3. “the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward” (Eph. 3:2)
4. “the dispensation of God which is given to me for you” (Col. 1:25)

Passage #1 (1 Cor. 9:17)

“A” (*singular, indefinite*) dispensation of “THE” (*singular, definite*) gospel is committed unto Paul. So there are (or at least can be) multiple dispensations of the same gospel, and Paul is referring to one of them, which is given to him. He may have phrased it this way because other dispensations of the same gospel were given to others (see Gal. 2:7-9).

Passage #2 (Eph. 1:10)

The dispensation mentioned is the “fulness of times”: i.e., times are full. That is, THE END. At that point, God gathers together in one all things in Christ. Compare this chapter (Ephesians 1:10-23) with 1 Corinthians 15:23-28, and see if they are talking about the same thing:

<i>Ephesians 1</i>		<i>1 Corinthians 15</i>
“dispensation” (v.10)	=	“then cometh” (v.24)
“fulness of times” (v.10)	=	“the end” (v.24)
“gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him” (v.10)	=	“every man in his own order... then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him” (v.23) (see also John 17:21-23)
“set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come... And hath put all things under his feet” (v.20-22)	=	“he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet... For he hath put all things under his feet... all things shall be subdued unto him” (v.24-28)
“the fulness of him that filleth all in all” (v.23)	=	“that God may be all in all” (v.28)

Passage #3 (Eph. 3:2)

Paul speaks of “the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward.”

There are two possibilities:

- 1) there is one dispensation of the grace of God, and it was given to Paul
- 2) Paul is referring distinctly to the dispensation of the grace of God that was given to him (as opposed to other dispensations of the grace of God)

Looking at the context, the meaning of “dispensation” becomes apparent:

v.2: the DISPENSATION of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward

v.7: the GIFT of the grace of God given unto me

v.8: this grace is given unto me that I should preach

Thus it is clear that the “dispensation of grace” Paul referred to is not some time period or “program” that he was in charge of; Paul was given the gift of God's grace to be able to preach the riches of Christ among the Gentiles, and to make them see that they can have fellowship with God—which thing was a mystery: because, in times past, the Gentiles had no hope and were without God in the world (Eph. 2:12).

God made promises to Abraham, and to his seed, which is Christ (see Gal. 3:16). When Christ came, he began to establish his church—which, at the first, was ONLY Jews. The “mystery” Paul spoke of, which was hidden before, was that Gentiles would be included as fellowheirs in the promise of the Spirit (Gal. 3:14) TOGETHER WITH Jewish saints in the SAME BODY. Paul was basically saying, “If you Gentiles believe this gospel that I preach, then you will get the same deal in Christ that the believing

Jews are getting in Christ.” Isn't that what Ephesians 3:3-9 is saying? If you don't see that, read the previous chapter, especially verses 11-22.

The “dispensation of the grace of God” was not what Paul preached, or a new “program” that began. It was God giving grace to Paul to make him, although less than the least of all saints, into a worldwide minister of the glorious gospel of Christ! Paul restates this in 1 Corinthians 15:10 (and many other passages) without using the term “dispensation”. Furthermore, grace was not dispensed to Paul alone; but to...

- All of us (John 1:16)
- All the apostles (Acts 4:33)
- Every one of us (Eph. 4:7)
- The humble (James 4:6)
- Christians to whom Peter wrote (1 Pet. 1:2, 10; 3:7; 4:10; 5:12)
- Christians to whom John wrote (2 John 1:3)
- The seven churches of Revelation, to whom John wrote (Rev. 1:4 & 22:21)

It must be seen that Paul is not the sole instrument, mediator, or distributor of God's grace to the world. That role is already taken by none other than the Lord Jesus Christ himself (1 Tim. 2:5; John 1:17; Acts 15:11). That grace is passed on from Christ to mankind through the ministry of all his members, which are stewards of that grace (1 Pet. 4:10); not through an exclusive, universal “Dispensation of Grace” given to Paul.

Passage #4 (Col. 1:25)

Paul mentions “the dispensation of God”. There are two possibilities:

- 1) God is the thing being dispensed; or
- 2) God is the one doing the dispensing.

In verse 26, we see that the “mystery” is the thing being dispensed; and in verse 27, we see that it is God who is making known the riches of the glory of this mystery. Therefore, God is the one doing the dispensing.

God makes manifest the mystery to his saints, to whom he would make known “what is the riches of the glory of this mystery.” So... what is the riches of the glory of this mystery? “...which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.” This is something that believing Jews were very much a part of, as evidenced by John 17:22 & 26: that Christ gave them his glory, and that he would be in them. What was yet a mystery, however, was that the Gentiles would be included in this also. Thus Paul preached among the Gentiles the mystery, and the riches of the glory of that mystery (i.e. what's so great about being in Christ).

Note, however, that this “mystery” was also dispensed to other saints by the Spirit (Col. 1:26 & Eph. 3:5); not just to Paul, or exclusively through Paul to others. It was expressly revealed to Peter in Acts 10 when he preached to Cornelius, before Paul ever preached to Gentiles.

To me, the evidence is very clear: the Bible's use of the word “dispensation” in no way indicates that God or Paul intended the Ephesians, Colossians, Corinthians, or us to divide history into a period of “dispensations”. Can it be done? Can we divide history into time periods, programs, administrations, etc.? Of course. The Bible gives us many such divisions. But please, that has nothing to do with the use of the word “dispensation” in the scripture. And the greatest harm of dispensationalism comes from applying that meaning to Ephesians 3:2, and thereby granting Paul a monopoly on “Church Age” doctrine. In effect, this thinking makes Paul into a kind of Baptist Pope, similar to how Catholics take Peter as their Pope. Both are equally wrong; for “the body is of Christ.” (Col. 2:17)

Problem #2: How is scripture to be divided?

Again, history *can* be divided. There *was* a time before sin entered into the world of men, and things *did* change at that point. There *was* a time when the tabernacle was constructed and the Levitical priesthood began. There *was* a time when the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and gave himself as one offering for sins for ever.

However, scripture is not the same as history. Dividing history is not the same as dividing scripture, and vice versa. History can be viewed as a whole unit, or in divisions; but, either way we choose to look at it, we still have only the present available to us. The Bible, however, is different. We have all of scripture available to us. Choosing to divide or not to divide it, and how to divide it, and why to divide it, all have an impact.

The incentive for dividing scripture, again, is given to us by 2 Timothy 2:15: “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” Dispensationalism gives us dispensations, which are divisions of history—not divisions of scripture. If we take the “dispensation of the grace of God” (Eph. 3:2) as a time period, program, administration, etc., it does not answer the question of how to “rightly divide” scripture.

It is obvious enough that there is a divide between the Old Testament and New Testament (speaking as writings, not covenants). What else can we, or should we, divide? We can divide between different facets of a text, as illustrated in Nehemiah 8:8. I’d agree to that. But this is not how the phrase “rightly dividing the word of truth” is wielded.

I’ll get right to the heart of the matter. “Rightly dividing” is used mainly to divide between:

- the writings of Paul vs. the Gospels (the doctrine of Christ)
- the writings of Paul vs. the other apostles
- pre-Paul Acts vs. post-Paul Acts
- anything written to Jews vs. anything written to Gentiles

If you have spent any length of time under dispensational teaching, these things should sound familiar.

I’ll add some approximate quotes that I am used to hearing along the same lines:

- “That’s for the Jews.”
- “That’s for the nation of Israel.”
- “That’s kingdom of heaven stuff.”
- “That’s for tribulation saints.”
- “That doesn’t apply to us.”
- “Paul is OUR apostle. We get our doctrine from Paul.”
- “That’s not OUR gospel.”
- “We are saved by faith alone. They were saved by faith plus works.”

Again, opinions may vary from church to church or sect to sect. However, once again, we cannot use the Bible as our final authority on how to divide it because *it doesn’t say*. It never says to divide Jesus from Paul, or Paul from the other apostles, or anything like this. It never gives any clues that we should do this. And it is an awfully big jump to come up with all of this from just the words “rightly dividing”. When Christians come to a consensus on this, it’s not because God gave them some special extra-Biblical revelation (many will claim this). The answer is simple: they’ve been following the same teaching from the same man, or group of men.

In fact, there are a number of indications that we should NOT separate the doctrine of Paul from the doctrine of Christ, or from that of the other apostles:

1. Paul warns Timothy in 1 Tim. 6:3-5 about those who “consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ”, saying that such a person is proud and knows nothing. (To be honest, this reminds me of myself as I was growing up, entrenched in dispensationalism.)
2. In 2 Peter 3:15, Peter says that Paul had written to the same audience. Additionally, Peter says at the beginning of that same chapter that this second epistle was written to the same audience; so Peter wrote *both* of his epistles to people that Paul had also written to.
3. In Acts 15, Paul consulted with the other apostles and elders of the church about doctrinal matters for his Gentile converts.
4. Paul says in Romans 1:5, “By whom we have received grace and apostleship, for obedience to the faith among all nations, for his name”. It is therefore clear that Paul was not the only one whose apostleship was for the obedience of the faith among the Gentiles.
5. Paul says in Ephesians 2:20 that Gentile believers “...are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone”. The foundation of the church includes more than one apostle (all of them, actually), and the prophets, and especially Jesus Christ.
6. In Ephesians 3:5, Paul says that the mystery revealed to him was also revealed unto the other apostles and prophets by the Spirit. It was not exclusively to or through Paul.
7. In 1 Corinthians 1:12, Paul rebukes the Corinthians for saying, “I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ.” He then asks several rhetorical questions, to which the answer is obviously NO: “Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?” Note the first question: “Is Christ divided?” If some believers were of Paul (Gentiles), and some were of Cephas (Jews), then the answer would be: yes, Christ is divided. It would be literally the opposite of what he said in Ephesians 2:14-22.
8. Paul explicitly tells the Corinthians that both Paul and Cephas are theirs. (1 Cor. 3:22)

It will be said that Paul was “the apostle of the Gentiles”—an office which he claimed in Romans 11:13 in an effort to provoke Jews to emulation; that is, to make them jealous for the faith that was supposed to be theirs. This doesn’t mean that Paul preached exclusively to the Gentiles; for he also preached to many Jews on a regular basis (Acts 20:21). Nor does it mean that the Gentiles were exclusively preached to by Paul; for both Philip and Peter were sent by God to minister to Gentiles (Acts 8:26-29 & 10:19-20).

It will also be said that the “gospel of the uncircumcision” was committed to Paul, while the “gospel of the circumcision” was committed to Peter (Gal. 2:7). That these are not two different gospels, but two different specializations that God wrought in them for different audiences, is manifest by the context (2:8-9). Here it is also shown that both Jews and Gentiles must be justified by the faith of Christ (2:16).

Paul focused on preaching the faith of Christ to the Gentiles. Peter focused on preaching the faith of Christ to the Jews. In both cases, the gospel is the faith of Christ; and having received it, there was no instruction for either Jew or Gentile to pay exclusive heed to either Peter or Paul. In fact, Paul says in both Galatians 3:28 and Colossians 3:11 that, in Christ, there is neither Jew nor Greek, circumcision nor uncircumcision: for we are one in Christ Jesus. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.

James? John? Jude? The other apostles? It must be remembered that Jesus collected his apostles at the same time and sent them forth at the same time. They received the same commission from Jesus Christ himself. They preached the faith of Christ from the very beginning, and remission of sins in his name; and as a result of their preaching, thousands of Jews were added to the one and only church that

Christ had promised to build (Matthew 16:18). When these men wrote their epistles, they were writing to real Christian human beings alive at that time who were part of the church—the same church of God that Paul would write to in each of his epistles.

Wait. Didn't James write to "the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad"? Yes. They are obviously Jews, right? Yes. So this can't be the church, right? Of course they were the church. At the time he wrote it, the church was only Jews! They were "scattered abroad" because of the persecution against the church! (Acts 8:1,4 & 11:19)

Let us consider this also: we have had a situation for almost 2,000 years where the church of Jesus Christ has consisted of both Jews and Gentiles. To claim Paul's writings as being for the Gentiles, and the other apostles' writings as being for the Jews, is to say that part of the church should follow Paul, and part of the church should follow the others. Two cannot walk together, except they be agreed; but isn't the whole point of this to say that Paul and the other apostles are not in agreement, teaching two different doctrines? If the case be so, in what sense are the Jew and Gentile one in Christ? Should the believing Jew today be following Paul, the administrator of the present Dispensation of Grace and apostle of the Gentiles? Or should the Jew follow the other apostles, since they were sent to the circumcision? Or did Paul's preaching to the Gentiles make void the ministry of the apostles, and leave all Jews of the present age with no one to follow?

All New Testament scripture, without exception, was written directly to believers in Jesus Christ; either to individuals (Timothy, Titus, Philemon, "the elect lady") or to groups of believers (Romans, Corinthians, Hebrews, etc.). Along with Old Testament scripture, which is also for our admonition and learning, it is all profitable to a believer in Jesus Christ.

Problem #3: "Rightly dividing" vs. "All scripture"

If we should manage to somehow translate dispensationalism into the correct method of "rightly dividing" scripture, the next problem we face is how to reconcile 2 Timothy 2:15 with 2 Timothy 3:16. As I mentioned earlier in my testimony, it has been proposed to me thus:

"All scripture is for us (2 Tim. 3:16); however, not all scripture is directly to us (2 Tim. 2:15)."

In other words, scripture ought to be rightly divided so that we give special emphasis to Paul's writings, since he is the *apostle of the Gentiles* (never mind that not all Christians are Gentiles); however, all scripture is profitable to the believer, so we should not totally exclude it. What, then, is the practical difference between these two? In what capacity, or to what degree, shall we judge non-Pauline writings as "profitable" to the Christian, or "not applicable" to the Christian?

It is my observation that these verses are used in tandem by dispensationalists to either retain or ignore non-Pauline scripture as is convenient to suit their accepted doctrine. When James says something that the dispensationalist wants or needs, he uses 2 Timothy 3:16 to accept it and use it; as all scripture, it is profitable. However, when James says something that seems undesirable, or seems to contradict Paul, the dispensationalist uses 2 Timothy 2:15 to reject it; for the scripture must be "rightly divided". This is standard practice for dispensationalists of every variety I've come across, differing only by the understanding or preference of the individual making the call.

Let's ignore 2 Timothy 2:15 for the moment (we'll return to it later), and focus our attention on 2 Timothy 3:16-17: "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for **doctrine**, for **reproof**, for **correction**, for **instruction in righteousness**: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works."

First, notice what I underlined; this is the theme. All scripture is profitable to this end: that the man of God would be made perfect, furnished unto good works (see Eph. 2:10 & 2 Tim. 2:21). We are not talking about Paul's writings; we are talking about *all scripture*. Now, seeing that ALL SCRIPTURE is profitable unto the PERFECTION of the Christian, what could possibly be added on top of PERFECTION by specializing in Paul's writings?

I'll say it another way. This time, notice what I put in bold type: doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness. These are the things that ALL SCRIPTURE is profitable for en route to Christian perfection. Since these things can be gained from ALL SCRIPTURE, what can Paul's epistles add to us in addition to these things? What additional purpose do Paul's epistles serve, which is beside or above these things that produce perfection?

Allow me to answer that. Perfection, by definition, is completion. There is nothing that can be added to it. Paul's epistles are not in a special class above the Gospels and the other apostles; they belong to the same class of ALL SCRIPTURE which is given to us by inspiration of God and is profitable unto perfection.

Problem #4: "the word of truth" does not refer to scripture

I'm all but certain that you are shocked right now, and perhaps even convinced that I'm a hell-bound heretic. Please, read further. "He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him." (Prov. 18:13)

If you are a dispensationalist, I hope that the information I've presented thus far has at least caused you to question your views. Specifically, I hope that you've been able to see, or at least consider...

1. That the word "dispensation", as used in the KJV, does not refer to what dispensationalism presents as a "dispensation": a program or time period.
2. That the doctrine Paul wrote of is not incompatible with, or to be divided from, the doctrine spoken by Jesus Christ and his other apostles.
3. That all scripture is profitable for the perfection of the man of God in Christ, and Paul never said anything to elevate his own writings to a special place of preference above the other scripture.

Even if you understand these things, you will say: "But 2 Timothy 2:15! We still have to rightly divide the word of truth! And the 'word of truth' is obviously the Bible; so we've got to divide it somehow!" In this, my friend, you are mistaken, as I have been for over 20 years. The Bible is indeed *the word of truth*; however, "the word of truth" mentioned in 2 Timothy 2:15 is not the Bible.

I considered 2 Timothy 2:15 for years, wondering especially why the commandment to rightly divide would be given without any explanation in the context as to what "rightly dividing" actually is. God is a God of order, not chaos. Paul was a very careful and methodical writer. It would seem quite unlike either of them to insert this random phrase without warning, "rightly dividing the word of truth", and not give any hint or indication in the context as to what it is or how to do it.

It was then that the final scales fell off from my eyes. I read the context. I looked at the words used. I read the context again. It suddenly became plain as day to me. This phrase, "the word of truth", does not refer to scripture.

In our day and age, we have a complete Bible. The word of truth that we have from God is contained entirely in that Bible. In our naivety, we have equated these two, and applied this equation to

2 Timothy 2:15. But let's consider the historical context of the epistle, the text itself, and the textual context of the verse, chapter, and book.

First, the historical context of the epistle. A chapter later, in this same epistle, Paul says that Timothy had known the holy scriptures since his childhood (2 Tim. 3:15). This highlights the fact that the only scriptures at this time were the Old Testament scriptures; that is what Timothy had, and what Paul said were able to make him wise unto salvation in Christ. Considering this, it is clear that Paul's original command to Timothy was not to divide the Pauline epistles from the Petrine epistles, or the words of Paul from the words of Christ—*Timothy did not have a New Testament!!!*

Second, the text itself: "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, **rightly dividing the word of truth.**" (2 Timothy 2:15) The two things we need to investigate are:

1. What is *the word of truth*?
2. What is meant by *rightly dividing*?

The first question is answered by the greater context of New Testament scripture. Consider these passages which discuss the word of truth; sometimes, though not always, the exact phrase "the word of truth":

"Sanctify them through thy truth: thy **word is truth.**" (John 17:17)
(The only thing I want to point out about this verse is that the Father's word, to which Jesus referred, is not necessarily restricted to scripture alone; this is evident by what he said in 17:8).

"But he said, I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth **the words of truth** and soberness." (Acts 26:25)

"By **the word of truth**, by the power of God, by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left," (2 Cor. 6:7)

"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," (Eph. 1:13)

"For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in **the word of the truth** of the gospel;" (Col. 1:5)

"For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in **truth, the word** of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe." (1 Thess. 2:13)

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

"Of his own will begat he us with **the word of truth**, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures." (James 1:18)

In the context of other New Testament writings which discuss "the word of truth", it is clear that this phrase does not refer to written scripture, but to *the word of truth* being spoken at that time by the apostles and evangelists. In the New Testament, "the word of truth" NEVER refers to scripture; and only

very rarely in the Old Testament (Esther 9:30; Prov. 22:20-21; Ecc. 12:10) does “words of truth” refer to something written down.

The second question, *What is meant by ‘rightly dividing’?*, is answered by the immediate context of the verse (2 Tim. 2:14-18, 22-26) and by the full context of both epistles (1 Timothy and 2 Timothy). It becomes much easier to see now that we have established the correct interpretation of *the word of truth*. The complete phrase, “rightly dividing the word of truth”, may be unique; but it represents a frequently recurring theme throughout both epistles:

"...that thou mightest charge some that they **teach no other doctrine, Neither give heed to fables** and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith: so do." (1 Tim. 1:3-4; see also full context, 1:3-10)

"This charge I commit unto thee, son Timothy, according to the prophecies which went before on thee, that thou by them mightest war a good warfare; **Holding faith**, and a good conscience; which **some having put away concerning faith** have made shipwreck: Of whom is Hymenaeus and Alexander; whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme." (1 Tim. 1:18-20)

"Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times **some shall depart from the faith**, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of **them which believe and know the truth**. [...] If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things, thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ, **nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine, whereunto thou hast attained. But refuse profane and old wives' fables**, and exercise thyself rather unto godliness." (1 Tim. 4:1-3, 6-7)

"Let not a widow be taken into the number under threescore years old, having been the wife of one man. Well reported of for good works; if she have brought up children, if she have lodged strangers, if she have washed the saints' feet, if she have relieved the afflicted, if **she have diligently followed every good work. But the younger widows refuse**: for when they have begun to wax wanton against Christ, they will marry; Having damnation, because they have cast off their first faith." (1 Tim. 5:9-12)

"And they that have believing masters, let them not despise them, because they are brethren; but rather do them service, because they are faithful and beloved, partakers of the benefit. **These things teach and exhort. If any man teach otherwise**, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; He is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: **from such withdraw thyself**." (1 Tim. 6:2-5)

"But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, **they have erred from the faith**, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But thou, O man of God, **flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness**." (1 Tim. 6:9-11)

"O Timothy, **keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings**, and oppositions of science falsely so called: Which **some professing have erred concerning the faith**. Grace be with thee. Amen." (1 Tim. 6:20-21)

"**Hold fast the form of sound words**, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. **That good thing which was committed unto thee keep** by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us. This thou knowest, that all **they which are in Asia be turned away** from me; of whom are Phygellus and Hermogenes." (2 Tim. 1:13-15)

"Of these things put them in remembrance, charging them before the Lord that they **strive not about words to no profit, but to the subverting of the hearers**. Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, **rightly dividing the word of truth**. **But shun profane and vain babblings**: for they will increase unto more ungodliness. And **their word will eat as doth a canker**: of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus; Who **concerning the truth have erred**, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some." (2 Tim. 2:14-18)

"**Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace**, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart. **But foolish and unlearned questions avoid**, knowing that they do gender strifes." (2 Tim. 2:22-23)

"This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: **from such turn away**." (2 Tim. 3:1-5)

"But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived. **But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned** and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them;" (2 Tim. 3:13-14)

"For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And **they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables**. **But watch thou in all things**, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry." (2 Tim. 4:3-5)

"Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil: the Lord reward him according to his works: **Of whom be thou ware also; for he hath greatly withstood our words**." (2 Tim. 4:14-15)

Note especially the recurring themes which I highlighted in bold:

- Paul commands Timothy to *teach, hold, keep, continue, follow, be nourished up* in the word of truth, which is the good doctrine of righteousness, godliness, faith, etc., according to the commandments of God and Christ.
- He also warns Timothy to *flee, refuse, shun, withdraw, turn away, beware*, and *not give heed* to those which turn from the word of truth and good doctrine unto the words of error.

And there, in the midst of all these instructions and warnings, we have 2 Timothy 2:15: “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” If my reader has eyes to see, it will be understood by now that Paul is not commanding Timothy to divide his Bible into dispensations, but to:

- **Study** the scriptures which he has known from childhood (2 Tim. 3:15)
- **to shew himself approved unto God** in righteousness (see Acts 2:22, Rom. 14:18, etc.)
- **a workman** (preacher: Matt. 10:10) **that need not be ashamed** at the Lord’s coming (1 Jn. 2:28)
- **rightly dividing the word of truth** from the word of error!

Many false, erroneous, wicked things were being spoken at that time (and also in our time) by those who had departed from the faith: things contrary to the sound doctrine of godliness; and Paul admonished Timothy all throughout both epistles to study the scriptures so that he would be able to **rightly divide between the word of truth spoken by the apostles and the word of error** spoken by false brethren, false teachers, and false apostles—the grievous wolves he warned of in Acts 20:29.

Conclusion

The true irony of this matter is how dispensationalism itself is somehow procured from Paul’s instruction to Timothy, in which he warns the young man against vain jangling, vain babblings, fables, doting about questions and strifes of words, and striving about words to no profit. For the modern church, dispensationalism encompasses a great theological pretzel that leads the believer into an intellectual pursuit of showing himself approved unto men. Let’s face it: God is not impressed with how many dispensations we can come up with. He never emphasizes or even mentions paying heed to one apostle over another, or one epistle over another. God’s desire, repeated again and again, is for us to follow in the doctrine of Christ by the faith of Christ, as Jesus and his apostles gave us example, and instruct others to do the same. That is the Christian life. Dispensationalism is only a path leading off to the wayside—a distraction from true Christianity.

In addition to being a distraction from the true doctrine of Christianity, wrongly dividing the scriptures has led to the rejection of important facets of the doctrine of Christ and his apostles, including many sobering admonitions, exhortations, and warnings. The doctrine of Christ is not heretical or inapplicable for a Christian, but absolutely essential. Jesus said, “If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” (John 8:31-32)

Dispensationalism is, in a way, a quick and easy substitute for true spiritual understanding. Dividing scripture from scripture is only seen as a necessity when one does not understand how scripture fits with scripture: how Jesus fits with Paul, how Paul fits with Peter, etc. When things cannot be reconciled, the simplest solution is to divide them. True spiritual understanding, however, reveals the unity of the Spirit at work in Abraham, in Moses, in David, in Christ, in Paul, in Peter, in James, in John, and in us.

*“All the words of my mouth are in righteousness; there is nothing froward or perverse in them. They are all plain to him that understandeth, and right to them that find knowledge.”
(Proverbs 8:8-9)*